In this chapter, I dwell on the semantics of agent-forming nominalisers. More specifically, I examine the meanings of morphemes and how they combine to form nouns. During the investigation, I verify three tenets of Cognitive Semantics. To that end, I organise the chapter as follows. In section 5.1, I say what an agent-forming suffix is and enumerate the mechanisms that condition its integration with a root to form a noun. In section 5.2, I argue that each agent-forming suffix has a core sense from which its other senses fan out. In section 5.3, I argue that the scope of meaning of an agent-forming suffix is demarcated by the type of semantic relations it has with its counterparts. In section 5.4, I argue that the members of a noun pair cannot be freely exchanged for each other despite the fact that they look alike. Each has a specific meaning which is the result of construal. To depict non-synonymy, I resort to their distinctive collocates. This is done by examining actual data offered in the corpus. In section 5.5, I repeat the main points of the chapter.

5.1 Introduction

An agent-forming suffix is a word-final element that is added to a root to form an agentive noun. Because it cannot occur alone, it is considered a bound morpheme. It integrates with a free morpheme to form a composite structure. For the integration to succeed, they should conform to what Langacker (1987: 277–327) calls valence conditions. First, they should show correspondence at both semantic and phonological poles. Second, they should show difference in dependence; the free morpheme occurs as autonomous while the bound morpheme as dependent. Third, they should show difference in determinacy; the bound morpheme acts
as a profile determinant and so is primarily responsible for the charac-
ter of the composite structure. It has a double import. Syntactically, it
marks a change in the class of a lexical item from abstract to concrete.
Semantically, it marks a shift in the meaning of the root. Fourth, they
should show difference in status; the bound morpheme is the head,
while the free morpheme is the complement. In some derivational
cases, the root undergoes a phonetic change, as in tactician from tactics,
whereas in others it preserves its phonetic shape, as in adoptee from
adopt.

5.2 Semantic networks

In this section, I examine the impact of the category theory on the
semantic description of agent-forming suffixes. An agent-forming
suffix, I argue, is polysemous in that it exhibits a cluster of distinct
but related senses, which are derived from a core, prototypical, sense.
The core sense serves as a standard from which the other senses are
derived via semantic extensions. The core sense has the common
properties of the category; hence it is deemed the best representative of it.
The core sense is the sense that comes to mind first or is the easiest
to recall. The remaining, peripheral, senses have some but not all of
the properties of the category; hence they are related to the core sense
relative to their degrees of similarity to it. Like members of a large fam-
ily, the peripheral senses are linked in a way that they resemble one
another in a variety of ways, yet each has its own individuality. Category
is then a powerful tool which reveals both the general as well as the
specific properties of a given lexical item, via their relationships with
one another.

To capture the semantic behaviour of an agentive suffix, I ground
the description in two cognitive models. With verbal roots, I ground
the description in the cognitive model of transitivity. Let me give an
example of the suffix -ee. In a prototypical formation, the suffix is added
to monotransitive verbs to denote a patient, as in examinee, and, in
some cases, to denote ditransitive verbs, as in presentee. Peripherally, the
suffix is added to verbs to denote an agent, as in retiree. With nominal
roots, I ground the description in the cognitive model of animacy. Let
me give an example of the suffix -(i)an. Prototypically, the suffix is added
to roots denoting intellectual disciplines to form agentive nouns. In
beautician, it is added to a name of a trade. In statistician, it is added to
a name of science. Peripherally, the suffix is added to names of countries
to form agentive nouns, as in American.