
From morphemes to periphrastic structures

Elisa Mattiello

2 Impolite suffixoids in English slang

Abstract: This study conducts a corpus-assisted analysis to investigate the role of some slang morphological means in contexts of impoliteness and offensiveness. In particular, the study adopts a morphopragmatic approach to explore the pragmatic functions/effects associated with the slang suffixoids *-ass* (e.g. *fat ass*), *-brain* (e.g. *birdbrain*), *-face* (e.g. *shitface*), and *-head* (e.g. *airhead*) used in verbal aggression. The productivity of *-head* and similar elements positions them on the borderline between compounding and derivation, as part of transitional morphology, i.e. transitional between sub-components of word-formation. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses of data drawn from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, Davies 2008) demonstrates the frequency of the morphological processes, their privileged co-texts, and their effects in context. The contrastive English-Italian analysis using *Open Parallel Corpus – English* (OPUS2) illustrates how the two languages express impoliteness and offensiveness through different morphological and syntactic means.

Keywords: impoliteness, English slang, morphopragmatics, affixoid, transitional morphology

1 Introduction

While lexical and discourse strategies of impoliteness and offensiveness have been widely studied thus far (Culpeper 2011), there is limited research devoted to the contribution of grammatical and morphological aspects to impolite language (see Van Olmen et al., this volume; see also Davis and Jang, this volume, on impolite morphology in Korean). A language variety which provides ground for an investigation of impoliteness is English slang.

Slang has for long been associated with informal, vulgar, or bad language (Dumas and Lighter 1978; Andersson and Trudgill 1990; Allen 1998; Stenström 2000) and defined as a special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character (OED). According to Mattiello (2008: 31), the word ‘slang’ may be defined with at least two senses: “First, slang is the restricted speech of marginal

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or distinct subgroups in society and, second, it is a quite temporary, unconventional vocabulary characterized primarily by connotations of informality and novelty". While, on the one hand, slang can be viewed as a means of sociability and in-group aggregation, especially among teenagers, college students, and young adults (Eble 1996; Munro 2001; Stenström, Andersen and Hasund 2002), it can, on the other hand, act as a means of social exclusion and even of impoliteness and offensiveness.

This paper provides a corpus-assisted analysis of morphological means used with offensive effects in slang, including phenomena such as insults, criticisms, contempt, and verbal aggression. The focus is on four suffixoids (*-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, *-head*), which are often used in English slang to form complex words referring to "specific groups, such as homosexuals, fools, or ineffectual people" (Mattiello 2023: 101).

The study builds on previous research (Mattiello 2023) that examined the compound families *X-ass*, *X-brain*, *X-face*, and *X-head* in the context of verbal aggression. This research focuses on how the elements *-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, and *-head* evolve from compound constituents to bound morphemes (suffixoids). In particular, the paper aims to demonstrate that, because of their frequency and productivity in the formation of forms of impoliteness, *-head* and similar elements have developed from compound constituents to affixoids, i.e. bound morphemes originated from free morphemes. Affixoids are here described as transitional elements between affixes and compound constituents: like affixes, they have a bound status (cf. *writ(e)* + *-er* and *air/bone/cabbage/egg/meat* + *-head*), yet, like compound constituents, they correspond to autonomous words (cf. *-head* vs. *head*; see 'transitional phenomena' in Mattiello 2022a). However, affixoids have acquired a more distinct meaning from that of their parent morphemes: e.g., in *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (Green 2023), the suffixoid *-head* is said to create terms 'with a negative personal meaning', often referring to 'foolish people' or 'idiots'. In particular, 1) suffixoids have acquired a figurative, namely metonymic and metaphorical meaning (e.g., in *cabbagehead*, *-head* stands for 'a person's brain' made of/full of what is specified by the first element), and 2) they are used in English slang with a specific pragmatic function, i.e. to express rudeness or even offend others.

The paper adopts a morphopragmatic approach (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi 1994) to investigate the pragmatic meanings obtained by morphological elements. It explores the pragmatic functions/effects associated with slang words in situations of impoliteness: e.g., *birdbrain* (*Ha, even a birdbrain can get that one*), *airhead* (*You do realise she is a total airhead*), or *fat ass* (*Get in the goddamn car, you fat ass*)¹ display a derisive, critical, and offensive function in their respective

¹ All contextualized examples in English are drawn from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, Davies 2008).

contexts. Derision, criticism, and offense will be differentiated as follows: derision involves ridicule and mockery, criticism entails condemnation and disapproval, and offense reflects attack and aggression.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses of data drawn from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, Davies 2008) will show the frequency of the morphological processes, their privileged co-texts and collocates, as well as their negative potential and face-threatening power. A contrastive English-Italian analysis in the *Open Parallel Corpus – English* (OPUS2), available on Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2004), will show how the two languages differ in terms of morphological richness and how they exploit their different morphological systems to express impoliteness. Since English and Italian belong to different language families (Germanic vs. Romance), differences in the use of morphological or syntactic means are expected in the two languages (see also Paternoster, this volume, on a curse construction in Italian).

The paper is organized as follows. After this introductory section, Section 2 introduces the background to the study, with special focus on the theoretical frameworks of morphopragmatics and transitional morphology, and on studies on impoliteness. Section 3 clarifies the distinction between affixoid, combining form, and compound constituent, either strict or loose compound. Section 4 explains the methodology used for data selection and presents the morphological means under investigation. The analysis conducted in Sections 5.1–5.2 is both quantitative and qualitative and aims to investigate the different distributions of slang morphological means and their pragmatic features and contexts of occurrence. Finally, Section 5.3 provides a contrastive analysis of the different morphological means that the two languages use to render comparable concepts and produce similar effects. A general discussion and some conclusive remarks are made in the final section.

2 Theoretical background

The Theory of Morphopragmatics (TMP) adopted in this study was pioneered by Wolfgang U. Dressler and Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi in several studies (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi 1986, 1987), further expanded as a model in Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994).

According to Merlini Barbaresi (2006: 332), morphopragmatics is a subdiscipline integrating morphology and pragmatics which can be defined as “the set of general pragmatic meanings/effects obtained by morphological rules”. It focusses on various phenomena, from Italian and German evaluative affixes (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi 1994) to German and Hungarian excessives (Dressler and Kiefer

1990), from Italian ethnic adjectives (Crocco Galeas 1992) to French and English suffixes (the French *-o* suffix in Dressler and Kilani-Schoch 1994; the English *-y/ie* suffix in Merlini Barbaresi 2001; the English *-o* suffix in Mattiello 2022b), and even to Spanish phenomena (Cantero 2003) and, recently, German expressive compounds (Korecky-Kröll and Dressler 2022).

TMP relies on the tenet that morphological rules do not only convey semantic meanings, but also possess some autonomous pragmatic features which are not derivable from semantics. For instance, Italian diminutives semantically express the meaning [small] or [young], but they also possess a pragmatic feature [nonserious] which is not derived from the denotational meaning. Thus, in the Italian utterance *Mangi come un maial-ino!* (lit. you eat like a pig-DIM! ‘you eat like a piggy!’), the suffix *-ino* is used to downgrade the illocutionary force of the evaluative assertion via an added playful character (Bazzanella, Caffi and Sbisà 1991). In the diminutive formation *maial-ino* ‘pig-DIM’, the pragmatic feature [nonserious/playful] can constrain the type of speech situation and reduce the strength of the illocutionary force by decreasing the speaker’s responsibility in uttering the sentence, thus obtaining mitigation of the critical remark (Caffi 2001).

Morphopragmatic effects created via morphological means range from positivity (e.g. pleasantness) to negativity (e.g. meanness), and often express a variety of emotions: from endearment, sympathy, or empathy to irony, sarcasm, or aggressiveness. As Hamilton (2012: 6) remarks, verbal aggression is “the act of using aggressive language on a target” in order to insult, tease, or provoke them.

Impoliteness and hate speech have recently attracted the attention of many scholars addressing the issue of hostile or antagonistic communication, especially in digital environments (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012; Culpeper, Iganski and Sweiry 2017; Miro-Llinares, Moneva and Esteve 2018) and social media (Oksanen et al. 2014; Knoblock 2017; Zhang, Robinson and Tepper 2018; Demata 2021). However, until now, attention has primarily been focused on lexical aspects and discursive strategies, with Knoblock (2022) being an exception, as her edited volume focuses on the grammar of hate, specifically on the morphological and syntactic means used to express aggressiveness.

In this study, the focus is on morphological aspects that contribute to impoliteness in English slang. The study is based on the assumption that English slang has developed some specific morphological means that are generally perceived as impolite, offensive, and face-threatening, both to the speaker’s and to the hearer’s face. Culpeper’s (2005: 38) definition of impoliteness accommodates both the speaker’s and the hearer’s perceptions of intentionality: “Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)”. Here I use impolite and offensive discourse as a cover term for Culpeper’s (2011)

face-aggravation and face attack against an individual or group of individuals, deliberately involving aggressive and offensive content.

The study builds on previous research (Mattiello 2023), where the author had already explored the emergence of the compound families *X-ass*, *X-brain*, *X-face*, and *X-head* in the context of verbal aggression. The present study, however, emphasizes the transition of the elements *-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, and *-head* from compound constituents frequently found in word families to bound morphemes (suffixoids). These suffixoids, like compound constituents, correspond to autonomous words, but acquire a more specific meaning or function when used productively across various examples/types. The productivity of these suffixoids will be verified through corpus-based quantitative analyses, showing their type/token frequencies (both raw and normalized). Their specific meanings will be investigated through collocational analysis, while their functions will be explored through a morphopragmatic analysis.

The following research questions will be addressed in this paper:

1. What is the morphological productivity of the four slang suffixoids under investigation?
2. What specific connotative meanings do these suffixoids convey, based on a comprehensive collocation analysis?
3. Does Italian use the same morphological means to convey impoliteness or offensiveness, and do these serve the same functions as English slang elements?

A corpus-assisted analysis will help clarify the productivity of the four slang suffixoids and their connotative meanings and functions. A systematic comparison with Italian, using parallel corpora, will reveal the different morphological means employed in a Romance language to convey the specific connotations of English slang suffixoids in impolite contexts. The following section outlines the distinction between affixoid, combining form, and compound constituent.

3 Affixoids, combining forms, and compound constituents

Before we move on to the data and methods, a preliminary distinction between ‘affixoid’, ‘combining form’, and ‘compound constituent’ is in order. The term ‘affixoid’ is used within Construction Morphology by Booij and Hüning (2014), who note how the element *free* has developed the more general meaning ‘without what is denoted by the base word’ when it is used as the right constituent of compounds,

as in *sugar-free* and *fat-free*. Moreover, unlike the suffix *-less* having the same denotative meaning in *sugar-less* and *fat-less*, the affixoid *-free* also presupposes a slightly negative evaluation (e.g., that the presence of sugar is not good for one's health). Therefore, affixoids exist alongside formally identical and usually free 'parent' morphs; yet, they acquire a more generalized meaning (Stevens 2005: 73) or 'desemanticization' (Amiot and Dugas 2020), as *-free* 'clear of something which or someone who is regarded as problematic' in *trouble-free*, *pollution-free*, *risk-free*, etc. Moreover, Amiot and Dugas (2020) specify that affixoids are "productive", i.e., are part of schematic constructions with high type frequency (e.g., [N-*free*]), and are bound to their bases (e.g., in *sugar-free*, the suffixoid and the base cannot be split up as **sugar very free*).

A comparable example is reported by Jespersen (1942: 457–458), who lists *-proof* among suffixes (NB: without using the label 'suffixoid'). Originating from the homonymous adjective, *-proof* has become more specifically used to form words meaning 'impenetrable by the thing denoted by the first component' (e.g. *rain-proof*, *sound-proof*, *water-proof*). These examples reflect the idea that affixoids have acquired a more generalized or specialized meaning than their lexemic counterparts, and that they can be used productively with this meaning. A very recent comparable example is *-exit* (in *Brexit*, after *Grexit*), which is becoming productively used with the meaning 'withdrawal (of a country) from the European Union', as in *Spexit*, *Frexit*, *Italexit*, etc. According to the above analysis, *-exit* can be regarded as a suffixoid because it is more generalized than the formally identical free morph (cf. Mattiello 2019).

A different approach is found in Meibauer (2013), where he examines the German prefixoids *ratten-*, *sau-*, *Hammer-*, and *Arsch-* in complex words such as *rattenscharf* ('rat sharp'), *sauschlecht* ('sow bad'), *Hammerauftritt* ('hammer performance'), and *Arschgesicht* ('arse face') as evaluative elements in adjectival and nominal compounds. Meibauer (2013) argues that these elements are not semi-prefixes because they remain lexemes, having only undergone metaphorical extension. Since their meanings are systematically connected with expressive meaning, I argue that they are German prefixoids used to add negative connotations to the base words.

In my model (Mattiello 2022a: 34), I classify affixoids as an instance of transitional morphology. Transitional morphology is that part of morphology that lies at the boundaries of morphological grammar or straddles the demarcation line between two (sub)components. It includes (a) phenomena that are transitional between morphology and other components (i.e. phonology, syntax, lexicon, semantics, pragmatics), (b) phenomena situated at the interface between different subcomponents of morphology (i.e. inflection, derivation, compounding), and (c) borderline phenomena that are non-prototypical representatives of one of the

above subcomponents. Therefore, if we focus on the internal boundaries of morphology, affixoids do not constitute a prototypical category of either compounding or derivation, but may be considered transitional between these two morphological subcomponents. Like compound constituents, affixoids correspond to autonomous words; yet, like affixes, they have a bound status, that is, they attach to words (e.g. *sugar+free*), and sometimes also to word parts (*Br(itish)+exit*). In this latter aspect, affixoids can be compared to combining forms.

Like affixoids, combining forms are either initial or final bound morphemes. However, unlike pre- and suffixoids, combining forms are either allomorphic variants of classical Latin or Greek words (e.g., *bio-* and *-logy* in *biology*), or shortenings of (native or non-native) English words (e.g., *e-* from *electronic* in *e-book*), often with the intervention of a secretion process (e.g., *-aholic* ‘person addicted to’ in *workaholic*) (Warren 1990).² Sánchez Fajardo (2022) has widely studied the pejorative connotation of *-head* (e.g. *egghead*) and *-pants* (e.g. *smartypants*), which he considers to be native combining forms. In particular, he considers them “pejorative formatives on account of their metonymic and synecdochic etymology” (Sánchez Fajardo 2022: 165), as they actually refer to human beings through some of their body parts by adding a depreciative connotation. However, while *bio-*, *e-*, *-aholic*, and *-logy* are bound morphemes which do not correspond to formally identical parent morphs, affixoids do correspond to free morphemes (cf. freestanding *head* vs. bound *-head*). Hence, in my approach, *-aholic* is a combining form while *-head* is an affixoid.

Furthermore, affixoids also differ from compound constituents. According to Bauer et al. (2013: 441), “[t]he most important criterion in distinguishing a compound element from a suffix is its relatedness to a free form”. Thus, if the bound form such as *-man* consistently differs in meaning from the free form *man*, one should assume the existence of an affix. This is also relevant to suffixoids. Indeed, the semantic differentiation between the suffixoid *-head* in *airhead* and the compound constituent *head* in *spearhead* suggests that the two elements should be treated as distinct.

Compound constituents are bases which constitute compounds and may occupy either the right or the left position, as in *birdcage*, which is a ‘cage’ (head) for ‘birds’ (modifier). As Bauer (2017: 1) observes, compounds “are made up of two elements each of which is used elsewhere in the language as a word in its own right”. However, unlike affixoids which correspond to free morphemes but

² According to Warren (1990: 119), “secretion” is “a process in which certain semantic elements in a linguistic unit are kept and others discarded”. Thus, for instance, in *workaholic* ‘a person addicted to working’, the semantic element ‘alcohol’ which is present in the meaning of *alcoholic* is discarded.

undergo desemanticization, compound constituents do not undergo reinterpretation such as generalization or specification, but acquire meaning depending on the base with which they are combined. Thus, *birdcage* is ‘a cage in which birds are kept’, *birdbath* is ‘a bowl filled with water for birds to drink and bathe in’, *seabird* is ‘a bird that lives near the sea and gets its food from it’, and a *songbird* is ‘any of many different types of bird that make musical sounds’. In the former two compounds *bird* acts as modifier, whereas in the latter two compounds it acts as head, the relationship between the compound constituents changes according to the other constituent combined with *bird*. By contrast, in *birdbrain* ‘a fool’ and *dog-ass* ‘an objectionable, unpleasant person’, the bases *bird* and *dog* lose their original meaning because they are combined with two suffixoids (*-brain* and *-ass*) whose pragmatic meaning/function is to convey impoliteness.

Another crucial distinction to be introduced here, especially because it is related to the Italian renditions of suffixoids, is that between strict and loose compounds. According to Scalise (1992: 181), “the presence of a strong boundary is indication of a loose compound while a weak boundary indicates a strict compound”. In line with this claim, in Italian, *sala stampa* ‘press room’ could be viewed as a loose compound because the two words *sala* and *stampa* are closely knit in form and meaning, as commonly happens in compounds, but still carry two-word accents and are spelt as two separate words, rather than being solid. By contrast, *quintessenza* ‘quintessence’ is a strict compound because of the weak boundary between *quinta* ‘fifth’ and *essenza* ‘essence’. A comparable distinction in English would be between the loose compound *head office*, with two-word accents, and the strict compound *spearhead*, stressed on the first constituent. Actually, in Italian we also find syntactic constructions characterized by prepositions. For instance, the [N+Adj]_N compound *testa vuota* ‘lit. head empty’ for ‘airhead’ is a strict compound, i.e. a morphological construction, whereas the [N+Prep+N]_N formation *testa di cavolo* ‘lit. head of cabbage’ for ‘pinhead’ is a phrase closer to Scalise’s (1992) loose compound, i.e. a syntactic construction.

For the latter construction, various labels have been used: namely, *composto sintagmatico* ‘syntagmatic compound’ (Scalise 1994), *lessema complesso* ‘complex lexeme’ (Voghera 1996), and (*unità*) *polirematica* ‘multi-word (lexical) unit’ (Voghera 2004). The problem remains as to whether they should be included in morphology or in the lexicon: some of these constructions are included in dictionaries as separate entries, like compounds, others are not recognized and rather fall under the category of lexical units or syntactic constructions. In this study, I will consider these loose compounds as far as they are attested in dictionaries and as prepositional phrases when they are not recognized. The distinctions between strict and loose compounds and between morphological and syntactic constructions will be essential in the contrastive analysis conducted in Section 5.3.

In the present study, I will use the term ‘suffixoid’ for such recurrent elements as slang *-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, and *-head*, because like compound constituents they correspond to free words, but unlike them they acquire specific pragmatic features connected with impoliteness (cf. Mattiello and Dressler 2018). In particular, I will focus on the pragmatic contribution that such slang constituents can make to offensive discourse and face-threatening acts.

4 Data and methodology

The data analyzed in this study were collected from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, Davies 2008). It is the most widely used corpus of American English created by Mark Davies, freely accessible at <https://www.english-corpora.org/>. It contains more than one billion words of text (20 million words each year) from eight genres: i.e., spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, and (recently updated) TV and movies subtitles, blogs, and other web pages.

For the selection of relevant data, I used a twofold process. First, I automatically searched for complex words ending in the selected slang suffixoids (**ass*, **brain*, **face*, **head*). The asterisk allowed me to obtain as results all words ending in the selected morphemes. However, sometimes these were word chunks (e.g. *compass* or *embarrass* do not include the suffixoid *-ass*). Hence, manual selection was necessary to clean the data from irrelevant examples.

Second, the selected data were searched in the digital edition of *Green’s Dictionary of Slang* (henceforth, GDS) for meaning and relevance. The digital version of GDS is available in updated online form at <https://greensdictofslang.com/>, including advanced search tools and the words’ etymologies. In GDS, the suffixoids under investigation were all labelled ‘suffixes’, with the exception of *-brain*. The senses of the complex words ending in a suffixoid are all from GDS.

The lexicographic inspection allowed me to restrict the number of formations to recognized slang nouns. For instance, words such as *busy-ass*, *bony-ass*, *lame-ass*, *long-ass*, *stupid-ass*, *sweet-ass*, or *ugly-ass* attested in COCA but not attested in GDS have been excluded from the analysis. However, they show the productivity of the suffixoids in terms of availability and profitability in the formation of nonce words or even of hapax legomena (once-only attestations) (Bauer 2001).³ In addition, *cheap-ass*, *fancy-ass*, *fine-ass*, *nasty-ass*, *weak-ass*, and *weird-ass* have been

³ By ‘availability’ I mean the potential a process offers the language user to produce new words, while ‘profitability’ is the actual use of the process to coin new words.

rejected because they are only attested as slang adjectives, whereas *sorry-ass* has been included because attested both as a noun and as an adjective, even if the raw frequency in COCA does not distinguish between the two parts-of-speech.

When two spellings (i.e. solid and hyphenated) were attested in the corpus, they have both been included in the quantitative analysis in order to identify the most frequent spelling: e.g., solid *badass* is more frequent than hyphenated *bad-ass* in COCA (see Table 1). Spelling as two separate words was not taken into account because affixoids are attached to bases.

The selection process yielded 28 *-ass* words, 15 *-brain* words, 31 *-face* words, and 51 *-head* words (different spellings are considered different words here because COCA gives them as separate entries). Most of the senses associated with these words have to do with foolishness, stupidity, incompetence, or are terms of abuse associated with vulgarity and derogatoriness. For *-head* words, those having meaning related to drugs have been excluded (e.g. *cokehead* ‘a regular cocaine user’, *dopehead* ‘a drug user’, *gearhead* ‘a narcotics addict’, *horsehead* ‘a heroin addict’) because their use is generally not connected with either impoliteness or offensiveness.

For the data analysis, I used the quantitative data obtained from COCA (both raw and normalized frequencies). Some of the words were only attested once in the corpus, as nonce words, and this confirms the productivity of the affixoids not only in terms of frequency but also in terms of profitability in the formation of new (less well-known) words (Bauer 2001).

In a previous study, Mattiello (2023) investigated a set of relevant examples of such formations referring to people with negative or undesirable characteristics, such as foolishness or stupidity, and presented their raw frequencies in COCA, along with normalized frequencies across different genres. In this study, I consider both high-frequency examples and hapaxes to demonstrate the productivity of the suffixoids and their evolution toward bound morphemes used with different meanings. These meanings are identified through a comprehensive analysis of the collocates of complex words ending in a suffixoid.

For the morphopragmatic analysis, I first selected the most frequent words from the quantitative analysis and examined their contexts and co-texts. The qualitative analysis supports the findings of previous research with additional examples and contexts, thereby confirming the functions previously discussed by Mattiello (2023). Some tokens of the most frequent types in COCA were excluded from the qualitative analysis because they were personal names (e.g. *Butt-head* is also a character’s personal name) or irrelevant to my analysis (e.g. *Bubblebrain* ‘a music label’ and *Fatbrain* ‘a toy company’ are brand names of business companies, while *boldface* is a technical term of printing referring to ‘a thick font type’). A close reading of the words in context (mainly spoken discourse or blog and web

genres) was necessary in order to select relevant examples showing the pragmatic functions/effects associated with *-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, and *-head* words. The main pragmatic functions/effects investigated were the derisive function (§ 5.2.1), the critical function (§ 5.2.2), and the offensive function (§ 5.2.3).

Finally, for the English-Italian contrastive analysis, I used the *WordReference* dictionary and the parallel English-Italian subcorpus OPUS2 to explore the possible Italian translations of such English formations. I also compared English and Italian in terms of their different morphological systems, diverse morphological means and morphological richness.

5 Analysis

5.1 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis of the four suffixoids under investigation (*-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, *-head*) includes an exploration of their most common types, which are also classified into semantic categories based on the GDS meanings. Additionally, the quantitative analysis presents the raw and normalized frequencies of the tokens and the immediate collocates of a representative type (*badass*, *fatbrain*, *fuckface*, *butt-head*), to investigate whether the collocates confirm the impolite contexts in which these slang suffixoids are used.

5.1.1 The suffixoid *-ass*

Table 1 reports the quantitative data (raw and normalized (per million words) frequency in COCA) of formations exhibiting the suffixoid *-ass*. This suffixoid shows 22 different types (excluding different spellings), with 5,616 tokens overall.

Table 1: Raw and normalized frequency of *-ass* words in COCA.

-ASS WORD	RAW FREQUENCY IN COCA	NORMALIZED FREQUENCY (PMW) IN COCA
badass	1,807	1.82
bad-ass	322	0.32
dumbass	825	0.83
dumb-ass	416	0.42

Table 1 (continued)

-ASS WORD	RAW FREQUENCY IN COCA	NORMALIZED FREQUENCY (PMW) IN COCA
big-ass	420	0.42
bigass	19	0.02
smart-ass	397	0.40
hard-ass	204	0.21
hardass	46	0.05
punk-ass	150	0.15
fat-ass	142	0.14
fatass	63	0.06
crazy-ass	136	0.14
wiseass	120	0.12
wise-ass	89	0.09
sorry-ass	101	0.10
half-ass	84	0.08
tight-ass	75	0.08
candy-ass	57	0.06
shit-ass	23	0.02
skinny-ass	21	0.02
dead-ass	19	0.02
jive-ass	16	0.02
pansy-ass	16	0.02
lard-ass	13	0.01
funky-ass	13	0.01
mean-ass	12	0.01
cracker-ass	10	0.01

According to GDS, *-ass* is “used to form generally negative (but increasingly positive too) adj[ective]s and occas[ionally] nouns”. Hence, its function is mainly intensifying in the case of adjectives. Since my analysis focuses on nouns, *-ass* nouns can be classified as:

1. referring to arrogant, stubborn or presumptuous people: *big-ass/bigass*, *smart-ass*, *hard-ass/hardass*, *wiseass/wise-ass*, *jive-ass*;
2. referring to foolish or aggressive people: *badass/bad-ass*, *dumbass/dumb-ass*, *crazy-ass*;
3. referring to unpleasant people (as terms of abuse): *punk-ass*, *tight-ass*, *shit-ass*, *funky-ass*, *mean-ass*;

4. referring to overweight or skinny people: *fat-ass/fatass, skinny-ass, lard-ass, cracker-ass*;
5. referring to stupid or incompetent people: *sorry-ass, half-ass*;
6. referring to cowards or effeminate people: *candy-ass, pansy-ass*;
7. referring to idle, lazy people: *dead-ass*.

These seven semantic categories, listed in order of type frequency, confirm the negative character of the suffixoid, with a potential use in contexts of impoliteness, offensiveness and aggressiveness.

When considering the most frequent type – i.e. *badass/bad-ass* – its most relevant collocates in COCA are noteworthy. These collocates, arranged by their Mutual Information (MI) score (indicated in brackets), reflect the strength of association between the word and its immediate collocates.

- *badass* + NOUN: *motherfucker* (6.36), *chick* (6.34), *dude* (5.50), *hunter* (5.10), *bitch* (4.53), *monster* (3.85), *killer* (3.53), *character* (3.28), *boss* (2.42), *shit* (2.02);
- *badass* + ADJ: *pretty* (6.60), *ultimate* (5.19), *total* (4.48), *inner* (4.43), *fucking* (4.19), *super* (3.93), *favorite* (3.58), *cool* (3.01), *complete* (2.68), *real* (2.55);
- *badass* + VERB: *fool* (3.48), *name* (2.44), *embrace* (2.38), *swear* (2.36), *sound* (2.30), *remind* (2.30), *feature* (2.19), *kick* (2.10), *slip* (2.03), *mix* (2.01);
- *badass* + ADV: *miserably* (5.38), *fatally* (5.21), *vaguely* (4.85), *boldly* (4.92), *alright* (3.52), *totally* (2.66), *definitely* (2.58), *fucking* (2.54), *constantly* (2.36), *pretty* (2.35).

The collocates for *badass* (e.g., *motherfucker, bitch, shit, fool, miserably*) and the adjectives/adverbs used to emphasize this noun (*total, fucking, complete, definitely*) highlight its negative connotation in some contexts. However, *badass* is a polysemous word that can also carry a positive meaning in slang when used as an adjective, i.e., ‘formidable, admirable, first-rate,’ as suggested by some of its collocates (e.g., *pretty, cool, real*). Therefore, it will be excluded from the qualitative analysis in Section 5.2.

5.1.2 The suffixoid *-brain*

Table 2 reports the frequency in COCA of formations exhibiting the suffixoid *-brain*, amounting to 14 different types (excluding different spellings) and 39 tokens.

Table 2: Raw and normalized frequency of *-brain* words in COCA.

-BRAIN WORD	RAW FREQUENCY IN COCA	NORMALIZED FREQUENCY (PMW) IN COCA
birdbrain	52	0.05
bird-brain	5	0.01
fatbrain	8	0.01
lame-brain	7	0.01
bubblebrain	3	0.00
pea-brain	3	0.00
mush-brain	2	0.00
mouse-brain	2	0.00
wet-brain	2	0.00
shit-brain	1	0.00
beanbrain	1	0.00
bean-brain	1	0.00
butterbrain	1	0.00
fuckbrain	1	0.00
dickbrain	1	0.00
meatbrain	1	0.00

In GDS, *brain* is not considered a suffix(oid) but rather an independent word displaying several meanings, one of which is “a stupid person”. However, words ending in *-brain* are compared to *-head* words in the dictionary (e.g. *fat-brain* and *fat-head*). All *-brain* words reported in Table 2 convey a derogatory sense of ‘a fool, a simpleton’. Some of them are marked as derogatory (e.g. *fatbrain*, *dickbrain*) and others clearly activate a metaphorical sense: e.g., *bubblebrain* ‘a foolish, careless person, with a brain like a bubble’, *bird-brain* ‘person having a brain comparable to that of a bird’, *pea-/bean-brain* ‘person having a brain of the dimensions of a pea or bean’.

These meanings confirm the negative connotation of the words containing the suffixoid *-brain*. As for the most frequent type, *fatbrain*, given the small number of contexts provided by the corpus, no collocates could be identified.

5.1.3 The suffixoid *-face*

Table 3 shows the frequency in COCA of formations exhibiting the suffixoid *-face*, amounting to 22 different types (excluding different spellings) and 675 tokens.

Table 3: Raw and normalized frequency of *-face* words in COCA.

-FACE WORD	RAW FREQUENCY IN COCA	NORMALIZED FREQUENCY (PMW) IN COCA
boldface	283	0.28
bold-face	9	0.01
fuckface	71	0.07
fuck-face	40	0.04
paleface	51	0.05
leatherface	50	0.05
pigface	29	0.03
shitface	27	0.03
shit-face	2	0.00
dogface	26	0.00
dog-face	2	
yellow-face	15	0.02
yellowface	5	0.01
assface	8	0.01
ass-face	3	0.00
buttface	7	0.01
butt-face	2	0.00
fish-face	6	0.01
fishface	3	0.00
moon-face	6	0.01
puke-face	6	0.01
dickface	5	0.01
stoneface	4	0.00
pie-face	3	0.00
cuntface	3	0.00
arseface	2	0.00
rat-face	2	0.00
ratface	2	0.00
monkey-face	1	0.00
apectace	1	0.00
cow-face	1	0.00

According to GDS, *-face* is “a s[uf]f[i]x used in comb[ination] with an abusive epithet to form a derog[atory] term of address”. Hence, its function is mainly derogatory, offensive and abusive. In particular, *-face* nouns fall into the following semantic categories, with some words belonging to more than one in GDS:

1. referring to unpleasant, contemptible or stupid people: *boldface/bold-face, fuck-face/fuck-face, shitface/shit-face, dogface/dog-face, assface/ass-face, fish-face/fishface, puke-face, dickface, pie-face, arseface, rat-face/ratface, monkey-face*;

2. referring to unattractive people: *pigface*, *buttface/butt-face*, *fish-face/fishface*, *cuntface*, *monkey-face*, *apeface*;
3. forming racist terms: *paleface*, *yellow-face/yellowface*, *moon-face*, *pie-face*;
4. referring to unemotional people: *leatherface*, *stoneface*;
5. referring to despicable women: *cow-face*.

These five semantic categories, again listed in order of type frequency, suggest a negative feature of the suffixoid.

Given the ambiguity of *boldface*, also used as font name, *fuckface* has been taken into consideration for collocations. The term *fuckface* shows collocates (mainly nouns and adjectives) with negative, offensive or vulgar meaning, arranged in MI order: e.g., piece-of-shit (13.35), cocksucker (11.84), asshole (8.82), fascist (8.69), motherfucker (8.50), dick (5.49), stupid (5.45), fuck (5.03), ass (4.94). This and related formations, therefore, encourage a morphopragmatic analysis to verify the specific use and functions of the suffixoid.

5.1.4 The suffixoid *-head*

Formations exhibiting the suffixoid *-head* are collected in Table 4, with information about their frequency in COCA. This suffixoid shows 37 different types (excluding different spellings), with 7,488 tokens overall.

Table 4: Raw and normalized frequency of *-head* words in COCA.

-HEAD WORD	RAW FREQUENCY IN COCA	NORMALIZED FREQUENCY (PMW) IN COCA
buckhead	1,219	1.23
butt-head	669	0.67
butthead	226	0.23
pinhead	669	0.67
pin-head	8	0.01
dickhead	661	0.67
dick-head	22	0.02
shithead	495	0.50
shit-head	6	0.01
flathead	445	0.45
flat-head	26	0.03
bonehead	427	0.43
bonehead	8	0.01

Table 4 (continued)

-HEAD WORD	RAW FREQUENCY IN COCA	NORMALIZED FREQUENCY (PMW) IN COCA
hammerhead	338	0.34
egghead	335	0.34
knucklehead	333	0.34
marblehead	288	0.29
airhead	183	0.18
sheepshead	182	0.18
meathead	174	0.18
fuckhead	173	0.17
fuck-head	9	0.01
fathead	131	0.13
fat-head	6	0.01
motorhead	64	0.06
motor-head	3	0.00
conehead	60	0.06
cheesehead	58	0.06
bubblehead	35	0.04
leatherhead	24	0.02
chickenhead	23	0.02
potatohead	22	0.02
potato-head	6	0.01
ironhead	22	0.02
butterhead	22	0.02
knothead	18	0.02
knot-head	5	0.01
buckethead	17	0.02
bucket-head	8	0.01
hardhead	12	0.01
stupidhead	11	0.01
beanhead	11	0.01
bean-head	3	0.00
dumbhead	9	0.01
bullet-head	5	0.01
asshead	4	0.00
lemonhead	4	0.00
melon-head	4	0.00
melonhead	3	0.00
wethead	1	0.00
lardhead	1	0.00

In GDS, *-head* is included as a main entry to indicate a suffix “used in a variety of comb[ination]s in which *-head* is linked to a n[oun] to create a term with a neg[ative] personal meaning”. Several examples of *-head* formations are provided by the dictionary whose meanings are related to foolishness: e.g., *airhead*, *blockhead*, *bonehead*, *cabbage-head*, *dickhead*, *egghead*, *meathead*, *pinhead*, *pointy-head*, and *shithead*. They mostly have metaphorical meaning, implying that the head in question is shaped like or otherwise resembles the noun it accompanies. All the formations included in Table 4 refer to ‘fools or stupid people’, with the exception of *buckhead* ‘a person with buck teeth’.

If we consider the most frequent type meaning ‘a stupid or obnoxious person’ – i.e. *butt-head* – its most relevant collocates in COCA include:

- *butt-head* + NOUN: cartoon (6.52), chick (6.12), angle (5.44), aisle (5.24), pause (5.08), creator (4.82), butt (4.17), plane (3.98), cow (3.81), idiot (3.54);
- *butt-head* + ADJ: nerdy (7.14), upsetting (6.74), muddy (5.81), unaware (5.25), dumb (5.15), cool (4.65), overweight (4.37), asleep (3.68), excited (3.44), stupid (2.24);
- *butt-head* + VERB: butt (7.67), suck (4.45), stare (3.85), kick (3.75), shut (3.70), wake (3.58), check (3.49), laugh (3.10), close (2.22), watch (2.17);
- *butt-head* + ADV: blankly (7.04), dead (4.78), wide (4.31), randomly (4.30), tight (3.93), suddenly (3.04), aside (2.99), barely (2.91), sure (2.17).

Not all the collocates for *butt-head* display a negative connotation; yet, some collocates are negative, especially vulgar (*butt*) or offensive (*cow*, *dumb*, *idiot*, *overweight*, *stupid*), or imply an aggressive tone (*furiously*, *shut (up)*, *suck*, *kick*, etc.), thus encouraging a morphopragmatic approach for the qualitative analysis.

5.2 Qualitative analysis

For the qualitative analysis, the suffixoids explored so far from a quantitative viewpoint will be contextualized to ascertain their morphopragmatic functions. The specific pragmatic functions that dominate the language of impoliteness and offensiveness can be grouped into three conflict functions; namely, derision, criticism, and offence (see “conflict situations” in Hamilton 2012). Hence, each of these functions – namely, derisive, critical and offensive – will be dealt with in Subsections 5.2.1–5.2.3 in order to investigate in more detail how they are served by the morphological means under investigation.

5.2.1 Derisive function

Speakers often opt for slang suffixoids as an indication of scorn, mockery, disdain, ridicule, and consequently disrespect and impoliteness, with the intent to laugh at someone perceived as stupid or of no value. The feature [derisive] deriving from a character [playful] or [non-serious] (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi 1994) may produce different morphopragmatic effects. For instance, speakers may use slang *-brain* words with a mocking intent, as in examples (1)–(2):

- (1) Of course, Mitten's never did that, did he? # Instead, it was revealed this past Monday, that it was Mormon Bishop Mittens who lied for POLITICAL GAIN. # You are a **bird-brain**! We are electing a president, not an Imam or priest. (BLOG, *US intel believes some Benghazi attackers tied to al Qaeda in Iraq*, 2012)
- (2) Hey! Paul, Staten Island, what do you got? Hey, Dogg, how you doing? Um, listen, I'm just calling in response to that **pea-brain** Philadelphia Phil. I'm listening here. It's unbelievable! I mean, you ever hear of innocent until proved guilty? It's a little thing called the American Constitution. (MOVIE, *Big Fan*, 2009)

The general tone in (1) is hilarious, humorous, or even sarcastic. Indeed, the accusation *You are a bird-brain!* is followed by the statement *We are electing a president, not an Imam or priest*, which indicates a mocking intent towards the addressee. By contrast, in (2) the word *pea-brain* has an external referent (*I'm just calling in response to that pea-brain Philadelphia Phil*), who is laughed at by the following utterances *It's unbelievable! I mean, you ever hear of innocent until proved guilty? It's a little thing called the American Constitution*. The speaker is clearly sarcastic when (s)he defines *the American Constitution* by using an ironic understatement (*a little thing*), which confirms his/her derisive attitude.

The function of *-head* words is similarly derisive in (3)–(5):

- (3) Show me proof of what you are saying is more than what you've gathered from your own opinions or watching Fox News. Give me concrete evidence so that I can believe you. Prove it to me. Otherwise, all you are is just a **pinhead** with an inflated sense of ego. And that's unfortunate. # HAHA, you people are so ignorant and so blind, you wouldn't see a door if it splits your heads wide open. . . your comments keep me entertained. . . (WEB, *Romney staff refusing to let frostbitten voters leave PA rally*, 2012)
- (4) Ash, You are a simpering, childish fool whose intellect is dwarfed by your stupidity. You come in here and talk like a little **dickhead** in front of the

grownups and you get pissy when we ignore you. I crap out better men than you every morning. You are a vapid, ignorant, small minded fool whose last happy day will be the one before the election. (WEB, *We Will Not Be Silenced*, 2012)

- (5) Yes, I realize it's a catfish. What the fuck do you know about fish, you're just a stupid beetle. Shut up, asshole. # What's so fucking surprising, **shithead**? Like you weren't just sitting around waiting to be discovered by humans. (WEB, *Fuck You, Penguin*, 2012)

Again, the general tone is aggressive and even sarcastic and *-head* words contribute to helping speakers in their mocking intent. Many collocates confirm the impolite context: e.g., nouns (*asshole, beetle, fool, stupidity*), adjectives (*blind, ignorant, pissy, small minded, stupid, unfortunate, vapid*), verbs (*crap out, shut up*), adverbs (*fucking*), and longer vulgar expressions (*what the fuck*).

Another vulgar context that also shows the use of an *-ass* word with a derisive function is illustrated in (6):

- (6) Bullshit. Translucent. What the f. . . Well, come on, you lime-sucking **smart-ass**. How the hell did you do it? (TV, *The Boys*, 2019)

In this example, the word *smart-ass* is derisory for the arrogant, know-it-all behaviour of the addressee (*Well, come on, you lime-sucking smart-ass*), as confirmed by the various negative (esp. aggressive and vulgar) collocates (*bullshit, what the f. . ., how the hell. . .*).

The derisive function also partly overlaps with the critical function, as most of the above contexts also suggest a critical attitude, more closely investigated in Section 5.2.2.

5.2.2 Critical function

Some of the same morphological means can take a disparaging meaning/function when used in a critical context, to express negative opinions or judgments about the bad qualities of someone or to condemn their behaviour. For instance, *-ass* words can be used to express critical remarks such as:

- (7) He's a dick it seems for the sake of being a dick; he's just a **dumbass** on nearly everything. . . a real hatchet mouth. . . (BLOG, *Do You Want To Watch Devin Faraci Get - Ain't It Cool News*, 2012)

- (8) My dad is such a **hard-ass**. He's breaking my balls 'cause I'm flunking history. Who needs to learn about shit that already happened? If they had a class called "future," I'd be all over it. (TV, *F Is for Family*, 2015)
- (9) Babe, are you still upset because of what **fat-ass** said? 'Cause I'll kick his ass if you want me to. What, I will, for you. I'm not gonna let anyone disrespect my girl. (MOVIE, *Night of Something Strange*, 2017)

All these words express criticism towards a third person, an external referent (*he's just a dumbass on nearly everything*, *My dad is such a hard-ass*, *Babe, are you still upset because of what fat-ass said?*). The speakers' disparaging attitudes are confirmed by the presence of offensive words (*dick*) and other vulgar expressions (*breaking my balls*, *shit*, *kick his ass*), showing the negative connotations of *dumbass*, *hard-ass*, and *fat-ass*.

In blogs and on the Web, *-brain* and *-head* words display a similar condemning function:

- (10) I'm not say it's not true just I having see the correct data. # Is there no subject of which he has no understanding that the **pea-brain** Michael Moore will not offer up an ignorant, emotional, and wrong opinion about? (BLOG, *Michael Moore on climate change and Superstorm Sandy*, 2012)
- (11) Jim Braselman # Here is the deal, and it is beyond dispute and self-evident. The GOP, got SPANKED in the election - badly spanked. And they are desparate (sic) to get back at Obama any way they can. This **pinhead** is elected in California, where GOP registration has fallen BELOW 30% statewide!! (BLOG, *Anderson Cooper Gets Heated With GOP Rep. Over Benghazi*, 2012)
- (12) You cannot impeach Obama because he is a **dickhead**. Being stupid is not against the law, you can not legislate to make people be smart. Obama is part of the price everybody pays for living in a free, democractic (sic) country. (WEB, *The American Spectator: Building 'Frankenstein' in the Middle East?*, 2012)

These three contexts show that the Internet is often an attractor of criticism, because people tend to use online posts to comment on political or other public people's behaviour (*the pea-brain Michael Moore*. . . , *This pinhead is elected in California*, *You cannot impeach Obama because he is a dickhead*). Collocates such as *ignorant*, *wrong*, or *stupid* confirm the negative attitude of the bloggers or web users. Yet, again, it is difficult to provide a clear distinction among the three functions of the slang suffixoids analyzed. The effect produced by *pea-brain*, *pinhead*, and *dickhead* is indeed offensive.

5.2.3 Offensive function

The third function that slang morphological means can perform is the offensive one, i.e. slang suffixoids are often deliberately used to attack and offend someone. Words frequently associated with offence are *fuckface* and *paleface*:

- (13) Hey, what the fuck, two out of three ain't bad. You expect everyone who runs a fucking football team to be a fucking Mother Theresa, like the fucking piece of shit who wrote that fucking article, right assholes? # Get fucking cancer, **fuckface**, and hey, if you've already got it, maybe you'd like to buy a nice comfy mattress to rest on during your convalescence. (WEB, *The Cranky Redskins Fan's Guide to Dan Snyder - Washington City*, 2012)
- (14) Now, is the salad bar still free, though? Why would you care? Doesn't look like you've had a salad in your whole life. I'm not telling you again. Now, get in here! - Die, **paleface**! - You little bastards! Hey! Hey, now! Hey, now! Hey! Hey! Knock that shit off! Those are my good golf clubs! (MOVIE, *Delta Farce*, 2007)

Both contexts are aggressive and extremely offensive, as the speakers are directly attacking their addressees by wishing them to get sick (*Get fucking cancer, fuckface*) or to die (*Die, paleface!*). Co-textual material confirms the speakers' attacking tone: in (13), the adverb *fucking* is used five times, accompanied by other abusive expressions (*piece of shit, assholes, what the fuck*), in (14), *paleface* is followed by the epithet *bastards* and the colourful expression *Knock that shit off*.

A similar offensive function is displayed by *-head* and *-ass* words in (15)–(18):

- (15) Would Amazon be better if there weren't any fake reviews at all? # Go read them now, before some **pinhead** complains to Amazon and they get removed. # After reading my reviews, take some time to read other reviews of those same products. Look at the pics customers have uploaded as well. You'll probably enjoy it as much as I did. (BLOG, *A Newbie's Guide to Publishing*, 2012)
- (16) I get that sometimes the other side is that people are ignorant idiots. Unfortunately, being a **dumbass** does not preclude you from reproducing. (BLOG, *Motherhood Uncensored: The other side*, 2012)
- (17) You never heard about him running around on any of his wives with other women. So where is he getting his sex? He's either a porn addict, or he is

GAY!!!! # H # This is really offensive in several ways. A little tip from me to you: try not being such a fucking **dickhead** next time, maybe you'll actually get a chuckle out of someone! (WEB, *Tom Cruise And Katie Holmes Divorce And I Think It's Hilarious*, 2012)

- (18) Hey, Juan, slow. . . Come on, guys. Slow it down. Juan. Hey, hey. Hey, Alvey! Alvey! The fucking fight is tonight, motherfuckers. You wanna lose that fucking million dollars, you **shithead**? You fucking eat yet, by the way? Hey. You fucking eat? I'll make you some fucking oatmeal. (TV, *Kingdom*, 2017)

In (15)–(16) the offence has no specific addressee (*before some pinhead complains. . . , being a dumbass does not preclude you from reproducing*), whereas in (17)–(18) the speakers are more direct and address their addressee with an offensive word (*try not being such a fucking dickhead next time, you shithead*). The contexts and collocates confirm that the offensive function overlaps with derision (in (16)) and with criticism (in (17)).

5.3 Contrastive analysis

For the contrastive analysis, the words resulting from the quantitative analysis reported in Tables 1–4 will be reconsidered from the translation perspective. The *WordReference* lexicographic tool and the parallel English-Italian OPUS2 corpus will be used to inspect how words ending in an English slang suffixoid can be translated in a dictionary and are rendered in the corpus. For *-ass* words, only seven are found in *WordReference* and six in OPUS2. Table 5 shows their possible Italian translations.

Table 5: Meaning and translation of *-ass* words in GDS, *WordReference*, and OPUS2.

-ASS WORD	MEANING IN GDS	TRANSLATION IN WORDREFERENCE	TRANSLATION IN OPUS2
badass	an unpleasant, aggressive individual	tosto, tipo tosto, duro, cazzuto	bastardo
dumbass dumb-ass	a fool	fesso, cretino, idiota, imbecille	stronzo, idiota, imbecille
smart-ass	one who sees themselves as cleverer than they really are	saputello, saccente, spocchioso, signor sottutoio, sputasentenze	sapientone, genietto, furbacchione

Table 5 (continued)

-ASS WORD	MEANING IN GDS	TRANSLATION IN WORDREFERENCE	TRANSLATION IN OPUS2
hard-ass hardass	a tough person, a thug	duro	osso duro, stronzo
fat-ass fatass	a very fat person; also as a term of address	ciccione, panzone, palla di lardo	ciccione, grassone
wiseass wise-ass	one who sees themselves as cleverer than they really are	sapientone, sotuttoio	furbone, furbino, sapientone, sbruffone
tight-ass	a mean person, a skinflint	tirchio	—

As Table 5 shows, the most common morphological strategy used to translate *-ass* words into Italian is the use of evaluative suffixes, especially augmentatives with a suffix *-one*: e.g., *smart-ass* → It. *sapient-one* ‘wise-AUG’, *furb-acchi-one* ‘sly-INFIX-AUG’; *fat-ass* → It. *cicci-one*, *grass-one* ‘fat-AUG’. Diminutives are less frequently used in translation: e.g., *smart-ass* → It. *saput-ello* ‘known-DIM’, *geni-etto* ‘genius-DIM’; *wiseass* → It. *furb-ino* ‘sly-DIM’. Moreover, most of these words (*sapientone*, *sbruffone*, *saputello*) are now lexicalized in Italian, meaning that they have lost their morphological boundaries. A derived word as Italian translation is in *badass* → It. *cazz-uto* ‘dick-SUFF’, where the suffix *-uto* expresses approbation (Rossi 2011).

As an alternative strategy, Italian may recur to compounding: e.g., V+N strict compounds (*smart-ass* → It. *sputa+sentenze* ‘spill+sentences’), loose compounds (*badass* → It. *tipo+tosto* ‘guy+determined’), or compounds deriving from phrases (*smart-ass* → It. (*signor*) *so+tutto+io* ‘Mr+know+all+I’ ‘know-it-all’; *hard-ass* → It. *osso+duro* ‘bone+hard’) (see Section 3). Prepositional phrases occur in the translations of *fat-ass* → It. *palla di lardo* ‘ball+of+lard’.

As for *-brain* words, only two types are found in both *WordReference* and *OPUS2*. Table 6 shows their possible Italian translations.

Table 6: Meaning and translation of *-brain* words in GDS, *WordReference*, and *OPUS2*.

-BRAIN WORD	MEANING IN GDS	TRANSLATION IN WORDREFERENCE	TRANSLATION IN OPUS2
lame-brain	a fool, a simpleton	stupido, scervellato	testa di caprone, idiota
bird-brain	a fool; also as a term of address	cervello di gallina	sciocco, coglione, cervello di gallina

As the table shows, for the rendering of both *-brain* words prepositional phrases are suggested: e.g., *bird-brain* → It. *cervello di gallina* ‘brain+of+hen’, *lame-brain* → It. *testa di caprone* ‘head+of+goat-AUG’, the latter also exhibiting an augmentative suffix. A derived word as translation is in *lame-brain* → It. *s-cervell-ato* ‘PREF-brain-SUFF’, with a privative prefix *s-* (‘without (brain)’) and a past participle suffix *-ato* (the origin of the term is from the verb *scervellare*).

Similarly, only two *-face* words are found in both *WordReference* and OPUS2. Table 7 shows their possible Italian translations.

Table 7: Meaning and translation of *-face* words in GDS, *WordReference*, and OPUS2.

-FACE WORD MEANING IN GDS		TRANSLATION IN WORDREFERENCE	TRANSLATION IN OPUS2
fuckface	a fool, an idiot, a generally contemptible person	faccia di merda, faccia da culo, faccia da cazzo	faccia di merda, faccia da cazzo
paleface	a white person	viso pallido	viso pallido

For *paleface*, both the dictionary and the corpus provide the compound *viso pallido* ‘face+pale’, which is a literal translation of the English word. For *fuckface*, instead, some prepositional phrases are suggested: *fuckface* → It. *faccia di merda* ‘face+of+shit’, *faccia da/di culo* ‘face+of+ass’, *faccia da cazzo* ‘face+of+ dick’.

The last group of *-head* words is more numerous and for thirteen cases both *WordReference* and OPUS2 provide at least one possible translation. All translations are reported in Table 8.

Table 8: Meaning and translation of *-head* words in GDS, *WordReference*, and OPUS2.

-HEAD WORD	MEANING IN GDS	TRANSLATION IN WORDREFERENCE	TRANSLATION IN OPUS2
butt-head butthead	a stupid or obnoxious person	coglione, cazzone, minchione	stupidotto, idiota
pinhead pin-head	a stupid person	testa di cavolo, zucca vuota	testa vuota, cervello di formica, cervello di gallina
dickhead dick-head	a fool, an incompetent	testa di cazzo	testa di cazzo, testa di minchia, coglione, deficiente
shithead shit-head	a derog[atory] term of general abuse, occas[ionally] nickname	stronzo, pezzo di merda, testa di cazzo	stronzo, faccia di merda, testa di cazzo

Table 8 (continued)

-HEAD WORD	MEANING IN GDS	TRANSLATION IN WORDREFERENCE	TRANSLATION IN OPUS2
bonehead bonehead	a fool, a dullard, an idiot; thus as a term of address	tonto, zuccone, fesso	testone, testa vuota, testa di rapa
hammerhead	anyone stupid and obstinate	testa di legno, zuccone	testa di legno
egghead	a fool; a bald person	testa d'uovo	cervellone
knucklehead	a term of abuse, a description for any foolish, stupid, slow person	testone, zuccone; testa di legno	testa dura, cretino, deficiente
airhead	an idiot, a fool, someone who has nothing but air, and no brains, in their head	testa vuota, testa di legno; zuccone, somaro	testa vuota, svampito
meathead	a stupid person; thus as a term of address	testa di rapa	testa di rapa, testa vuota, polpettone
fuckhead fuck-head	a fool, a complete idiot; esp[ecially] as a term of address	testa di cazzo; stronzo, coglione	testa di cazzo, pezzo di merda, stronzo, coglione
fathead fat-head	a fool, an idiot; often used affectionately as well as derog[atory]	stupido, scemo	testa di rapa, testa di cazzo, capoccione, imbecille
hardhead	a fool	testa dura	testa dura

As Table 8 shows, *-head* words are often translated into Italian by means of an augmentative suffix *-one*: e.g., *butt-head* → It. *cazz-one*, *minchi-one* ‘dick-AUG’ (*minchia* is the popular South Italian word for ‘penis’); *bonehead*, *airhead* → It. *zucc-one* ‘pumpkin-AUG’. Only *butt-head* → *stupid-otto* ‘stupid-DIM’ exhibits a diminutive suffix.

Compounds are provided, for instance, for *pinhead* → *zucca vuota* ‘pumpkin+empty’; *bonehead* → *testa vuota* ‘head+empty’; *knucklehead* → *testa dura* ‘head+hard’. The only translation which involves derivation is *airhead* → *s-vampito* ‘PREF+flame+SUFF’, with a privative prefix *s-* used to refer to someone who is ‘absent-minded’.

Most translations involve a prepositional phrase: e.g., *pinhead* → It. *testa di cavolo* ‘head+of+cabbage’, *cervello di gallina* ‘brain+of+hen’; *dickhead* → It. *testa di cazzo*; *shithead* → It. *pezzo di merda* ‘piece+of+shit’, *faccia di merda* ‘face+of+shit’; *bonehead*, *meathead* → It. *testa di rapa* ‘head+of+turnip’; *hammerhead* → It. *testa di legno* ‘head+of+wood’.

In summary, a contrastive analysis shows that English slang suffixoids are rendered into Italian using a variety of different morphological means: namely, augmentatives (*fat-ass* → It. *grassone* ‘fat-AUG’), diminutives (*wiseass* → It. *furbin* ‘sly-DIM’), derived words (*lame-brain* → It. *scervellato* ‘PREF-brain-SUFF’), strict compounds (*smart-ass* → It. *sputa+sentenze* ‘spill+sentences’), loose compounds (*badass* → It. *tipo tosto* ‘guy+determined’), and prepositional phrases (*bird-brain* → It. *cervello di gallina* ‘brain+of+hen’). The most productive class of *-head* words is generally translated using *testa di X* ‘head of X’ (*pinhead* → It. *testa di cavolo* ‘head+of+cabbage’).

Thus, the predominance of compounding over derivation in English has facilitated the formation and use of suffixoids, which are rare in Italian, neither in slang nor in standard language. Italian, therefore, resorts to other morphological means to compensate for this morphological gap.

6 Conclusions

In Culpeper’s (2005: 38) definition of impoliteness, either the speaker deliberately communicates face-attack or the hearer perceives the speaker’s behaviour as deliberately face-attacking. This study has shown how slang suffixoids *-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, and *-head* are used in face-aggravation and face attack against an individual or group of individuals, deliberately involving aggressive and offensive content. Unlike compound constituents, suffixoids are productively used to create series of offensive words, most of which are attested in slang dictionaries and in corpora, with some occurring only once, as confirmation of their availability and profitability in the creation of new words.

The quantitative analysis in COCA has shown that the suffixoid *-ass* has produced 22 different types and 5,616 tokens overall, *-brain* has 14 different types and 91 tokens, *-face* has 22 different types and 675 tokens, and *-head* has 37 different types and 7,488 tokens, the latter being the most productive.

The qualitative analysis has shown that these slang suffixoids serve three specific pragmatic functions that dominate the language of impoliteness and offensiveness: namely, derision, criticism, and offense. Many of the suffixoids are added to vulgar or derogatory bases: e.g., *dickbrain*, *fuckbrain*, *shit-brain*; *arseface*, *assface*, *cuntface*, *fuckface*, *shitface*; *butt-head*, *dickhead*, *fuckhead*, *shithead*, *stupidhead*. Hence, they add derogatory and offensive pragmatic meanings to the negatively denoted words. Other suffixoids convey an overall metaphoric meaning: e.g., *bean-brain* or *airhead* suggest that the addressee has a brain of the size of a bean or a head filled with air and no brain at all. Others display metonymic meanings: e.g.,

badass, *big-ass*, and *fat-ass* respectively refer to a person having ‘a bad, big, or fat ass’, i.e. ‘unpleasant, aggressive’; ‘superior’; ‘very fat’.

An exploration of the collocates of *-ass*, *-brain*, *-face*, and *-head* words confirms their impolite and offensive character: they range from other offensive epithets (*asshole*, *motherfucker*, *piece of shit*) to insulting and aggressive adjectives (*small minded*, *stupid*), to imperative forms (*crap out*, *shut up*), intensifiers (*fucking*), and even to colourful expressions (*break my balls*, *kick his ass*, *what the fuck*).

A contrastive analysis reveals that English slang suffixoids are translated into Italian using a variety of morphological strategies, highlighting the differences between the two languages’ morphological systems. This also confirms that English suffixoids occupy a transitional space between derivation and compounding, which explains their rendering in Italian through either derivational or compounding processes, or even through syntactic patterns.

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