

EXPLORING THE SUFFIX POTENTIAL OF THE ELEMENTS -(A)THON, -PRENEUR, -TAINMENT AND -ZILLA IN PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH

Maria Kolarova
St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

m.kolarova@uni-sofia.bg

The paper studies the morphological status of the elements *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* in present-day English. The elements in question behave very much like suffixes, frequently appearing in creative and often playful neologisms. By analysing their behaviour, with a focus on their origin, the types of morphs they combine with and the meanings they convey, this study aims to assess how closely *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* align with fully-fledged suffixes in present-day English word-formation.

Key words: suffix, combining form, splinter, English word-formation

I. Introduction

Change is an inherent feature of language and, as pointed out by Aitchison (2001: 4), “[i]n a world where humans grow old, tadpoles change into frogs, and milk turns into cheese, it would be strange if language alone remained unaltered”. Change that affects the structure of words is known as morphological change (Trips 2017: 1) and one specific type of morphological change is what Trips (2017: 13) refers to as “the development of new word-formation patterns on semantic grounds”, as shown by the emergence of the formatives *-burger* and *-gate*. These word-formative elements arose as a result of the reanalysis of morphological complexes, i.e. *-burger* developed from *Hamburger* denoting ‘a person from Hamburg’ and *-gate* from *Watergate* related to Nixon’s Watergate scandal (Trips 2017: 12–13). The English language provides particularly favourable conditions for similar processes to occur frequently due to its dynamic nature and distinctive ability to integrate new concepts through creative word-formation.

This study investigates the morphological status of the elements *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* in present-day English. These elements bear some resemblance to suffixes in that they exhibit increasing productivity in their ability to attach after another element, which results in the formation of creative and often playful neologisms. Their semantic density, however, is higher than that of standard suffixes and they are ambiguous between splinters and combining forms (CFs), which, as noted by Mattiello (2023: 187, 188, 204), constitute two distinct and heterogeneous categories.

By analyzing the behaviour of *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla*, with a focus on their origin, the types of morphs they combine with and the meanings they convey, the study seeks to determine how closely the features of these four elements resemble the features of fully-fledged suffixes in present-day English. To achieve this primary objective, the study relies on a self-compiled database of items, drawn mainly from the *News on the Web* corpus (NOW), along with some online dictionaries, websites, and reference books. In addition, the adequate fulfillment of this objective requires a summarized, yet systematic review of the terms affix, affixoid, combining form and splinter, which is presented in the section that follows.

II. Distinguishing between affixes, affixoids, combining forms and splinters

In order to gain a more precise understanding of the morphological status of *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* in present-day English, it is important to clarify the nuances between the terms affix, affixoid, combining form and splinter. We shall do so by outlining the key features of these elements and providing relevant examples where necessary.

To begin with, some of the descriptions of affixes in the linguistic literature include the following: “bound morphs which do NOT realize unanalyzable lexemes” (Bauer 1983: 18) (original capitalization); bound morphemes made up of “one or more segments that typically appear before, after, or within a base morpheme” (Lieber 2009: 197); shorter morphemes that cannot occur alone but attach to a word or a main part of a word and usually have an abstract meaning (Haspelmath and Sims 2010: 19); bound morphemes that attach “to a root or stem to form a new lexeme (derived form) or an inflected form or stem of an existing lexeme” (Aronoff and Fudeman 2011: 258); recurrent pieces of phonological material, which are not roots and which have “a relatively consistent effect on the meaning of the word” in which they occur (Bauer 2014: 118). Thus, on the basis of these

definitions, we can describe affixes as bound morphemes that typically carry an abstract meaning and exert a generally consistent influence on the meaning of the word in which they appear.

As regards the term affixoid, also called semi-affix, some of its definitions in the literature are more restrictive than others (Bauer 2014: 121). In Booij (2005: 114), this term is used “to denote morphemes which look like parts of compounds, and do occur as lexemes, but have a specific and more restricted meaning when used as part of a compound”. Thus, elements such as *-like* (*childlike*), *-ware* (*tableware*) or *-worthy* (*newsworthy*) are classified by Booij (2005: 114) as suffixoids or semi-suffixes “since they are morphemes that function as suffixes and have corresponding lexemes”. The author also indicates that these morphemes resemble suffixes in that “the set of words ending in *like*, *worthy*, and *ware* can be extended” (ibid. 114).

The term combining form (CF) is typically applied to neoclassical elements of Greek or Latin origin, such as *bio-*, *geo-*, *-logy* or *-phile*, which are bound morphemes attaching to other elements either initially (*biorhythm*) or finally (*fashionology*) (Mattiello 2023: 1). In Bauer’s words (1983: 213), CFs “function as affixes in some places” but they “appear to be distinct from affixes in other facets of their behaviour”. The author illustrates that while Initial Combining Forms (ICFs) (*bio-*, *electro-*) can easily combine with Final Combining Forms (FCFs) (*-crat*, *-phile*) to form neoclassical compounds such as *biocrat* or *electrophile*, suffixes are not capable of combining with ICFs and prefixes are not capable of combining with FCFs (e.g. **electroness* or **bephile* are impossible words) (Bauer 1983: 213–215). However, the forms *hyper-ness* (“I went from a state of hyper-ness to tears”), *pseudo-ness* (“To be clear, pseudo-ness isn’t solely about ownership”) and *retro-ness* (“I love the retro-ness of these sunglasses”), taken from the NOW corpus, show that it is not entirely impossible for a suffix to combine with a neoclassical ICF. In this case, it is the suffix *-ness*, whose exceptionally high productivity in present-day English may partly account for the emergence of such unusual and creative formations.

In Bauer et al. (2013: 441), CFs are described as “formatives of potentially unclear status as base or affix”, neoclassical or non-native elements, many of which are obligatorily bound. The authors explicitly indicate that “the classical elements may sometimes also be used in English as free forms” (ibid. 441). Overall, CFs constitute a ‘fuzzy’ category (Bauer et al. 2019, as cited in Mattiello 2023: 2) and as Mattiello (2023: 9) puts it, they are “notoriously difficult to define and classify”.

Yet, Mattiello (2023) has conducted an extensive investigation where she has identified three distinct categories of CFs: a) neoclassical, defined as “allomorphic variants of classical Latin or Greek words” and considered to be “the closest to compound constituents” (*bio-* or *-logy*) (ibid. 2–3, 79); b) abbreviated, formed through deleting initial or final material while preserving “all the semantic content of their source lexemes” (*cyber-* or *-tainment*) (ibid. 15, 58, 106) and c) secreted, involving both abbreviation and semantic reinterpretation (*-gate* or *-zilla*) (ibid. 15, 58, 146). Regarding the origin of abbreviated and secreted CFs, the author notes that they can be obtained from either native or non-native English words (ibid. 64).

In addition, Mattiello (2023: 43) observes that “CFs are variously combinable with bound and free morphs” and “they even combine with one another”. She also points out that semantically, the various CFs exhibit substantial differences but “CFs bear higher semantic weight and lexical density than affixes, in that they involve reanalysis (e.g. the name of the Greek town *Marathon* is segmented as *mara* + *-thon*) and semantic reinterpretation (e.g. *-thon* ‘long and strenuous event’)” (ibid. 16). What could be added for the abbreviated CFs in which no semantic change occurs is that their higher lexical density is due to preserving the meaning of the original lexeme. In the case of neoclassical CFs this increased lexical density can be attributed to their origin as condensed, allomorphic variants of Latin or Greek words.

Another key observation by Mattiello (2023: 146) relevant to our research is that “[l]ike abbreviated CFs, secreted CFs are close to affixes because of their bound character and abstract meaning”. As to abbreviated CFs in particular, the author indicates that what makes them similar to affixes is their boundedness (ibid. 106).

Concerning the category of splinters, Bauer et al. (2013: 19, 525) define them as “originally (mostly) non-morphemic portions of a word that have been split off and used in the formation of new words with a specific new meaning” and indicate that splinters are “used recurrently on new bases (free or bound)”. The authors also add: “Given that splinters seem to be only moderately productive, it may even be the case that most of them are never firmly established as bound morphemes. But when they do become more productive, they may even start a life as a free form as in the case of *burger* ‘patty served on a bun’” (ibid. 525). The productivity potential of splinters is emphasized in a subsequent study where they are defined as “abbreviated elements that arise in blends and then have the potential to be used productively” (Bauer 2017, as cited in Mattiello 2023: 22). Another essential feature of these elements, indicated by Bauer et al. (2013: 19) is that they

“usually carry some of the semantic content of the original word from which they split (*-licious* from *delicious*, *-scape* from *landscape*, etc.), and therefore are more contentful than typical affixes”.

What emerges from the provided definitions of splinters and CFs is that the boundary between these two types of formatives is often blurred. This is in line with Mattiello’s (2023: 22) observation that “the borders between CFs and blends seem not to be clear”. She clarifies that for the categories of CFs, there may be more central and easily recognizable examples, as well as examples whose status is not easy to determine (ibid. 23). Regarding splinters, Mattiello (2023: 22) describes them as “transitional between word parts used in blends to proper CFs”.

Beliaeva (2019: 8–17), for her part, investigates the recurrent use of splinters in contemporary English, highlighting at the same time that “[i]t is not surprising that splinters can be one-off formations only existing in the blends they appeared in, given the complex interplay of factors involved in their forming to suit a particular environment” (ibid. 9). Accordingly, the distinction between splinters and CFs can be sought in terms of productivity, as Lehrer (1998: 4) suggests: “[t]he creation of a blend does not necessarily result in a new combining form. It depends on whether the SPLINTER, that is, the truncated word, becomes productive” (original small caps). In other words, only when a splinter is productively involved in the formation of novel words, can it be recognized as a combining form (Mattiello 2023: 187).

In our investigation the terms splinter and combining form will be used interchangeably (see Beliaeva 2019: 9) to refer to units that have arisen in blends, exhibit higher semantic density than typical affixes, and combine recurrently with other morphs, either free or bound. We shall not make use of the term affixoid so as to avoid terminological confusion.

III. Origin, meaning and behaviour of *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* in present-day English

The elements *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* differ in their origin, meaning, and combinability properties. Thus, while some of them seem to be more susceptible to a suffix interpretation, others are still quite far from the class of fully-fledged suffixes. What follows is an overview of the key features of these elements. Due to space limitations, however, the discussion will be kept concise and focused on the most relevant aspects.

► The element *-(a)thon* occurs in a large number of forms such as *appathon*, *Barack-athon*, *bikeathon*, *buildathon*, *cleanathon*, *climbathon*,

collectathon, cookathon, danceathon, datathon, designathon, dogathon, drumathon, funathon, get-it-on-athon, golfathon, greenathon, ideathon, knitathon, mapathon, metathon, pickathon, pinkathon, readathon, rockathon, runathon, shavathon, singathon, spendathon, swimathon, talkathon, techathon, telethon, thankathon, vaxathon, walkathon, webathon, yogathon, zumbathon, etc. As noted above, *-(a)thon* originates from the noun *marathon* ('a running race of about 26 miles') and has evolved to signify 'a long and typically strenuous event' (*bikeathon, swimathon, walkathon*), often organized for charitable purposes or fundraising (*rockathon, singathon, telethon*) (Mattiello 2023: 16). Thus, *-(a)thon* exemplifies a process of reinterpretation, i.e. secretion, which, in this particular case, involves a semantic widening of the source word (Mattiello 2023: 15–16). We could add that while *-(a)thon* has indeed widened its meaning from a running race to include a variety of long and strenuous events, it has also developed a more specialized nuance referring to events typically organized for charitable purposes or fundraising (cf. Mattiello 2023: 16). Thus, in the case of *-(a)thon* the process of semantic widening appears to have been followed by, or occurred alongside, a process of semantic specialization.

This element combines with a large number of free bases, which are mainly verbal (*knitathon, singathon*), or nominal (*golfathon, ideathon*), but adjectival bases are not impossible either (*greenathon, pinkathon*), as well as proper nouns (*Barack-athon*¹) and even complex bases (*get-it-on-athon*²). Within the purely nominal bases, *-(a)thon* seems to prefer inanimates (*bikeathon, drumathon, mapathon*), but animates are not entirely excluded (*dogathon*). Clippings can also occur as in *techathon* (*tech* < *technology*) or *vaxathon* (*vax* < *vaccination* or *vaccine*). In addition, *-(a)thon* is found in formations such as *metathon* and *telethon*, where it is combined with a non-native prefix / neoclassical ICF³. Our database, however, does not contain many examples of this type.

In the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Merriam-Webster *-(a)thon* is classified as a combining form, whereas Collins Dictionary and Cambridge Dictionary list it as a suffix and the Online Etymology

¹ *Barack-athon* denotes the activity of endlessly watching newsclips, TV shows and videos about Barack Obama (urbandictionary.com).

² *Get-it-on-athon* is used to refer to an ostentatious and prolonged display of affection, often occurring in a fairly public setting (urbandictionary.com).

³ In Bauer et al. (2013: 603–610), neoclassical elements such as *crypto-*, *hyper-*, *hypo-*, *inter-*, *intra-*, *mega-*, *meta-*, *mini-*, *multi-*, *retro-*, etc. are classified as non-native prefixes.

Dictionary simply labels it as a word-forming element. Baldi and Dawar (2000, as cited in Mattiello 2023: 18–19) recognize the suffix status of *-(a)thon*, citing it as an example of “unconventional suffixes (“folkmorphs”)” used “to create appealing names for certain types of jargon expressions”. Additionally, this element appears to have started to acquire some independence, as illustrated by the following citation, where it is used as a modifier to a noun: “After months of silence on Ghana’s attempt to set a “thon” record, 2nd July, 2024, seemed like the day destined for glory” (NOW). The insertion of inverted commas around *thon*, however, suggests that the writer perceives this usage as relatively novel or unusual.

► The element *-preneur*, obtained from the French borrowing *entrepreneur*, preserves the meaning of the source word: ‘an individual who manages the risks of a business or enterprise’. Thus, according to Mattiello’s (2023) model *-preneur* qualifies as an abbreviated CF. It is worth noting that in French *preneur* functions as an independent lexeme literally meaning ‘taker’, especially one who accepts an offer or takes a bet.

The element *-preneur* is frequently used in present-day English to form nouns that generally denote a person who actively undertakes an initiative, business or project within a certain field or industry. Our database includes examples such as: *agropreneur*, *artpreneur*, *beautypreneur*, *cinemapreneur*, *dealer-preneur*, *ecopreneur*, *edupreneur*, *electropreneur*, *fashionpreneur*, *foodpreneur*, *hairpreneur*, *homepreneur*, *hustler-preneur*, *info-preneur*, *intrapreneur*, *jack-of-all preneur*, *kidpreneur*, *maker-preneur*, *mediapreneur*, *migrant-preneur*, *mompreneur*, *multi-preneur*, *musicpreneur*, *parentpreneur*, *passionpreneur*, *salespreneur*, *smartpreneur*, *techpreneur*, *tenderpreneur*, *womanpreneur*, *youthpreneur*, among others.

As illustrated by the provided examples *-preneur* easily combines with free bases, which can be abstract nouns (*beautypreneur*, *musicpreneur*, *passionpreneur*), person-referring nouns (*kidpreneur*, *parentpreneur*, *migrant-preneur*), nouns denoting inanimate entities (*foodpreneur*, *hairpreneur*) or nouns specific to certain fields such as business, commerce, communication, cinema, etc. (*cinemapreneur*, *mediapreneur*, *salespreneur*, *tenderpreneur*). Additionally, there are examples where the left-hand constituent is an *-er* derivative, (*dealer-preneur*, *maker-preneur*) and, occasionally, even a phrase (*jack-of-all preneur*). An adjectival base in left-hand position is not impossible either (*smartpreneur*). The formative *-preneur* also enters into combination with non-native prefixes / neoclassical ICFs (*agropreneur*, *ecopreneur*, *intrapreneur*, *multi-preneur*), other splinters (*edupreneur*) or clippings (*info-preneur*, *techpreneur*).

In some formations, the left-hand constituent highlights the personal identity or role of the entrepreneur. For instance, a *parentpreneur* is an individual who balances the responsibilities of being a parent with running their own business and a *kidpreneur* is a child or teenager actively engaged in entrepreneurial ventures. In other formations, the left-hand element specifies a particular field, object or concept associated with the business enterprise. For example, a *salespreneur* is an entrepreneur working in sales, a *foodpreneur* is an entrepreneur involved in the food industry, and a *fashionpreneur* is one who manages ventures related to fashion. The form *passionpreneur* is somewhat different as it refers to an individual who transforms their personal passion into a viable business venture (Urban Dictionary).

Citations taken from the NOW corpus show that *(-)preneur* is not infrequently perceived and used as an independent lexeme: “In a rising economy, with the urge to go it alone, through a variety of start-up models, becoming the norm, we welcomed ‘mumpreneur’, ‘seniorpreneur’, ‘photopreneur’, and ‘hairpreneur’. In fact, any ‘preneur’ you care to mention was welcomed into the corporate fold” and “Since selling Method, the risk – the thrill! – was gone. I was an entrepreneur with no preneur”, where *preneur* is not surrounded by inverted commas. It should also be noted that the formative *-preneur* is not recorded in any of the dictionaries cited in reference to *-(a)thon*.

► The element *-tainment* is abbreviated from *entertainment* and is used to form “nouns denoting genres of broadcasting, journalism, etc., in which entertainment is combined with aspects of the genre indicated by the first element” (Mattiello 2023: 126; OED). Some of the examples in our database are *afrotainment*, *agritainment*, *anger-tainment*, *artainment*, *beautytainment*, *cricketainment*, *cruisertainment*, *digitainment*, *docutainment*, *eatertainment*, *eco-tainment*, *edutainment*, *exertainment*, *fashiontainment*, *foodtainment*, *garden-tainment*, *Hypertainment*, *infotainment*, *intertainment*, *irony-tainment*, *lawyer-tainment*, *mobitainment*, *newstainment*, *politainment*, *retro-tainment*, *shoppertainment*, *sportainment*, *supertainment*, *tentertainment*, etc.

The element *-tainment* retains the meaning of the original word *entertainment* and thus, as stated by Mattiello (2023: 58), qualifies as an abbreviated CF. This element has the ability to combine with free bases, which range from abstract or uncountable nouns (*anger-tainment*, *beautytainment*, *fashiontainment*, *newstainment*) to concrete inanimates

(*cruisertainment*, *garden-tainment*), person-referring nouns (*lawyertainment*) and occasionally adjectives (*high-tainment*⁴).

The element in question also occurs in different structural types of blends. In one type, which includes examples such as *edutainment*, *exertainment* or *politainment*, *-tainment* combines with another splinter, e.g. *edutainment* < *education* + *entertainment*. In another type, represented by formations such as *artainment*, *cricketainment* or *sportainment*, the left source word remains unaltered and its final consonant overlaps with the initial consonant of *-tainment* (see Bauer 1983: 236; Beliaeva 2019: 8), e.g. *cricketainment* < *cricket* + *entertainment*.

There are also blends, such as *eatertainment* or *shoppertainment*, which preserve a larger portion of the source word *entertainment*, e.g. *shoppertainment* < *shopping* + *entertainment* (The rise of “shoppertainment” – the fusion of shopping and entertainment – redefines how brands connect with audiences” (NOW)). Another example is *tentertainment*, where the overlap between the source words *tent* and *entertainment* allows both to be fully preserved in the resulting formation, e.g. *tentertainment* < *tent* + *entertainment*.

Bauer et al. (2013: 529) indicate that “a blend analysis is impossible in those cases where the splinter carries a meaning that is different from that of the original word”. Since *-tainment* retains the meaning of its source word, an interpretation in terms of blending seems to be readily applicable to *-tainment* formations that feature a phonological loss in the first component (Bauer et al. 2013: 528–529) or an overlap between the two components.

The element *-tainment* also has the ability to combine with non-native prefixes / neoclassical ICFs, as illustrated by *afrotainment*, *agritainment*, *eco-tainment*, *Hypertainment*, *retro-tainment* or *supertainment*. This combinability property suggests that *-tainment* cannot straightforwardly be assigned a suffix status, despite the above-mentioned observation that it is not absolutely impossible for a suffix to combine with a non-native prefix / neoclassical ICF, as in the case of *hyper-ness*. Such formations are unusual and do not reflect the typical behaviour of conventional suffixes in English. In addition, *(-)-tainment* has started to gain currency as a standalone lexeme, which can be seen in the following citations from the NOW corpus: “On the “tainment” side of things, there is now in-car gaming courtesy of

⁴ *High-tainment* denotes a type of entertainment experienced by someone who is “high”, i.e. under the influence of drugs (urbandictionary.com).

AirConsole, video streaming with YouTube, a TiVo app, BMW's Bundesliga app, and other apps" and "a little bit of info and an awful lot of tainment", where *tainment* is used without inverted commas.

That *(-)tainment* has arguably developed features of a free morph is also largely supported by the availability of the form *supertainment* and Bauer's (1983: 215) observation that "*super-* does not appear to be prefixed to FCFs at all", where *super-*⁵ is cited as a prefix synonymous with the ICF *hyper-*. While *-hyper* was originally a CF, it is now included in the class of non-native prefixes in English and "continues to be able to attach to other combining forms" (Bauer et al. 2013: 405, 605). Furthermore, like *super-*, *hyper-* is also found in combination with *(-)tainment*, as in *Hypertainment*, and Bauer et al.'s (2013: 405) remark that both prefixes *super-* and *hyper-* "now attach freely to words" seems to lend extra support to the likely word status of *(-)tainment*.

Another important point to note is that *-tainment* is listed as a combining form in the OED, but it does not appear in Merriam-Webster, Collins Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary or the Online Etymology Dictionary.

► The element *-zilla* is obtained from *Godzilla*, the name of a fictional, gigantic, dinosaurian monster that emerged from Japanese pop culture, specifically from Ishirō Honda's 1954 film *Gojira* (see Mattiello 2023: 169). This element is used to form "humorous, usually temporary words which depict a person or thing as a particularly imposing, relentless, or overbearing example of its kind" (Mattiello 2023: 169; OED). Some of the *-zilla* formations we have collected include *Batzilla*, *Birdzilla*, *birthdayzilla*, *Bosszilla*, *Bridezilla*, *Catzilla*, *clientzilla*, *cowzilla*, *Dadzilla*, *Ecozilla*, *Fedzilla*, *filmzilla*, *fishzilla*, *Foodzilla*, *Fordzilla*, *Frogzilla*, *gamezilla*, *Gateszilla*, *Goldzilla*, *Govzilla*, *groomzilla*, *Megazilla*, *MetaZilla*, *melonzilla*, *Minizilla*, *momzilla*, *promzilla*, *sharkzilla*, *Snowzilla*, *Sportzilla*, *Steakzilla*, *TransZilla*, *Trumpzilla*, *WarmZilla*, *Webzilla*, *weddingzilla*, *wifezilla*, *wormzilla*, etc. Since *-zilla* involves both abbreviation and semantic reinterpretation – specifically metaphorization, as it links a person, animal or thing to the colossal and violent monster *Godzilla* due to their domineering behaviour or massive size – it qualifies as a secreted CF (Mattiello 2023: 21, 169).

Besides the meaning of imposing size or overbearing behaviour, *-zilla* has developed a more specific nuance, denoting a person intensely obsessed with what is indicated by the left-hand element of a *-zilla* formation. This

⁵ The original prefix status of *super-* in English is also specified in Bauer et al. (2013: 405).

can be seen in examples such as *birthdayzilla* ('a person excessively obsessed with planning and celebrating their birthday' (Urban Dictionary)), *gamezilla* ('a person obsessed with gaming' (Urban Dictionary)), *promzilla* ('an overly prom-obsessed adolescent' (NOW)) or *weddingzilla* ('a person obsessively focused on planning every detail of their wedding' (NOW)).

-Zilla is also commonly used in names of companies such as *CarZilla*, *Homezilla*, *PizzaZilla*, *Sportzilla*, *TechZilla*, *WarmZilla*, *WebZilla*, etc. Presumably, this usage suggests that the company is metaphorically a giant or force to be reckoned with in its field. The element *-zilla* adds a tone of exaggeration, often combined with humour, and creates attention-grabbing brand names because of its association with Godzilla. Mattiello (2023: 170), for her part, comments on the use of *-zilla* in advertising, where nonce words like *Burgerzilla* or *Steakzilla* are coined "to attract new customers by drawing their attention to the huge size of such food as hamburgers or steaks".

This element combines with free bases, which are mainly common nouns, human (*Bridezilla*, *Dadzilla*, *momzilla*, *wifezilla*), non-human animate (*Birdzilla*, *Catzilla*, *cowzilla*, *sharkzilla*) or inanimate (*filmzilla*, *melonzilla*, *Snowzilla*, *Steakzilla*) but proper nouns are also possible (*Gateszilla*, *Trumpzilla*) and occasionally adjectives (*WarmZilla*). It can combine with non-native prefixes / neoclassical ICFs (*Ecozilla*, *Megazilla*, *MetaZilla*, *Minizilla*, *TransZilla*) or clippings (*Fedzilla* < *federal* (*government*) + *Godzilla*, *Govzilla* < *government* + *Godzilla*).

In informal contexts, *(-)zilla* is also used as a free morph to describe a person or animal perceived as fearsome, tough or excessively assertive. For example: "Monster Bridesmaids: Why should the bride be the only Zilla – especially after she made her friends buy these horrible dresses?"⁶. Additionally, it can refer to any type of monster such as a dinosaur, King Kong, Godzilla, etc. ("Look, dad, what a zilla!") or function as a slang intensifier, indicating the greatness or intensity of something, as in "I got zilla cash" or "some zilla brain" (Urban Dictionary).

In the OED, *-zilla* is listed as a combining form and in the Wordplay Section of Merriam-Webster, it is defined as a suffix that "has come to indicate a particularly strong or large example of its variety" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/-zilla>). This element, however, is not recorded in Collins Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary or the Online Etymology Dictionary.

The following section provides a summary of the findings from the analysis of *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* presented above. In

⁶ This citation has been taken from: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/zilla>.

addition to summarizing the findings, it briefly highlights topics that merit further investigation.

IV. Summary of findings and other research avenues

The elements *-(a)thon*, *-preneur*, *-tainment* and *-zilla* have originated as truncations of content words and exhibit higher semantic density than traditional suffixes. A notable shared feature is that these elements can combine not only with free morphs (*bikeathon*, *kidpreneur*, *foodtainment*, *sharkzilla*) but also with non-native prefixes (*metathon*, *multi-preneur*, *retro-tainment*, *Megazilla*). Thus, their combinatory ability is generally less constrained than that of typical suffixes, although, as illustrated in section II, it is not impossible for a highly productive suffix such as *-ness* to attach to elements that fall in the class of non-native prefixes or neoclassical ICFs. The four elements, however, display varying degrees of suffix potential.

So, while *-(a)thon* and *-zilla* exemplify secretion, involving both abbreviation and semantic reinterpretation, *-preneur* and *-tainment* are based only on abbreviation, preserving the full semantic content of their source words (*-preneur* = *entrepreneur*, *-tainment* = *entertainment*). In addition, as shortened forms of *entrepreneur* and *entertainment*, respectively, the abbreviated CFs *-preneur* and *-tainment* are also susceptible to being used as free morphs, although this usage is still unusual and restricted to informal or creative contexts. Also, given their ability to combine with non-native prefixes / neoclassical ICFs (*multi-preneur* and *retro-tainment*) and other splinters (*edupreneur*, *edutainment*), it is fair to say that rather than adhering to the typical behaviour of fully-fledged suffixes, *(-)preneur* and *(-)tainment* seem to bear a considerable resemblance to clippings, and a clipping, as defined by Haspelmath and Sims (2010: 322), is “a shortened word that does not differ semantically from the longer version”.

Another essential point is that although all four elements exhibit higher semantic density than traditional suffixes, the secreted CFs *-(a)thon* and *-zilla* seem to be closer to the class of suffixes than the abbreviated CFs *-tainment* and *-preneur*, because they involve reinterpretation and their meanings are more abstract, similar to affixes.

Of the four discussed elements, *-(a)thon*, denoting a prolonged and typically strenuous event, frequently organized for fundraising or charity, appears to show the highest suffix potential. It has a systematic and productive use as a bound morph, although it may sporadically occur as a standalone lexeme. Like the other three elements, *-(a)thon* is also found in

combination with a non-native prefix / neoclassical ICF but our database contains very few items formed on this pattern.

The element *-zilla* behaves in a similar way. Its high productivity and abstract meaning associated with exaggeration, dominance or obsession are indicative of its significant suffix potential. Yet, in comparison with *-(a)thon*, *-zilla* appears to be less close to the class of fully-fledged suffixes as it exhibits greater freedom functioning not infrequently as an independent morph (*some zilla brain*) and combining with non-native prefixes / neoclassical ICFs (*Ecozilla*, *Megazilla*, *Minizilla*, *TransZilla*).

The proposed study provides a sound basis for delving deeper into the combinability properties of the *-ness* suffix in present-day English, the role of semantic reinterpretation in word-formation, or the boundaries between splinters, combining forms and affixes. These topics remain highly favourable for further investigation, given the dynamic nature of the English language.

REFERENCES

- Aitchison 2001:** Aitchison, J. *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Aronoff, Fudeman 2011:** Aronoff, M., Fudeman, K. *What Is Morphology?* 2nd edition. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Bauer 1983:** Bauer, L. *English Word-formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Bauer et al. 2013:** Bauer, L., Lieber, R., Plag, I. *The Oxford Reference Guide to English Morphology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bauer 2014:** Bauer, L. Concatenative Derivation. // *The Oxford Handbook of Derivational Morphology*. Ed. by R. Lieber & P. Štekauer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 118 – 135.
- Bauer 2017:** Bauer, L. *Compounds and Compounding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Bauer et al. 2019:** Bauer, L., Beliaeva, N., Tarasova, E. Recalibrating Productivity: Factors Involved. // *Zeitschrift Für Wortbildung / Journal of Word Formation*, 3 (1), 2019, 44 – 81.
- Baldi, Dawar 2000:** Baldi, P., Dawar, C. Creative Processes. // *Morphologie-Morphology: An International Handbook of Inflection and Word-Formation*. Vol. 1. Ed. by G. Booij, C. Lehmann, J. Mugdan, W. Kesselheim, S. Skopeteas. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000, 963 – 972.

- Beliaeva 2019:** Beliaeva, N. Blending Creativity and Productivity: On the Issue of Delimiting the Boundaries of Blends as a Type of Word Formation. // *Lexis*, 14, 2019, 1 – 22.
<<https://doi.org/10.4000/lexis.4004>> (10.11.2024).
- Booij 2005:** Booij, G. E. Compounding and Derivation: Evidence for Construction Morphology. // *Morphology and its Demarcations*. Ed. by W. U. Dressler, D. Kastovsky, O. E. Pfeiffer, F. Rainer. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2005, 109 – 132.
- Haspelmath, Sims 2010:** Haspelmath, M., Sims, A. D. *Understanding Morphology*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder Education, an Hachette UK Company, 2010.
- Lehrer 1998:** Lehrer, A. Scapes, Holics, and Thons: The Semantics of Combining Forms // *American speech*, Vol. 73, No. 1. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998, 3 – 28.
- Lieber 2009:** Lieber, R. *Introducing Morphology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Mattiello 2023:** Mattiello, E. *Transitional Morphology: Combining Forms in Modern English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.
- Trips 2017:** Trips, C. Morphological Change. // *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
<<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.260>> (02.10.2024).

ONLINE DICTIONARIES AND SOURCES

- Cambridge Free Dictionary <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/>> (06.10.2024).
- Collins Dictionary <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>> (05.10.2024).
- Dictionary.com <<https://www.dictionary.com/>> (11.12.2024).
- Merriam-Webster <www.merriam-webster.com> (05.10.2024).
- News on the Web Corpus <<https://www.english-corpora.org/now/>> (30.09.2024).
- Online Etymology Dictionary <<https://www.etymonline.com>> (05.10.2024).
- Oxford English Dictionary <<https://www.oed.com/>> (05.10.2024).
- Urban Dictionary <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/>> (05.10.2024).