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ROYALTY IN MIND: A DIACHRONIC CONTRAST
IN THE LEXICOGENESIS OF *KING*-DERIVED FORMATIONS
IN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN TIMES

Abstract. This study examines a diachronic evolution of *king*-based lexical formations, focusing on their semantic and morphological productivity from Old English to the present. Using Cognitive Metaphor Theory, diachronic lexical semantics, and data from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the analysis tracks over 250 formations, highlighting compounding as the primary mechanism of lexical innovation. Notably, over 95% of *king*-derived lexical innovations result from compounding, yielding both endocentric and exocentric constructions. Findings reveal that while *king* originally functioned as a marker of political authority, the lexicogenesis in which it was involved shifted the term into diverse new conceptual domains, including ZOOLOGY, BOTANY, SOCIETY, and COMMERCE. Medieval formations reinforced hierarchy, while the 16th–17th centuries saw more metaphorical coinages extending into nature, festivities, and commerce. These findings link socio-political changes, especially the decline of absolute monarchy and the rise of parliamentary governance, to the semantic evolution of the lexeme *king*.

Keywords: lexis; compounding; metaphor; diachronic semantics; conceptual domains

MAJĄC NA MYŚLI TO, CO KRÓLEWSKIE:
DIACHRONICZNE UJĘCIE LEKSYKOGENEZY FORM ZAWIERAJĄCYCH
LEKSEM *KING* W ŚREDNIOWIECZU I CZASACH NOWOŻYTNYCH

Abstrakt. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje historyczny rozwój form leksykalnych pochodzących od leksemu *king*. Artykuł omawia semantyczną i morfologiczną produktywność tego leksemu od czasów średniowiecznych po współczesność. W oparciu o teorię metafor poznawczych, diachroniczną semantykę leksykalną oraz dane pozyskane z *Oxford English Dictionary*, analiza obejmuje ponad 250 form pochodnych, wskazując na złożenia wyrazowe jako podstawowy mechanizm słotwórczy.

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Ponad 95% innowacji leksykalnych wynika z procesu tworzenia złożań wyrazowych, zarówno konstrukcji endocentrycznych jak i egzocentrycznych. Wyniki wskazują, że choć *king* pierwotnie nawiązywał do funkcji władzy politycznej, leksykogeneza, której stanowił podstawę, przesunęła ten leksem w inne domeny pojęciowe, takie jak zoologia, botanika, społeczeństwo oraz handel. Analiza ilościowa ujawnia, iż nowo utworzone wyrażenia średniowieczne nawiązywały do politycznych struktur państwowych, natomiast wieki XVI i XVII charakteryzowały się powstawaniem neologizmów wykraczających poza sferę sprawowania władzy nad królestwem, obejmujących domeny przyrodnicze, obrzędowe i gospodarcze. Wyniki niniejszego badania wskazują na związek procesów słowotwórczych opartych na leksemie *king* ze zmianami społeczno-politycznymi, w szczególności ze słabnięciem monarchii absolutnej oraz pojawieniem się rządów o charakterze parlamentarnym.

Słowa kluczowe: słownictwo; złożenie wyrazowe; metafora; semantyka diachroniczna; domeny pojęciowe

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a novel approach to the diachronic lexicogenesis of *king*-derived formations in the English language. While previous studies have examined representations of kingship in literature, such as in Shakespearean drama with reference to the themes of divine right and political authority (e.g. Kizelbach, 2014; Milică, 2023; Saad, 2023), these explorations have not addressed the lexical innovation stemming from the English lexeme *king*. This study traces the evolution of king-derived lexemes across conceptual domains, linking linguistic innovation with socio-cultural change.

The data drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* attest to derivational processes operating on the lexeme *king*. Suffixation yields adjectives and abstract nouns. For instance, the suffix *-less* forms *kingless* and *-hood* produces *kinghood*; *-ly* gives rise to *kingly*, used to mean ‘in a royal manner’; *-land* appears in *kingland*, a formation parallel to *kingdom*; and *-ness*, as in *kingliness*, denotes the quality of being royal. The prefix *un-* produces *unking* ‘to deprive of kingship’; *anti-* yields *anti king*; *re-* forms *reking*, meaning ‘to make king again’; *demi-* produces *demi king*; *vice-* results in *vice king*; and *de-* creates *deking*, meaning ‘to depose or dethrone a king’. However, only eleven of the 253 *king*-derived formations are produced through affixation representing approximately 5% of the total. The remaining 95% of the formations are compounds. These compounds fall into three structural types: 119 are endocentric with *king* serving as the head of the compound; 112 are endocentric structures with *king* functioning as a modifier; and 11 are exocentric, in which the overall meaning is not a direct combination of its parts. For in-

stance, the endocentric compounds with *king* as head include *child king*, *folk king*, *high king*, *May King*, *overking*, *philosopher king*, *priest king*, and *prophet king*. In these formations, *king* acts as a semantic nucleus, while a preceding modifier specifies a particular quality or type of kingship. In contrast, the endocentric compounds with *king* as a modifier are exemplified by *king bee*, *king conch*, *king crab*, *king cobra*, *king duck*, *king mackerel*, *king parrot*, *king prawn*, *king salmon*, and *kingfisher*, where *king* functions as an attributive element that conveys a sense of superiority or prominence. Finally, the exocentric compounds include *king pair*, *king hit*, *king shit*, *King's X*, and *king by your leave*. For instance, in cricket slang, *king pair* refers to a batsman being dismissed for zero in both innings, marking an especially disgraceful outcome. *King's X* denotes an idiomatic truce or exemption call in children's games, typically accompanied by crossed fingers, and *king by your leave* describes a game similar to hide-and-seek in which one player, designated as 'king', is temporarily exempt from being tagged.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framed within the paradigms of cultural linguistics (Wierzbicka, 1992; Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011) and historical semantics (Geeraerts, 1997, 2010), the analysis draws on a corpus of over 250 lexical and phrasal items adduced from the *OED*.¹ It offers an account of how the original concept of kingship has, through processes of lexicogenesis (Miller, 2014), generated a considerable number of semantic extensions that mirror broader socio-historical dynamics. Informed also by Cognitive Linguistics (Gibbs, 2011; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Rosch, 1978), which claims that the human conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical, this paper emphasizes the dual role of the lexeme *king*. It functions both as a concrete historical figure, defined in the *OED* as "a male sovereign ruler of an independent state or people, esp. one who inherits the position by right of birth; a male monarch" and as an abstract cognitive resource that facilitates the mapping of characteristics traditionally associated with monarchy onto various abstract domains, such as ZOOLOGY, BOTANY, or ECONOMICS. Central to this analysis is the observation advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that language is inherently metaphorical. Their work, along with subsequent refinements by Kövecses

¹ Retrieved February 2025, from <https://www.oed.com/dictionary>

(2010), demonstrates that abstract domains, such as authority or excellence, are systematically understood through mappings from more concrete, culturally salient source domains. Complementary studies by Rosch (1978), Jackendoff (1983), Langacker (1987), and Sweetser (1990) further elucidate how our perceptual and bodily experiences ground these conceptual structures. Historically, *king* signified monarchical power and served as a metaphorical template across semantic fields, including nature (e.g. *good King Harry*, *kingcup*, *king crab*, *kingfisher*, *kingsnake*), entertainment (e.g. *king ale*, *king's ball*, *king-by-your-leave*, *king play*), and everyday social practices (e.g. *king's cushion*, *king's cup*, *king's coin*, *prom king*).

Diachronic semantics provides essential tools for tracing the evolution of meaning over time. Foundational works by Meillet (1906), Stern (1931), and Ullmann (1957) laid the groundwork for understanding processes such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, and pejoration. More recent contributions by Blank (1999) and Traugott and Dasher (2001) have refined models for systematic semantic shifts in response to sociocultural change. In this context, Klepanski's study (1997) provides a compelling case study by meticulously demonstrating how semantic change is driven by cultural transformations and underlying cognitive processes. Similarly, Kiełtyka's (2008) work illustrates the interplay between morphological processes and semantic change, offering a model for how historical shifts in word usage emerge from cognitive, cultural, and structural factors. Applying the methodologies of these studies, it can be observed that the lexeme *king* was repurposed to express metaphorical shifts which respond to the broader socio-historical transformations.

2. METHODOLOGY: SOURCE AND CATEGORIZATIONS OF *KING*-DERIVED FORMATIONS

This study offers a conceptual and diachronic classification of *king*-derived formations based on lexical data extracted from the *OED*, selected for its diachronic scope and established reliability in documenting lexical developments (cf. Mugglestone, 2023). Numerous lexicographic studies have affirmed that the lexicographic rigour makes the *OED* one of the most reliable sources for tracking semantic shifts and morphological variations (Atkins et al., 2005; Rundell & Atkins, 2008). Central to the corpus framework of the *OED* editorial work is the use of carefully curated citation files. Since its inception, this practice has been essential to the editorial process (Hartmann & James, 2001).

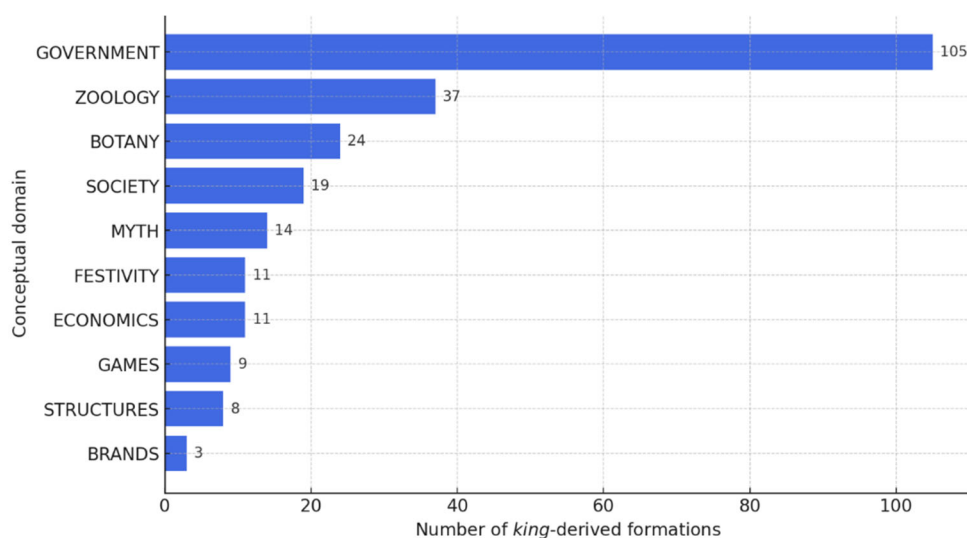
These citations offer empirical evidence regarding word usage, thereby contributing to the verifiability of historical usage and meaning. Consequently, the categorization of *king*-derived formations is both linguistically sound and historically informed, which enables a detailed examination of both word formation productivity and semantic change over time.

2.1 CATEGORIZATION OF *KING*-DERIVED FORMATIONS ACROSS CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS

The classification of *king*-derived lexical formations followed a systematic approach, grouping terms into nine conceptual domains based on their primary semantic function. As shown in Figure 1, the conceptual domain of GOVERNMENT contains the largest number of formations (105 occurrences), reflecting the lexeme's deep historical association with monarchy, rulership, and political structures. Terms such as *high king* 'a supreme ruler to whom others owe allegiance', *King's Court* 'a legal institution presided over by a royal judge', and *kinghood* 'the state or dignity of being a king' illustrate the prevalence of *king* in legal and hierarchical contexts.

GOVERNMENT is followed by ZOOLOGY, the second-largest category with 37 occurrences, highlighting how *king* is used to denote dominance, size, or a distinguished species in animal naming conventions. Examples include *kingfisher* 'a brightly coloured bird known for its skilful fishing habits', *king vulture* 'a large scavenger bird found in the Americas', and *king cobra* 'a highly venomous snake'. Similarly, BOTANY, with 24 occurrences, encompasses plant-related terms, such as *kingcup* 'a bright yellow buttercup-like flower', *good King Henry* 'a historically cultivated edible plant', and *king's spear* 'a flowering plant of the asphodel family', demonstrating how regal metaphors have been applied to prominent or distinctive flora.

Figure 1. Distribution of *king*-derived formations by conceptual domain (lexical items ad-duced from the *OED*)



The SOCIETY domain with nineteen occurrences captures metaphorical extensions of *king* into social roles and figures of influence, with examples like *prom king* ‘a title given to a student recognized at a school prom’, *king-maker* ‘a person wielding influence in appointing leaders’, and *pearly king* ‘a figure in Cockney culture known for traditional pearl-buttoned attire’. The MYTH category (14 occurrences) consists of legendary and folkloric figures, reinforcing *king*’s presence in storytelling traditions. Notable examples include *fairy king* ‘a ruler of supernatural beings’, *Erl-king* ‘a mythical figure in Germanic legend associated with the forest’, and *serpent king* ‘a name given to Cecrops—the first legendary king of Athens’.

The FESTIVITY and ECONOMICS categories, each with 11 occurrences, highlight two different dimensions of *king*-based terminology. FESTIVITY includes words associated with celebratory or ceremonial traditions, such as *Christmas King* ‘a figure presiding over Christmas festivities’, *king ale* ‘a traditional celebratory drink’, and *king’s ball* ‘a social dance event, often with royal themes’. ECONOMICS, by contrast, contains words denoting financial and industrial influence, such as *money king* ‘a magnate in financial circles’, *oil king* ‘a dominant figure in the petroleum industry’, and *railroad king* ‘a powerful figure in railway commerce’, showing how *king* has been extended to represent financial supremacy.

In the GAMES domain with 9 occurrences, *king* appears in strategic and formal game terminology, particularly in chess and similarly structured games. Examples include *king's gambit* 'a well-known chess opening strategy', *king's rook* 'a chess piece positioned on the king's side', and *king row* 'the final row in draughts, where a piece is crowned king'. The STRUCTURES category with 8 occurrences consists of architectural and mechanical terms, such as *king post* 'a central vertical support beam in roof structures', *king bolt* 'a key fastener in vehicle axles', and *king truss* 'a type of support framework in bridges or roofs', indicating how *king* has been metaphorically applied to integral structural elements.

Finally, BRANDS, the smallest category of 3 occurrences, represents modern commercial applications of *king*. This includes *king-size* 'indicating a product larger than standard, particularly beds and cigarettes', *California king* 'a specific mattress size', and *King Cotton* 'a historical term personifying the dominance of the cotton industry in the U.S. economy'. Despite its lower frequency, this domain highlights how *king* continues to be used in marketing and consumer culture, reflecting its enduring symbolic association with grandeur and prestige.

Figure 1 visually encapsulates these trends, demonstrating the overwhelming prevalence of GOVERNMENT formations, followed by a strong presence in ZOOLOGY, BOTANY, and SOCIETY. The remaining categories of MYTH, FESTIVITY, ECONOMICS, GAMES, STRUCTURES, and BRANDS further illustrate the lexeme's semantic expansion across various fields.

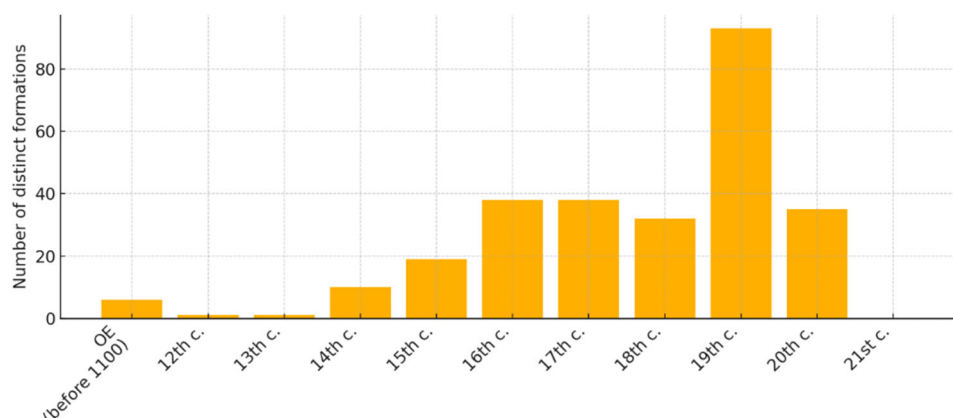
2.2 DIACHRONIC CATEGORIZATION OF KING-DERIVED FORMATIONS

By identifying the earliest recorded date of each formation, as documented in the *OED*, the historical distribution of *king*-derived formations was determined. The entries provide a comprehensive historical record of the formations that is reflected in their definitions, and earliest known quotations (Atkins et al., 2005). These attestations serve as historical and cultural reference points, enabling this study to trace the evolution of *king*-based formations. The first recorded attestation of each formation was assigned to a century bracket. Items with citations such as *c1000* were categorized under Old English (pre-1100), while an attestation such as *c1175* was grouped within the 12th century (1100–1199). Cases marked with approximate dating (e.g. *a1400* for ante-1400) were classified within their respective centuries, ensur-

ing that all time classifications conform to standard linguistic periodization. Similar conventions applied to mid-century citations such as *c1425* for the 15th century, maintaining chronological consistency across the dataset.

Figure 2 represents the chronological distribution of *king*-derived formations, showing fluctuations in their productivity across centuries. It can be observed that *king*-derived formations emerged sporadically in early periods before experiencing significant growth from the 16th century onward. The earliest recorded formations, appearing in Old English and the 12th–14th centuries, are relatively scarce, reflecting the restricted lexical productivity of *king* in medieval English. A notable increase occurs from the 15th century onward, with each subsequent century showing heightened word formation activity.

Figure 2. Diachronic distribution of *king*-derived formations (lexical items adduced from the *OED*)



The 16th and 17th centuries mark the first major wave of productivity, correlating with linguistic standardization and expansion of print culture, which facilitated the documentation and dissemination of new lexical formations (see Eisenstein, 1979 and Allington & Squires, 2019). The 18th and 19th centuries maintain this trend of innovation, but the 19th century, in particular, stands out as the peak period of productivity, with the highest number of new formations recorded. This coincides with industrialization, colonial expansion, and socio-political transformations, which contributed to the emergence of new social, economic, and scientific terminologies incorporating *king*. As observed in Miller (2014), rapid socio-economic changes during industrialization

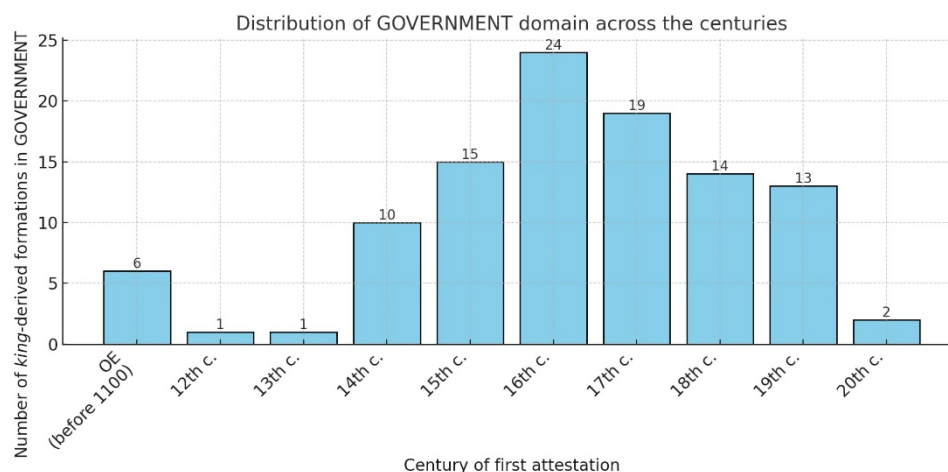
and colonial expansion significantly increased lexical productivity in the 19th century. Traugott and Dasher (2002) further claim that evolving economic and political institutions provided favourable conditions for such innovations, while Bybee (2010) presents empirical evidence linking these broader socio-cultural shifts to the accelerated coinage of new lexical items incorporating *king*.

In contrast, the 20th century shows a decline in productivity, although *king*-derived formations continue to appear, particularly in branding, popular culture, and metaphorical extensions. The 21st century exhibits a further reduction, reflecting the diminished lexical activity of *king* in contemporary English. This mapping reveals linguistic and sociocultural factors shaping word formation, shedding light on how *king*-derived lexical items proliferated, evolved, and embedded themselves in the English lexicon over time. The data highlights the changing role of *king* in English, from literal monarchical references to metaphorical extensions in various domains, as outlined earlier.

3. DISCUSSION: SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

The diachronic data reveal that the fluctuations of *king*-derived formations correlate with shifts in English social and political structures. During the medieval period, when monarchical authority was a pervasive force in governance and social organization, lexical innovation in *king*-derived formations remained relatively inactive. For example, as detailed in the diachronic classification (see Figure 2), the Old English period produced only a handful of distinct formations, specifically, six items: *folk-king*, *high king*, *king's man*, *lede king*, *under-king*, and *world king*. Moving into the 12th century, only one new formation, *overking* (c1175–), appears. Similarly, in the 13th century, the sole addition is *douth-king* (c1275), pointing to the very limited lexicogenesis involving *king* in the medieval times. All these formations pertain to royal administration of the country, see Figure 3.

Figure 3. Diachronic distribution of *king*-derived formations in the GOVERNMENT conceptual domain (lexical items adduced from the *OED*)



This sparse innovation suggests that the term *king*, deeply embedded in the sacred and political realms, left little semantic room for metaphorical transfer. In other words, the very centrality of monarchy may have inhibited further lexical creativity in this domain, as the use of the term was tightly bound to its established, venerable connotations. This phenomenon has been observed in scholarship, i.e. in Chaney's *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (1970). Chaney examines the evolution of kingship during the Anglo-Saxon era, highlighting the monarchy's central position in both the pagan and Christian contexts, and emphasising the ideological and religious significance of the royal institution. As he observes,

[i]n the transition from paganism to Christianity, the new theology was translated into terms of northern life, and crucial to this was the royal nature of God. The concept of God or Christ as King of Heaven is, of course, common to many theological metaphors besides those of Germanic peoples. It was, however, peculiarly congenial to Anglo-Saxon, as to Scandinavian, thought. It is not simply that the imagery is frequently startling, with 'the Chief of princes, the Ruler of all peoples' giving *mund* to his *fyrð* from his high-seat in the wine-hall of Heaven. The fundamental basis of Anglo-Saxon kennings for God is the concept of God as heavenly monarch. (Chaney, 1970, p. 46)

Chaney's observation points to the fact that the sacred status of the king was reinforced by Christian theology. The notion of God as a "heavenly monarch" not only permeated religious thought but also found its earthly analogue in the person of the English king, thereby reinforcing the taboo against using *king* in non-royal or non-sacred contexts. The conceptual parallel between divine kingship and earthly kingship helps explain why, in this period, *king* remained relatively static in its semantic range and resisted broader metaphorical application. Kantorowicz's work, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957), provides a complementary perspective which discusses how medieval political theology conceived the king as simultaneously a mortal ruler and an immortal, symbolic body. This duality further entrenched the sacred character of kingship which rendered the term even less susceptible to metaphorical extension outside its established, politically and religiously loaded sphere. Numerous studies on medieval monarchy have built on such insights. For instance, as illustrated in the volume edited by Deploige & Deneckere (2006), royal authority is not confined merely to formal social and institutional structures; it is also intimately linked with the symbolic dimensions of monarchy. Williams (2003) reevaluates the complexities of kingship in the Anglo-Saxon period; Huscroft (2016) explores the evolution of governance from Anglo-Saxon to Norman rule; and Carpenter (2003) analyses the consolidation of royal power following the Norman Conquest.

However, the position of monarchy in England was bound to change dramatically with the signing of Magna Carta in 1215. Although originally conceived as a pragmatic solution to baronial discontent, Magna Carta introduced the revolutionary notion that even the sovereign was subject to law. By mandating that certain taxes could only be imposed with the common counsel of the kingdom, the charter not only curtailed the arbitrary exercise of royal power but also initiated the gradual development of a constitutional framework (cf. Jones, 2015). This legal constraint mitigated the previously unchallenged sacred character of kingship – a character that, as Chaney (1970) and Kantorowicz (1957) demonstrate, was deeply intertwined with Christian theology and medieval political thought. The weakening of the monarchy's traditional, centralized power in medieval England is well documented in Church (2015) who argues that King John's reign marked a turning point in the erosion of royal authority, while Painter (2020) provides an analysis of how domestic discontent and conflicts contributed to this decline.

By the 14th century, England had experienced crises such as the Great Famine (1315–17) and was soon to enter the Hundred Years War (1337–1453),

events that helped reshape notions of sovereignty and administration. Within the *king*-derived lexicon, this century sees at least ten new forms attested, such as *kinghood* (a1375–) and *kingly* (c1384–), which continued to emphasize the dignified dimension of kingship. At the same time, more institutional or legal connotations emerge with items like *King's Bench* (c1390–) ‘a court of record and the supreme court of common law in England and Wales’ and *King's Letters* (a1387–) ‘a document issued by a king to command an action or payment’, reflecting the integration of royal authority into the judicial and administrative apparatus.

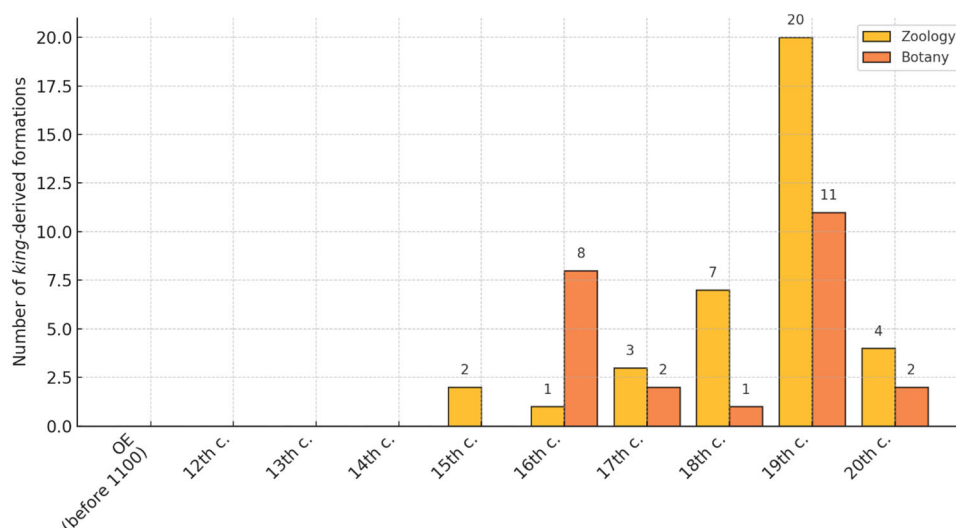
Moving into the 15th century, the aftermath of the Lancastrian usurpation and the intensifying conflicts of the Wars of the Roses brought further developments of the *king*-based formations. These can be exemplified with *kingship* (a1400–), which codifies the concept of royal status and duties, and the verb *to king* (?c1425–), reflecting the dynamic process of conferring regal authority. Other items, such as *King's Court* (c1400–) and *King's Coin* (c1400), underscore the expansion of monarchic power into economic and legal domains. In the 16th century, the pace of lexical innovation significantly increases as over three dozen new formations emerge (Figure 2). This is the era of the Tudor monarchy, the English Reformation, and overseas expansion. Over three dozen morphologically distinct formations appear, many of which are drawn from the prestige and authority of the crown. For instance, *King's Advocate* (1511–) and *King's Commission* (1539–) exemplify how terms originally tied to the monarch extend into the legal and administrative domains. Meanwhile, terms like *interking* (1533) and *king-elect* (1543) introduce more refined political and ceremonial concepts that reflect an emerging need to articulate nuanced relationships between sovereign authority and its ceremonial or elective status. Additional examples such as *King's Books* (1536–) and *Christmas King* (1537–) show how cultural and institutional life increasingly uses *king*-related terminology. More 16th century formations include: *kingcup* (1538–) ‘any of several plants of the genus *Ranunculus* having bright yellow, cup-shaped flowers’, *emperor-king* (1539–) ‘ruler who is simultaneously king of one territory and emperor of another’, *King of Arms* (1548–) ‘a herald who grants the right to wear or display arms’, *King's English* (1553–) ‘the English language regarded as under the guardianship of the King of England; (hence) standard or correct English’, *unking* (a1556–) ‘to remove a monarch from office’, *king's bishop* (1562–) ‘in chess, the bishop standing on the king's side of the board at the beginning of the game’. This diachronic progression ultimately marks a significant departure from the strictly sacred and politically

confined usage of *king* in medieval times, setting the stage for its later, more varied applications in modern discourse.

One notable trend during this period is the expansion of *king* into the natural world, particularly in ZOOLOGY and BOTANY, as seen in the NATURAL WORLD across the centuries in Figure 4. In the 15th century, the natural world began to echo the regal imagery that had long defined human hierarchies. Among the first attestations is *kingfisher* (1440–), ‘a small Eurasian bird, which feeds on fish’. Around 1450, the term *little king* emerged. This formation refers to ‘the Eurasian (or winter) wren, *Troglodytes*’. These attestations illustrate how the semantic domain of KING began to shift during the 15th century. This lexical expansion not only reinforced the idea of rank and dominance among species but also set the stage for the later surge in zoological and botanical coinages that coincided with the rise of scientific classification and taxonomy in subsequent centuries. By the 19th century, the semantic expansion of the lexeme *king* into zoology and botany had reached its peak, mirroring most likely the intense interest in natural history typical of the era. As the sciences of taxonomy and natural history matured, scholars and laymen alike began to attribute regal titles to species, thereby transferring notions of dominance and prestige from human politics to the natural world. For example, *king parrot* (1803–) is defined in the OED as ‘any parrot of the genus *Alisterus*, comprising medium-sized birds with brilliant red and green plumage found in Australasia and Indonesia’. The striking colours and commanding appearance of these birds evoke the authority of a monarch. Similarly, *king crow* (1809–) ‘any of several South Asian birds of the family *Dicruridae* thought to resemble crows, especially the black drongo (*Dicrurus macrocerus*)’ uses the modifier *king* to elevate a familiar bird into a symbol of dominance within its environment. Moving into marine biology, in *king conch* (1815–) ‘any of several large marine gastropod molluscs with ornate shells, esp. *Lobatus gigas*’, the regal epithet reflects not only the size and beauty of the shell but also their economic value. Other examples include: *king-cure* (1817–53) ‘a pipsissewa (*Chimaphila umbellata* or *Chimaphila maculata*)’, *king eider* (1824–) ‘a large sea duck found throughout the Arctic, *Somateria spectabilis*, the male of which has a mostly black body, pale bluish head, and a distinctive orange plate outlined in black above the bill’, *king fern* (1829–) ‘any fern of the genus *Osmunda*, or more specifically, a very large fern native to parts of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa’, *king’s flower* (1870–) ‘a pineapple flower (genus *Eucomis*); esp. *Eucomis regia*, which has prostrate leaves and greenish-white flowers’, and *king cobra* (1887–) ‘a large, highly

venomous snake of the forests of eastern India and Southeast Asia, *Ophiophagus hannah*, known for its distinctive long narrow hood'. Together, these examples of *king*-based coinages illustrate a remarkable period of lexical innovation. In the 19th century, as scientific inquiry reshaped our understanding of the natural world, the term *king* was creatively extended into zoology and botany.

Figure 4. Diachronic distribution of king-derived formations in the NATURAL WORLD (ZOOLOGY and BOTANY) (lexical items adduced from the *OED*)



In contrast, the 20th century marks a decline in *king*-based innovation. This decline corresponds with the reduction of monarchical influence in political affairs, as constitutional governments and republics supplanted absolute rule. However, *king* remained productively reinterpreted in cultural and commercial contexts, where it came to signify prominence, excellence, or branding (*king-size*, *California king*, *King Cotton*). The 20th century's relatively low output in new GOVERNMENT terms (only two recorded formations) suggests that while *king* remained culturally salient, its direct association with governance had diminished.

Central to the above observations is the understanding that the figure of the king operates on a dual level: as a literal, historical authority entrenched in feudal and political structures, and as a flexible cognitive construct that is

readily adapted as a metaphor across diverse domains. Initially, *king* denoted tangible political power, typically vested in a hereditary ruler. However, as governance structures evolved, the same lexeme was repurposed to symbolize excellence, dominance, or preeminence in domains unrelated to monarchy. The fluctuations in lexical productivity across different periods, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, demonstrate that while the literal political application of *king* declined, its symbolic and metaphorical productivity increased and maintained productivity.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

As outlined in earlier sections, this study offers insight into how the diachronic evolution of *king*-derived formations is closely tied to broader socio-historical and cognitive shifts. The development of these formations, from more literal monarchical terms in the medieval period to metaphorical applications in the modern era, illustrates how language functions as both a mirror and a driver of cultural change. The evidence from the *Oxford English Dictionary* corpus of lexical items reveals that while the literal sense of *king* as a ruler has diminished, its symbolic force remains resilient, allowing its semantic scope to be repurposed across diverse non-royal domains.

The study highlights three key processes underlying the diachronic expansion and reinterpretation of the lexeme *king*: 1) lexical innovation operates in transitional periods, 2) cognitive metaphors serve to broaden conceptual frameworks and expand naming practices, and 3) lexicogenesis functions as a barometer of cultural change. The 16th and 17th centuries mark a pivotal period of innovation, corresponding with major political and social transformations. As feudal authority waned and new economic and social structures emerged, speakers sought novel expressions that recontextualized *king* outside of strictly monarchical settings. The increase in lexical creativity during those times illustrates the dynamic relationship between linguistic change and socio-political shifts.

The expansion of *king* into non-political domains, particularly ZOOLOGY and BOTANY, reflects a broader restructuring of hierarchical thinking. The emergence of terms such as *kingfisher*, *king crab*, and *kingcup* suggests that monarchical attributes of centrality and dominance were projected onto the natural world. This pattern corresponds to the Cognitive Metaphor Theory,

which explains how dominant cultural schemas, such as kingship, are mapped onto new conceptual domains. The peak of zoological and botanical formations in the 19th century coincides with the rise of scientific taxonomy, illustrating how linguistic and intellectual developments reinforce each other.

The decline of GOVERNMENT formations after the 18th century and the subsequent rise of metaphorical and commercial *king*-based terms (e.g. *king-size*, *King Cotton*, *California king*) suggest a cultural shift in the way power and prestige are conceptualized. As monarchy became less politically dominant, the lexeme *king* was increasingly reinterpreted in commercial and cultural contexts, where it signified excellence, superiority, and desirability. This supports the view that lexicogenesis reflects cultural change, providing insights into how societies negotiate various conceptual notions.

Ultimately, the fluctuations in *king*-derived lexicogenesis, as represented in Figures 3 and 4, reflect broader patterns of cultural adaptation and conceptual restructuring. While the literal sense of *king* has faded, its semantic productivity endures, extending into domains as varied as nature, economy, entertainment, and branding. This transformation points to the interplay between linguistic evolution and socio-cultural change, reinforcing the view that language is not merely a static repository of meanings, but a dynamic system shaped by historical forces. As this study has also illustrated, the evolution of *king*-derived formations is emblematic of the broader mechanisms that govern linguistic change. The shifts in productivity across centuries, the cognitive repurposing of *king* as a metaphorical construct, and the influence of socio-historical developments all contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how language adapts to cultural change. The findings invite further exploration into how key cultural lexemes evolve in response to social change as seen in the fields of historical linguistics, cognitive semantics, and cultural linguistics.

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