

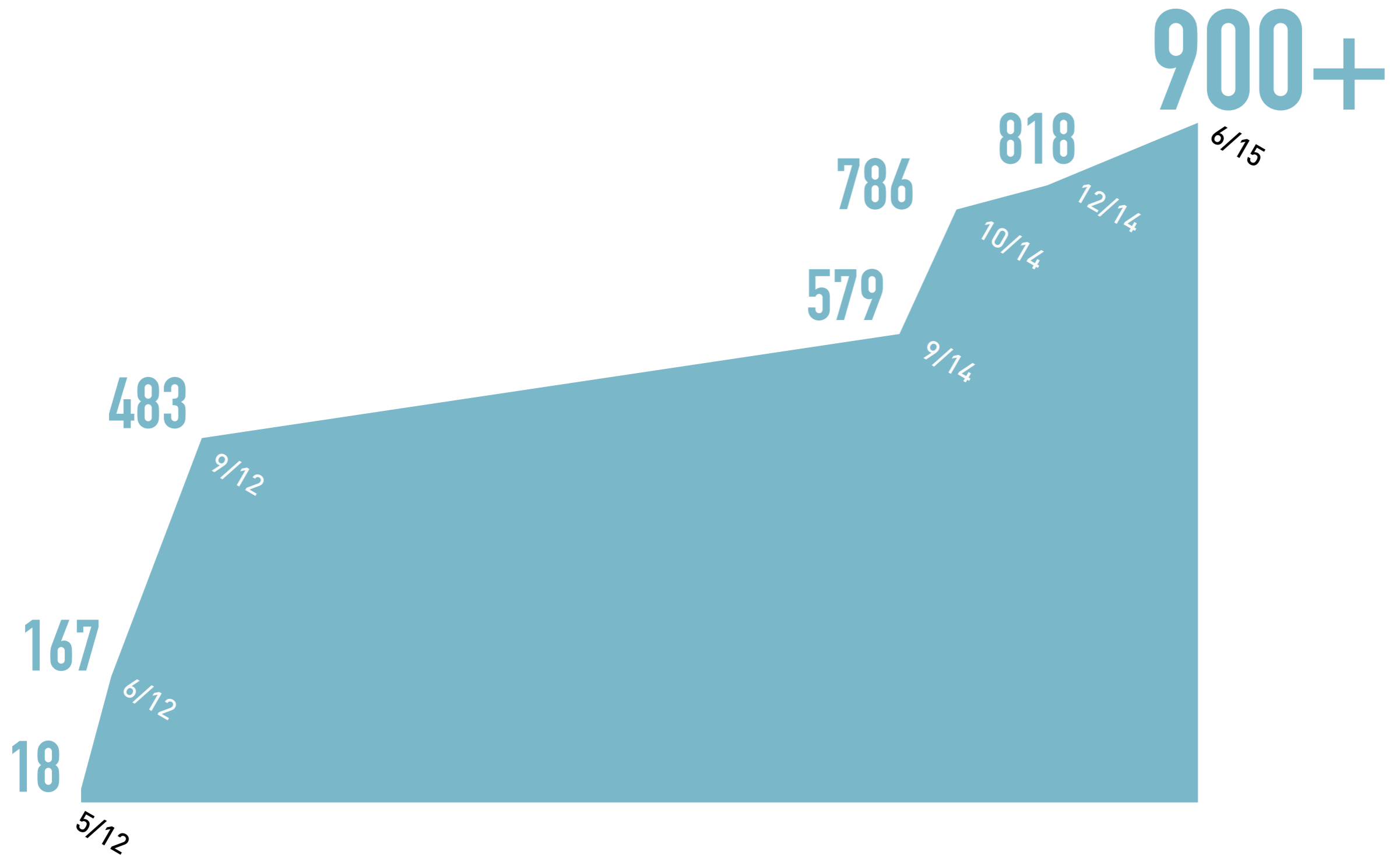
DSNA-20 / SHEL-9

DOES A SLINGSHOT SLING SHOTS?

DIFFICULTIES IN IDENTIFYING
ENGLISH CUTTHROAT COMPOUNDS

Brianne Hughes

HARVESTING CUTTHROATS



CUTTHROAT COMPOUNDS

Exocentric Verb-Noun Compounds

Transitive Verb + Direct Object

They name by **describing**
the essential action of the person or thing.

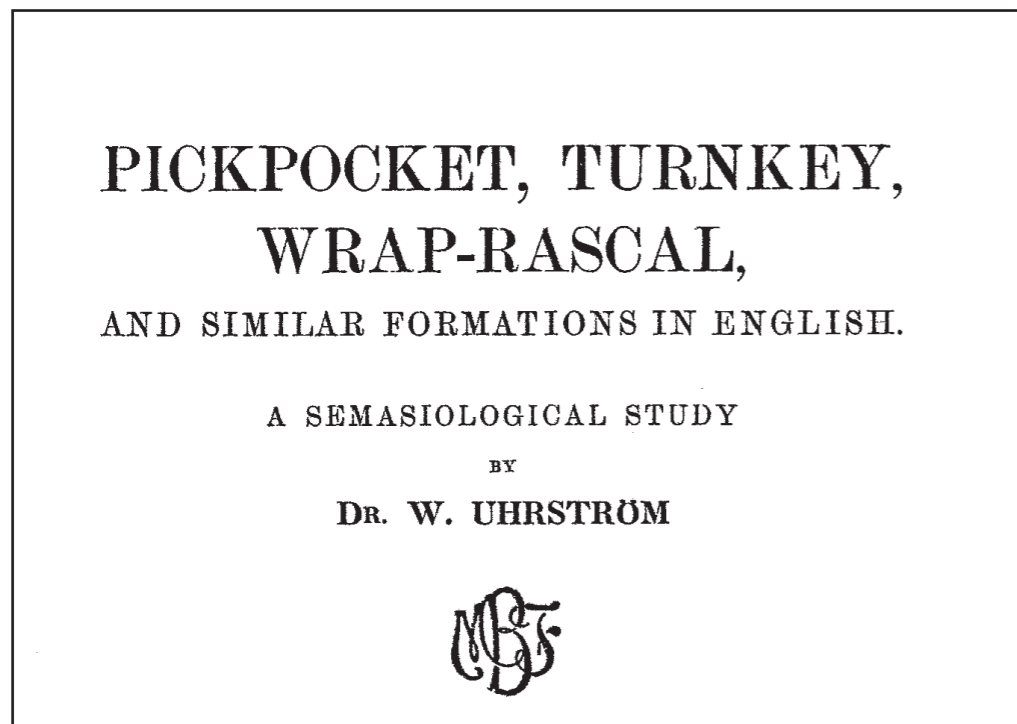
CUTTHROAT STRUCTURE

1535 A **cutthroat** is a **person who cuts throats**.

1542 A **pick-tooth** is a **tool that picks teeth**.

1874 **Toss-penny** is a **game where players toss pennies**.

CUTTHROATS BY ANOTHER NAME



Pickpocket
Scarecrow
Shakespeare
Turncoat

Cutthroat is a better term

- Uses **cut**
- Describes a violent criminal
- Is a calque

NON-ENGLISH CUTTHROATS

English cutthroats come from French

We kept some --- { 1400 wardrobe
1866 pince-nez

We translated some --- { 1430 gain-pain
1855 win-bread

We forgot the
structure of some --- { 1285 curfew
1325 kerchief

NON-ENGLISH CUTTHROATS

Cutthroats are limitlessly productive in Romance languages

Spanish	}	el lavaplatos	(wash + dishes)
		el quitasol	(remove + sun)
		el rompecabezas	(break + heads)
		el huelebraguetas	(smell + zippers)
Italian	-----	il caca-fuoco	(shit + fire)

1598 shitfire

1600 spitfire

NATIVE CUTTHROAT PRODUCTIVITY

Children spontaneously create cutthroats
during compound development

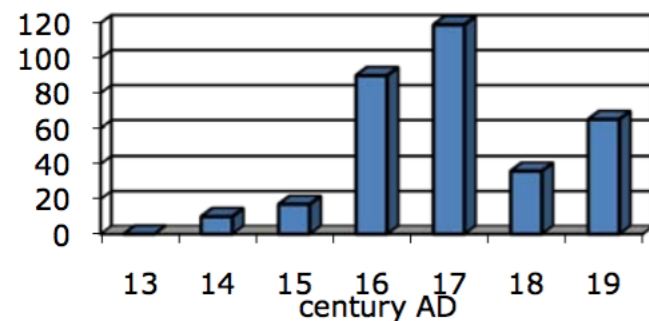
Chart 5. Stages of Compounding Acquisition, Modified from Clark et al. (1986)

Stages	English children	Child Examples	Adult Examples
Stage 0	N+N (head-final)	present-man, plant-man	fireman, airplane
Stage 1	V+N (subject)	washman, openman	scrubwoman, hovercraft
Stage 2	V+N (object)	hug-kid, break-bottle	pickpocket, scarecrow
Stage 2.5	V+ing+N, V+er+N	throwing-ball, puller-wagon	-
Stage 3	N+V+er	water-drinker, well-builder	truck driver, can opener

NATIVE CUTTHROAT PRODUCTIVITY

English has been slowly producing cutthroats
from 1050 to 2015, mostly as insults

Figure 1: First mentions in sample:
Absolute frequencies



gulch-cup 1200 drunkard

lack-brain 1596 stupid person

draw blood 1608 violent criminal

quake-buttock 1627 coward

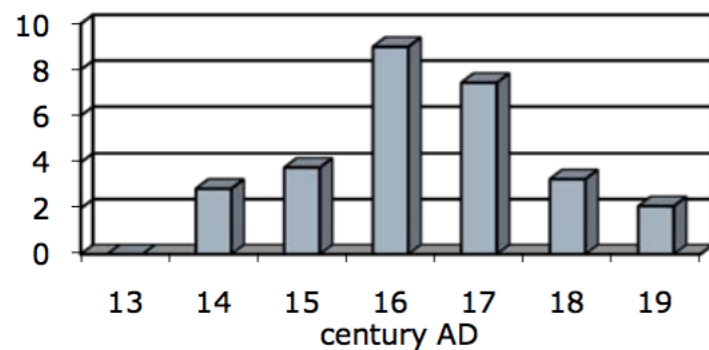


Figure 2: First mentions relative to corpus
size (n/25,000 quotations)

CUTTHROATS IN MODERN ENGLISH

PEOPLE

cutpurse
cutthroat
daredevil
fussbudget
killjoy
lackbeard
mountebank
pickpocket
pinchpenny
prodnose
sawbones
scofflaw
sellsword
skinflint
spendthrift
spitfire
spoilsport
swashbuckler
tattletale
turncoat

ADJECTIVES

breakneck
do-nothing
know-nothing
lackluster
makeshift
stop-gap
tell-all

FOOD & DRINK

amuse-bouche
breakfast
killdevil rum
rotgut

GAMES

grab ass
hopscotch

SURNAMES

Silence Dogood
Dr. Do-Little
Dudley Do-Right
John Lackland
Asa Lovejoy
Luna Lovegood
Ada Lovelace
William Makepeace Thackeray
William Shakespeare

TOOLS

Armor All
breakwater
catch-all
DisposAll
dreadnaught
parasol
passport
pastime
pickwick
pince-nez
portfolio
portmanteau
scarecrow
wardrobe

21ST CENTURY CUTTHROATS

2000 sellsail

2006 Princess Tinglepants

2007 amuse-douche

2009 pesterchum

2014 Tiffany Huffcrotch
and Samantha Drinkbeave

2014 Professor Stealwater

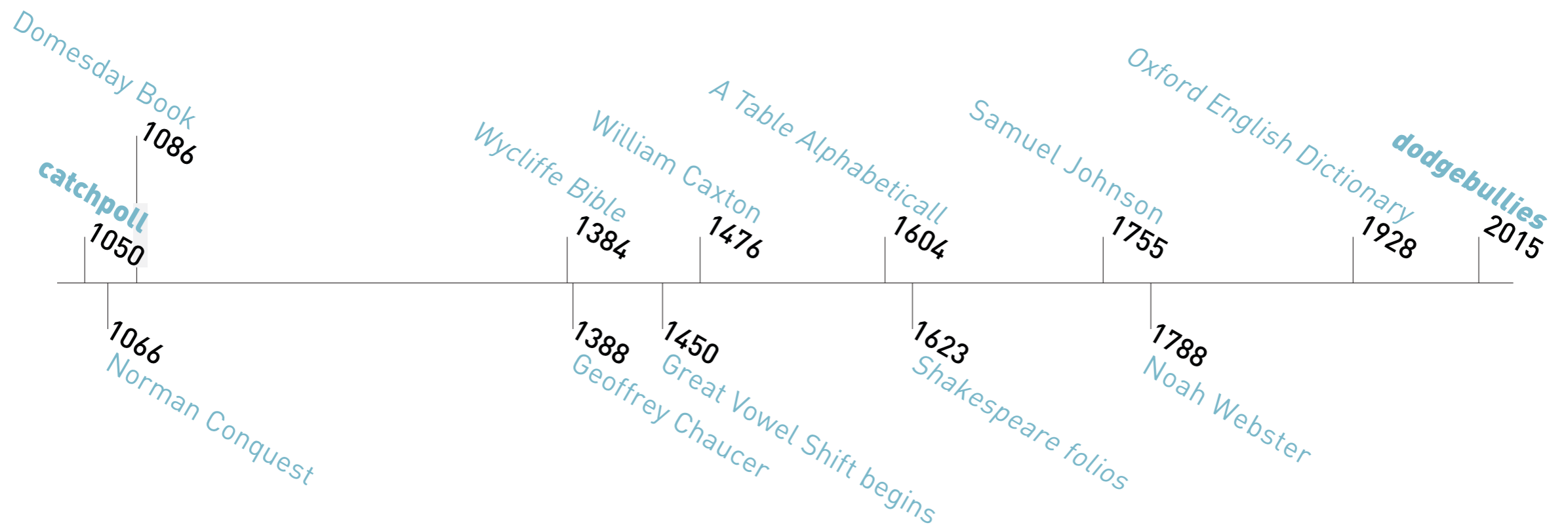
2015 dodgebullies

QUESTIONABLE CUTTHROATS

In the big list of 901, many lack the evidence to be definitely labeled as cutthroats.

surname	Strokeher
1705	clingstone
1575	makehawk
1641	rattle-head
1699	bundletail
1834	jumprope
1849	slingshot
1889	speakeasy

CUTTHROATS COULD BE ANYWHERE



SEPARATED BY A COMMON LANGUAGE

1586 blow-point

1586 fear-babe

1702 couple-beggar

1903 snickfadge

COMPOUND AMBIGUITY

Any relationship is possible

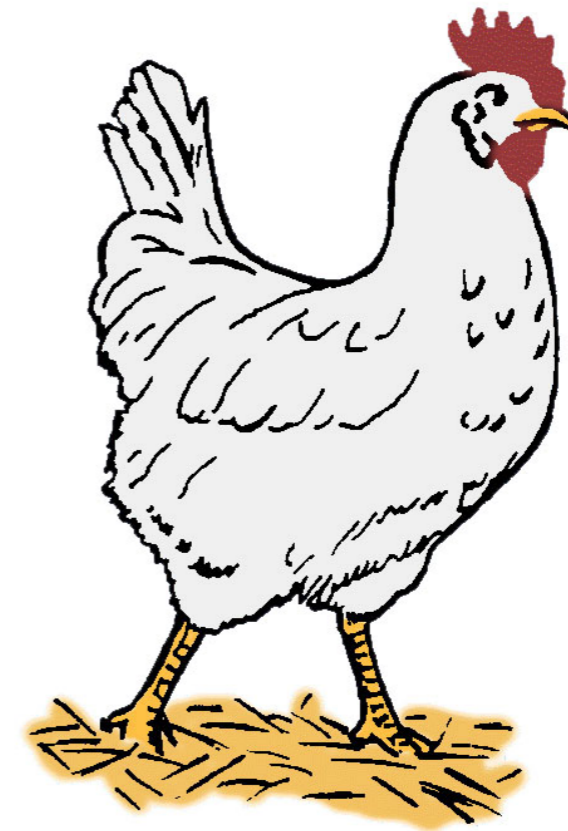
Only a few resources are available

Gender

Case

Word class markers

Headedness



egg plant

ENGLISH COMPOUND AMBIGUITY

tear-away
'tear-brain
tear-brass
tear-bridge
tear-cat
tear-down
tear-down
tear-mouth
tear-off
tear-out
tear-placket
tear-rogue
tear-sheet
tear-throat
tear-thumb
tear-up

tear, n.1	971
tear, n.2	1611
tear, adj. and n.3	c1400
tear, v.1	a1000
tear, v.2	c950
tear-, comb. form	1605
tearable, adj.	1859
tear-bottle, n.	1658
tearer, n.	a1550
tearful, adj.	a1586
tearing, n.1	c1460
tearing, adj.1	a1616
tearing, adj.2 and n.2	c1000
tear-jerker, n.	1921
tearless, adj.	1603
tearlet, n.	1858

PROBLEMS

No gender

No case

Inconsistent use of word class markers

Homonyms

Zero derivation

SOLUTIONS

Headedness

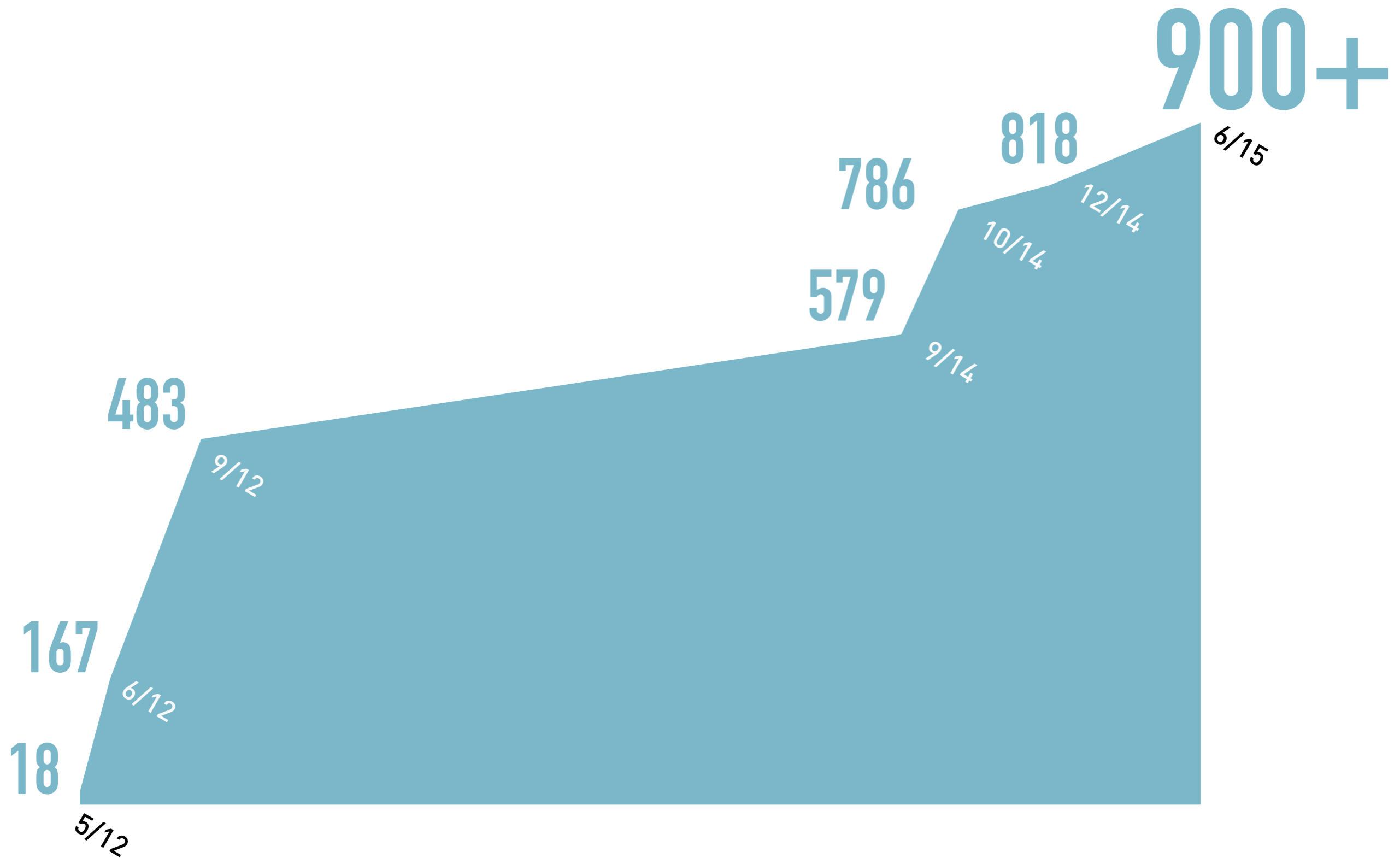
Context

CUTTHROAT COMPOUND AMBIGUITY

- No head (exocentric)
- No word class markers
- No context in dictionaries

Finding cutthroats seems impossible.

900 CUTTHROATS AND COUNTING



SEMANTIC CLUMPING IN CUTTHROATS

Certain verbs, nouns, and topics
appear in cutthroats again and again.

CLUMPS OF TOPICS

People swinge-breech

Games pitch-button

Animals break-net

Plants tangle legs

Tools scratch-back

Adjectives kill-dick swig

CLUMPS OF NOUNS

1606 clunch fist

1611 clusterfist

1643 clutchfist

1752 suck fist

1861 close-fist

CLUMPS OF VERBS

301 verbs = 901 cutthroats

break	26	kill	14
turn	20	lick	13
make	19	catch	12
lack	16	cut	11
pick	15		

AMASSING CUTTHROAT VERBS

	ATTACK/BREAK/HIT	REPAIR	JOKING	GROUP	AFFECTION
	bang	fix	amuse	bunch	love
	batter	mend	mock	bundle	buss
	bite	cure	scoff	cluster	kiss
	break	heal		gather	tickle
	bust	knit		hold	stroke
	chop	patch		keep	tingle
	cut	thread			
	stab				
	swash				
	hurt				
	rap	FEAR	CLEAN	FIRE	HOLD CLOSE
	scratch	dread	rinse	burn	cling
	shear	fear	wash	scorch	clutch
		scare	wet	torch	cleve
				scald	grip
	THROW	RUIN		CHANGE/SHAKE	
	toss	spoil		change	
	pitch	mar		mix	
	fling	rot		muddle	
	pass			quake	
	scatter	CONFUSE		rattle	
		fuddle		shake	
	REJECT/AVOID	puzzle		shuffle	
	spurn	muddle		wag	
	shun			wave	
	dodge				
	skip				

AMASSING CUTTHROAT VERBS

G	GAIN	GATHER
	GARDE	GRAPPLE
	GATHER	GRATE
	GIVE	GRAZE
	GRAB	GROOM
	GRIND	GROUP
	GRIPE	GROW
	GRIPP	GROWL
	GULCH	GRUB
		GRUNT
		GULP
		GURK
		GUSH
		GUT
H	HALE (HAUL)	HALT
	HANG	HANDLE
	HAP	HARASS
	HAUNT	HEAT
	HEAL	HEAVE
	HELP	HIDE
	HIT	HOARD
	HOLD	HONK
	HOP	HOOK
	HUFF	HUCKLE
	HUM	HUDDLE
	HUNT	HUGGLE
	HURT	HUMP
	HUSTLE	HURL
		HUSK

CUTTHROATS ON OED.COM

† **swingebreech, n.**

Text size:

View as: [Outline](#) | [Full entry](#)

Quotations: [Show all](#) | [Hide all](#)

Etymology: ? < *swinge*, [SWING](#) *v.*¹ + [BREECH](#) *n.* 4.

Obs. nonce-wd.

? One who struts or flaunts about.

[Thesaurus »](#)

[Categories »](#)

1581 A. GILBY *Pleasant Dialogue* sig. M3, Their [*sc.* the bishops'] pompous trayne of proud idle swingebreeches, in the steede of Preachers & Schollers.

[\(Hide quotations\)](#)

SEARCHING FOR CUTTHROATS

crack-rope c1450 Scots + 1571–1818

widdy-neck c1480–a1583 Scots

widdiful 1508–1882 Scots

stretch-hemp 1532–1566

man of death 1535–1642

slip-string 1546–1624 + 1828

hang-up 1562/3

hempstring 1566–1606

crack-halter 1566–1607

ropefull 1567 Scots + 1583 Scots

hang-rope 1570

waghalter 1570–1638

gallow(s)-clapper 1570–1708

rope-ripe 1573–1632

wag-string 1578–1633

stretch-halter 1583–1606

gallows 1588–1838

halter-sack/sick 1598–a1616

wag-with 1611

roper 1615

gallows-climber 1668

hang-string 1675

hempie 1718–1893 Scots & northern English

gallows-face 1724

hang-gallows 1785–1828

SEARCHING FOR CUTTHROATS

S L	S M
Wooden Dish. <i>To look a Skew</i> , or on one side.	<i>Sleeveless story</i> , a Tale of a Tub, or of a Cock and a Bull. <i>To laugh in one's Sleeves</i> , inwardly slyly.
<i>Skew-fisted</i> , awkward, ungainly.	<i>Slice</i> , when a Hawk <i>Muteb</i> a great distance from her.
<i>Skin-flint</i> , a griping, sharpening, close-fisted Fellow.	<i>Slippery Trick</i> , or <i>Fellow</i> , deceitful, as having two properties of Ice, smooth and slippery.
<i>Skinker</i> , that fills the Glass or Cup. <i>Who Skinks?</i> Who pours out the Liquor.	<i>Slot</i> , the footing of a Hart.
<i>Skipper</i> , c. a Barn; also a Dutch Master of a Ship or Vessel.	

Dictionary of the Canting Crew, B.E. (1699)

SEARCHING FOR CUTTHROATS

breakfast=time
break-in
breaking=diameter
breaking=engine
breaking=frame
breaking=weight
break=iron
break=lathe
breakneck, *a.* and *n.*
break-off
breakpromise (a person)
breakshare
break=signal
breakstaff
breakstone (a plant)
break=up
break=van
breakwater
breamflat (a fish)

cutaway
cut=chundoo
cut drop
cut=grass
cutheal (valerian)
cutlas=fish
cutlips (a fish)
cut=lugged
cut=mark
cut=off
cut=out
cut=pile
cutpurse
cut=splay
cutter=bar
cutter=grinder†
cutter=head
cutter=stock
cutthroat
cutting=board
cutting=box
cutting=compass
cutting=engine
cutting=file
cutting=gauge
cutting=line
cutting=lipper (a fish)

English Compound Words and Phrases
by F. Horace Teall (1892)

SEARCHING FOR CUTTHROATS

*Sluggards,
Unintellec-
tual Persons.*

The verbal stem **Lack**, which is used to denote a deficiency in various respects, occurs in several formations indicating a want of intellectual gifts, e. g.,

Lack-brain: 1596. Shakesp. *1 Hen.* IV. II. iii. 17:
What a lacke-braine is this?

Lack-mind (1887), **Lack-sense** (1881), **Lack-wit** (1667).

Synonymous with **Lackwit** is †**Wantwit**, 'one destitute of wit or sense; a fool.'

'Such a want-wit sadness makes of me
That I have much ado to know myself.'

Shakesp. *M. of V.* V. i. 1. 6.

Suck egg is a popular term for a silly person. (Barrère and Leland.)

*Ignorant
Persons.*

Know-nothing (1739) literally denotes 'one who knows nothing, a very ignorant person, an ignoramus'; further 'one who holds that nothing can be known, an agnostic'; thirdly it meant a member of a political party in U. S.,

Pickpockets, Turnkeys and
Wrap-Rascals by Uhrstrom (1898)

MOVING BETWEEN CLUMPS

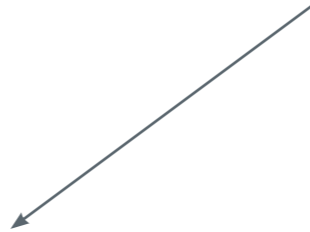
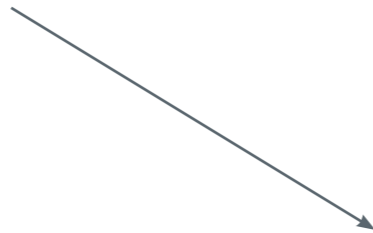
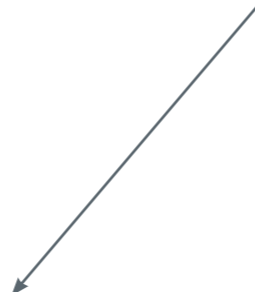
choke-children
choke-dog
choke-priest
choke-sparrow

kill-priest
strozzapreti (strangle+priest)

scare-goose
strangle-goose
wake-goose

knock-salt
lack-brain
saddle-goose

clap-saddle
saddle-nag



SO WHAT ABOUT SLINGSHOT?

1600 sling-dart

1849 slingshot

How much evidence is enough?

OTHER QUESTIONABLE CUTTHROATS

NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION

1230 Gropecuntlane

1325 wait-gleed

MAY BE ENDOCENTRIC

1575 makehawk

1510 wag-tail

MAY NOT BE A NOUN

1586 do-little

1838 catch-all

1889 speakeasy

THE POWER OF THE INTERNET

Stan Carey

David-Antoine Williams



Stan Carey @StanCarey · May 24

@E_Briannica It's probably discounted for reasons etymorphological, but is STOPGAP a cutthroat? A friend suggested it.



Rodney Breen @rodney_breen · May 25

@E_Briannica Worrywart? Not sure about that one.



[View conversation](#)



Hugo @hugovk · May 29

@E_Briannica Possible #cutthroats from four pages of 1875 swears: SPLAY FOOT (1612), SQUINT-EYE (1653), STUFFGUT (?) archive.org/stream/poetica...



[View conversation](#)

IS THIS A CUTTHROAT?

Compounds are ambiguous.

From little context, and separated by decades and centuries, many compounds lack the evidence to be definitively classified as compounds.

You can help.

CONTACT

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[@E_Briannica](#)