



A Linguistic Analysis of Derivational Suffixes in Short Story Entitled “The Nightingale and The Rose” by Oscar wilde

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the types of derivational suffixes found in the short story *The Nightingale and the Rose* by Oscar Wilde. The background of this research lies in the importance of understanding the word formation process through derivational suffixes in literary texts, which helps readers and linguists explore how meaning and grammatical function are constructed. The theoretical framework is based on Plag (2003) and Katamba (1993), who classify derivational suffixes into four types: nominal, adjectival, verbal, and adverbial. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, using documentation as the data collection technique. The data source is the eBook version of the story downloaded from Project Gutenberg, consisting of 2,331 words. The analysis reveals a total of 53 derivational suffixes, including 24 adjectival (45.29%), 19 nominals (35.85%), 10 adverbials (18.87%), and none for verbal (0%). Adjectival suffixes appear most frequently, showing that descriptive language and characterization dominate the text. The phrase "morphological and stylistic richness" in this context refers to the variety of word classes formed and the expressive style achieved through suffixation. The findings of this study may be useful for students and researchers of linguistics and literature in understanding how derivational morphology contributes to language structure and narrative style in literary texts.

Keywords: *derivation, suffixes, word formation, morphology*

Introduction

Language is made up of meaningful units that form the structure of words. One key component in understanding how words are created is the morpheme. A morpheme, as defined by Katamba (1993), is the smallest linguistic unit that carries meaning. Morphemes are divided into free morphemes (which can stand

alone as words, such as *book*) and bound morphemes (which must be attached to other forms, such as *-ness* or *un-*). Within this system, derivational morphology plays a central role in word formation by creating new words through the addition of affixes. According to Plag (2003), derivational suffixes serve to form new words by altering the meaning or the grammatical category (word class) of the base word. For example, *happy* becomes *happiness* (adjective to noun), showing a class-changing process, while *friend* becomes *friendship*, showing a class-maintaining shift with new meaning.

There are four main types of derivational suffixes: nominal, adjectival, verbal, and adverbial, as classified by Plag (2003: 86-98). These suffixes can be added to different base forms such as nouns, verbs, or adjectives to create new lexical items. For instance, the suffix *-ness* forms abstract nouns (e.g., *kind* → *kindness*), while *-ly* forms adverbs (e.g., *quick* → *quickly*). Understanding how these suffixes operate is essential in morphological studies, particularly in literary texts where vocabulary richness and expressive language are crucial.

Several previous studies have investigated derivational suffixes in literary and digital texts. Pidada and Winarta (2024) examined nominal suffixes in the video game *Final Fantasy VIII*, using Katamba's (1993) and O'Grady's (2010) theories. Their study found *-ing*, *-ment*, and *-ness* to be the most frequent suffixes, highlighting the potential of interactive texts as data sources in morphology. Pramesti et al. (2025) analyzed derivational suffixes in the novel *A Little Princess* using Plag's (2003) and Bauer's (1983) theories. They identified 161 suffixes, with *-ly* being the most frequent, and showed that class-changing derivation dominated the data. Meanwhile, Putri et al. (2022) investigated *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and found *-ly*, *-er*, and *-ion* to be the most common suffixes. They used Fromkin et al.'s (2007) theory and tree diagram models to explain grammatical shifts caused by suffixes.

However, most of these studies focused on full-length novels or interactive media and emphasized the quantity of suffixes rather than their contextual function. Few have analyzed how suffixes function within the confined structure of a single short story, where narrative focus is tighter and stylistic choices more deliberate. This study addresses that gap by focusing on Oscar Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose*, a literary short story known for its poetic language, emotional depth, and compact narrative structure. Wilde's work is ideal for this analysis because of its dense use of descriptive and emotive language, which provides a rich source of derivational forms such as *-ful*, *-ness*, *-ly*, and *-ion*.

This study uses the theories of Plag (2003) and Katamba (1993) to examine the types and functions of derivational suffixes in the story. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What types of derivational suffixes are found in *The Nightingale and the Rose*?
2. How do these suffixes contribute to word class changes and stylistic features in the text?

By focusing on a single, compact literary work, this research offers new insight into the role of derivational morphology in short fiction, enriching the understanding of how suffixes support both language structure and narrative style.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine derivational suffixes found in Oscar Wilde's short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*. The short story, originally published in 1888 and republished as a digital eBook on Project Gutenberg in 1997 (updated 2021), was selected based on its rich use of poetic and emotional language, brevity, and literary value. These criteria make it a suitable text for morphological analysis within a compact narrative structure.

The data collection technique used was documentation. The full text of the story was downloaded legally from Project Gutenberg, which provides public domain literature for academic and educational purposes. Ethical considerations were followed, as the work is copyright-free. The researcher read the entire text carefully and identified words that contained derivational suffixes, which in this study refers to suffixes that form new words by changing meaning and/or grammatical category (e.g., happy → happiness or hope → hopeful).

The analysis followed the classification proposed by Plag (2003), who divides derivational suffixes into four types: nominal, adjectival, verbal, and adverbial. Each word containing a derivational suffix was analyzed and categorized based on its base form, the suffix used, the word class before and after derivation, and the resulting semantic shift. Although the initial focus was on nominal suffixes, this study ultimately categorized and discussed all four types to gain a complete understanding of word formation in the text.

The steps of analysis included:

1. Reading the entire text and identifying derived words.
2. Listing and classifying each derivational suffix according to its type.
3. Determining whether the suffix involved a class-maintaining or class-changing process.
4. Cross-checking each classification with morphological references (Plag, 2003; Katamba, 1993) to ensure accuracy.
5. Presenting findings both in formal form (tables and percentages) and informal narrative discussion.

No software was used in this analysis; the process was conducted manually. To enhance reliability, the researcher compared suffix usage with previous studies and referenced standard morphology textbooks. However, this study has some

limitations, such as the reliance on a single short story and analysis conducted by only one coder, which may affect inter-rater reliability. Future studies could apply multiple raters or triangulate with other texts to increase robustness.

Results

This study identified four types of derivational suffixes in Oscar Wilde's short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*: adjectival, nominal, adverbial, and verbal suffixes. A total of 53 data were found. Adjectival suffixes were the most frequent (24 occurrences or 45.29%), followed by nominal suffixes (19 occurrences or 35.85%), and adverbial suffixes (10 occurrences or 18.87%). No verbal suffixes were found in the text.

No	Type of Derivational Suffix	Frequency	Percentage
1	Adjectival	24	45.29%
2	Nominal	19	35.85%
3	Adverbial	10	18.87%
4	Verbal	0	0%
	Total	53	100%

The dominance of adjectival suffixes (45.29%) reflects the importance of descriptive language in the short story. Wilde frequently uses suffixes like *-ful*, *-ous*, and *-less* to enhance imagery and characterization. For example:

"...and his **beautiful** eyes filled with tears."

The word *beautiful* is formed from *beauty* + *-ful*, showing a class-changing derivation from noun to adjective. This transformation adds emotional weight and contributes to the poetic tone of the narrative.

Nominal suffixes, accounting for 35.85% of the data, play a key role in forming abstract and agentive nouns, which enrich the thematic depth of the story. One example is:

"Ah, on what little things does **happiness** depend!"

The noun *happiness* is derived from *happy* + *-ness*, changing an adjective into a noun. This form emphasizes an emotional state and supports the story's central theme of love and longing.

Adverbial suffixes, found in 18.87% of the data, often appear as *-ly* and are used to modify verbs or adjectives, adding stylistic nuance. For instance:

"She will dance so **lightly** that her feet will not touch the floor."

Here, *lightly* is formed from *light* + *-ly*, illustrating a class-changing derivation from adjective to adverb. It enhances the fluidity of the character's movement and reflects Wilde's poetic style.

No verbal suffixes were identified, indicating that Wilde rarely, if ever, derives verbs through suffixation in this narrative. This aligns with the text's lyrical and descriptive focus rather than action-based narrative progression.

Compared with previous research, such as Putri (2022) which found that *adjective to adverb* transformations with *-ly* were the most common this study shows a different trend, with adjectival suffixes being more prominent. This may reflect Wilde's emphasis on vivid imagery and symbolic description rather than frequent adverbial modification. Significance of this distribution reveals how derivational suffixes contribute not only to word formation but also to narrative tone, emotional depth, and stylistic elegance in literary texts. A full list of the derivational words found, along with their morphological breakdown, is provided in the appendix to enhance data transparency.

Discussion

This study identified three types of derivational suffixes in Oscar Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose*: nominal (19), adjectival (24), and adverbial (10). No verbal derivational suffixes were found in the story. The predominance of adjectival suffixes highlights the central role of descriptive language in shaping the emotional tone and poetic expression of the narrative. This suggests that Wilde relied heavily on adjective formation to convey nuanced emotions, vivid imagery, and the moral undertones of the story.

Based on the theories of Plag (2003) and Katamba (1993), derivational suffixes function to transform word classes and expand meaning. The high occurrence of adjectival suffixes supports the notion that adjectives serve a stylistic function in literary texts especially in short fiction where space is limited and precision is crucial. Words such as *beautiful*, *true*, *lonely*, and *mighty* are not only grammatically functional but also contribute significantly to the atmosphere of sorrow, irony, and unfulfilled love that characterizes Wilde's work.

Compared to Pramesti et al. (2025), who found a greater frequency of adverbial suffixes in a novel, this study found a higher occurrence of adjectival suffixes. This difference may be attributed to the nature of short stories, which prioritize emotional resonance and visual detail over extended narrative pacing. These results indicate that morphological patterns vary not only by author but also by genre. The findings support morphological theory by illustrating how adjective derivation is a productive and stylistically significant process in literary texts. It also confirms that derivational morphology plays an essential role in defining literary tone, character portrayal, and thematic development.

However, this study is limited to one short story and does not generalize across authors, genres, or time periods. Future research could expand the analysis to multiple texts by different authors or compare across genres such as poetry, novels, or plays. A cross-linguistic comparison would also be valuable to examine

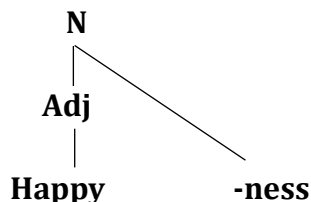
whether derivational patterns differ in literature written in or translated into other languages. Practically, these findings can inform vocabulary instruction and stylistic analysis in English language and literature education. Understanding how suffixes contribute to meaning and style may help learners appreciate the depth of literary language and develop morphological awareness.

Nominal derivational suffixes

According to Plag (2003: 86-92), nominal derivational suffixes create nouns from other word types like verbs and adjectives. These suffixes give nouns different meanings such as actions, qualities, results, or professions. The nominal suffixes are **-age, -al, -ance, -ence, -cy, -dom, -ee, -eer, -er, -or, -ess, -hood, -ion, -ism, -ity, -ship, and -ful**. These suffixes change the base word into a noun with a new meaning or function. In this study, nominal suffixes appeared 19 times, making up 35.19% of the total data. The use of suffixes varies only three (3) sample would be used to represent this classification.

Data 1

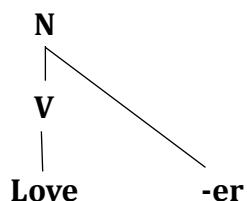
"No red rose in all my garden!" he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Ah, on what little things does happiness depend!"



The word *happiness* is formed by adding the derivational suffix *-ness* to the adjective *happy*, resulting in a class-changing process from adjective to noun. According to Plag (2003), *-ness* is a nominal suffix used to express a state or condition. Lieber (2009) adds that derivational suffixes not only shift grammatical class but also enrich the semantic content of a word. In the context of the story, *happiness* reflects the Student's emotional longing and desire, contributing to the central theme of unfulfilled love. This shows how derivational suffixes help build emotional nuance and stylistic richness in literary narratives.

Data 2

"Here at last is a true lover," said the Nightingale.



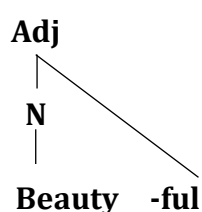
The word *lover* is formed by attaching the suffix *-er* to the verb *love*, resulting in a noun. According to Plag (2003), *-er* is a nominal derivational suffix that creates agentive nouns words that refer to someone who performs an action. Here, *lover* means “a person who loves.” *Love* is a free morpheme that can stand alone, while *-er* is a bound morpheme that requires attachment. As Lieber (2009) notes, derivational suffixes like *-er* do not only change grammatical class but also assign semantic roles. In the story, *lover* emphasizes the identity of the Student as someone defined by his deep emotional longing, contributing to the theme of romantic sacrifice.

Adjectival derivational suffixes

According to Plag (2003: 94–97), adjectival suffixes are used to form adjectives from nouns or other adjectives. These suffixes show meanings like ability (*-able* in *readable*), having a quality (*-ful* in *hopeful*), lack of something (*-less* in *fearless*), or similarity (*-ish* in *childish*). Some also describe style, like *-esque* in *picturesque*. Other common adjectival suffixes are *-ic*, *-able*, *-ish*, *-al*, *-ary*, *-ed*, *-ive*, *-ous*, and *-ly*. These suffixes help create descriptive words used to describe people, things, or ideas. In this study, adjectival suffixes appeared 24 times, making up 44.44% of the total data. The use of suffixes varies only three (3) sample would be used to represent this classification.

Data 3

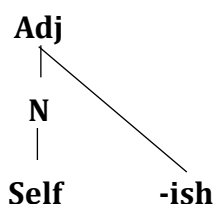
In the centre of the grass-plot was standing a beautiful Rose-tree



The word *beautiful* is derived by attaching the adjectival suffix *-ful* to the noun *beauty*. According to Plag (2003), *-ful* is used to form adjectives that mean “full of” or “characterized by” the base noun. Here, *beauty* is a free morpheme, and *-ful* is a bound morpheme. Lieber (2009) states that derivational suffixes not only shift word class but also enrich meaning *beautiful* thus means “having beauty.” In the story’s context, this word enhances the imagery of the rose-tree, reflecting Wilde’s poetic style. The term is **polymorphemic**, as it contains more than one morpheme, and it supports the descriptive tone central to the story’s emotional and visual appeal.

Data 4

She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish.



The word *selfish* is formed by adding the adjectival suffix *-ish* to the noun *self*, changing it into an adjective. According to Plag (2003), *-ish* is used to form adjectives that denote characteristics or tendencies, often with a critical or negative nuance. *Self* is a free morpheme, while *-ish* is a bound morpheme. Lieber (2009) explains that derivational suffixes like *-ish* not only alter the grammatical class but also enrich the word's semantic content. In this context, *selfish* describes someone overly focused on themselves, aligning with the narrator's critique of artistic self-absorption. The word is polymorphemic, reflecting both a structural and stylistic element in Wilde's characterization.

Verbal derivational suffixes

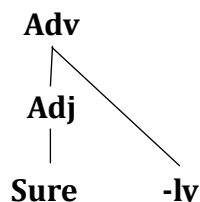
According to Plag (2003: 92–94), verbal suffixes are endings added to base words typically nouns or adjectives to form verbs. These suffixes usually indicate an action or a process of change, such as in *modernize* (from *modern*) meaning "to make modern," or *simplify* (from *simple*) meaning "to make simple." Common verbal suffixes include *-ize*, *-ify*, *-en*, and *-ate*. However, in this study, **no instances of verbal derivational suffixes were found** in the short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*. This indicates that the story does not employ verb formation through suffixation, and instead relies more heavily on base verbs or inflected forms to express action. The absence of verbal derivational suffixes suggests a stylistic choice that emphasizes other word classes particularly adjectives and nouns to build the narrative's emotional depth and poetic expression.

Adverbial derivational suffixes

According to Plag (2003: 97–98), adverbial suffixes are used to form adverbs from adjectives or nouns. These suffixes usually show how something is done, its direction, or style. The most common adverbial suffix is *-ly*, as in *quickly*, meaning "in a quick way." Another example is *-wise*, like in *clockwise*, which shows direction. These suffixes help adverbs describe actions more clearly in a sentence. In this study, adverbial suffixes appeared 10 times, making up 18.52% of the total data. The use of suffixes varies only three (3) sample would be used to represent this classification.

Data 5

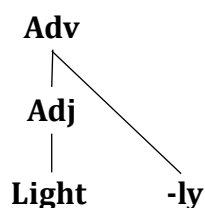
Surely Love is a wonderful thing.



The word *surely* is formed by adding the adverbial suffix *-ly* to the adjective *sure*, converting it into an adverb. According to Plag (2003), *-ly* is commonly used to derive adverbs from adjectives, typically indicating manner or degree. Here, *sure* is a free morpheme, and *-ly* is a bound morpheme. Lieber (2009) adds that derivational suffixes like *-ly* not only shift word classes but also introduce semantic refinement. In this sentence, *surely* means “with certainty,” reinforcing the narrator’s firm belief in the value of love. The word is polymorphemic and functions to emphasize the narrator’s conviction, supporting the emotional tone of the text.

Data 6

She will dance so **lightly** that her feet will not touch the floor.



The word *lightly* is derived by adding the suffix *-ly* to the adjective *light*, forming an adverb. According to Plag (2003), *-ly* is a typical adverbial suffix used to express the manner in which an action is performed. In this case, *light* is a free morpheme, and *-ly* is a bound morpheme. As Lieber (2009) notes, derivational suffixes such as *-ly* not only change the grammatical category of a word but also refine its meaning. The word *lightly* here means “in a soft or graceful manner,” highlighting the elegance of the girl's dancing. This morphological construction contributes to the poetic and delicate atmosphere of the story, and the word itself is polymorphemic, consisting of two morphemes.

Conclusion

This study concludes that derivational suffixes contribute significantly to the morphological and stylistic features of Oscar Wilde’s short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*. From the total of 53 data found, adjectival suffixes were the most dominant with 45.29%, followed by nominal suffixes with 35.85%, and adverbial suffixes with 18.87%. No verbal derivational suffixes were found in the text (0%).

The high frequency of adjectival suffixes highlights the importance of descriptive and emotional expression in the narrative, while the presence of nominal and adverbial suffixes supports lexical variation and modification of meaning. These findings show that derivational morphology not only transforms word classes but also enhances literary tone and style. In this study, the tree diagram method was used to analyze each word formation, demonstrating how base words and suffixes interact to create new forms. Based on these results, future research is encouraged to examine derivational suffix usage in other short stories or literary works to identify whether similar morphological patterns emerge across different genres or authors.

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