Exploring the Semantic Development of Verb-to-Noun Conversion Conveying [+human] in English Colloquial and Slang Words

José A. Sánchez Fajardo, University of Alicante, Spain

This research study aims to design and explore a morphosemantic taxonomy of converted deverbal nouns conveying the semantic trait [+human], particularly in English slang and colloquial lexis (e.g. a creep*, a* bang*, a* lie-about*). For the purpose of analysis, data were first extracted from descriptive dictionaries in the form of a list of senses (N=163). Based on the prototype and construction morphology approaches, the words were modeled according to (i) their input semantics (Sem) and output semantics (SEM), and (ii) their prototypical and marginal patterns. This modeling demonstrates the existence of two types of evaluative recategorization: internal (or linguistic) and external (or non-linguistic). Also, on the basis of the semantic and syntactic frames of the lemmas listed in the dataset, three general categories are identified: agentive, patientive and causative. Agentive models are the most frequent in the data, where the evidence also suggests that the suffix* -er *and the zero morpheme (-∅) are in competition (e.g.* creeper/creep*). The data also demonstrate that most of the converted words (95% of the dataset) convey negative meaning, which is the result of a metonymic process whereby the trait [+human] is used in lieu of [+action]. On average, negative traits are not necessarily inherited from the verbal base (as in a* cheat*), but rather from how the action or the person performing this action is perceived by speakers (as with a* bang*).*

Keywords*: verb-to-noun conversion, pejorative meaning, metonymy, English*

1 Introduction

The process of conversion, also known as functional shift, zero derivation or implicit transposition, is generally associated with the change of the word class, in which the form remains unchanged, e.g. *daily* (adj.) > *daily* (n.), *shower* (n.) > *shower* (v.) (Bauer 1989: 32; Bauer & Valera 2005: 8). However, through polysemy, words might also undergo a semantic revamping, which does not necessarily affect the original form class, e.g. *coffee* (uncountable noun) > a *coffee* (countable noun). This type of conversion, known as non-major (or secondary) conversion (Quirk *et al*. 1985; Bauer 1989), confirms the varied nature of functional shift at the syntactic level. Either way, such a change of grammatical/semantic category might be regarded as a subcategory of derivation, which is why conversion is occasionally referred to as "derivation of a new word without any overt marking" (Plag 2018: 105). The type of conversion that is examined in this article pertains to the primary kind, that is, words that undergo a change of grammatical category (from verb to noun), but whose output semantics conveys the seme [+human], e.g. a *lie-about* 'a lazy person', as in (1), and a *swish* 'a male homosexual', as in (2).

(1) This former LIE-ABOUT has got himself married. (*The Guardian*, Jan. 27, 1961, OED3)

(2) The SWISH next door said he 'played the field—he wasn't seeing anyone in particular.' (*L.A. Confidential*, James Ellroy, 1990)

The covert marking of conversion, as opposed to affixed units, might constitute the primary source of theoretical dubiousness. For example, there is still uncertainty on the directionality of conversion (Balteiro 2007; Plag 2018) and on the use of a zero morpheme to imbue the process with a certain degree of paradigmaticity. Although the use of a zero-affix might be problematic (see, for example, Lieber 1992, 2004, 2005),[1] the processes of conversion and derivation can be approached from the same angle. This approach is of help in i) gaining a sense of generalization between a zero-form and an affix through the so-called "overt analogue criterion" (Plag 2008: 110), and ii) understanding the roots of the semantic transition that a converted form might have undergone. A clear-cut example of such an approach is easily traced in doublets made up of a derivative, as in *creeper* in (3), and a converted form, as in *creep* in (4). These two units, *creeper* and *creep*, which are intentionally used here within the same syntactic frame [X is such a *creep*(*er*)], denote someone who is acknowledged as obnoxious. Both deverbal forms (< *creep* [v.]) coincide in that they are characterized by polysemy, but not to the same extent. While most of the senses listed for *creep* (n.) in MWD11[2] are connected to the result of an action/movement (with the exception of sense 5 denoting "an unpleasant or obnoxious person"), the senses for *creeper* are more varied: a type of bird, of plant, of insect, a piece of garment, or a device.

(3) The girl is unperturbed and he is such a CREEPER, touching her hair. (*The Wickerlight*, Mary Watson, 2019)

(4) Augh, he is such a CREEP! That man's intellect is rivaled only by garden tools! (*Dan All Over Again & The Mountie Steals a Wife: An Anthology*, Tina Wainscott & Barbara Dunlop, 2014)

The semantic development shown in the above example of *creep* suggests that there might be a connection between the expression of pejorative meaning and the process of verb-to-noun conversion, where the resulting noun conveys the semantic trait [+human] (henceforth VNC_{hum}).[3] In other words, the converted deverbal noun denoting [+human] in (4) stems from a semantic reassignment (or recategorization) which takes an action as a metonymic vehicle or source: *creep* (v.) 'to move slowly or silently not to be heard' > *creep* (n.) 'one who is unpleasant/obnoxious.' In the analysis of this semantic reassignment (i.e. AGENT FOR ACTION), special attention should be paid to the semantic class of the base, which, as suggested by Bauer *et al*. (2013: 213), is key to interpreting the nominalization of the verb more clearly. Also, although previous studies confirm that most native verbs in English have a converted nominalization and that "[t]he creation of nouns by conversion is far less productive in current

[1] Lieber argues that no zero morpheme is added to the bases in the case of conversion, which is not an instantiation of derivation, since "[i]f conversion would have been a case of zero-derivation [...] then we would expect the zero affix to show similar behaviour as the overt affixes." (Don 2005: 3). I adopt the idea of a zero morpheme in this study to put forward the notion of suffix rivalry (see §4.2).

[2] A list of abbreviations that are used throughout the text is found in the Abbreviations section.

[3] Some previous studies refer to this type of conversion as a case of "personification" (see, e.g., Kuczok 2011). Although the term "personification" conveys the conceptual development of AGENT FOR ACTION, it is also used in other instances where animals or objects are conceptualized as humans. For instance, in the expression *to father a plan*, the word *plan* undergoes metaphorical conversion into a child (this example is taken from Kuczok [2011]). Therefore, the form VNC_{hum}, which also refers to a change of grammatical category, is preferred here.

English than the creation of verbs" (Bauer *et al*. 2013: 203-204), it remains unclear what makes covert VNC_{hum} an effective morphopragmatic process in the expression of negative meaning. In this vein, Cetnarowska's (1993: 101) work on verb-to-noun conversion suggests that VNC_{hum} agentives, such as (4), are rare in English, and "usually have a pejorative tinge in their interpretation." Finally, while the cases of *lie-about* in (1), *swish* in (2) and *creep* in (4) point to the well-defined status of agentive-ness, other cases, such as *ride* 'a sexual partner' in (5) and *yawn* 'someone boring or tedious' in (6), conform to, respectively, patientive and causative models. These latter cases confirm that VNC_{hum} is not always interpreted as agentive and that there is a need to investigate the taxonomy of this type of conversion.

(5) Look at the headlights on that RIDE. What is that? A Pontiac? I was talking about your mother. (*Mad magazine*, Jan. 18, 2003, GDS)

(6) All Nicholas's friends were such wrinklies and some of them were a real YAWN. (*Patrick Melrose*, Edward St Aubyn, 1994)

While a number of studies have focused on the process of conceptual recategorization in noun-to-verb and verb-to-noun conversion processes (cf. Marchand 1964; Cetnarowska 1993; Plag 1999; Nagano 2008; Bauer *et al*. 2013; Valera 2017, 2020; Baeskow 2022), little is known about the verb-to-noun conversion where the converted noun is categorized as [+human]. This research addresses this gap and aims to propose and explore the morphosemantic taxonomy that characterizes the formation of converted deverbal nouns that convey the semantic trait [+human], in English slang and colloquial language. This taxonomy is also useful in providing further evidence of: i) the pragmatic effects of VNC_{hum} forms, ii) the correlation between the semantics of bases and that of converted forms, iii) the extent to which metonymy contributes to the recategorization of verbal sources, and iv) the likely association between the gender of the person denoted and the properties of agentive-ness and patientive-ness. Based on the prototype approach, this theoretical study examines the semantic development (or expressivity) in linguistic networks "in which the peripheral senses extend out from a prototype" (Hamawand 2007: 46), as well as exploring how certain morphological (converted) forms contribute stable pragmatic effects (Merlini Barbaresi & Dressler 2020: 408), which, in this case, correspond to the expression of pejorative meaning.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 begins by laying out the scope of study: a taxonomical distinction between a semantically extended recategorization and an evaluative one (§2.1), and a brief account of the concept of conversion, which is examined here through the prototype approach and through the theory of metonymization (§2.2). Section 3 is concerned with the methodology used for this study. In Section 4, the main findings of the research are presented and discussed, focusing on an all-embracing proposal for the morphosemantic taxonomy of VNC_{hum} (§4.1). To facilitate the understanding of this proposal, the taxonomy is divided into the categories of agentive models (§4.2) and of patientive/causative models (§4.3). The discussion of the findings is illustrated with authentic examples taken from the dictionaries, a compilation of which is found in the form of a table in Appendix A. This table also includes, if available, the first recorded usage of the lemma, as well as the lexicographical source from which the sense was extracted.

2 Limiting the scope of study

2.1 *Semantically extended and evaluative recategorization of VNC$_{hum}$*

As commented in §1, very little is known about verb-to-noun forms that convey the semantic trait [+human] in English. Previous studies have adopted, for example, the denomination "bare nominalization" to describe the process of verb-to-noun conversion, where its default reading is the event/act(ion) interpretation (Cetnarowska 1993: 123-124). In general, there are no exhaustive collections of VNC$_{hum}$ words in English. The only exception is the database of English zero-derived nouns and deverbal nominalizations (Iordachioaia & Melloni 2022), where approximately 1,200 lemmas are listed and classified on the basis of their "possible interpretations and their ability to realize verbal argument structure" (ibid. n.p.). This database, primarily extracted from OED3, shows, for instance, that there are 64 VNC$_{hum}$ agentives, many of which, such as a *scrounge*, a *teach*, a *grizzle*, are standard words in English. There is, therefore, a dearth of research on how this type of conversion occurs in English colloquial and slang words.

The first step in the analysis of these converted forms is to elaborate an empirical typology that encompasses the semantic development or recategorization of VNC$_{hum}$. There are two general types of VNC$_{hum}$ recategorization: a semantically extended recategorization and an evaluative one (see Figure 1). As implied by the name, semantically extended recategorization indicates that although VNC$_{hum}$ units are attested by dictionaries as deverbal forms, they might in fact originate from other converted nouns through the process of semantic extension or polysemy. Valera's (2017: 10) claim on this type of recategorization leaves no room for doubt that it is not always clear to determine "which of these developments should be considered as falling within word–formation and which not." For example, *jerk-off* 'an inadequate individual' is classed as deverbal (< [v.] *jerk off*) by OED3, and thus listed in the dataset. However, it is not completely illogical to assume that it might have been semantically extended from the sense "[a]n act of male masturbation" (OED3) rather than directly from the verb. The act of masturbation, denotatively conceived as a type of sexual self-stimulation, has traditionally generated taboo and interdictive attitudes towards the act itself and towards those who engage in it. Then, using the forms 'inadequate' or 'unacceptable' to describe someone who does not necessarily masturbate stems from the social perception of the act, and not so much from its sexual connotations. Interestingly, this recategorization does not adhere to the morphosemantic regularity underlying most of the VNC$_{hum}$ units whereby the prototypical [an act/result of V-ing] coexists with the marginal [one who V-s]. In other words, while *jerk-off* (n.) conveys the meaning 'the act of masturbation', the form *jerk-off* (n.) used to express 'the individual who masturbates' does not exist. Instead, the converted form *jerk-off* (n.) conveying [+human] is found with a meaning that is not related to the act of masturbation *per se*, but from the socially negative attributes associated with the act. Therefore, a *jerk-off* (n.) 'an inadequate

individual' adopts various pejorative traits of the act of masturbation without being linked to the sexual act itself.[4]

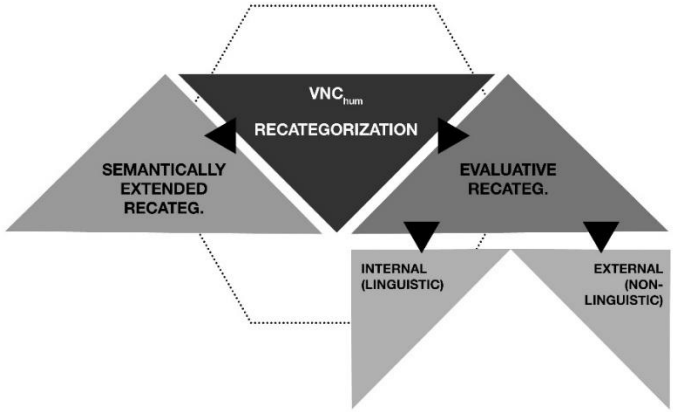

Figure 1: Types and subtypes of recategorization of VNC_{hum}

The evaluative recategorization is of a more complex nature. It deals with the extent of evaluative meaning provided by the input (verbal) semantics, which is divided into two types: internal (linguistic) or external (non-linguistic). This differentiation, as shown in Figure 1 above, is made on the grounds of whether a Sem is encoded through the inherent semantics of the verbal base (internal) or through the word coiner's perception of the verbal semantics or the person representing it as pejorative or taboo (external). For instance, a *lie-about* 'a lazy person' is represented as [ONE who V-s_j]$_i$, which stems from the verb *to lie about* "to spend time being lazy when you should be doing something" (MDE2). The pejorative meaning of the converted form *lie-about* adheres, therefore, to the internal semantics of its verbal base. So, a *lie-about* is the product of evaluative internal recategorization. Alternatively, a *blow-in* "a newcomer who is not yet accepted by the locals" (GDS) originates from the verb to *blow in* "to arrive unexpectedly and casually" (GDS). Unlike the example of internal *lie-about*, the case of *blow-in* demonstrates that the pejorative meaning expressed by the converted form is not fully inherited from the verbal etymon, but rather from the new conceptual form of 'someone who is still seen as an outsider', which has nothing to do with the manner in which he/she arrived in town. Whilst the noun *blow-in* is primarily represented as [ONE who V-s_j]$_i$, this Sem is not, however, sufficient in itself to convey the general output semantics of the pejorative meaning of *blow-in*. The connotative traits of depreciation and/or taboo, therefore, must be added to the denotative model to complete the semantic reconfiguration: [ONE who V-s_j]$_i$ is [−appreciative]. Regardless of the (non-)linguistic sources of their recategorization, both evaluative forms share the SEM [a PERSON who is negatively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$.

[4] Due to its limited word count, this paper only focuses on evaluative recategorization. The cases of semantic extension, although of a conceptually different nature, are classed as external.

A central part of the general reconfiguration, which is also the gist of this study, is devoted to internal and external types and how they are present in both agentive and patientive models. The complexity of external recategorization does not lie in the verbal semantics itself, but rather in whether the action constitutes a notion expressing taboo (e.g. *wank*$_2$ 'a contemptible person') or whether the action is identificatory of a class of people who are generally (and socially) subject to depreciation (e.g. police officer → *nab*, homosexual → *swish*). Thus, this external semantics results from the blending of known categorization of social and cultural taboos (and prejudices) and the semantics of the verbal base. This proposition, which is based on the theory of blended spaces (see, for example, Faucconier 1997; Faucconier & Turner 2002), might help explain how these external forms, particularly those where the verb is semantically neutral (e.g. *swish*), are susceptible to pejoration.

While the external recategorization is generally marginal, the internal recategorization shows two types of prototypical models: a prototypical ACTION and a prototypical AGENT. The former, as in *cheat* (7),[5] coincides with Aronoff & Fudeman's (2005)[6] prototype whilst the latter, which is what is examined in this study, is a relaxed form of the core meaning. Although (8) is not as prototypical as (7) in regard to the degree of generalization and abstraction, it is a subtype of prototypical modeling, named here prototypical AGENT, which is representative of the category of deverbal agentive-ness. Deverbal agentive-ness is abstracted in (8) as a schematic representation[7] of the process of internal recategorization, that is, the verbal meaning is metonymically reconfigured as an agentive noun, where no extralinguistic appraisal is added (i.e. ∅). Therefore, the 'negatively appraised' in [a PERSON who is negatively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$ is assigned through the inherent semantics of the verbal base.[8]

(7) *cheat* (n.) "the act or an instance of fraudulently deceiving" (MWD11)
prototypical ACTION
Sem: [the ACT of V-ing$_j$]$_i$ is ∅
SEM: [RESULT of an ACTION$_j$]$_i$

[5] The form *cheat* is not listed in the dataset because it is not lexicographically acknowledged as a colloquial or informal word. It is, however, used as an example of agentive because its early origin (i.e. [1563]) might be indicative that the pair *cheat*/*cheater* may have been a model pattern for subsequent VNC$_{hum}$ coinages.

[6] For more information on Aronoff & Fudeman's (2005) prototype approach, see §2.2.

[7] On the basis of the Construction Morphology framework (see, for example, Jackendoff 2002; Booij & Audring 2017; Booij 2010, 2015, 2019), the semantic decomposition of the generalizations (or schemas) is made up of two layers: the input semantics of components (Sem) and the output semantics of the schema (SEM). This decomposition contributes to a better understanding of i) how the semantics of the verbal base is metaphorically or metonymically connected to SEM, ii) how converted forms are syntactically categorized, and iii) how an extralinguistic assessment of the verbal base effects the general compositionality of SEM. For instance, the decomposition of *soak* (n.) informs us that the agentive nature of the converted form is inherited from the syntactic model [ONE who V-s]. The etymon *soak* (v.), which means "to drink heavily" (GDS), is not intrinsically negative; what is acknowledged as negative is how the features of 'excess' and 'alcohol consumption' are cognitively assessed as disagreeable (or [−pleasant]) and/or socially unacceptable.

[8] Note that in the schemas used throughout the text, as in (7) and (8), a distinction is made between the meaning of the verbal base and that expressed by the converted form through the subscripts 'j' and 'i', respectively.

(8) *cheat* (n.) "one that cheats" (MWD11)
prototypical AGENT
Sem: [ONE who V-s_j]$_i$ is ∅
SEM: [a PERSON who is negatively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$

The modeling of constructional schemas, as with (7) and (8) above, offers a clear identification of the verbal argument structure in Sem, and allows for establishing three types of VNC_{hum} models on account of their SEMs: agentive, patientive and causative (see §4). This typology is an essential part to this research: these three models demonstrate how their output semantics is a reflection of the semantic extension that originates from a prototypical construction through metonymy.

2.2 *VNC_{hum} evaluative recategorization through the lens of metonymy and the prototype approach*

This section is intended to review how the concept of metonymy and the prototype approach are integrated into the general framework of VNC_{hum}. This review offers a clear understanding of how the evaluative recategorization is also dependent on metonymic extensions of a prototypical model. The property of agentive-ness,[9] for instance, is involved in many of the VNC_{hum} schemas that are modeled and explored in this study. An interesting method for analyzing this property in converted deverbal nouns is that described by Aronoff & Fudeman (2005), which centers on core (or prototypical) and marginal paradigms that are used as indicators of paradigmatic and syntagmatic regularities. According to this theory, as with the case of *-er* agentives, "the prototypical agentive is a person who habitually performs a particular type of action" (Aronoff & Fudeman 2005: 146), e.g. *teacher*, *worker*, *writer*. Alternatively, marginal paradigms represent *-er* agentives that do not comply with the full prototype; for instance, a *setter* ('a dog breed') and a *threader* ('a tool') concur in that neither conveys the sense [+human] in their output semantics, which implies that both models are marginal. Therefore, the suffix *-er* should not be solely described as an agentive morpheme (Bauer *et al*. 2013: 38). Along with the semantic trait [+human], and following the prototypical paradigm described before, a verbal base is another prerequisite in the equation, and as such *-er* derivatives such as *gardener*, *weekender*, *second-grader* and *baby-boomer* should also be considered marginal types. This leads to the conception that *setter* and *weekender* are marginal forms for two different reasons: while *setter* deviates from the semantic trait [+human], *weekender*, on the other hand, stems not from an action but from a nominal base conveying a temporal sense.

When extrapolated to the case of conversion, the prototype approach is even more difficult to apply because deverbal agentives, for instance, are not overtly marked. Therefore, the analysis of conversion-based schemas calls for a reassessment of what stands for a prototypical deverbal agentive that is formed through conversion. Owing to the absence of

[9] Although this study examines three types of models (agentive, patientive and causative), this section centers on the property of agentive-ness in order to illustrate how the semantic development in VNC_{hum} occurs through the prototype approach. This analysis is then extrapolated to patientive and causative models in §4.

overt marking, agentive nouns are to be explored here by looking at the concepts that originate from the verbal base ('input semantics') and those expressed by the resulting agentive noun ('output semantics'). This is also related to what is known as onomasiological recategorization,[10] which redefines a new approach to conversion where "each naming unit results from an intellectual analysis of an extra-linguistic object to be named" (Štekauer 2005: 52). Following this line of thought, and using deverbal nouns as examples, see the cases of *cheat* ('one who cheats') and *invite* ('an invitation') in (9) and (10), respectively. In both examples, the input semantics [+action] is converted into [+human] or [+object] (or substance),[11] where the grammatical (or functional) shift occurs along with a denotational change. As proposed by Bauer *et al*. (2013), the verbal base helps understand the type of nominalization that results from the conversion process, which, in these two cases, does not really suffice. In both models, *cheat* (v.) and *invite* (v.) are transitive verbs, where the trait [+human] is inherently ingrained: [someone *invites*/*cheats* someone]. The recategorization process, however, points to two radically different types of nominalization, according to which an *invite* is never understood as an *inviter* or an *invitee*. The issue here, then, lies in establishing what makes *cheat* (v.) reconduct its conversion path into a rather marginal schema where [+human] constitutes a representative (or metonymic) trait.

(9) *cheat* (v.) → *cheat* (n.)
action → substance - human (doer of the action)

(10) *invite* (v.) → *invite* (n.)
action → substance - object (instrument used to execute the action)

Whilst conversion is derivationally seen as a process in which two lexemes of the same form, but different grammatical categories, are linked (Bauer & Valera 2005: 8), the actual complexity of conversion lies in determining the cognitive and semantic roots of such association. These roots can, for example, be represented through the aspect of consecutive mappings or recursiveness (Cetnarowska 2011), which is understood as a chain (or an extension) of meanings which are connected to each other. This idea of recursive interconnection confirms the property of contiguity, through which a new converted form (e.g. a *cheat*) is characterized by activating one representative trait (e.g. [+human]), which is imported from the semantic and syntactic configuration of the verbal form *cheat*. This primal configuration of *cheat* (v.) generally involves the following structure: [+human] *cheats* [+human]. It is therefore logical to ascertain that one of the semantic traits imbued in the structure (i.e. *cheat* [v.] requires an agent) shifts into the representative trait, which results in one of the paradigms described by Radden & Kövecses (1999: 37): ACTION FOR AGENT. These paradigms, then, confirm a long-standing premise about conversion being "a matter of metonymy rather than a matter of a morphological process of word-formation" (Bauer 2018: 183). Finally, as suggested by Cetnarowska (1993: 131), some categories of verbal bases might

[10] For more information on the onomasiological theory of word formation, see Štekauer (1998, 2005).

[11] The term 'substance' pertains to Štekauer's set of general categories (substance, action, quality and concomitant circumstance), which are aimed at drawing conceptual generalizations at the supralinguistic level of analysis (Štekauer 2005: 46-47).

be used as predictors of conversion; for instance, agentive bases that denote "movement as a result of which a mark is left on the patient, e.g. *bite, bump, cut, dent*" are usually found as converted nominalizations.

3 Methodology

This study draws on the elaboration of constructional schemas to gain insights into the taxonomy of VNC_{hum} forms in colloquial and slang English, and to determine whether there is any connection between VNC_{hum} and the expression of pejorative meaning. The data (N=163), which was collected from descriptive dictionaries (ASD, GDS, OED3, MWD, MED2, CDS, ODS), was made up of deverbal nouns conveying the semantic trait [+human] (see Appendix A).[12] While the vast majority of senses (approximately 87%) were extracted from GDS, other dictionaries, particularly of slang and colloquial English, were also used to confirm (i) if there were other nonstandard VNC_{hum} lemmas or senses, and (ii) if the lemmas extracted are lexicographically labelled through some form of marked language use, e.g. 'informal', 'offensive', 'slang', 'colloquial'. Morphologically speaking, the bases of the converted terms included in the study are not limited to simple verbs but also compounds or phrasal verbs are listed (e.g. *asswipe, buzzkill, beat off, turn-out*). The inclusion of these forms allows for finding out if these compound or phrasal units are more prone to one type of evaluative recategorization, i.e. agentive, patientive or causative.

Once the words were compiled, they were individually modeled in the form of constructional schemas, but only the semantic aspects (SEM and Sem) were used as grouping criteria. This semantic classification provides for a finer-grained identification of prototypical and marginal typologies (Aronoff & Fudeman [2005]; Hamawand [2007]). The elaboration of schemas helps i) understand the correlation between converted forms conveying the sense [+human] and the expression of negative meaning, ii) establish the taxonomy of semantic recategorization in the formation of this type of deverbal nouns in slang and colloquial English, and iii) explore the cognitive and semantic roots underlying this conversion process.

Although this study is not primarily concerned with the competition that emerges from *-er* and *-Ø* (as in *creeper*/*creep*), the analysis of the dataset also includes the *-er* derivatives that are semantically equivalent to VNC_{hum} forms. This analytical step employs a qualitative methodology to critically evaluate, for instance, whether these forms in competition are associated with the expression of feminine or masculine gender.

One of the difficulties in the data-collection stage was guaranteeing that the verb-to-noun directionality of the converted words was attested. Lexicographical sources were in fact used to map out (and confirm) the verb-to-noun directionality. In the dictionaries consulted, particularly GDS, OED3 and MWD11, the verbal origin of the lemmas is specified, and no major discrepancies on the directionality verbal > noun were found. But perhaps the most important limitation lies in the fact that the dataset is only made up of nonstandard (or extragrammatical) lemmas, which could have an effect on the typology of constructions and

[12] The only case of a VNC_{hum} unit without an attested verbal origin is *pushover*.

their output semantics. Finally, being limited to evaluative recategorization, this study does not delve into the process of semantically extended recategorization, which might be used in future research to explain how some pejorative senses emerge from nominal constructions.

4 Analysis

The examination of the dataset through the elaboration of constructional schemas unravels three types of VNC_{hum}: agentive, patientive and causative. The first type is discussed further in §4.2, and the other two types in §4.3. This analytical section also includes a taxonomical analysis of the semantic development of VNC_{hum} words (see §4.1), which focuses on its metonymic and recursive basis, as well as on the role of the speaker's appraisal in the process of evaluative reconfiguration. Based on the dataset, Section 4.1 is intended to construe an all-embracing typology of VNC_{hum} that showcases how the categories of internal/external and marginal/prototypical are systemically integrated into the three types of VNC_{hum}.

4.1 *The morphosemantic taxonomy of VNC_{hum}*

This section aims at examining how the process of semantic development occurs within the framework of evaluative recategorization, which is of avail in understanding the morphological typology that is discussed in §4.2 (agentive) and §4.3 (patientive and causative). This analysis starts by considering the levels of abstraction and generalization of VNC_{hum} words through metonymy.

To illustrate the metonymic basis of this typology, let us take again the examples of *cheat* (n.) and *swish* (n.), both of them instances of VNC_{hum}. The verbal base *cheat* in itself conveys a negative notion that is then transferred, as suggested above, onto the form *cheat* (n.). The negative notion expressed by *cheat* (n.) reflects the pejorative nature of its verbal etymon through a metonymic process (i.e. ACTION FOR AGENT). The external recategorization, on the other hand, originates from a more complex process, by means of which an external element is added to the deverbal schema. For instance, the agentive *swish* stems from the following schema: $[[\text{ONE who V-s}_j]_i$ is [−appreciative] for resembling an $\text{ACTION}_j]$, where, similar to the example of *creep* in (4) in §1, there is a metaphorical encoding that involves the movement of *swishing* as a socially frowned-upon action. This means that, alongside the metonymic strategy ACTION FOR AGENT, the negative connotations of a *swish* (n.) are not strictly rendered by the verbal base, but rather they are the product of speakers' attitudes towards extralinguistic features, such as *swishing*, as a salient (and stereotyped) way of characterizing male homosexuals. Thus, although both types of recategorization are formed through a metonymic reconfiguration of the verbal semantics of the base (verb → agent), the latter is also reconducted through the import of non-linguistic traits (e.g. [−appreciative]) that reflect how the action and those who perform the action are generally appraised by the speaker.

The examples of *cheat* and *invite* confirm the correlation between the syntactic pattern of verbal bases and their semantic compositionality, although this compositionality is characterized by different types of marginal-ness. The categorization of prototypical and marginal paradigms is outlined in Table 1, where three levels of abstraction are devised: the

first level refers to the input verbal semantics which represents the syntactic status of *cheat* and *invite* (transitivity, doer of the action/instrument, etc.). The second level establishes the prototypical pattern that involves the verbal bases, and in which the expression of the action turns into the act or result of such an action. Finally, the third level corresponds to the marginal paradigm, which retakes two dissimilar values: *cheat* is a nominalization representing the doer of the action whilst *invite* becomes the instrument with which one accomplishes the action.

Table 1: Levels of abstraction as expressed by input and output semantics

input semantics	**output semantics**	
verbal base	***prototypical paradigm***	***marginal paradigm***
cheat (v.) [someone V-s someone]	*cheat*$_1$ (n.) [the act/result of V-ing]	*cheat*$_2$ (n.) [one that V-s]
invite (v.) [someone V-s someone]	*invite*$_1$ (n.) [the act/result of V-ing]	*invite*$_2$ (n.) [something used for V-ing]
pick up (v.) [someone V-s someone]	*pick-up*$_1$ (n.) [the act/result of V-ing]	*pick-up*$_2$ (n.) [one that is V-ed]

As shown in Table 1, there are two steps underlying the formation of nouns by conversion where the process of metonymy is involved, albeit at different rates, in the process of figurative interpretation (Bauer 2018a; Bauer 2018b, 2020; Valera & Ruz 2021). The first is a productive process in English that results from an action and where the resulting forms are converted nouns. There is, therefore, a large number of verbs that are generally correlated with converted nominalizations in English (e.g. *to run* > *a run*, *to look* > *a look*). This first process of conversion shows a non-figurative interpretation because the result of an action is a more intrinsic (or built-in) trait compared to the features of subject, object or instrument (which are complementary).[13] The second step, however, illustrates an instance of figurative interpretation,[14] through which one trait that is initially imbued in the semantic and syntactic configuration of the verbal base is adopted as the new denotational representation that redefines the action, either as an agent (*cheat*) or as an instrument (*invite*). This leads to the question of *cheat* ('one that cheats') being a nominalization by conversion of *cheat* (v.) or a nominalization by semantic reconfiguration of *cheat* ('the act of cheating').[15] Notwithstanding the reconfiguration path, metonymy does play an important role in the recategorization process, as suggested by Brdar & Brdar-Szabó (2014) and Baeskow (2021, 2022). The example of *pick-up*$_2$ ("someone met in informal circumstances; sex may be involved, but not invariably" [GDS]), which stems from a patientive reconfiguration process, confirms the intricacy of semantic development in VNC$_{hum}$. While *cheat*$_2$ and *pick-up*$_2$ follow similar developments, it

[13] Bauer *et al*. (2015) make a distinction between nouns conveying event/state/result and those conveying participants in events (agent, patient), qualities, collectives or instruments.

[14] Bauer (2020: 164) asserts that 'figurative interpretation' constitutes one of the sources of semantic extension or polysemy.

[15] The semantic reconfiguration undergone by the verbal base is also conceptually related to what has been defined as 'extent of polysemy', which indicates "whether a particular morphological form might have a propensity towards one or another reading" (Lieber & Plag 2022: 308).

is still problematic to determine why, say, *pick-up*$_2$ is not semantically decoded through an agentive reading, as in 'one who wanders looking for casual sexual encounters.' Regardless of the causes underlying each semantic development, both the doer (*cheat*) and the recipient (*pick-up*$_2$) of the action are metonymically used to represent a new concept.

However, if conversion is represented as a linear process, where marginal schemas stem from prototypical ones ([one that V-s] < [the act of V-ing]), no change of grammatical category is envisaged. To this end, conversion, in its narrow sense, is not present in the second step, but rather the word undergoes a semantic extension (or reassignment) whereby it transitions from the result of an action ([the act of V-ing]) into one of the semantic components of the schema (e.g. agentive in [one that V-s]). To make things more complicated, there are instances of conversion in which a prototypical schema is missing, as in *bone* 'a very hard-working student' (n.) and *crap-out* 'a defeatist' (n.), where a generic [the act of V-ing] is not attested. This has two possible readings: i) the prototypical pattern existed at one point and then fell into disuse, or ii) the marginal schema results directly from the verbal base.

Table 1 also illustrates how the prototypical paradigm ([the act of V-ing]) is involved in the two models represented for *cheat*$_2$ and *invite*$_2$. More importantly, this table showcases the connection between *cheat*$_2$ ([one that V-s]) and *cheat* (v.), the former also being linked to *cheat*$_1$ ([the act of V-ing]). It can be seen from this connection that *cheat*$_2$, semantically being a marginal model, might also act as a morphological print, in the form of a prototypical word, whose earliest usage is as far back as the year 1563 (OED3). Historically, the vast majority of VNC$_{hum}$ units compiled, as confirmed in OED3, came into being in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the exceptions of *screw* ('a sexual partner', [1725]), *snitch* ('an informer', [1785]), *take-in* ('a swindler', [1772]), and of course, *cheat* [1563].

The metonymy-based levels of abstraction and generalization that are discussed above show that the reconfiguration of verbal bases follows different semantic routes, which are also dependent on their argument structure and their output semantics, the latter being classed, as commented above, as internal or external. Figure 2 shows a matter-of-fact arrangement of VNC$_{hum}$ types in which the agentive, causative and patientive models constitute the three global categories. These three groups are differentiated through the wording of Sem (e.g. [ONE who makes someone else $V_j]_i$ → causative; [[ONE who V-$s_j]_i$ is [−appreciative] for resembling an $ACTION_j$] → imitative).

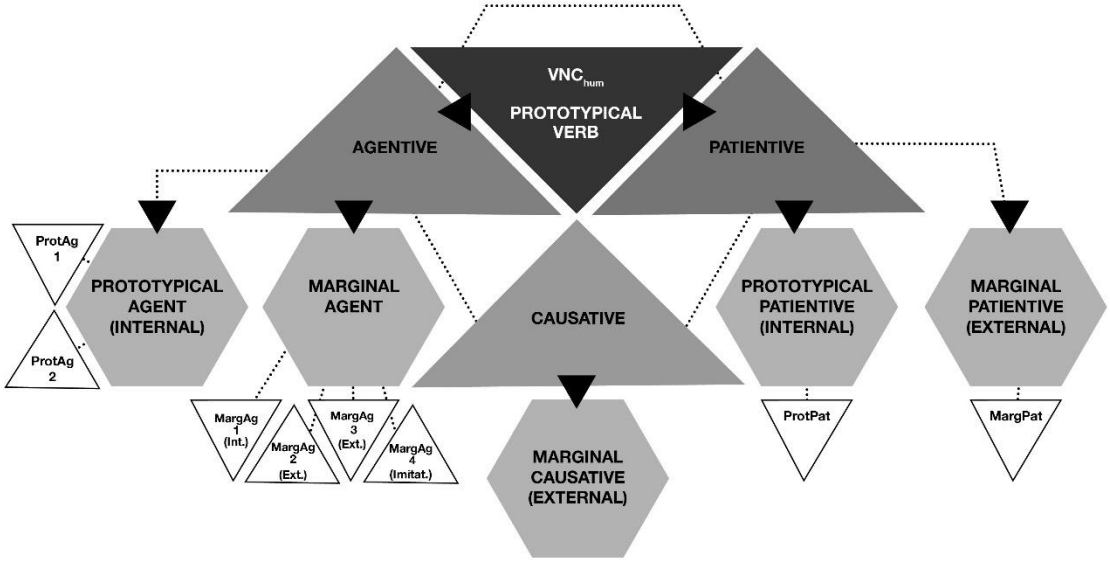

Figure 2: Taxonomy of VNC_{hum} forms according to the evaluative recategorization as expressed by their Sem

Thus, based on Aronoff & Fudeman's (2005) categorization of lexical semantics, Hamawand's (2007) prototype approach, and Bauer's (2018a) reflections on metonymy in word-formation, Figure 2 also establishes two levels of metonymization: core (or prototypical) and peripheral (or marginal). The former takes the result of the action as a "vehicle", allowing language users to saliently "[provide] mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same idealized cognitive model" (Radden & Kövecses 1999: 21). The semantic trait [+result] is inherent in verbal frames (as well as state and event ones), which in English is also expressed by conversion or affixation (e.g. *close* [v.] → *closing* [n.], *betray* [v.] → *betrayal* [n.]). The marginal level, on the other hand, resorts to the salient notions [+agent], [+instrument] and [+patient] to represent the concepts of 'one that *cheats*', 'something used for *inviting*', and 'one that is *picked up*', respectively.

This second type of analysis, as opposed to that represented in Table 1, does not deny the existence of a connection between prototypical and marginal forms, since a rejection of this principle can be understood as a denial of the process of polysemy. What Aronoff & Fudeman (2005) call "relaxation of the core meaning" is in fact a methodological strategy to enable generalizations of semantic reassignment to be made. For instance, the prototypical *cheat*$_1$ (n.), *invite*$_1$ (n.) and *pick-up*$_1$ (n.) are the result of actions which necessarily involve an agent [+human], and this value is repurposed by the marginal agent/patient or instrument. On the other hand, prototypical forms might also be a type of "morphological footprint" (Laufer & Cobb 2020) in the sense that new formations are likely because a converted deverbal noun is already in use. The abstraction of these two levels of analysis allows for a better understanding

of the roots of agentive-ness and patientive-ness in conversion, particularly in English slang and colloquialisms.

The following sections (i.e. §4.2 and §4.3) will examine the general categories of agentive, causative and patientive, as well as their classification as prototypical and marginal types. This taxonomical distinction is intended to shed light on the cognitive and morphosemantic motivations underlying the formation of a prototypical agentive (ProtAg), a marginal agentive (MargAg), a prototypical patientive (ProtPat), a marginal patientive (MargPat), and a marginal causative (MargCaus).

4.2 *Agentive VNC$_{hum}$*

The agentive schema through which the semantic trait [+human] is reconfigured opens up infinite ways of coining new lexical forms. This schema is based on Dirven's (1999) analysis of an actional schema, which has been described as "a force-dynamic schema which describes events in which an [a]gent deliberately and responsibly acts upon a patient" (Baeskow 2021: 6). In line with this claim, an agentive schema describes an agent that is identified by its tendency to perform an action or to act like an outside entity. For instance, a *creep* conforms to an agentive schema where someone does not literally creep, but rather resembles an animal or something that creeps.

However, an agentive schema does not follow a fixed pattern. To show the schematic variability of the units, let us compare the following three converted forms conveying the meaning [+human]: a *cheat*, a *stand-in* 'a substitute at work' and a *creep*. The first two nouns (a *cheat* and a *stand-in*) pertain to an agentive schema where the resulting converted form materializes the person who performs an action, which is strictly rendered by the verbal base. Also, while *stand-in* is unambiguously converted into an agent (the verb *to stand in* is intransitive), the noun *cheat*, although stemming from a transitive verb, opts for an agentive model, rather than a patientive one, where the figurative reading of [ONE who is *cheated*] is not possible. These two converted nouns also coincide in that their agentive schemas can be viewed as prototypical because the verbal meanings are transferred onto the nominal bases through a metonymic reconfiguration: ACTION FOR AGENT. On the other hand, the agentive form *creep* (n.) differs from the other two examples in that an imitative value is added to the schema. The verbal meaning of *creep* (v.) is not directly transposed onto the agent—otherwise, a *creep* could be interpreted as 'someone who *creeps*' (type of movement). Instead, the agentive *creep* (n.) is characterized by the earlier-mentioned metonymic strategy (ACTION FOR AGENT), where someone's behavior or attitude is metaphorically constructed on the salient features of either the action of creeping or creatures that creep.

The vast majority of VNC$_{hum}$ words in the dataset pertain to the agentive category, which accounts for a total of 136 words (approximately 83% of the dataset). Deverbal agentive-ness is, therefore, a general trend of VNC$_{hum}$. However, as shown in Figure 2 and also discussed in §4.1, there are two types of agentive models: prototypical and marginal, the former being slightly more frequent (52%) than the latter. The prototypical taxonomy includes two types of agentive-ness conforming to the prototypical Sem [ONE who V-s$_j$]$_i$: ProtAg1 and ProtAg2 (see Table 2). Both internal types are differentiated through their semantic output (or SEM). Table 2 also shows that ProtAg1 has no evaluative mark and might be connected to the expression of

a profession or trade (e.g. a *scrape* > 'one who scrapes' > a barber). Being far more frequent than Type ProtAg1, Type ProtAg2, on the other hand, represents the doer of an action (or agent), who is negatively appraised, but only because the verb from which it originates already conveys a negative meaning, e.g. *butt-in*.

Table 2: Types of prototypical agentive models

Type ProtAg1	Prototypical agentive (internal)
Sem	[ONE who V-s_j]$_i$
SEM	[a PERSON who is (professionally) known for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC_{hum} units	*chirp, eyeball, punt, scoot, scrape*$_1$, *spout, stake-out, stand-in, swot*
Type ProtAg2	Prototypical agentive (internal)
Sem	[ONE who V-s_j]$_i$
SEM	[a PERSON who is negatively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC_{hum} units	*bend, bluff, butt-in, buzzkill, clip*$_1$, *clip*$_2$, *cloy, cop-out, crab, crap-out, croak, dig*$_2$, *dip*$_1$, *dive, fiddle, flakeout, flunk, fuck-up, futz, gobble, goof-off, goof up, gross-out, drop-out, grizzle, grunt*$_1$, *hang, hold-up, jerk*$_2$, *kiss-up, lie-about, mooch*$_1$, *mooch*$_2$, *muck-up, mess-up, ponk, punk-out, screw-up, sell-out, skeeve, skip, snitch, snoop, squeak, stretch, suck, suck-in, suck-off, suck-up, show-off, space-out, swank, take-down, take-in*$_1$, *tearaway, tip-off, tossout, tout*$_1$, *turn-off, vamp, washout*

The marginal agentive category is made up of four types: MargAg1, MargAg2, MargAg3 and MargAg4 (see Table 3 below), in which Type MargAg3 accounts for nearly 74% of the marginal agentive units. While all four share an agentive model, they each also show major differences in regard to their semantic development. The first marginal model (MargAg1) is internal in nature, which implies that the action being performed by the agent is unambiguously represented in the verbal base. Alternatively, types MargAg2 and MargAg3 are external models, which means that the evaluative meaning (either ameliorative or pejorative) expressed by the converted form is not rendered by the verbal base. These evaluative traits are external because they are the product of how speakers perceive the qualities of the person who performs these actions. The imitative model in MargAg4, on the other hand, follows a more complex semantic process, by which the agent does not perform the action expressed by the verbal base, but rather its generally pejorative semantics is based on the negative perception towards the action (e.g. *creep*$_1$) or the agent who originally performs this action (e.g. *flit* 'a male homosexual').[16]

[16] A distinction should be made between imitatives, such as *grunt* (n.), whose imitative value was gained through the formation of the verb *to grunt* 'to complain', and marginal agents of imitative nature (MargAg4), whose imitative development occurs within the process of VNC_{hum}. An example of the latter is *flit* (n.), which expresses the idea that someone makes light and smooth movements, but its verbal form does not convey the meaning 'to be/act like a male homosexual'. So, the semantic transition occurs within the conversion process under study here.

Table 3: Types of marginal agentive models

Type MargAg1	Marginal agentive (internal)
Sem	[ONE who V-s_j]$_i$
SEM	[a PERSON who is positively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC$_{hum}$ units	*bone*, *grind*, *schmooz*, *turn-on*
Type MargAg2	Marginal agentive (external)
Sem	[ONE who V-s_j]$_i$ is [+appreciative]
SEM	[a PERSON who is positively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC$_{hum}$ units	*cack*, *cut-up*$_1$, *cut-up*$_2$, *dig*$_1$, *knockout*
Type MargAg3	Marginal agentive (external)
Sem	[ONE who V-s_j]$_i$ is [−appreciative]
SEM	[a PERSON who is negatively appraised for doing an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC$_{hum}$ units	*asswipe*, *ball*, *beat off*, *blow-in*, *bop*, *bugout*$_1$, *bugout*$_2$, *burnout*, *crock*, *cruise*, *dip*$_2$, *dip*$_3$, *dropout*, *flip*$_1$, *flip*$_2$, *flip-flop*$_1$, *flip-flop*$_2$, *flip-out*, *gunch*, *grunt*$_2$, *jerk*$_1$, *jerkoff*, *kiss-ass*, *nab*, *nug*, *plotz*, *put-on*, *score*$_1$, *score*$_3$, *scrape*$_2$, *screw-off*, *skizzle*, *snout*, *soak*, *swipe*, *swish*, *tuck-in*, *turn-out*$_1$, *turn-out*$_2$, *turn-out*$_3$, *turnover*, *wank*$_2$, *wank*$_2$, *wham*$_1$, *wham*$_2$, *woof*
Type MargAg4	Marginal agentive (imitative)
Sem	[ONE who V-s_j]$_i$ is [−appreciative] for resembling an ACTION$_j$
SEM	[a PERSON who is negatively appraised for resembling an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC$_{hum}$ units	*clunk*, *creep*$_1$, *creep*$_2$, *flit*, *flop*$_1$, *flop*$_2$, *flop*$_3$

Not all the marginal instances possess the same degree of semantic complexity, particularly as far as the expression of negative meaning is concerned. In the case of MargAg3, for instance, what is negatively perceived is the action performed by an agent, although this action, acknowledged as [−appreciative], is not converted into the agentive noun by the same degree of metonymization. For instance, the words *snout*, *bugout*$_1$ and *woof* agree on the fact that their agentive values are socially reproachable, i.e. 'an informer', 'one who behaves in a foolish manner' and 'a criminal', respectively. This perception is also built on the speaker's axiological-evaluative insight towards the concepts being represented. However, these words also differ in that their VNC$_{hum}$ process occurs at different levels of abstraction. Their corresponding verbal bases (*to snout* 'to act a police informer', t*o bugout* 'to go insane' and *to woof* 'to speak gruffly or aggressively') confirm that while *snout* is the most semantically transparent, *woof* involves a more complex metonymic process, whereby the act of barking at someone is first recognized as being representative of the way criminals or vandals behave. This action, among many others, is therefore used metonymically to represent the agentive noun 'criminal'.

Surprisingly, the data also indicate that there might be a degree of competition between *-er* agents and VNC$_{hum}$ agents in colloquial English. However, only 34 (out of 136) are fully correlated to congruent and semantically equivalent *-er* suffixed forms:

> *ass-kiss*/*ass-kisser*, *ass-wipe*/*ass-wiper*, *bop*/*bopper*, *bone*/*boner*, *bluff*/*bluffer*, *cack*/*cacker*, *cheat*/*cheater*, *chirp*/*chirper*, *clip*/*clipper*, *crab*/*crabber*,

croak/*croaker*, *cruise*/*cruiser*, *dig*/*digger*, *dip*/*dipper*, *dive*/*diver*, *fiddle*/*fiddler*, *flop*/*flopper*, *futz*/*futzer*, *grind*/*grinder*, *hang*/*hanger*, *jerk*/*jerker*, *mooch*/*moocher*, *muck-up*/*mucker-upper*, *nab*/*nabber*, *scrape*/*scraper*, *skip*/*skipper*, *snitch*/*snitcher*, *snoop*/*snooper*, *soak*/*soaker*, *squeak*/*squeaker*, *suck*/*sucker*, *swank*/*swanker*, *swipe*/*swiper*, *wank*/*wanker*.

There are *-er*/ VNC_{hum} doublets that are semantically unrelated where the *-er* derivative does not convey the value of [+human]: *stretcher* ('a tool'), *clunker* ('an old car'), *yawner* ('something boring'). In a similar way, there are also *-er* congruent units that convey the sense [+human] which are not semantically related to their VNC_{hum} counterparts:

bender ("a male homosexual," GDS), *bonker* ("rapist," GDS), *buster* ("an informer," GDS), *flipper* ("a tramp who rides the railroads, rather than travels by road," GDS), *flunker* ("a teacher who often fails students," GDS), *grizzler* ("a beggar who pretends blindness or physical disability," GDS), *gobbler* ("an individual who performs oral sex," GDS), *jerker* ("a bartender; a drinker," GDS), *mounter* ("one who swears false oaths," GDS), *plugger* ("a male copulatory," GDS), *puller* ("a smuggler; a pickpocket," GDS), *rider* ("a male copulator," GDS), *rustler* ("a busy, active person; an enthusiast," GDS).

There are some units, however, that are semantically related, in some measure, to their VNC_{hum} congruent forms: *eyeballer* ("a know-it-all," GDS), *flitter* ("one that moves in an erratic way," MWD11), *puker* ("one that vomits," MWD11), *slougher* ("one who helps a thief dispose of stolen goods," GDS).

From a statistical perspective, the most surprising aspect of the data is that there are 22 (out of 163) VNC_{hum} units where the person denoted is female, as opposed to seven units conveying male individuals. It is worth noting that five of these seven units refer to male homosexuals, as in *flit* and *gunch*, which reinforces the pejorative value of VNC_{hum} by alluding to stereotypical effeminacy of homosexual men. The account of agentive models above also suggests that *-er* seems to be more strictly linked to agentive-ness than VNC_{hum} units, which, as observed in §4.3, are also attested as patientive, and, to a lesser degree, causative. This can thus have an effect, for instance, on the gender of units which convey the semantic trait [+human] and are associated with sexual practices. For instance, while the *-er* derivatives *bonker*, *mounter*, *puller* and *rider* are reserved for male copulators, the converted forms *bonk*, *mount*, *pull* and *ride* refer to female individuals.

Based on the data analyzed in this paper, the agentive-imitative type (MargAg4) is low in frequency: only seven cases are attested. However, the varied nature of the imitative process results in the formation of semantically different converted agents, since a distinctive action that is imitated becomes representative of a reality or concept. These new concepts are generally marked with taboo, which is also reflected in the reconfiguration of the agentive-imitative nominalizations. There are two kinds of verbal semantics imbued in imitative models: type of movement (e.g. *creep*) and type of sound (e.g. *flop*). The former is even more cryptic because the unpleasant trait of the noun is perhaps rendered by the appearance of animals that creep.

4.3 *Patientive and causative VNC$_{hum}$*

Table 4 shows that there are only two types of patientive-ness, which have fewer VNC$_{hum}$ attested lemmas than opposed to agentive models. The prototypical patientive (ProtPat) schema [ONE who is V-ed$_j$]$_i$ is modeled on the syntactic attributes of nominal units that are the targets of an action. While the units in Type ProtPat show that their pejorative sense is spawned from the inherently negative meaning conveyed by the verbal base (e.g. [n.] *setup* < [v.] *set up* 'to frame someone'), the forms in Type MargPat are negatively appraised because the person represented by the converted form is the target of a socially interdicted action (e.g. [n.] *pickup* < [v.] *pick up*). In fact, most of the nouns described in Type MargPat are related to sexual intercourse or sexual practice, which accounts for the rather strict connection between patientive VNC$_{hum}$ units and the expression of a sexual partner.

Table 4: Types of marginal patientive models

Type ProtPat	Prototypical patientive (internal)
Sem	[ONE who is V-ed$_j$]$_i$
SEM	[a PERSON who is negatively appraised for being the target of an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC$_{hum}$ units	*pushover*, *rollover*, *rustle*, *setup*, *slough*, *smooch*
Type MargPat	Marginal patientive (external)
Sem	[ONE who is V-ed$_j$]$_i$ is [−appreciative]
SEM	[a PERSON who is negatively appraised for being the target of an ACTION$_j$]$_i$
VNC$_{hum}$ units	*bonk*, *buttfuck*, *fuck*$_1$, *fuck*$_2$, *bang*, *kickout*, *lay*, *easy make*, *mount*, *pickup*, *plug*, *pull*, *punch*, *ride*, *score*$_2$, *screw*, *shack-up*, *tap*, *thrum*

The data in Table 4 also confirm that the patientive converted forms, particularly those that refer to sexual intercourse, are semantically related to feminine gender. As suggested in §4.2, there are doublets of *-er* agentive nouns and converted forms in which the former is reserved for masculine agents (e.g. *bonker*/*bonk*, *mounter*/*mount*). Interestingly, converted forms that are not correlated to congruent *-er* derivatives are semantically associated with female sexual partners, which corroborates the function of VNC$_{hum}$ in the expression of pejorative sexist attitudes, e.g. *smooch*, *plug*, *screw*, *thrum*. Also, of the 22 VNC$_{hum}$ senses itemized in the dataset conveying the meaning of female person, 10 correspond to patientive models, where women are pejoratively denoted as the "passive player" in sex. The semantic value of these colloquial forms is a reflection of extralinguistic attitudes towards sex and women that still hold sway among speakers and word-coiners. It is then logical to establish a synonymic relation between VNC$_{hum}$ and patientive *-ee*. There are no patientive models conveying an imitative value, which confirms that imitative meaning is only expressed by agentive forms.

The marginal causative model (Type MargCaus) is the least productive. Only four examples are included in the dataset (see Table 5). The external nature of this type is provided by the fact that the causer is negatively appraised for making the causee perform an action, which is also socially censurable. These VNC$_{hum}$ units are also found, as opposed to agentive

and patientive types, as VNC_{obj}, e.g. a *yawn* could refer to someone or something boring. The word *barf* 'an ugly woman' is the only case referring to the gender of the causer, but due to the limited number of causative cases, no connection between causative VNC_{hum} words and feminine gender is established.

Table 5: The marginal causative model

Type MargCaus	Marginal causative (external)
Sem	[ONE who makes someone else $V_j]_i$ is [−appreciative]
SEM	[a PERSON who is negatively appraised for causing an unpleasant $ACTION_j]_i$
VNC_{hum} units	*barf, piss-off, puke, yawn*

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a strict correlation between phrasal/compound units and a type of VNC_{hum}. This finding corroborates Cetnarowska's (1993: 131) studies of positive condition on verb-to-noun conversion, where monomorphemic units are predominant, and "[p]hrasal verbs serve fairly frequently as the input to verb-to-noun conversion, e.g. *break-down, walk-about* and *shake-up*." Another finding that stands out from the results reported earlier is that approximately 13% of the agentive forms included in the dataset (18 out of 136) convey either neutral or positive meaning, which contrasts with patientive and causative units, which are all pejorative. This suggests that the process of patientive or causative VNC_{hum} is more likely to convey negative connotations than agentive models.

5 Conclusions

This project was undertaken to design and examine a morphosemantic taxonomy of VNC_{hum} units in English, which could also be used to confirm the rather strict association between the process of VNC_{hum} and the expression of pejorative meaning. One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is the taxonomical examination of evaluative recategorization, which, in general, provides information about the extent of evaluative meaning that is provided by the verbal base. The evaluative recategorization is in turn divided into two different categories: internal and external. The internal stems from the input semantics of the verbal base, rather than from an external element (e.g. the speaker's appraisal of the person that is denoted by the converted form). This differentiation is used in construing a more general taxonomy, in which three types of morphosemantic recategorization are identified: agentive, patientive and causative.

Of these three semantic categories, agentive schemas are by far the most frequent, which also raises the question of suffix rivalry between *-er* and *-Ø* (as in *creeper* and *creep*). Although suffixal rivalry was not addressed in this study, the data analyzed show that approximately 95% of the VNC_{hum} units are pejorative, which confirms Cetnarowska's (1993) claim on the negative semantics of these "bare nominalizations." Also, the polysemic nature of *-er* and its being attached to varied grammatical categories (e.g. *writ-er, weekend-er, New York-er, build-er upp-er, foreign-er*) might have implications on its less defined tendency to convey

negative connotations. Unlike the causative category, which only has a marginal construction, the agentive and the patientive categories show both prototypical and marginal constructions. The agentive ones, in particular the marginal types, show various types of semantic patterns, which range from positive models (MargAg1, e.g. *turn-on*) through negative ones (MargAg3, e.g. *asswipe*) and imitative ones (MargAg4, e.g. *creep*), negative ones being the predominant type.

The taxonomization of VNC_{hum} sheds light on how metonymy and syntactic frames are encoded in the form of converted forms, which, according to the dataset, are generally associated with the expression of negative meaning. The study has also thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. For instance, although there is a marked distinction between patientive and agentive models, originating from the same base, in regard to the gender of the person (e.g. *mount* → female, *mounter* → male), there is a dearth of data to facilitate a cognitive understanding of what makes a verbal base convert into a patientive or a causative model, e.g. a *pick-up* is not someone who *picks up*, but the person who is *picked up* (in a sexual context). Further research could usefully explore how this type of conversion is dependent on specific morphosemantic and cognitive constraints.

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Abbreviations

ASD: *American Slang Dictionary*
CED4: *Cambridge English Dictionary Online*
DCS: *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*
GDS: *Green's Dictionary of Slang*
MargAg: marginal agentive
MargCaus: marginal causative
MargPat: marginal patientive
MED2: *Macmillan English Dictionary*
MWD11: *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary Online*
ODS: *Oxford Dictionary of Slang*
OED3: *Oxford English Dictionary Online*
ProtAg: prototypical agentive
ProtPat: prototypical patientive
Sem: input semantics
SEM: output semantics
VNC_{hum}: the process of verb-to-noun conversion, where the resulting noun conveys the semantic trait [+human]

VNC_{obj}: the process of verb-to-noun conversion, where the resulting noun conveys the semantic trait [+object]

Appendix A

List of VNC_{hum} units and senses extracted from dictionaries.[17]

VNC_{hum} word	**Sense**
asswipe [1953]	'a general term of abuse; thus one who is not worth *wiping one's ass on*' (GDS)
ball	'one who has or offers sexual intercourse' (GDS)
bang	'a person rated as a sexual partner' (ASD)
barf	'an ugly woman' (GDS)
beat off	'an unpleasant person' (GDS)
bend	'a prostitute' (GDS)
blow-in [1907]	'a stranger, a newcomer, someone who has 'blown in', esp. one who is not yet accepted by the locals' (GDS)
bluff [1904]	'an impostor, a deceiver, one who bluffs' (GDS)
bone	'a very hard-working student' (GDS)
bonk	'usu. of a woman, one who is available for sex' (GDS)
bop	'a member of a teen street gang' (GDS)
bugout$_1$	'someone who acts in a silly or comic way' (GDS)
bugout$_2$ [1956]	'a person who opts out of a situation early in order to avoid danger or difficulty' (OED3)
burnout	'a heavy abuser of drugs' (GDS)
buttfuck [1977]	'a male homosexual' (ASD)
butt-in [1903]	'a meddler, one who interferes' (GDS)
buzzkill [1992]	'an unpleasant person, esp. one who ruins a hitherto enjoyable time' (GDS)
cack	'a good looking woman' (GDS)
chirp	'a female vocalist' (GDS)
clip$_1$	'a thief or robber' (GDS)
clip$_2$ [1880]	'an impertinent or forward girl' (OED3)
cloy	'a thief, a pickpocket' (GDS)
clunk	'a fool'(GDS)
cop-out	'a coward, someone who runs away from problems, a weakling' (GDS)
crab	'a nag, a complainer' (GDS)
crap-out	'a defeatist, a quitter' (GDS)

[17] The date of coinage, if available, is provided in square brackets.

croak	‘a boring complainer, a whinger’ (GDS)
crock [1876]	‘an invalid, a hypochondriac’ (GDS)
creep$_1$ [1914]	‘a stealthy robber, a sneak thief, esp. one who works in a brothel’ (GDS)
creep$_2$ [1876]	‘an unpleasant person, with poss. implication of some physical peculiarity or of criminality’ (GDS)
cruise	‘a male homosexual who picks up partners on the street’ (GDS)
cut-up$_1$	‘an amusing person, a joker; also ironically’ (GDS)
cut-up$_2$	‘a success, a ‘smart’ individual’ (GDS)
dig$_1$	‘a diligent or over-dedicated student, one who studies hard’ (GDS)
dig$_2$	‘a pickpocket’ (GDS)
dip$_1$ [1859]	‘a pickpocket’ (GDS)
dip$_2$	‘a drug addict’ (GDS)
dip3	‘a womanizer’ (GDS)
dive	‘a pickpocket’ (GDS)
dropout [1930]	‘one who drops out of school’ (MWD11)
easy make	‘a promiscuous or easily seducible woman, also in homosexual use’ (GDS)
eyeball [1970]	‘a careful person’ (GDS)
fiddle [1874]	‘a swindler, a card-sharp’ (GDS)
flakeout	‘a person who has collapsed from exhaustion, drink or drugs’ (GDS)
flip$_1$	‘a passive male homosexual’ (GDS)
flip$_2$	‘an informer’ (GDS)
flip-flop$_1$	‘an eccentric; a madman’ (GDS)
flip-flop$_2$	‘an individual who first gains parole and then returns to the same prison after breaking the terms of that parole or committing a new crime’ (GDS)
flip-flop$_3$	‘a homosexual who takes either the active or passive role in sex’ (GDS)
flip-out	‘an eccentric, a madman’ (GDS)
flit	‘a male homosexual’ (ODS)
flop$_1$	‘a fat, ungainly, slovenly person, esp. a woman’ (GDS)
flop$_2$	‘a dull, unpleasant person, a misfit, a failure’ (GDS)
flop$_3$ [1909]	‘flabby’ or ‘soft’ person’ (OED3)
flunk [1893]	‘a student who has failed’ (GDS)
fuck$_1$ [1870]	‘a person when evaluated as a sexual partner’ (DCS)
fuck$_2$	‘a person, especially when viewed as a fool, victim, villain, etc.’ (DCS)
fuck-up [1945]	‘someone who does everything wrong’ (ASD)
futz	‘a fool, an unpleasant person’ (GDS)

gobble	'one who is excessively greedy' (GDS)
goof-off	'a loafer, idler' (GDS)
grind [1893]	'a hard-working student' (ODS)
grizzle [1885]	'a grumbler, a whinger' (GDS)
gross-out [1966]	'something or someone disgusting' (GDS)
gunch	'a male homosexual' (GDS)
grunt$_1$	'an ill-tempered, constantly complaining person' (GDS)
grunt$_2$ [1969]	'a (dog) soldier, an army private' (DCS)
hang	'a loiterer, someone who spends a lot of time at a place' (GDS)
hold-up	'an armed robber' (GDS)
jerk$_1$	'a male masturbator; a general term of abuse' (GDS)
jerk$_2$ [1935]	'a fool, an idiot, a failure' (GDS)
jerk-off [1939]	'a useless, despised person, a lazy incompetent' (GDS)
kickout	'one who has been ejected from a job or from their education' (GDS)
kiss-ass	'a toady, a sycophant' (GDS)
kiss-up	'a sycophant' (GDS)
knockout [1892]	'a good-looking man or woman' (ASD)
lay [1932]	'a person with whom one has sexual intercourse, or a promiscuous woman' (GDS)
lie-about [1937]	'a lazy person' (ODS)
mess-up	'an inadequate or incompetent person, a person with problems' (GDS)
mooch$_1$ [1914]	'a beggar' (ASD)
mooch$_2$ [1910]	'a slow-witted person' (OED3)
mount	'a wife, a mistress; a promiscuous woman, who is 'ridden'' (GDS)
muck-up	'of a person or situation, a mess' (GDS)
nab [1813]	'a police officer' (GDS)
nug	'a young woman' (GDS)
pickup [1871]	'someone met in informal circumstances; sex may be involved, but not invariably' (GDS)
piss-off	'something or someone annoying' (GDS)
plotz	'a fool' (GDS)
plug	'a woman with whom one is having an affair (in addition to one's primary relationship' (GDS)
ponk	'a smelly, contemptible person' (GDS)
punch	'a promiscuous woman' (GDS)

puke [1834]	‘an obnoxious person or thing, a pest’ (GDS)
pull [1969]	‘applied to a woman picked up as a sexual partner’ (ODS)
punk-out	‘a coward’ (GDS)
punt [1704]	‘one who bets in a gambling game’ (GDS)
pushover [1907]	‘someone or something who is easily overcome, convinced or imposed upon’ (GDS)
put-on	‘an old female beggar who specializes in putting on a look that makes her look as pitiful as possible’ (GDS)
ride [1937]	‘a person regarded as a sexual partner or as sexually desirable’ (OED3)
rollover	‘one who presents no problems, e.g. to a policeman, a ‘pushover’’ (GDS)
rustle	‘an orphan, esp. one whose parents are unknown [such a child is the product of a quick, brief relationship])’ (GDS)
show-off [1841]	‘one that shows off’(MWD11)
schmooz	‘a person who behaves in a calm, relaxed manner’ (DGS)
scoot	‘an elevator boy’ (DGS)
score$_1$	‘a male or female prostitute’s client’ (GDS)
score$_2$	‘a sexual conquest’ (DGS)
score$_3$	‘a drug dealer’ (GDS)
scrape$_1$	‘a barber’ (GDS)
scrape$_2$	‘an illegal abortionist’ (GDS)
screw [1725]	‘a prostitute’ (OED3)
screw-off	‘an idler, a loafer’ (GDS)
screw-up [1944]	‘of a person, a failure, an incompetent’ (GDS)
sell-out	‘a person who betrays someone, or who sacrifices their principles for money’ (GDS)
shack-up [1969]	‘a person with whom one has a sexual relationship’ (GDS)
setup [1926]	‘a person who is easily duped, a ‘sucker’’ (GDS)
skeeve [1987]	‘a disgusting person’ (GDS)
skip [1915]	‘an absconder, esp. one who leaves without paying their debts’ (GDS)
skizzle	‘a promiscuous woman’ (GDS)
slough	‘a convict’ (GDS)
smooch	‘a girl, a girlfriend’ (GDS)
snitch [1785]	‘an informer’ (GDS)
snoop [1891]	‘an inquisitive person, a ‘nosey parker’’ (GDS)
snout	‘an informer’ (GDS)

[1919]	
soak [1820]	‘a drunkard’(GDS)
space-out	‘a giddy person’ (ASD)
spout	‘a religious or political orator’ (GDS)
squeak	‘an informer, esp. one who turns informer to save themselves after being arrested’ (GDS)
stake-out	‘one who conducts such a surveillance’ (GDS)
stand-in [1933]	‘a substitute at work’ (GDS)
stretch	‘a general term of address, usu. to a tall thin person’ (GDS)
suck [1900]	‘a parasite, a toady, a sycophant’(GDS)
suck-in	‘a swindler’ (GDS)
suck-off	‘a despicable person, esp. a toady’ (GDS)
suck-up [1970]	‘one who curries favour with others, a toady, a parasite’ (GDS)
swank [1854]	‘an aristocrat, a member of the upper classes’ (GDS)
swipe	‘a heavy drinker’ (GDS)
swish [1941]	‘a male homosexual’ (ODS)
swot [1850]	‘a hard worker, orig. one devoted to mathematics’ (GDS)
take-down [1888]	‘a deceiver, a swindler, a cheat’ (GDS)
take-in$_1$ [1772]	obsolete, ‘a swindler’ (GDS)
take-in$_2$	obsolete, ‘a man who escorts a woman in to dinner’ (OED3)
tap	‘a person likely to give a donation to a charitable cause’ (GDS)
tearaway [1938]	‘a minor gangster, a small-time villain’ (GDS)
thrum	‘a prostitute’ (GDS)
tip-off [1941]	‘an informer, an ‘inside man’’ (GDS)
tossout	‘an addict who feigns fits’ (GDS)
tout$_1$ [1864]	‘a person who sells betting advice’ (GDS)
tout$_2$ [1853]	‘one who solicits custom’ (OED3)
tuck-in [1823]	‘a hearty eater’ (GDS)
turn-off	‘anything or anyone repellent, whether physically (esp. sexually) or emotionally’ (GDS)
turn-on [1969]	‘a sexually attractive person’ (ODS)
turn-out$_1$	‘one who is up very late, after customers have been ‘turned out’ of everywhere else’ (GDS)

turn-out$_2$	‘a novice, a recent initiate, e.g. a new whore’ (GDS)
turn-out$_3$	‘a young prisoner who is forced into life as homosexual’ (GDS)
turn-out$_4$ [1826]	‘one of a body of strikers’ (OED3)
turnover	‘one who is seen as betraying their race, usu. black or Puerto Rican, by assimilating into or at least succeeding in the white society’ (GDS)
vamp	‘a robber’ (GDS)
wank$_1$	‘a person who is logged on to a computer (usu. the Internet or involved in hacking) for a long time’ (GDS)
wank$_2$	‘an objectionable or contemptible person’ (OED3)
wash-out [1918]	‘a useless or unsuccessful person’ (GDS)
wham$_1$	‘a large, aggressive man’ (GDS)
wham$_2$	‘an unpleasant woman’ (GDS)
woof	‘a criminal’ (GDS)
yawn	‘anything or anyone considered tedious, boring and thus productive of yawns’ (GDS)

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José A. Sánchez Fajardo
jasanchez@ua.es
Departamento de Filología inglesa
Universidad de Alicante
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras I
Carretera de San Vicente del Raspeig s/n
03690 San Vicente del Raspeig, Alicante (Spain)

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