

-ee derivatives in English: Focusing on dual role of -ee suffix

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Jeong, Haeja. “-ee derivatives in English: Focusing on dual role of -ee suffix.” *Studies in English Language & Literature* 43.3 (2017): 167-183. This paper argues three things : (a) -ee is morphological counterpart of syntactic passive morpheme -ed, following Oeggli(1988). Unlike -ed, -ee is supposed to do a dual job for deriving words such as sittee, whose base verb is stative and intransitive. -ee must absorb an external theta role only when there is any internal theta role, resulting in deriving a word to denote a person or a thing that undergoes passivity such as advisee, while -ee can not do so when there is none, (b) -ee English suffix is not sensitive to the transitivity of verb, but to the feasibility of having a dynamic sense of verb, which is acting as a base to -ee. It is because there are many -ee derivatives whose bases are intransitive verbs such as arrivee, and (c) the monopolic status of -ee in English for derivatives with patient reading is likely to lead over-generation, which is assumed to be inevitable for the sake of fewer constraints on -ee of our analysis compared to those of the previous ones and the over-generated possible -ee derivatives are subject to pragmatic contexts for their existence in actual speech community. The pragmatic context is to be assumed to function as a filter in the sense of Halle (1974) in order to allow over-generation of -ee suffix. (Chonbuk National University)

Key Words: dual role on theta-roles, absorption, passive reading, pragmatic context, over-generation

I. Introduction

- (1) a. The professor advised the advisee. (Direct object)
a'. blackmail^{ee}, cure^{ee}, defere^{ee}, franchise^{ee}, hugge^{ee}, educate^{ee}, honore^{ee},

rushee, slanderer, squeezer, visiter¹

- (2) a. He explained the problem to the explainee. (Indirect object)
 a'. addressee, allottee, assignee, consignee, dedicatee, narrate, issuee, offeree
- (3) a. The accountant conferred about the taxes with a conferee.
 (Object of a preposition)
 a'. callee, complainee, drawee, insistee, laughee, looker
- (4) a. Two escapees escaped from a prison. (Subjects of intransitive verbs)
 a'. ascender, advancee, dinee, faller, resignee, sittee, stander, waiter
- (5) a. Two meetees met last night. (Subjects of transitive verbs)
 a'. The management met union representatives last night.²
 a". adaptee, deferee, embarkee, forgettee, mergee, offender, pledgee, representee

As are seen in (1-5), derivatives with suffix of -ee refer various syntactic arguments which are associated with the base verbs. The derivatives are direct objects in (1-a, a'), indirect objects in (2-a, a'), object of preposition in (3-a, a'), subject of intransitive verb in (4-a, a'), and subject of transitive verb in (5-a, a', a").

One of the most discussed issues related to the variety of the base of -ee is whether the -ee derivatives are formed syntactically (Levin & Rappaport (1988) or lexicomorphologically (Barker, 1998) and what kinds of restrictions the base takes (Lieber, 2005). Our proposal is quite simple under the pragmatic-morphological approach. The idea comes from Jaeggli

¹ The examples are from Bauer (1983) and the other examples shown in (1) are also from Lieber, and et al (2103).

² According to Bauer (1983), (5-a) might be an instance of (5-b). Subjects in (5-a) are intransitive verb.

(1986), who suggested passive morpheme ‘-en’ is a morpheme for the theta-role absorption of subject in passive construction, so the subject in the passive construction does not receive a theta-role from the base verb.

-ee nouns must be morphologically derived by taking any verb as its base regardless of transitivity, denoting a person or a thing which is in the passive position. This hypothesis makes the strong prediction that even intransitive verbs are available to be a base of -ee derivatives because, according to Bauer, et al (2013), the suffix -ee is the only suffix³ in English that is primarily related to passive reading. Our analysis implies that -ee suffix can add to any verb, noun, and to any object of a preposition if -ee derivatives can only refer to a person, or a thing which is in the passive position in actual use. It will be discussed in the section 3 that the high productivity of the only object-referencing suffix -ee is substantially related to pragmatic factors which may influence the ordinary everyday language. In this paper we argue that Barker (1998)’s restraints to account for the -ee derivation cannot be maintained and his restraints are not enough to cover the seemingly over-generated -ee derivatives. Thus, we propose that primarily patient-object referencing suffix -ee can be a base of any kind of verb, a small number of noun and over-generation of -ee derivation will be checked by pragmatic context argued that the pragmatic restrictions have an edge on the semantic restraints such as Barker’s one.

II. The previous semantic analysis: Barker’s (1998)

Arguing against that thematic roles⁴ belong to syntactic aspects of

³ The suffix -ling is similar to -ee in the possibility of passive reading. For example, ‘fatling’ is an animal which has been fatted (Bauer, et.al., 2013: 388)

argument structure, Barker (1998) said they are semantic properties quoting Jackendoff (1990): thematic roles are not part of syntax, but part of the level of conceptual structure. He suggested that a speaker knows the properties of his language and unconsciously also knows what constraints are actively involved in new word formation.

Barker classified the -ee derivatives into six main categories based on the syntactic properties of the base and then argued that his semantic constraint analysis is simple and direct. He pinpointed that the syntactic analysis has disadvantages and it needs to unify cases which are not related in terms of argument structure.

Let's review his 6 categories of -ee derivatives.

- (6) the -ee nouns referring to the direct object:
advisee, consultee, detainee, employee, trainee

To get 'employee', the sentence like (7-a) is needed where its verb licenses a direct object for its argument.

- (7) a. Mr. A employs Mr. B. → Mr. B is employed by Mr. A.
b. Mr. B is an employee.

In this way, the -ee derivatives in (6) can be derived from the sentences.

- (8) the -ee nouns referring to the indirect object:
addressee, debtee, lessee, presentee

In the same way as (6), to get 'sendee', the sentence like (9-a) is needed where its verb licenses an indirect object for its argument.

⁴ For detailed classification, refer to Aarts(2008).

- (9) a. Mr. A sent Mr. B a letter. ->Mr. B was sent a letter by Mr. A.
b. Mr. B is a sendee.

The -ee derivatives in (8) can be derived from the sentences like (5-a).

- (10) the -ee nouns referring to the object of a governed preposition:
callee, conferee, consultee, drawee, gazee, laughee

For (10), it can be explained in the same way as above so it is not repeated. For the below (11,12,13), there have been no explicit syntactic analyses and the data show that the -ee derivatives come from non-objective, nonverbal bases.

- (11) the -ee nouns referring to the subject:
arrivee, advancee, dinee, escapee, offende, standee
- (12) the -ee nouns coming from no corresponding argument position in the argument structure of the stem verb:
amputee, drainee, dumpee, expiree, pluckee, twistee
- (13) the -ee nouns formed from nonverbal base :
asylee, biographee, mastectomee

As we see in (6-13), the bases for the -ee nouns are so various that it is very difficult to explain the derivation syntactically because there must be many derivational rules for the same -ee nouns. Barker also said that the set of possible referents for -ee nouns just does not seem to be a natural class, so any syntactically oriented treatments are either descriptively inadequate or severely disjunctive.

To solve the inadequate explanation for the -ee derivation, like Aarts(2008), Barker assumed theta role is a semantic property and

proposed three semantic constraints: sentence, episodic linking, and lack of volitional control on the part of the -ee noun referent, which will be briefly introduced. He said they must be independently associated with the suffix -ee because these semantic requirements can't be derived from the syntactic argument structure of the base. We will argue that his constraints also do not explain the data satisfactorily.

In order to give the counterargument for the three semantic constraints, we'll briefly explain the constraints of sentence, episodic linking, and lack of volitional control on the -ee noun referent, respectively. Barker first suggested the sentence constraint for -ee derivatives like employee, advisee, consultee, detainee whose referent must be sentient. But as he himself added a set of exceptions for this sentence constraint, there are a great number of the -ee derivatives whose referents are not sentient as in raisee, governee, controllee, actee, kickee. The derivatives above are used a lot, especially in the field of science, mathematics as in (14).

- (14) a. Formulations of both the target and source of the raisee in terms of sequence/configuration” (Anderson 2004, 84)
 b. The text in (5) and (8) provides examples for Turkish, Latin,..... showing various governors and governees, with the governed case markers.....” (Moravcsik 2006, 90)

Furthermore, we insist that the fact that in English there is no suffix to derive nouns whose referents are undergone passivity except -ee and -ling suffixes leads the possibility of over-application to any kind of verb.

The second constraint, episodic linking, requires the referent of an -ee noun must be linked to the event which the base verb causes. Quoting Barker, a gazee must be participated in a certain role in a gazing event. But this constraint is so self-evident that it looks unnecessary, which will be discussed more in the next section.

As the last one, Barker insisted that the referent of -ee nouns must show no volitional control on the event shown in (15).

(15) beatee, debtee, divorcee, honoree, lovee, nominee

To explain his third constraint, that is, lack of volitional control, he argued that the referents of these nouns clearly don't have control power over the relevant event. For example, a murder_{ee} is sure lacking in volitional control over the relevant murdering event. But, if we look into the meaning of (15), this third constraint is insufficient and inappropriate. When a person gets a divorce file and goes through the procedures, we can't say he or she doesn't show any volition during the divorce procedures. We, therefore, surmise that the constraint of lack of volitional control is not sufficient to explain all the -ee derivatives in (15).

III. Morpho-pragmatic analysis

3.1 The property of -ee

The crucial idea I wish to propose in the paper is quite simple under the pragmatic-morphological approach. Jaeggli(1986) suggested theta-role absorption for the lack of theta-role of [NP, S] position in passive constructions. In the following passive sentence as in (16), the underlined suffix -ed functions as the recipient of the external theta -role of the verb 'believe'.

(16) It was believed that the conclusion was false.

Once the external theta-role is assigned to this suffix -ed, it can no longer be assigned to [NP, S] position. He called this property of the passive suffix -ed as a theta-role absorption. This absorption property is defined as morphological and syntactic for the passive suffix -ed. In English only with verbs that assign an external theta role to the suffix -ed, passive construction can appear, which means that intransitive verbs fail to passivize because intransitive verbs in English are not structural Case assigners.

Adopting the spirit of Jaeggli(1986) in part, we assume that the -ee suffix is involved in transferring the patient theta role onto the derivative N and absorbing the external theta role only when there is any internal role of the predicate. This fact implies one important property in our analysis. Due to this property and the dynamic sense, such derivatives as 'arrivee, attendee, resignee, retiree, returnee, standee' can be derived because there is no internal theta role and so no need to absorb the external theta role, which is a natural consequence. The following (17) bears out our idea.

- (17) arrivee, attendee⁵, resignee, retiree, returnee, standee

The nouns in (17) all denote agents. So a retiree is an agent just as the subject of the verb 'retire' is an agent. Likewise, a standee is an agent just as the subject of the verb 'stand' is an agent. In the case of -ee derivatives using intransitive verb base, we have to consider two things: following Bauer(1983), they are more likely to be interpreted to be passively affected by circumstances rather than to act of their own free will. The other thing we assumed is that intransitive verbs must be

⁵ Its subject agent form 'attender' is blocked by 'attendant'. This kind of blocking in the pair of '-er' and '-ee' with the same denotation remains a further research.

checked to see whether it can have a temporary dynamic sense. With this, we can block the following words in (18)

- (18) *comee, *appearee, *likee, *believee, *knowee

The words in (18) can not be used as a base for -ee because they all can not have a temporary dynamic sense⁶ at all.

Therefore, we suggest that it is reasonable to assume that -ee acts as an internal theta-role transfer agent and an external theta-role absorber for transitive verbs and as an external theta-role transfer agent for a few nouns and intransitive verbs. These properties of -ee are defined as morphological because an affix, one of bound morphemes, is included in the lexicon because it has no predictable meaning.

3.2 -ee suffixation

Our proposal supports that the semantic approach like Barker's(1998) is superior to the syntactic one, but argues that his restriction for -ee suffixation is not satisfactorily explanatory. We showed in the previous section that his three restrictions of sentience, episodic linking, and lack

⁶ Dynamic verbs typically denote actions, activities, processes, accomplishments, and temporary or changeable conditions and on the other hand, stative verbs denote states of 'being, having', intellectual states, states of emotion or attitude or perception, bodily sensation as in (1) (Greenbaum & R. Quirk. 2013)

- (1) a. Mr. Smith wrote a letter.
b. Mr. Smith knew a great deal about economics.

But it is common for verbs to be used either dynamically or statively as in (2).

- (2) a. The red fox lives in the Sahara desert.
b. These red foxes are living in a zoo cage.

of volitional control on the part of the -ee noun referent do not explain why -ee derivatives from intransitive verbs such as *fallee*, *standee*, *arrivee* and some transitive verbs such as *raisee*, *governee*, *causee* can't be derived and the constraints look insufficient to provide the readings of the -ee derivatives.

Let's repeat with some examples in the previous section that show 6 kinds of syntactic arguments.

- (19) a. *advisee*, *callee*, *detainee*, *employee*
 b. *debtee*, *explainee*, *presentee*, *sendee*
 c. *conferee*, *consultee*, *drawee*, *laughee*
 d. *arrivee*, *retiree*, *returnee*, *standee*
 e. *attende*, *forgettee*, *offendee*, *singee*

- (20) *asylee*, *biographee*, *festschriftee*

As it is well-known syntactically, the bases of the above -ee derivatives come from direct object, indirect object, object of a governed preposition, subject of intransitive verbs, subject of transitive verbs, and nouns. This syntactic variety of the base brings about difficulty for the explanation of the above derivation. Any syntactic analysis can't overcome the shortcomings that it has to deal with the heterogeneous syntactic bases. With regard to the base, (19) tentatively shows we must use all kinds of the verb base for -ee derivatives regardless of the transitivity of the base verb. In our analysis, unlike Barker's, the base of -ee suffix can be any verb, regardless of transitivity and a small group of nouns like (20).

We assume that -ee suffix is the counterpart of syntactic passive morpheme -ed and its primary sense which -ee has is always realized in derivatives. The data in (19, 20) show the derivatives are all in the passive position.

Some of the occurring words which are derived from the intransitive verb are in fact not possible words in either syntactic or semantic approach. Our analysis, however, can explain how the -ee derivatives from the intransitive verb base can occur. That is, -ee can't absorb the external theta-role so that it is percolated onto the derivative and at the same time -ee suffix projects its passive meaning to the derivative, resulting in deriving 'X' to be read to be passively affected by circumstances.

Since -ee attaches to transitive and intransitive verbs with the restrictions of the feasibility of having dynamic sense, it can be sufficient to use 'retire, return, stand as a base, referring to agents which are to be read to be in the position passively affected by contexts. In English, the agent suffix -er can attach to most of the verbs so that the above verbs such as retire, return, stand can be suffixed with -er, meaning agent with active position. In many cases, the meanings of Xer and Xee derivatives are not differentiated, which is unique in the doublets such as 'stander, standee'. It is not that this kind of pattern always occur in the derivation with other suffixes. Most derivatives such as unhuman ~ inhuman, uncomparable ~ incomparable are formed by doublet affixes such as un-, in-, are differentiated in meaning.

This is the mechanism we postulate the dual job of -ee to explain the contrast of semantic theta-role realization in the -ee forms. To confirm that the -ee suffix must take any kind of the base verb, the grammatical contrast in (21, 22) is needed.

- (21) a. The moderator presented him in the meeting.
 b. The presentee was presented in the meeting (by the moderator)
- (22) a. Mr. Smith consulted the interview with Y.
 b. The interview was consulted with Y (by Mr. Smith).

- *c. Y was consulted his interview with (by Mr. Smith).
 d. Y was a consultee.
 ?* e. The interview was a consultee.

In (21) direct object is an -ee derivative, and on the other hand in (22), direct object of the verb may or may not be an -ee derivative as in (22-e), and that of the preposition can as in (22-d). Analogously to (22), (23) shows that even subjects of intransitive or transitive verb or noun can take -ee suffix.

- (23) a. The escapee escaped from the island.
 b. The forgettee forgot his car key on the bus.

Except for -ee suffixation with intransitive verbs, noun, -ee suffixation with transitive verbs is working well with absorption of external theta role by -ee. Considering the above reasoning, we suggest that the -ee derivatives have the following structures:

- (24) [employ]v + [ee] -> [employ]v + [ee] -> [[employee]n]
 [Θs, Θd] [Θp] [Θd] [Θs, Θp] [[Θd, Θp]]Θp⁷

- (25) [retire]v + [ee] -> [retiree]n
 [Θs] [Θp] [[[Θs][Θp]]] Θp

The word-formation rules for -ee are given in (26):

⁷ The symbols used here to represent the Θ-roles are from Jaeggli (1986). He said there was indeterminacy surrounding the nature of the particular thematic role assigned to any particular argument and so he used the symbols to represent Θ-roles like these: Θs for the Θ-role assigned to the subject of a predicate; Θd for the Θ-role assigned to the direct object of a predicate.

(26) Word-formation rule -ee

phonology: X-/i:/

base: X = verb, noun

semantics: 'X' to be read to be passively affected by
circumstances

restrictions: i) verb can have a temporary dynamic sense

ii) -ee must absorb an external theta role only if there is
any internal theta role

3.3. Over-generation

Lieber (2005) said the reason why -ee suffix violates the canonical constraints about the category of the bases to form new words quoting Bauer(1994) as follows:

"In the nineteenth century, the suffix -ee is used regularly and almost exclusively in personal nouns with a passive meaning, bearing the grammatical function of either direct object or object of a preposition in relation to the base verb. In the twentieth century, the situation is markedly different. Most importantly, "the number of -ee words which act syntactically as the object of a preposition is falling in this century, while the number of subject formations is on the increase". This trend may be illustrated with subject neologisms like attendee, knockee, waitee." (440)

It seems that Lieber recognized the predominant, unique capacity of -ee itself to form the derivatives to refer a passive agent. In addition to this, we propose that neologisms, whether they are derivatives or compounds, are inevitably affected by contextually determined beliefs and assumptions (Aronoff(2001), Hohenhaus(2005)). What is needed for a correct understanding of these kinds of derivatives is all the context. Almost all the context will guide us to a correct understanding of a newly-derived word.

Our analysis relying heavily on the pragmatic context is likely to lead over-generation of -ee derivatives. But we assume that over-generation has an overwhelming edge to produce -ee derivatives than generation with a few constraints. It is because it is more appropriate to let the pragmatic context do the filtering job over the feasibility of being an occurring word, and in other words, it is the people's acceptability of it that matters. That is why numerous impossible, but occurring or possible words exist as in (27).

(27) asylee, biographee, squeezeeee⁸, payee⁹

We surmise that the issue of whether there is any mechanism other than the context to allow over-generation remains a further research. We found it reasonable to get hint from compound formation. The preference of compounds over the phrases in actual speech community lies in their compression of notions. Likewise, the compression of notion of passivity is well expressed in the suffix of -ee because the suffix -ee does not say which argument is used, but say directly the way in which the passivity relation of the base and -ee suffix is to be deciphered.

Let us show here the context allows the passivity relation of the base and -ee suffix as in (28, 29 and 30).

- (28) a. He sent a boucher to his client.
b. He drew a picture of her.

- (29) a. A boucher was a sendee.
b. His client was a sendee.

⁸ According to (26), it is possible, but is blocked by a phonological restriction of haplology.

⁹ According to (26), it is possible, but may or may not be blocked by a phonological restriction of haplology.

- (30) a. A picture was a drawee.
b. She was a drawee.

In our analysis all the underlined derivatives of (29, 30) are possible derivatives and if the appropriate context is met, the interpretation of (29, 30) is not difficult. From this supporting case, our analysis seems to be taken as proof of better hypothesis over other ones mentioned in the previous section. As far as there is no general principle which does not prohibit these occurring words in (29,30), they are possible words due to many pragmatic contexts¹⁰.

IV. Conclusion and implications

We have discussed the syntactic, semantic conditions for English -ee suffixation. We proposed (a) the English suffix -ee is not sensitive to the distinction of syntactic argument which the base of -ee has, but to the fact that they can have a temporary dynamic sense and that (b) dual roles of -ee plays a crucial role to derive -ee nouns whose bases are transitive and intransitive verbs. The suffix -ee is listed in the lexicon as having a patient theta-role to derivatives and on the other hand, the passive suffix -ed is not listed because it is formed syntactically, and that -ee suffixation is simply the result of the interaction of morphological and pragmatic operations. If our proposal is on the right track, we surmise that '-ee' suffixation is better analysed neither in syntactic approach as in Levin and Hovat (1988) nor in semantic approach as in Barker (1998). '-ee' suffixation would be better analysed in morphological approach with the help of pragmatic usage.

¹⁰ This is one of the central claims of Allen's(1978) over-generating morphology.

In a nutshell, the suffix ‘-ee’ is simple-mindedly attached to any kind of argument which forces the argument base to take the passive standing, regardless of the transitivity of the base argument. Our approach is argued to be much simpler and more explanatory than the previous ones. Further research, we surmise that field questionnaire would be needed to confirm whether over-generation could be tolerated in actual use.

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