Claudia PISOSCHI
University of Craiova, Romania

THE SUFFIX –*ATE* IN ENGLISH. A DIACHRONIC VIEW

Introduction

From the beginning of her book, *An Introduction to Modern English Word* Formation, Valerie Adams points out that the form i.e. structure of a word is of no concern to the user, as long as he/she understands the meaning of that word, 'the object or concept it denotes' (Adams, 1973: 1). She adds that in a derived word at least one element, the affix, is a bound form, with no independent existence and, characteristically, with the more general meaning that one would expect a 'grammatical' element to have. (Adams, 1973: 30) Nevertheless, one's interest in the structure of a word derives precisely from the need to understand the degree of transparency specific to it, which might explain its degree of frequency in language. More so, if the suffix under discussion is a Latinate suffix.

The present-day values of the English derivational suffix –*ate* arouse the interest of the linguists since in English a derivational suffix rarely becomes poly-functional, contributing to the formation of distinct parts of speech. That makes even more challenging the discovery of the linguistic and extra-linguistic reasons which led to such a state of affairs.

In contemporary English the suffix has maintained its triple value: adjectival, nominal and verbal. This case of affix homonymy cannot be analysed but by considering as point of departure the Latin origin of the suffix. The influence of Latin on English throughout time accounts for the Latinate borrowings and their becoming part of the basic English vocabulary to a large extent. Borrowings are a method of filling in a lexical gap reflecting a semantic gap but the chances a word has to be integrated within the source language depend on many linguistic (word length, pronunciation, spelling, referential domain, synonyms etc) and extra-linguistic factors (attitude towards the source language, frequency of use, connotations, register etc).

All the factors mentioned above may facilitate or hinder the integration of a word within the target language and a similar treatment to that of native words. At the same time, it is equally true that the loan word is more easily integrated if its structure resembles a pattern and/or a use specific to native words of the same category. That might explain the behavior of the words ending in –*ate* in English, at least partly.

Since the diachronic view remains the best method of explaining the words ending in –*ate* in point of their lexical class and function, irrespective of their variable degree of transparency in time, we will start by discussing the value of the adjectival suffix –*ate* and then follow the stages through which the suffix went to become poly-functional.

The Latin Influence on English vocabulary. Loan words and borrowed affixes

There is an inverse proportionality between the impact that the Roman culture and Christianization had on the Anglo-Saxons, on their way of thinking and material culture, and the number of words borrowed from Latin in Old English, especially compared to the number of Latin words coming in during Middle and Early Modern English, linguists acknowledging the versatility of the native vocabulary in the process of rendering a foreign concept. Semantic loans, loan

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

translation and loan creation in the Old English period 'lack a full scale investigation'. It cannot be denied that loans are much easier to recognize and it's not always easy to prove whether a given lexical item has been modeled after a foreign original.

Due to the contact between English and various foreign languages, a large number of foreign words as well as derivative morphemes have been adopted, resulting a series of hybrid composites. Marchand (1969: 210-211) distinguishes two basic groups: a foreign word combined with a native affix, and foreign affixes added to native words. In the latter case, the target language assimilates a structural pattern from the source language. Foreign suffixes continue to live in the target language as a result of a process of reinterpretation of loans.

The analysis of any suffix should have in view the formal level (the derivative as part of speech, the nature of the base), the semantic level (the meaning of the derivate in relation to the basic sememe of the base) and, last but not least, the pragmatic aspects regarding the frequency of use, the register that the derivatives under discussion belong to etc.

We can determine the semantic value of a suffix only as a function of the basic sememe corresponding to the base-lexeme and of the derivative sememe. Semantically, the domain of the derivative is larger than that of the stem/base. The difference between the two is the sememe of the suffix. (Iliescu, 2008: 195) Any derivative can be expanded and the Deep Structure of the phrase explaining the meaning and the syntactic structure condensed into the newly-formed lexeme is actually the dictionary definition of that derivative. A suffix is defined by Marchand (1969: 209) as 'a bound morpheme which in a syntagma AB occupies the position B. It is the determinatum of a syntagma whose determinant is a simple or composite free morpheme'. All the syntagmas of this type are called derivations by Marchand, in contrast with the expansions which contain free morphemes as determinate. To Marchand, suffixes can be synonymous in the same way as free morphs are, but there is partial synonymy, since each suffix represents a different totality of semes.

Nominal derivatives contain a head word, the determined word functioning as the hyperordinate category and semantically as the archisememe, and a determiner, containing the specifying semantic features of the derivatives. As far as the position of the basic lexeme is concerned, it has a fixed position, but semantically its semantic features have a variable place within the explanatory periphrase. (Iliescu, 2008: 196) In case of adjectives the determined element does not exist, the Deep Structure of an adjective being 'x has the feature y'.

In Latin, the suffix *-atus, -ata, -atum* was specific to first conjugation verbs and was a grammatical suffix since it represented the marker of the perfect participle passive. This form of the verb to be conjugated was combined with the forms of the auxiliaries *sum* or *habeo.* This construction preceded the appearance of the compound past tenses in Romance languages. (Pîrlog, 1966: 78-79) As a participle forming suffix, *-atus* creates derivatives which have a double value: verbal and adjectival. Some of the participles containing the suffix have evolved into adjectives proper.

The same suffix was also a denominal suffix meaning 'office, function, institution of', found in examples such as *consulatus, magistratus, triumviratus* (belonging to legal and political domain), *episcopatus, pontificatus, pastoratus, prioratus* (from ecclesiastical English), *comitatus, ducatus, electoratus* 'dignity of a German Elector' (from the administrative domain). (Marchand, 1969: 254-255) Most examples were created in the 16-th century or later.

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

As The Webster Dictionary (1994: 93) acknowledges that the distribution of the English derivatives containing the suffix *–ate* parallels that of the corresponding Latin words. The suffix *–ate* is considered by Marchand (1969: 209) as being mainly a verbal suffix which serves 'to adapt real or potential Latin verbs in *–ate*', representing 'a final element of foreign origin which has merely an adaptational character'. The definition might imply that the semantic content of the suffix becomes thus extremely reduced.

The adjectival suffix *–ate* in English

Initially, as a result of the Latin influence on the English vocabulary during the Middle Ages, the suffix *–ate* was mainly used to form adjectives of the type *passionate (*Bauer, 1983: 224). The adjectives of this type are very few and along with *passionate* (attested in 1450). Marchand (1969: 255) adds on his list *proportionate, affectionate* 'full of passion', *com/dispassionate, opinionate, extortionate, notinate* 'full of notions, headstrong'. The suffix was added to Latin past participles in *–atus, -ata.* In English adjectives of the type *desolate, moderate, separate* appeared. The example *separate* is given in The Webster Dictionary (1994: 93) as the typical adjective formed from an *–a* stem verb. The presence of the adjectival derivatives as ranked first in a dictionary is a proof of the fact that the productivity of these derivatives is high enough to justify their inclusion and also that the source of further homonymous derivatives are the adjectives.

As an ending of participles or participial adjectives *-ate* is equivalent to *–ed*; sometimes both the participle and the adjective proper obtained by suffix dropping are maintained in language, one of them being nevertheless more frequent as in the case of *situate* or *situated*; *animate* or *animated.* In the former case, the adjective has the same form as the verb which leads to confusions and might determine the user to favour the participle. With the latter example there is a slight semantic difference *animate* meaning ‚alive' whereas *animated* includes the seme /alive/ in its meaning but also implies /having strong feelings, attitudes, ideals, interests/ being a synonym of *joyful, active, involved, enthusiastic* etc. In this case the participle meaning encompasses the value of the adjective whose semantic range is more restricted: *animate referent* but *animated party.*

The semantic definition of the derivatives of this type is /full of; having the quality of/. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2000: 64)

The nominal suffix *–ate* in English

The existence of the nouns ending in this suffix can be accounted for by a process of conversion (Bauer, 1983: 226-227). The Webster Dictionary (1994: 93) also states that the adjectival form resulting form the derivation of a verbal stem with the suffix under discussion 'could be used independently as a noun: *magistrate, advocate*.' 'Independent use' is another term for conversion.

The nominal suffix was added to Latin words ending in *–atus, -ata, -atum*, as we said, originally past participles used with adjectival value or nouns containing the nominal suffix *-atus*. In point of form, etymological dictionaries specify that the borrowings contained the suffix in the variant *–at*, the final *e* being added after 1400 out of phonetic reasons to indicate a long vowel. (http://www.etymonline.com)

In some cases, the adjectives of the type mentioned above, borrowed from Old or Middle French into English, underwent a process of conversion in English, resulting a series of nouns: *estate, primate, senate, doctorate, electorate, sulphate.*

As a nominal suffix, *–ate* creates derivatives having the archiseme /a status; function of/: *primate, doctorate.* Some nouns derived with *–ate* are defined

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

semantically by the sememe /group of people/ /having the status or function of/: *senate, electorate.*

Sulphate is the common example given in dictionaries to illustrate the specialised meaning that the suffix *–ate* has in English, ‚a salt formed by the action of an acid' (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2000: 64). In chemistry *-ate* is generally used to denote the salts formed from those acids whose names end *-ic* (excepting binary or halogen acids): *sulphate* from *sulphuric acid*, *nitrate* from *nitric acid* etc. It is also used in the case of certain basic salts. The chemical terms are coined in English on Neo-Latin bases beginning with the last decade of the 18-th century; the suffix represents the anglicized Latin participle in *–atus.* (Marchand, 1969: 255-256)

The number of nouns ending in *–ate* is rather reduced, most of them having the meaning 'office, dignity, institution' – *triumvirate, syndicate, directorate, episcopate.* The meaning 'territory' appears in examples such as *emirate, sultanate.* (Marchand, 1969: 255) In time the suffix ceased to be the rendering of a Latin suffix and became an English suffix. Discussing derivative alternations, Marchand (1969: 217) groups the words which developed a derivational relation among them, originally they representing separate loans. One group contains a derivative from an English word which, in its turn, is the only possible base for a further derivative: an illustrative example is *piracy- pirate.* The second group contains examples of pairs which do not involve a necessary relationship between the base-derivative and new lexeme obtained by further derivation: *creation- create.* The noun derives from the verb but the existence of the verb is a possibility, not a necessity. Sometimes the second element of the pair, the base derivative does not exist.

The verbal suffix *–ate* in English

In case of the verbal suffix *–ate* it is interesting to notice the mechanisms which favored the appearance of the verbs containing this suffix, in spite of the fact that *-ate* is not always considered as a one of the basic verb-forming suffixes in English. The diachronic evolution of these verbs might justify the position of most linguists on the matter.

In English, the suffix *–ate* evolved from the verbal suffix specific to Latin verbs in *–are* (the first conjugation). Marchand (1969: 256) considers the suffix as 'an adaptational termination with verbs' resulted from the need anglicize the Latin verbs mentioned before. The process of adaptation was specific to Middle English, being visible about 200 years after the Norman Conquest, and preceding the coming into use of any other verbs. For instance, Lat. *creatus* >Eng. *create;* Lat. *ordinatus* >Eng. *ordinate.* The process of adaptation regards all borrowings, therefore both Latin and French participles are subject to the integration process.

H. Marchand (1969: 256), counterarguing Ole Reuter's hypotheses (1934) interpreted the data in a different manner. The process of integrating Latin and French participles within the English language involves their further derivation by native suffixes. It is a concrete result of the need to achieve a functional synchronization between the loans and the prevalent form of the corresponding native words. The English morpheme for past participles, *-ed*, was added to borrowed participles - *painted, incorporated, desolated.* As a result of that, the present stems came to end in *–t* and *–ate.*

The final *–t* which marked the past participle of the loan words was apprehended as a marker of the past participle and the preterite. The removal of the ending results in a back formation process which creates present tense/infinitive forms: *compact* > *compack; corrupt* > *corrupe; rapt* > *rap.* Marchand observes the overlapping of the form of native words and borrowings. At the time

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

there were not only loan words ending in *–t* but also native verbs having the same ending, the latter displaying grammatical homonymy between past participle and infinitive/present tense: *cut, burst, put, set, split* etc. That would be a reason to interpret the participle of loan words as a present tense/infinitive (*discomfit, anoint*) but also as a preterite without further marking them by the suffix *–ed.*

The free use of the suffix *–ate* to derive verbs even from nominal Latin stems was registered beginning with the 16-th century: *felicitas* > *felicitare; capacitate, foliate, facilitate* etc. The process continues in scientific terminology nowadays: *decapsulate, dehydrate* etc. On the other hand, Latin verbs ending in *–ate* preceded the establishment of the formative *–ate.* Latin verbs in *–ificare* were paralleled by Frech loans ending in *–efy/ify*, both categories being adapted as *–ize* verbs in English.

Another possibility of forming the verbs in *–ate* could have been a process of back formation involving the Latin nouns ending in *–atio,* anglicized as ending in *–ation* under the influence of the corresponding Latin nouns found by the Anglo-Norman scholars in Latin texts: *cerebration* > *cerebrate; demarcation* > *demarcate; reparation* > *reparate; legislation* > *legislate* etc. (H. Marchand,1969: 256) The derivation of verbs from nouns by means of back formation in case of loan words parallels a process of backformation existing in Late and Middle English: within the process of ending leveling and disappearing, a series of native adjectives and verbs became homonymous: for instance, [[*gnornan/gnornian* ‚to be sad, murmur, complain, mourn, lament, grieve'] – suffix *–an*]$_V$ become identical with the corresponding adjective and noun, *gnorn* **1**. *adj* ‚sad, sorrowful, troubled, depressed'; **2**. *m* ‚sadness, sorrow, trouble'. (http://home.comcast.net/~modean52/oeme_dictionaries.htm)

R. Quirk (1991: 1557) lists the suffix *–ate* exclusively as a verb forming suffix, considering it as rather productive in English. Its meaning is not analysed separately, but it is included within the general meaning of all English verbal suffixes, which share the seme /cause to/. As the ending of a verb, *-ate* means ‚to make, to cause, to act' etc: *to propitiate* (‚to make propitious'), *to animate* (‚to give life to' – also fig.). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000: 64) defines the meaning of the verbs derived with the suffix *–ate* as containing the seme /give the thing or quality mentioned to/. It is the archiseme which characterises all the verbs derived in this way. All verbs formed with this suffix are transitive verbs and they seem to be productive formations especially in scientific English, whether we refer to medicine or chemistry. We list some of these verbs:

> *facilitate, accumulate, equilibrate, innovate, impregnate, calculate, corrugate, fascinate, decimate, escalate, emancipate, emanciate, escoriate, parodiate, conjugate, alternate, consumate, activate, contemplate, educate, altercate, translate, consternate, administrate, modulate, create, situate, saturate, affiliate etc*

In point of form they are attached mostly to neo-classical noun bases (R. Quirk,1991: 1557) but they can form verbal derivatives from non-Latin bases, such as *calibrate* (Webster, 1994: 93) attested from 1864, verb formed from the stem *caliber* + *-ate*. In spite of the explanation given by The Webster Dictionary the noun *caliber*, meaning ‚degree of merit or importance', was attested from 1560 from the M.Fr. *calibre* (appeared in the 15-th century), apparently ultimately from the Arabic *qalib* ‚a mold for casting'. Arabic also used the word in the sense ‚mold for casting bullets', which is the original literal meaning in English, though the earliest cited

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

sense is a figurative one. The current meaning ‚inside diameter of a gun barrel' is attested from 1580s. (Online Etymological Dictionary)

An interesting thing is that, in spite of *–ate* verbs deriving from past participles become adjectives, they are subject to further derivation, thus resulting *-able* adjectives which typically imply truncation (the reduction of the word by removing the verbal suffix and adding the adjective-forming suffix to the root thus obtained):

tolerate- tolerable; negotiate-negotiable; irritate-irritable

In some cases double forms exist, one involving truncation and being shorter and thus preferred by users; truncation is in such cases optional. We selected only a few examples, Ioana Ştefănescu's list (1978: 229) being more comprehensive:

cultivate- cultivable- cultivatable
demonstrate- demonstrable-demonstratable
navigate- navigable- navigatable
separate- separable- separatable

The presence of the double forms by and without truncation and also their different stress display (*compáre – compárable – cómparable*) led Ioana Ştefănescu (1978: 231) to the conclusion that there are two *–able* suffixes. Irrespective of that, she concludes that all verbs ending in *–ate* which form *–able* adjectives by or without truncation of the base are Latin loans; the truncated form represents the loan adjective (of Latin origin transmitted through French) and the non-truncated form is the regular *–able* formed adjective. She emphasizes the necessity of a diachronic perspective as the only solution of explaining the existence of the two adjectival forms. These processes and the double forms explain that the user is concerned with the structure of the word, which is interpreted in a right of wrong way, but which determines the manner in which the base is further derived. The speaker's preference for the shorter form is explained by J. Carroll and M. Tanenhaus (1976) in the form of the minimax principle: the speaker tries to reach an optimal surface complexity level of the word at the same time maximizing the amount of information contained by that word.

Ioana Ştefănescu (1978: 179) mentions that the rule of truncation also applies in order to produce derived nouns of the type *participate/participant, postulate/postulant, illuminate/illuminant, denaturate/denaturant* etc. Using Mrs. Ştefănescu's terminology this case can be generalized by stating that 'the *–ant* WFR (word formation rule) triggers truncation in case the morphological structure of the base is x = [y + -ate]', which implies an intermediate in-existent form * $[participate]_V$ + $-ant]_N$. Applying the truncation rule without exception would mean that from the verbs *dilate* and *inflate* there are such corresponding nouns as **inflant* and **dilant*, instead of the real forms *inflatant* and *dilatant.*

The explanation is not that there are *–ate* verbs which represent exception from the truncation rule but that *–ate* is not a suffix in these two cases; if that were true, i.e. –ate were a suffix, it follows that the prefixation by *in-* and *di-* would lead to the structure *in = fl + -ate* and *di = l + -ate*, the roots being thus *fl* and *l*, which is false. Truncation only applies to morphemes and ate is not a morpheme in these two cases but part of the root; therefore the resulting nouns *inflatant* and *dilatant* obey the general rule of derivation. Further examples of verbs where *ate* is part of the root are given when discussing *–able* derivatives (Ştefănescu (1978: 228).

A similar truncation rule explains the abstract nouns in *-ation* formed from verbs ending in *–ate: damnation, restauration, vexation, quotation, augmentation, exultation* etc. Such stems form a very productive base for the suffix *–ation* and the abstract nouns formed represent Middle English loans from Latin or French.

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

Ştefănescu (1978: 190) includes in her list the nouns *starvation* and *botheration* derived from native verbs. These examples illustrate Marchand's classification of hybrid composites (1969: 210-211) that we had previously referred to as being a case of structural pattern assimilation, which means more than adopting a lexical unit.

Conclusions

A diachronic perspective could be the only way of understanding both the form and the morpho-syntactic behavior of certain classes of lexemes, originally borrowings. In spite of its obvious advantages, such a method does not rule out various hypotheses on word adaptation.

Word loans and affix loans can go hand in hand at a certain moment in the evolution of a language. Moreover, their survival and integration within the target language might depend on their synchrony or even identity of form and/or function with native words, formatives and even with linguistic processes specific to the target language.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Adams, V (1973), *Introduction to Modern English Word Formation*, London, Longman.

Bauer, L. (1983), *English Word Formation*, Cambridge, CUP.

Baugh, A.C., Cable, T.A., (1978), *A History of the English Language,* Third Edition, London, Henley and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Duţescu-Coliban, Tania, (2001). *Derivational Morphology,* Universitatea Spiru Haret Bucureşti, Editura Fundaţiei România de Mâine,.

Iliescu, M., (2008). *Miscellanea Romanica,* Cluj-Napoca, Clusium & Scriptor.

Lass, R., (2006). *The Cambridge History of the English language,* Cambridge, CUP.

Marchand, Hans (1969), *The Categories and Types of the Present-day English Word Formation,* Munich.,

*** (2000). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 6-th edition, Oxford, OUP.

Pîrlog, Maria, (1966), *Gramatica limbii latine*, Bucureşti, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

Plag, Ingo, (2003), *Word Formation in English*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics, Cambridge, CUP.

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., Svartvik, J., (1991). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, London & NY, Longman.

Ştefănescu, I., (1978). *English Morphology. Volume I English Word Formation,* Bucureşti, TUB.

*** (1994).Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, Gramercy Books, NY/Avenel.

http://home.comcast.net/~modean52/oeme_dictionaries.htm
http://www.etymonline.com
utledge and Kegan Paul.

RÉSUMÉ

LE SUFFIXE –ATE EN ANGLAIS. UNE APPROCHE DIACHRONIQUE

Le thème offre la possibilité de discuter les facteurs linguistiques et extralinguistiques qui ont engendré les valeurs actuelles du suffixe dérivationnel - *ate* en anglais. Actuellement le suffixe a une triple valeur: adjectivale, nominale et verbale. Cet article se propose de discuter les hypothèses qui expliquent ce cas d'homonymie affixale, ayant comme point de départ l'origine latine du suffixe, l'influence du latin sur l'anglais le long du temps, ainsi que les ressemblances et les différénces structurales entre l'anglais et le latin au niveau lexical et morphologique. Les emprunts tendent à être acceptés dans la langue cible s'ils remplissent un vide lexical et sémantique, mais, une fois acceptés, ils peuvent passer par les mêmes

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)

changements que les mots autochtones. Simultanément, les emprunts sont plus facilement intégrés si leur structure ressemble au moule ou à l'emploi spécifique des mots autochtones de la même catégorie. Initialement, suite à l'influence du latin sur le vocabulaire anglais du Moyen Âge, le suffixe – *ate* était utilisé pour former des adjectifs du type *passionate*. L'existence des substantifs dérivés avec ce suffixe peut être expliquée par la conversion. Au cas du suffixe verbal – *ate* il est intéressant d'observer les mécanismes qui ont favorisé l'apparition de ces verbes, bienque – *ate* ne soit pas considéré un des suffixes verbaux typiques à l'anglais. L'évolution de ces verbes en diachronie peut justifier la position de la majorité des linguistes. L'étude en diachronie reste la plus adéquate méthode d'expliquer les mots qui contiennent le suffixe – *ate* du point de vue de la classe lexicale, et leur fonction, indifféremment de leur degré variable de transparence dans le temps.
Mots clé: *diachronie, latin, suffixe, etymologie, influence étrangère.*

BDD-A3332 © 2011 Editura Europlus
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.239 (2026-11-04 04:30:38 UTC)