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DERIVATIONAL CHAINS WITH ADJECTIVAL AND PARTICIPIAL MOTIVATORS IN THE HISTORICAL THESAURUS OF ENGLISH DEVERBATIVES

Introduction

A derivational chain in the word-forming deverbal family consists of an adjective or participle originating from the parent verb and the ultimate adverb or noun that is motiv ated by the respective adjective or participle. A historical thesaurus of verbs contains chronologically restructured strings from a randomly selected present-day thesaurus (Laird 1985) on the basis of the earliest attestations of these strings' constituents as dated in the textual prototypes of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Weiner 1999). Diachronic textual prototypes for the deverbal coinages were taken from the *OED* as well. A somewhat similar approach can be found in the publications on the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (cf. Kay, Wotherspoon 2002). Both secondary deverbatives and their immediate motivators make up historical near-synonymous strings of the common-category lexemes that are derivationally related to strings of synonymous verbs. The foundation for such a relatedness is the commonness of the root shared by the constituents of the respective chain.

In this paper we will concentrate on the heuristic possibilities provided by the application of corpus methodology to the problem of discovering verifiable parameters concerning the extent of (dis)similarity of the diachronic formation of the constituents' sequence in the string of secondary deverbatives of a given onomasiological affiliation with the formation of the respective sequences in parent verbs as well as primary and secondary deverbatives. A sequential reconstruction of different sections of the thesaurus of deverbal families is conducive to the study of such relevant issues of historical onomasiology as re-categorization of the vocabulary over time and the evolution of the derivational structure of semantic spaces.

A typology of deverbal chains

One may distinguish between deverbal adjectives, present participles, passive modal adjectives and past participles. In the enumerated categories only those lexemes of the said status that reveal *OED* documented transformations into nouns and adverbs are considered. Likewise, only those verbs which give rise to the ultimate secondary coinages via an adjectival/participial motivator are relevant to the aim of the present study. In view of the homonymy of some of the motivating verbs to nouns, we took into account only the textual prototypes of the respective primary and secondary coinages that are clearly related to the common-root verb. The dating of the *OED* textual prototypes covers the entire evolution of the English lexicon from the OE written records to quite recent sources. The constituents that have by now become archaic are marked with the asterisks placed after the respective lexeme.

The two participial motivators of secondary deverbal coinages make use of one suffix each. Adjectival motivators reveal a greater number of suffixes. To mark the derivational complexity of a coinage in comparison with the common-root base we use the transformation symbol " → " .

As the participle is basically a morphological form of the verb only those participles were included into the corpus that are lexicalized as separate lemmas in the *OED* or listed in the end of the respective glosses for verbs. The suffixes involved in such coinages are, respectively, *-ed* for the past participle (e.g. *abase 1393 → abased 1611*) and *-ing* for the present participle (e.g. *abide 1000 → abiding 1377).* When the historical variant of the present participle suffix *-nd* sporadically occurs in the earliest *OED* citation, e.g. 1300 Cursor M.11378 (Cott.) *the nest yeire foluand*, its dating is taken into account, but the very illustration of the participial coinage in the compiled corpus is the one with the suffix *-ing*, *follow 950 → following 1300*.

Deverbal adjectives are formed by means of the alternative suffixes and their allomorphic variants: *retreat 1422 → retreatant 1880; abduce 1537 → abducent 1713; complete 1530 → completory 1659; adjust 1611 → adjustive 1883; bewail 1300 → bewailful 1592; fester 1377 → festerous 1854; flap 1320 → flappy 1598*. Derivatives with morphemic complications, e.g. *ive/-ative*, *-ous/-itious*, are taken for the main suffix coinages, here, respectively, *-ive* and *-ous*, e.g. *think 888 → thinkative* 1662, traject 1624 → trajectitious 1656*. Passive modal adjectives are formed by means of the suffix *-able*, e.g. *alter 1374 → alterable 1526*, or its allomorphic variant *-ible*, e.g. *comprehend 1340 → comprehendible 1814*. Besides the mentioned cases of suffix variance in adjectives, deverbal adjectives in *-ive* and passive modal adjectives in *-able* and *-ible* employ alternative suffixes *-ity* and *-ness* for their secondary nouns, e.g. *additivity 1908, alliterativeness 1818; movability 1374, bowableness 1475; accendibility 1859, conducibleness 1599*.

When one and the same verb produced coinages with the help of variant suffixes the older one was taken into account while filling in the respective electronic lattice slot in the developed framework, e.g. *prevent 1432 → preventable 1640 / preventible 1850, adopt 1548 → adoptive 1430 / adoptant* 1671; desire 1230 → desirous 1300 / desirant* 1415; beguile 1225 → beguilous* 1483 /beguileful 1530*. The same principle was applied to suffix multiplicity with more than two formatives, e.g. *infest 1477 → infestive* 1563 / infestant* 1589 / infestuous 1593*.

A chain within the common-root deverbal family demonstrates a growth in the word-forming complexity from the verb to a primary and then secondary deverbal coinage. Eight types of deverbal chains can be singled out. In the examples downloaded from the corpus, with the help of the developed software, coinages are labelled with the bracketed numbers of the respective slots (d_5 – d_{16}) from the aggregate derivational structure of the deverbal word-forming families, in which the first four categories are allotted to primary deverbal nouns that do not figure in this study.

When there was suffix variance in secondary derivatives and/or their motivating adjectives the older suffix of the common-root coinages was taken into account in either slot. The quantitative outcome of the queries given in brackets after minimal random exemplification stand for the filled in slots of the electronic lattice: 1) verb → adjective (d_5) → adverb (d_9): *accord 1123 → accordant 1315(5) → accordantly 1400(9); annoy 1250 → annoyous* 1340(5) → annoyously* 1374(9); express 1382 → expressive 1400(5) → expressively 1627(9); fear 1000 → fearful 1340(5) → fearfully 1526(9); imprecate 1613 → imprecatory 1587(5) → imprecatorily 1874(9); incandesce 1874 → incandescent 1794(5) → incandescently 1803(9)* ... [493 attestations]; 2) verb → adjective (d_5) → noun (d_{10}): *urge 1560 → urgent 1496(5) → urgentness 1598(10); talk 1205 → talkative 1432(5) → talkativeness 1609(10); twist 1340 → twisty 1857(5) → twistiness 1904(10); teem 700 → teemful 1755(5) → teemfulness 1855(10); impend* 1486 → impendious* 1623(5) → impendiousness* 1727(10)* ... [341 attestations]; 3) verb → present participle (d_6) → adverb (d_{11}): *adore 1305 → adoring 1652(6) → adoringly 1824(11)* ... [1,407 attestations]; 4) verb → present participle (d_6) → noun (d_{12}): *rattle 1330 → rattling 1398(6) → rattlingness 1869(12)* ... [284 attestations]; 5) verb → passive modal adjective (d_7) → adverb (d_{13}): *impute 1375 → imputable 1626(7) → imputably 1710(13); apprehend 1398 → apprehensible 1631(7) → apprehensibly 1672(13)* ... [259 attestations]; 6) verb → passive modal adjective (d_7) → noun (d_{14}): *accend* 1432 → accendible 1630(7) → accendibility 1859(14); limit 1380 → limitable 1581(7) → limitableness 1644(14); review 1576 → reviewable 1846(7) → reviewability 1975(14)* ...[629 attestations]; 7) verb → past participle (d_8) → adverb (d_{15}): *fade 1340 → faded 1580(8) → fadedly 1899(15)*... [450 attestations]; 8) verb → past participle (d_8)

→ noun (d$_{16}$): *strain 1300 → strained 1400(8) → strainedness 1639(16)… [423 attestations]*.

Not infrequently, both the secondary adverb and noun share a common-root adjectival or participial motivator: *fret 1000 → fretful 1593(5) → fretfully 1789(9), fretfulness 1615(10) … [253 attestations]; sleep 825→ sleeping 1300(6) → sleepingly 1638(11), sleepingness* 1398(12)… [251 attestations]; allow 1300 → allowable 1393(7) → allowably 1588(13), allowableness 1692(14) … [211 attestations]; resolve 1374→ resolved 1497(8) → resolvedly 1595 (15), resolvedness 1611(16) … [230 attestations]*. Here, a 'single verb → adjective/participle' pair gets finalized in two part-of-speech branches, otherwise known as steps of word-formation, manifested in two derivational chains.

On the basis of an earlier attestation, two rival suffixes can find their way to the position of deverbal adjective and its secondary coinage. In this case the derivational chain is suffix heterogeneous as we take into account an older chronological manifestation of the respective categorial slots, e.g. *fulgurate 1677 → fulgurous 1616(5) / fulgurant 1647 (5) → fulgurantly 1873(9); amuse 1480 → amusatory* 1613(5) / amusive 1728 → amusiveness 1805(10); admit 1413 → admittable 1420(7) / admissible 1611 → admissibly 1818(13)*. Although the developed software allows one to attain suffix homogeneity in variant manifestations of the chains through substituting the oldest suffixal variant by the respective younger common-root functional counterpart in an historical onomasiological dictionary it seems natural to operate with the prototype fillings of the slots.

The historical thesauri of secondary deverbatives

Among the deverbatives of a specified categorial affiliation there existed relationships of near-synonymy on condition that their motivators, i.e. adjectives/participles and verbs, were constituents of the respective synonymic strings. To put it differently, the minimal condition for such derivationally reflected synonymy arises when there are at least two motivating constituents within the parent primary (verbal) and secondary (deverbal adjectival or participial) strings and each of them produces a coinage of the respective onomasiological category.

The historical string of secondary deverbatives consists of the constituents of the contemporary string that are placed in the chronological sequence according to the descending age of their *OED* first quotations. In this rearrangement the present-day dominant may chance to be the oldest constituent of the string. However, in a fair proportion of cases the oldest constituent that initiates the historical string is not the string's present-day dominant. In cases of

identical (same year) dating of more than one of the string's constituents their ordinal sequence from the contemporary string was accepted as an unavoidable convention.

The constituents of the historical string of derivatives might lack among their motivating bases the dominant from the parent string. The reason for this lies in the derivational constraint imposed on the respective word-forming stem. Thus, the actual number of historical strings of deverbatives is larger than the number of coinages brought about by the dominants of the strings of motivating bases even though such derivatives may fail to concatenate strings of their own remaining the only coinages assigned to the respective synonymic strings of motivating adjectival or participial bases.

Another favourable factor for the appearance of strings in the historical derivational thesaurus of deverbatives is polysemy of the parent verbs. This peculiarity is responsible for the fact that one and the same verb gives rise to multiple strings of synonyms enhancing the probability of the construing of strings of primary and, consequently, if there are no constraints imposed on at least two of the latter ones, secondary derivatives. Owing to the discussed factors 2,246 diachronic deverbal chains make up 9,454 historical strings of secondary deverbatives. In the subsequent exemplification we separate the historical dominant of the string, which is its earliest component, from its other constituents with the symbol " $\subset$ ".

In almost all onomasiological categories of secondary deverbatives slightly over a half of the strings ultimately corresponding to synonymous parent verbs have two constituents: d_9 (e.g. *despisantly* 1389 $\subset$ abhorrently 1813*); d_{10} (e.g. *indulgentness 1727 $\subset$ permissiveness 1837);* d_{12} (e.g. *sparingness 1579 $\subset$ forbearingness 1855*); d_{13} (e.g. *comprehensibly 1755 $\subset$ understandably 1921*); d_{14} (e.g. *acceptableness 1611 $\subset$ admissibility 1778*); d_{15} (e.g. *elevatedly 1593 $\subset$ raisedly 1611*); d_{16} (e.g. *settledness 1571 $\subset$ inhabitedness 1900*). As adverbs from the present participles are considerably more productive than other categories the quota of two-member strings in their thesaurus, e.g. *seemingly 1483 $\subset$ appearingly* 1554*, is lower than in the thesauri of other secondary deverbatives and the proportion of strings having more than two constituents is, respectively, higher.

One in five of the total number of strings have three constituents: d_9 (e.g. *sparefully* 1570 $\subset$ evasively 1736, forbearantly 1855*); d_{10} (e.g. *exclusiveness 1730 $\subset$ suspensiveness 1816, exceptivity 1870*); d_{11} (e.g. *pleasingly 1400 $\subset$ satisfyingly 1643, gratifyingly 1822*); d_{12} (e.g. *tauntingness 1727 $\subset$ provokingness 1840, affrontingness 1853*); d_{13} (e.g. *perceivably 1603 $\subset$ answerably* 1611, remarkably 1638*); d_{14} (e.g. *separability 1640 $\subset$ partibility 1644, dividableness 1674*); d_{15} (e.g. *approvedly 1611 $\subset$ admiredly 1637 reputedly 1687*); d_{16} (e.g. *astonishedness 1530 $\subset$ amazedness 1557, bewilderedness 1847*).

Somewhat more than one fourth of the strings in the studied onomasiological classes of secondary deverbatives, though with certain numeric fluctuations, exceed three constituents: d_9 (e.g. *urgently 1548 ⊂ obligatorily 1563, restrictively 1610, contractively* 1648, coercively 1661, enforcively* 1880*); d_{10} (e.g. *conversiveness 1671⊂ reformativeness 1824, accommodativeness 1860, adaptativeness 1881, commutativity 1929, substitutivity 1940*); d_{11}(e.g. *passingly 1340 ⊂ affirmingly 1470, confirmingly 1603, sustainingly 1640, encouragingly 1646, favouringly 1829, approvingly 1837, recognizingly 1854, supportingly 1895*); d_{12} (e.g. *beggingness* 1382 ⊂ sneakingness 1647, fawningness 1673, cringingness 1695, beseechingness 1863, imploringness 1863, flatteringness 1894*); d_{13} (e.g. *notably 1380 ⊂ seeably* 1548, observably 1646, markably* 1650, viewably 1680, noticeably 1855);* d_{14} (e.g. *changeability 1388 ⊂ variableness 1432, reformableness* 1591, alterableness 1655, adaptability 1661, modifiability 1840, transformability 1875*); d_{15} (e.g. *favouredly 1530 ⊂ acceptedly 1599, settledly* 1602, pleasedly 1651, obligedly 1659, sustainedly 1842, gratifiedly 1854*).

When one and the same adjective/participle produces both an adverb and a noun, each of the latter may concatenate a synonymic string of its own though the constituents of such strings typically diverge, e.g. cf. d_{15} (*advisedly 1375 ⊂ directedly* 1539, preparedly 1606, persuadedly 1638, informedly 1642, instructedly 1873*) and d_{16} (*advisedness 1400 ⊂ preparedness 1590, instructedness 1628, persuadedness 1648, suggestedness 1802, directedness 1922, informedness 1946*). Synonymous concatenation may, however, characterize only one of the two coinages engendered by a shared base. It happens when synonyms to that base fail to produce at least two secondary deverbatives of either adverbial or nounal type but do so in respect to the other type.

A framework for sequential comparisons of the strings' constituents

The identity of the constituents' succession in the formation of derivationally related lexemes with the succession of constituents within the parent string is optional. This succession in respect of the common-root constituents of the derived string can be altered owing to the differences in the transposition time that a derivative takes to appear after the attestation of its base. The said time can also be negative when a derivative is attested prior to its base. But even in the event of identical succession, the effect of the evenness of the two strings' formation can be upset owing to the differences in the width of the transposition time. Hence, the unevenness of cross-categorial expansion is an intrinsic feature of the formation of the diachronic thesaurus

of deverbal derivational families. For that matter it seems worthwhile comparing the expansion of pairs of strings over time.

A computerized procedure of building matrices of the compared strings' expansion similarity was developed (cf. Bilynsky 2006). The similarity/dissimilarity between the constituents chronology in two synonymic strings depends on their relative ordinal positions. The ordinal position of the constituent in the string is determined by the age of its first *OED* citation. In the case when the constituents reveal identically dated diachronic textual prototypes they are placed, as mentioned above, in the succession of the contemporary strings. The extent of similarity of the temporal expansion of two compared diachronic strings is represented in a matrix.

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Example   INDICATE

URGENTLY            1548   URGENT         1496
INDICATIVELY        1603   INDICATIVE     1530
DISTRIBUTIVELY      1626   DISTRIBUTIVE   1475
INSTRUCTIVELY       1631   INSTRUCTIVE    1611
EXECUTIVELY         1661   EXECUTIVE      1646
ADMONITORILY        1845   ADMONITORY     1594
REGULATIVELY        1854   REGULATIVE     1599
SUGGESTIVELY        1859   SUGGESTIVE     1631
CONDUCTIVELY        1870   CONDUCTIVE     1528
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a) *similarity of the strings of adverbs and their motivating adjectives*

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Example   INDICATE

URGENTLY            1548   URGE        1560
INDICATIVELY        1603   INDICATE    1651
DISTRIBUTIVELY      1626   DISTRIBUTE  1460
INSTRUCTIVELY       1631   INSTRUCT    1477
EXECUTIVELY         1661   EXECUTE     1386
ADMONITORILY        1845   ADMONISH    1325
REGULATIVELY        1854   REGULATE    1630
SUGGESTIVELY        1859   SUGGEST     1526
CONDUCTIVELY        1870   CONDUCT     1400
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b) *similarity of the strings of adverbs and their motivating verbs*

Figure 1. Exemplification of the cross-tier matrices of temporal expansion similarity for derived adverbs.

The similarity is marked positively (pluses in the matrix squares) when the ordinal number the *i-th* constituent of the string placed in the matrix column (left-hand side lists in *Figures 1* and *2*) is larger than the ordinal number(s) of the constituent(s) from the string in the matrix row (right-hand side lists in *Figures 1* and *2*) located leftwards of its own common-root counterpart and, conversely, when the ordinal number of an arbitrary constituent of the column string is smaller than the ordinal number(s) of the constituents(s) placed rightwards of the respective common-root counterpart from the matrix row string. When these conditions fail to come true the similarity of the expansion of strings' constituents is lacking (minuses in the matrix squares). Then one may safely talk about the sequential deficiency of the compared strings.

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Example  REALIZE

APPREHENDINGLY        1581  APPREHENSIBLY        1672
DISCERNINGLY          1634  DISCERNIBLY          1643
REALIZINGLY           1849  REALIZABLY           1885
RECOGNIZINGLY         1854  RECOGNIZABLY         1840
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a) participial-adjectival direct cross-diathetical relatedness in adverbs

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Example  DIRECT

INSTRUCTEDNESS        1628  INSTRUCTIVENESS      1661
DIRECTEDNESS          1922  DIRECTIVENESS        1710
INFORMEDNESS          1946  INFORMATIVENESS      1924
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b) participial-adjectival reverse cross-diathetical relatedness in nouns

Figure 2. Exemplification of the one-tier matrices of temporal expansion similarity for secondary deverbal strings of the common part-of-speech affiliation.

Comparing two strings of synonyms whose constituents are members of the common-root deverbal families involves several types of relationships. In respect towards secondary deverbatives these are first and foremost cross-tier comparisons between the said coinages and their motivating bases in the form of common-root adjectives/participles and verbs (see exemplification of this on *Figure 1*). Such comparisons can be presented in the form of binary matrices. One may also speak about non-motivating cross-tier comparisons

between a string of a given class of secondary deverbatives and a string of deverbal nouns or a string of adjectives or participles whose categorial affiliation is different from that of the string that motivates the secondary deverbatives in question. Finally, there exist one-tier comparisons between two strings of secondary deverbatives with varied or identical status as regards their part-of-speech, derivational or diathetical, i.e. according to the grammatical category of voice of the verb in the respective paraphrase, affiliation (see exemplification of this on *Figure 2*).

The placement of either of the compared strings in the position of the matrix row and column is arbitrary. Yet, the advantage of writing the string of coinages in the matrix column when the string of respective one-root derivational bases is in the matrix row lies in avoiding empty lines in the matrix. The constituents that are derivationally sterile drop out from the matrix column, which does not happen if their string is placed in the matrix row. This becomes possible owing to the fact that there are no secondary derivatives without the respective common-root constituents in the strings of their derivational bases. Certainly, this peculiarity does not hold true for cross-tier non-motivating relationships nor for one-tier comparisons in the thesauri of secondary deverbatives.

Possible queries

The construed historical strings of secondary deverbatives give rise to almost eighteen and a half thousand matrices, revealing the similarity of their expansion with that of the respective strings of common-root motivators. One may speak of comparable figures for the numbers of construed matrices revealing comparisons of temporal expansion in pairs of strings of secondary deverbatives themselves, and cross-tier comparisons of strings of secondary deverbatives with those of primary deverbal nouns or their common-root non-motivating adjectives/participles. This vast empirical evidence can be analyzed along a number of different lines.

Assessing the affinity of the manifestation of specific features is graded, the respective objects being more or less akin rather than akin in principle. The initial attempt at generalization lies in distributing all the construed matrices for a given pair of strings according to the quotas of temporal expansion similarity minuses, or, eventually, pluses. The 10 per cent ranges of these quotas appear to fluctuate for the respective pairs of the compared strings allowing for looser or tighter groupings of classes of deverbal onomasiological categories.

In the visualization of the collected data (see the figures below) the horizontal axis shows the number of matrices and the vertical axis stands for the similarity ranges; the table specifies the compared strings with an optional length limitation on the string in the matrix column.
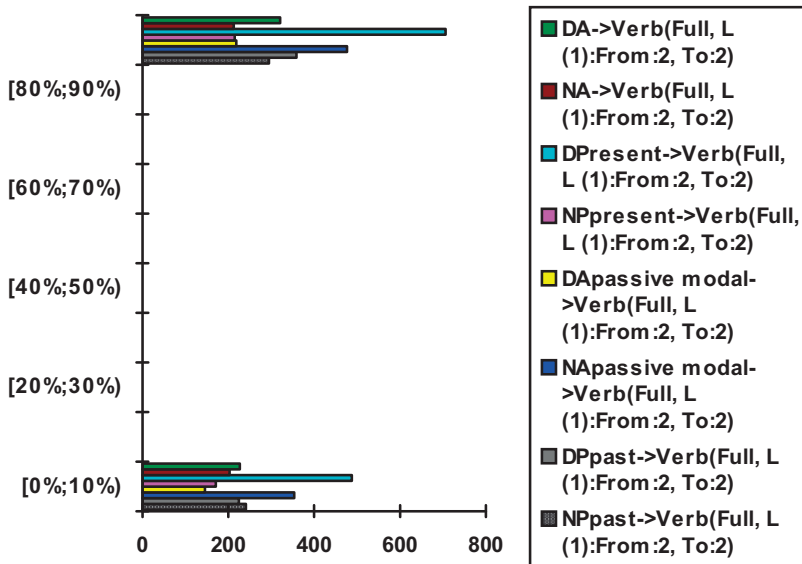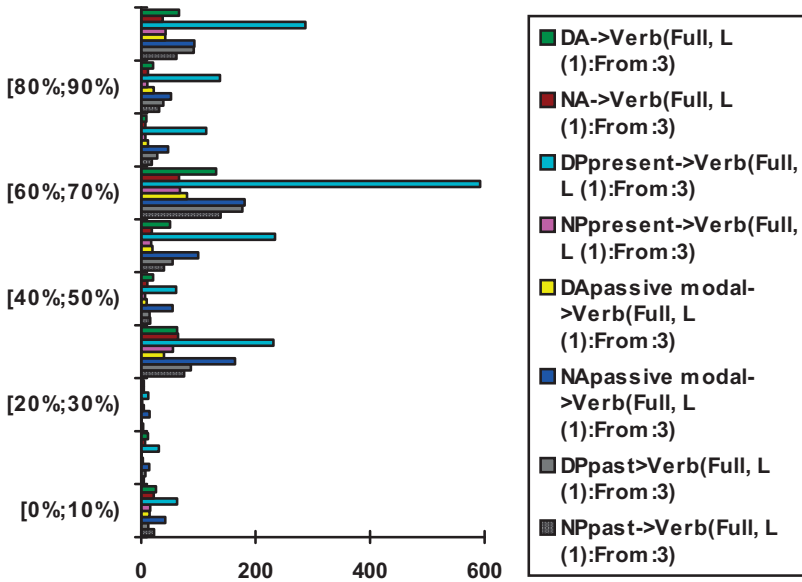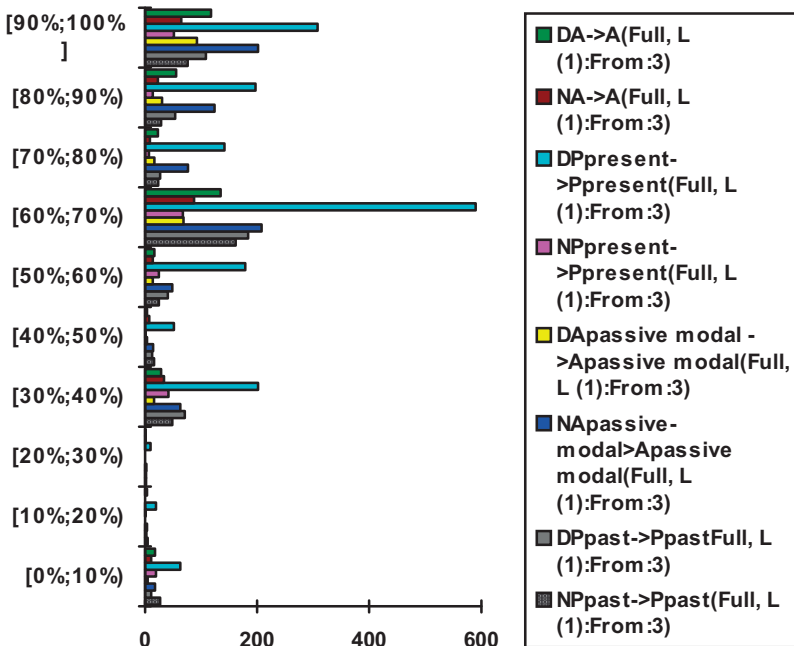
a) secondary deverbatives compared to verbs
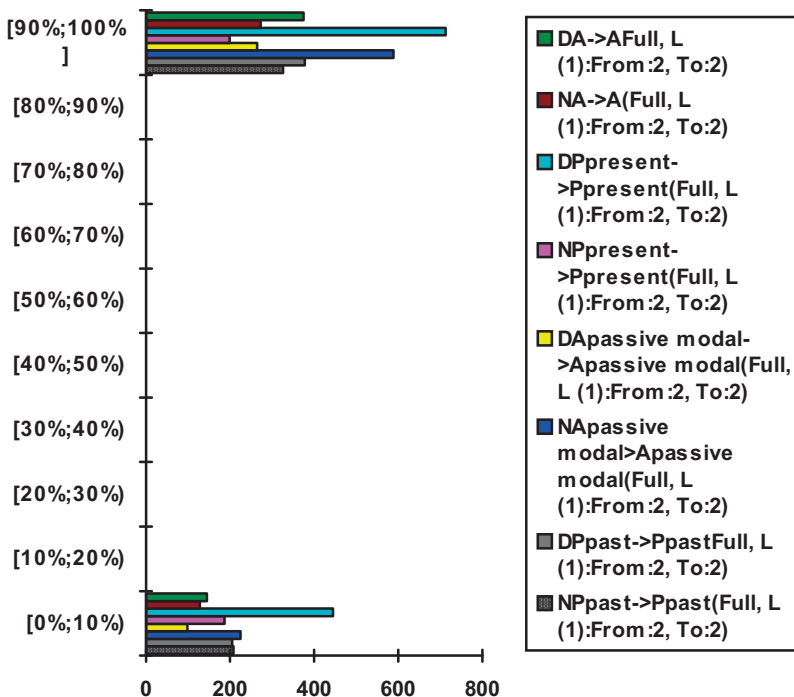
b) secondary deverbatives compared to adjectives/participles

Figure 3. Sequential similarity of two-member strings.

18

a) secondary deverbatives compared to verbs

b) secondary deverbatives compared to adjectives/participles

Figure 4. Sequential similarity of strings with more than two constituents.

Two-member strings revealing a derivationally motivating relationship yield identical or different expansion only (extreme upper and lower values on the vertical axis) whereas strings of larger lengths give a more versatile picture of sequential (dis)similarity distribution. Likewise, in two-member strings, which do not reveal motivating relations, extreme (dis)similarity values are the only ones possible, though there is no column-row conversion relationship of the strings' constituents. That is why there can be only two constituents in the matrix column when there are more than two constituents in the matrix row.

In strings of secondary deverbatives with just two constituents their sequential expansion is somewhat more similar to the expansion of the common-root motivating adjectives/participles than to the verbs (*Figure 3*). This observation also holds true for strings of secondary deverbatives that have more than two constituents. The upper half of the vertical axis on *Figure 4 (a)* is denser than on *Figure 4 (b)*. This is in line with the assessment of sequential similarity of the string's constituents expansion over time as an adaptation process that is more likely to arise in conditions of temporal and structural-semantic proximity than distance.

The compared strings of adverbs are generally longer than strings of nouns. Hence, the medium values of similarity in *Figure 5* occur more often than on *Figure 6*. As the extreme values of (dis)similarity of these classes of strings are roughly proportional repetition of sequential logic in the expansion of strings of adverbs generally occurs more often than in strings of nouns.
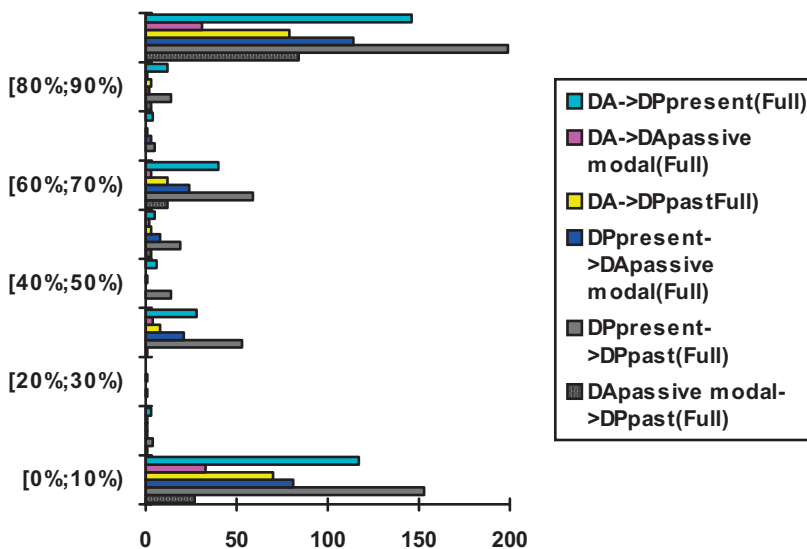

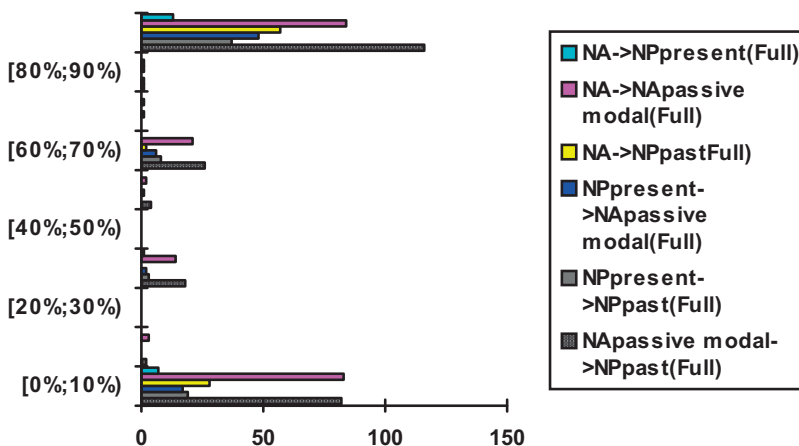*Figure 5*. Sequential similarity of strings of adverbs.

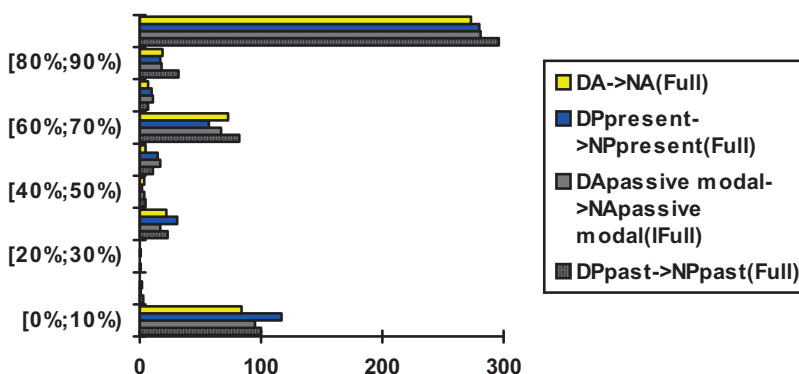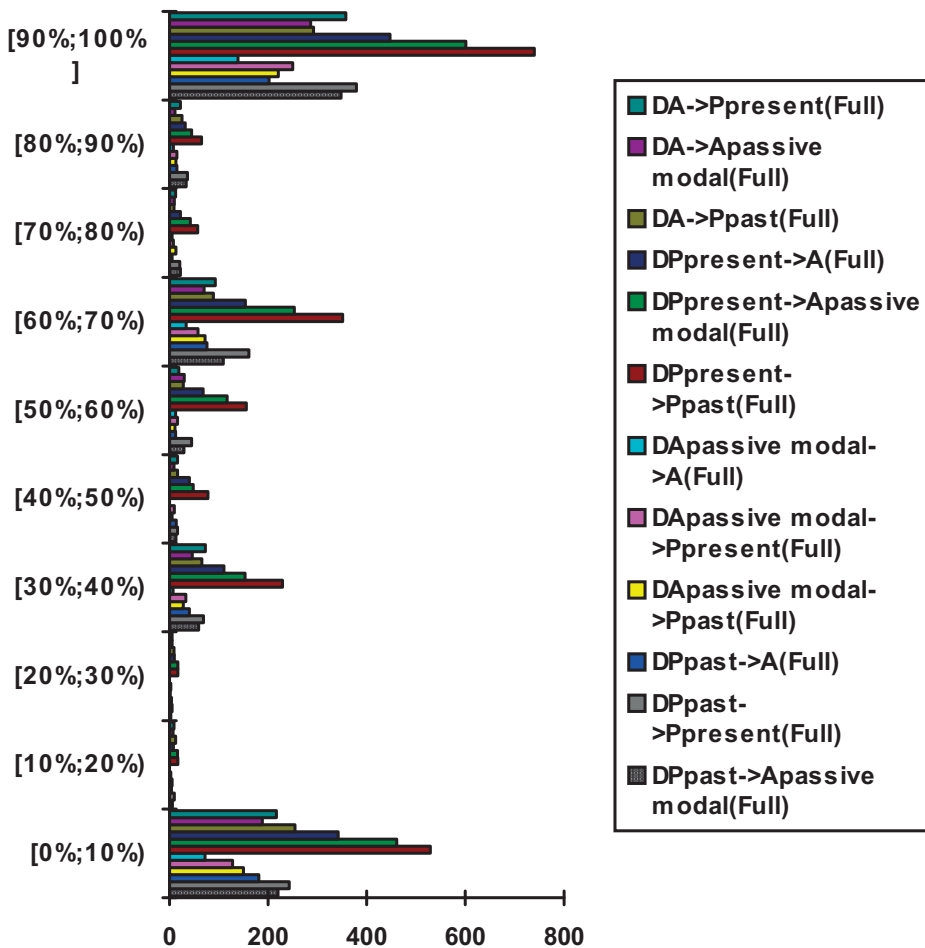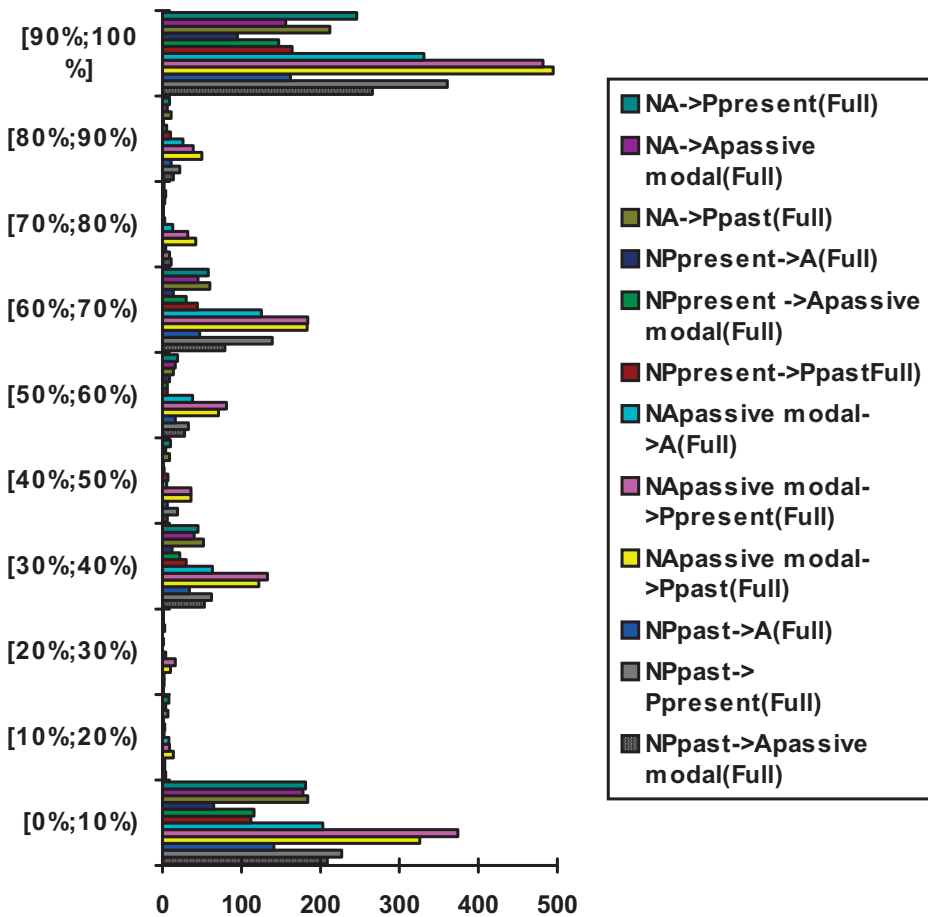*Figure 6.* Sequential similarity of strings of nouns.

Figure 7. Sequential similarity of strings of adverbs and nouns sharing common adjectival/participial motivators.

Secondary adverbs and nouns tend to show almost identical behaviour as regards the repetition of sequential logic revealed by the strings of their motivating and non-motivating common-root adjectives and participles with the exception of specific instances of re-categorization (cf. the numbers of matrices in the first two categories on *Figure 7* as well as categories 4 and 5 on *Figures 8* (a) and categories 8 and 9 on *Figure 8* (b)). A similar disparity is visible between all categories on *Figure 5* and their counterparts on *Figure 6*.

It is also possible to search for more subtle approaches to the issue of the expansion of synonyms over time on the basis of the values of mean imitative logic for strings of specific lengths. It appears that such values will be accessible in terms of the absolute age differentials between the very datings of the *OED* textual prototypes.

The chart shows horizontal bars grouped by percentage ranges on the vertical axis ([90%;100%], [80%;90%), [70%;80%), [60%;70%), [50%;60%), [40%;50%), [30%;40%), [20%;30%), [10%;20%), [0%;10%)) and values from 0 to 800 on the horizontal axis.

Legend:
- DA->Ppresent(Full)
- DA->Apassive modal(Full)
- DA->Ppast(Full)
- DPpresent->A(Full)
- DPpresent->Apassive modal(Full)
- DPpresent->Ppast(Full)
- DApassive modal->A(Full)
- DApassive modal->Ppresent(Full)
- DApassive modal->Ppast(Full)
- DPpast->A(Full)
- DPpast->Ppresent(Full)
- DPpast->Apassive modal(Full)

a) strings of adverbs and non-motivating adjectives/participles

b) strings of nouns and non-motivating adjectives/participles

Figure 8. Sequential similarity of the expansion of strings of secondary deverbatives and strings of non-motivation common-root adjectives/participles.

Concluding remarks

It is of value to note that the framework developed here may be applied to multiple stratification of the verbal and/or deverbal lexicon along chronological periods, etymological origin, thematic affiliation or otherwise determined

grounds. It is also open to testing by diachronically restructured evidence from compatible present-day thesauri as well as variant historical evidence from the *Middle English Dictionary*.

Combining the information from the OED with that contained in the lexicographic sources compiled according to the onomasiological tradition, the dictionaries of strings of synonyms being among them, is capable of opening up an integral area of diachronic semantic research. We have brought into this avenue the problem of word-forming re-categorization evinced in the derivationally reflected synonymy, as well as some possibilities of computer-aided quantitative lexicology, in particular the corpus format of data design, storage and recoverability, exemplary and/or exhaustive factual illustrations as well as visualization of distributions. It is beyond doubt that the approach developed here is but a single demonstration of the inexhaustible heuristic potential inherent in the earliest quotations corpus from the monumental Oxford English Dictionary.

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