THE VERBALIZATION OF INSTRUMENTALS IN ENGLISH

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1.0. There are at least three common and productive ways of deriving new verbs in English: (1) by transforming Verb+Instrumental Preposition+Noun into a verb derived from the noun object of the proposition, (2) by transforming Verb+Locative Preposition+Noun into a verb derived from the noun object of the proposition, or (3) by transforming Verb+LIKE+Noun into a verb derived from the noun after LIKE, i.e., a simile is transformed into a metaphor. Examples of these three types are as follows:

1a he covered his face with lather
1b he lathered his face

2a he got his opponent into a corner
2b he cornered his opponent

3a he ate his food like a wolf
3b he wolfed his food

In this article only the instrumental type (cf., 1a, 1b) will be discussed. The other two types were revealed while the corpus was being compiled.

1.1. A common way of deriving new verbs in English is to transform $V + PI + N$ into $VI$, where

$V$ = Main Verb

$PI$ = Instrumental Preposition

$N$ = Noun (Object of PI)

$VI$ = Verbalized Instrumental

For example:

John pounded the nail with a hammer =>

$N_1 \quad V \quad N_2 \quad PI \quad N_2$

John hammered the nail

$N_1 \quad VI \quad N_2$
The object of the preposition is transformed into the main verb and replaces it, and the prepositional phrase is lost. The repetition of the prepositional phrase would be redundant if VI is derived from \( N_2 \), cf.,

\[ \text{John hammered the nail with a hammer} \]

However, if VI is not derived from \( N_2 \), then a new sentence

\[ \text{John hammered the nail with a stone} \]

is possible, although a new sentence *John stoned the nail* is not possible.

The following article will show in which semantic categories this type of transformation tends to be productive; however, it must be remembered that this type of construction is not necessarily automatic.

1.2. Morphophonemes and Derivation. Verbs derived from instrumentals undergo sporadic morphophonemic alternations. The only regular and consistent alternation is that of final -\( o \) to -\( o \), e.g.,

Noun verb
mouth > mouth /maw/ /maw\( o \)/
bath > bathe /bathe/American only/

The vowel alternation in bath/bathe does not belong to a regular pattern of such alternations. Except for the alternation cited above /\( o \)<\( o \)/ the form of the derived verb is identical to the noun from which it is derived.

1.2.1. Back formations are also possible. For example, nouns ending in -\( er \) which look formally like a noun of agent lose the -\( er \) element when the new verb is derived.

Verb Noun
bulldoze < bulldozer
Also: house < housing
televise < television

1.2.2. In compound nouns one of the elements may be lost when the new verb is derived, cf.,

Verb Noun
sand < sandpaper
vacuum < vacuum cleaner

1.2.3. If the verbal element of a phrasal verb is being replaced by a noun, only the verb is lost; the phrasal particle remains, cf.,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shoot down with a gun} & > \text{gun down} \\
\text{tie up with a string} & > \text{string up} \\
\text{close up with bricks} & > \text{brick up}
\end{align*}
\]

1.3. Morphology. All verbs derived in this way are regular even though they may be homonymous with irregular verbs.

\[ \text{he ringed the bull} = \text{he provided the bull's nose with a ring} \]

The two exceptions to the rule that all such verbs are regular are the verbs light and shoe (a horse). In both British and American English the verb light may be regular or irregular:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{light} & \quad \text{lighted} & \quad \text{light}\text{ed} \\
\text{light} & \quad \text{lit} & \quad \text{lit}
\end{align*}
\]

as in:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{he lighted her cigarette} \\
or: \text{he lit her cigarette}
\end{align*}
\]

The principal parts of shoe are: shoe shoed shoeed

1.4. The Semantic Categories. The corpus of approximately two hundred items that we gathered — mainly by thinking them up rather than by searching through dictionaries or texts — revealed that there are numerous semantic areas where the verbalization of instrumentals can take place. Below is given a preliminary list — preliminary because the list can be expanded considerably and because the number of semantic categories might be combined thus reducing the number.

1.4.1. Verbs of ASSAILING, ATTACKING, HITTING.

4a. he attacked the enemy with a club
4b. he clubbed the enemy
5a. they attacked the enemy position with rockets
5b. they rocketed the enemy position
6a. he hit the guy in the groin with his knee
6b. he kneed the guy in the groin
7a. the doctor opened the boil with a lance
7b. the doctor lanced the boil

A. Other nouns which act the same way: bayonet, bomb, machine gun, grenade, shell, spear, elbow, knife, gun down, bazooka, ram (from battering ram), cone, stone, hammer, saw, cudgel, bat, whip, switch.

B. Words in the same category that do not act the same way: rifle (except in the meaning of search through, e.g. a drawer), tank, fist, foot, sword, dagger, lance (the large variety), bow, arrow, bullet.

At least two reasons may be found for certain items not fitting the general transformational rule: (1) with a word like bullet the semantic emphasis is placed on the instrument used for launching the bullet, i.e. the gun, since
bullets are fired only from guns. Rockets, however, may be launched from
airplanes or rocket launchers of various sorts so that the emphasis is only the
type of shelling used, and (2) words which already have a verb closely associa-
ted with them seem to resist the verbal transformation, e.g.,

fist — hit, punch sword, dagger — stab
foot — kick arrow — shoot

1.4.2. Verbs of ATTACHING, SECURING.

8a. he attached the papers together with a staple
8b. he stapled the papers together
9a. he attached the boards together with a nail
9b. he nailed the boards together
10a. he is putting on the stamp with glue
10b. he is gluing on the stamp

A. Other nouns which act the same way: pin, tack, thumbtack, screw (from screwdriver), tape (scotchtape, cellotape), gum, paste, rivet, stitch, wire, chain, band, rope, cement, bridge, lock, bolt, hinge.

1.4.3. Verbs of CLEANING AND TIDYING.

11a. she cleans the floor with a Hoover
11b. she hooeors the floor
12a. she cleans the tub with Ajax
12b. she ajaxes the tub
13a. he ventilates the room with air
13b. he aired the room

Note that in this group there are several verbs derived from trademarks.
A. Other nouns which act the same way: shampoo, vacuum (from vacuum
cleaner), Brillo, brush, comb, filter.
B. But not: broom, most likely because the noun broom is closely associated
with the verb sweep.

1.4.4. Verbs of PROVIDING. This category "to provide something with
something" seems to be the largest group of those verbs which can make the
instrumental transformation.

14a. she provided the needle with thread
14b. she threaded the needle
15a. he provided the screw with threads
15b. he threaded the screw

16a. the men were provided with housing in barracks
16b. the men were housed in barracks
17a. he provided the soup with salt
17b. he salted the soup

A. Other nouns which act the same way: vine (in the expression wine and
dine), stamp, address, seal, putty, heel (a shoe), toe (a shoe), water (horse,
garden), mark, check, star, line, arm (military), stock, cover, collar (a horse),
shoe (a horse), gas up (a car), oil (a machine), grease (a car), camouflage,
bug (provide with bugs = listening devices), pepper, spice, sugar (tea),
rin (a bull), letter.

1.4.5. Verbs of ENCLOSING. These verbs are closely related to the verbs
of PROVIDING, however, the result is always enclosure, confinement or
restraint.

18a. they enclosed the beer with bottles
18b. they bottled the beer
19a. he caught the fish with a net
19b. he netted the fish
20a. the cowboy caught the steer with a lasso
20b. the cowboy lassoed the steer

A. Other nouns which act the same way include: can (Amer.), tin (Brit.), box
barrel, case, carton, trap, snare, harpoon, hook, spear, rope, leash, jail, hand
seal, sack, bag, crate, fence in, corral, hedge (avoid confrontation), wall up
brick up, board up, plug up, dam up.

1.4.6. Verbs of COVERING. These verbs are also closely related to the
verbs of PROVIDING, but in such cases the entire surface of an object is
covered with some substance.

21a. he covered his back with soap
21b. he soaped his back
22a. he covered the wall with paint
22b. he painted the wall
23a. she covered the bread with butter
23b. she buttered the bread

A. Other nouns which act the same way: lather, paper, wallpaper, lacquer,
varnish, grease, oil, tar and feather, plaster, stucco, tar, asphalt, surface, wax,
carpet, panel (a wall), tile, whitewash, dust (for fingerprints — not remove
dust!), color, dye, powder (face).
1.4.7. Verbs of CONTACTING. A few nouns denoting means of communication can be transformed into verbs.

24a he contacted his mother by cable
24b he cabled his mother
25a the captain contacted the ship by radio
25b the captain radioed the ship
26a he contacted his aunt by telephone
26b he telephoned his aunt

A. Other nouns which act the same way: phone, wire, S. O. S., telex.
B. But not: letter, telegram, satellite, E. S. P.

1.4.8. Verbs of RECORDING. A very few verbs may be formed from nouns to denote the recording of an object or event. The recording may be internal (in the mind, memory) or external (on tape, on records, etc.).

27a he recorded the music by means of tape
27b he taped the music
28a he recorded her (image) on a photograph
28b he photographed her
29a he recorded her (image) by means of paint
29b he painted her

A. Other nouns which act the same way: eye, nose, nose around, film, xerox, microfilm, type (from typewriter), televise.

1.4.9. Verbs of TRANSFORMING. Within this class of derived verbs the meaning implied is that as a result of the action a thing is changed so that it cannot be restored to its original condition. One might argue that such verbs should be included together with the verbs of ATTACKING, etc., in 1.4.

30a he transformed the board with a plane
30b he planed the board
31a they leveled the ground with a bulldozer
31b they bulldozed the ground
32a he prepared the floor with sandpaper
32b he sanded (sandpapered) the floor

A. Other nouns which act the same way: plow, hoe, rake, harrow, combine, tool (leather), chisel, axe, saw, drill.

1.4.10. The final category of instrumentals which can be verbalized are those nouns of TRANSPORTING and TRANSPORTING. This is the only class of nouns which produces intransitive verbs as well as transitive. The reader may have already noticed that all of the verbs generated so far are transitive. When modes of transportation are referred to and the main verb is go, an intransitive verb will result.

33a they went to the city by (motor) car
33b they motored to the city
34a he went to school by bicycle
34b he bicycled (cycled) to school
35a they went to Paris by jet (plane)
35b they jetted to Paris

Most of the nouns denoting means of transportation do not undergo this transformation, perhaps because the verbs go, ride or travel are closely associated with them, cf., car, auto, plane, train, coach, horse, rocket, streetcar, tram, buggy, motorcycle, motorbike, scooter.

Transitive verbs of this class include:

36a they take children to school by bus
36b they bus children to school
37a they took the eggs to market by cart
37b they carted the eggs to market
38a he transferred the book to me by hand
38b he handed me the book
39a they put the hay onto the wagon with a pitchfork
39b they forked the hay onto the wagon

A. Other nouns which act the same way: spoon, match (a train), hoist, shovel, rake (leaves).

Note that the intransitive verbs ski, skate, iceskate, sled should probably be categorized together with the locative types mentioned in 1.0. and not with the instrumentals discussed here, cf., go on skis, go on skates, go on a sled, though it could be argued that they mean go by means of skis, etc.

1.5. Conclusion. In TG terms there seems to be a transformation which deletes certain adverbial and prepositional phrases and places the nominal in these phrases in the verb position. In such cases we can posit a deep verbal which is deleted in the deep structure and replaced with the lexical item which might otherwise be attached to the NP position in the adverbial or prepositional phrase.
For instrumental prepositional phrases there seem to be several (ten were counted here) semantic categories of deep verb which may be replaced. It has been noted that not all nouns may be automatically transformed into a verb in a given category; but, on the other hand, such constructions do not disturb a native speaker of either British or American English even if he has never heard or produced a given expression. This type of construction is productive especially when the deep verb is PROVIDE or one of those closely related to it (COVER or ENCLOSURE). The reasons for an English speaker's readiness to make such transformations is probably threefold: (1) a tendency to produce the shortest and most concise utterances to give the greatest amount of information, (2) the fact that English has very little morphological baggage so that it is very easy to take any lexical item and use it as a noun, verb, or even adjective, and (3) the fact that ambiguity virtually never arises. Of course, a sentence such as

40a. she bottled the wine

could mean:

40b. she attacked the wine with a bottle

as in: she clubbed her husband
or: 40e. she covered the wine with bottles
as in: she soaped her back
or: 40d. she contacted the wine with a bottle
as in: she wired her mother-in-law
or: 40e. she recorded the wine with a bottle
as in: she filmed her husband's French lesson

and so on. However, there is usually no problem in interpretation, and a language easily supports the ambiguities that do exist without too much confusion given the proper context—even with a sentence like: Da Vinci painted the chair. In the verbs derived in this short presentation ambiguity is resolved primarily because every speaker of English is fully aware of the use and limitations placed on the instruments under discussion.

A further study should be made to (1) attempt to reduce the number of deep verb semantic categories in the instrumental constructions, (2) examine those locative and metaphorical constructions which also involve the transformation of nouns into verbs, and (3) examine the possibility of whether perhaps not all verbs are in fact derived from nouns in a similar way in the deep structure.