

CUTTHROAT BACKSTABBERS

THE VULGAR WORLD OF
VERB-NOUN COMPOUNDING

**LANGUAGE IS A TOOL,
DON'T BE A TOOL ABOUT LANGUAGE.**

WHAT IS A COMPOUND?

A compound is two words
put together to express one idea.

Firetruck

Strong man

Hovercraft

Ice cold

Blue-green

Kickstart

A COMPOUND JOKE



SOME BOAT COMPOUNDS

Longboat adj + noun

Rowboat verb + noun

Tugboat verb + noun

Steamboat noun + noun

Lifeboat noun + noun

Gravy boat noun + noun

COMPOUND “HEADS”

The right-most part of a compound is the head.

Steamboat
boat
(the head)

The head tells you the category
of the compound:

A **steamboat** is a type of **boat**.

BUT WAIT!

Not all compounds work like that!

Some are:

**“agentive and instrumental
exocentric
verb-noun
compounds”**

EXCEPTIONS LIKE CUTTHROAT

cut + throat = verb + noun

row + boat = verb + noun

A rowboat is a **boat**.

A cutthroat is a **person**.

“CUTTHROATS” STILL IN USE

Breakfast

Killjoy

Scarecrow

Breakneck

Lackluster

Skinflint

Breakwater

Makeshift

Spendthrift

Ceasefire

Passport

Spitfire

Cutpurse

Pastime

Spoilsport

Cutthroat

Pickpocket

Swashbuckler

Daredevil

Rotgut

Tattletale

Dreadnaught

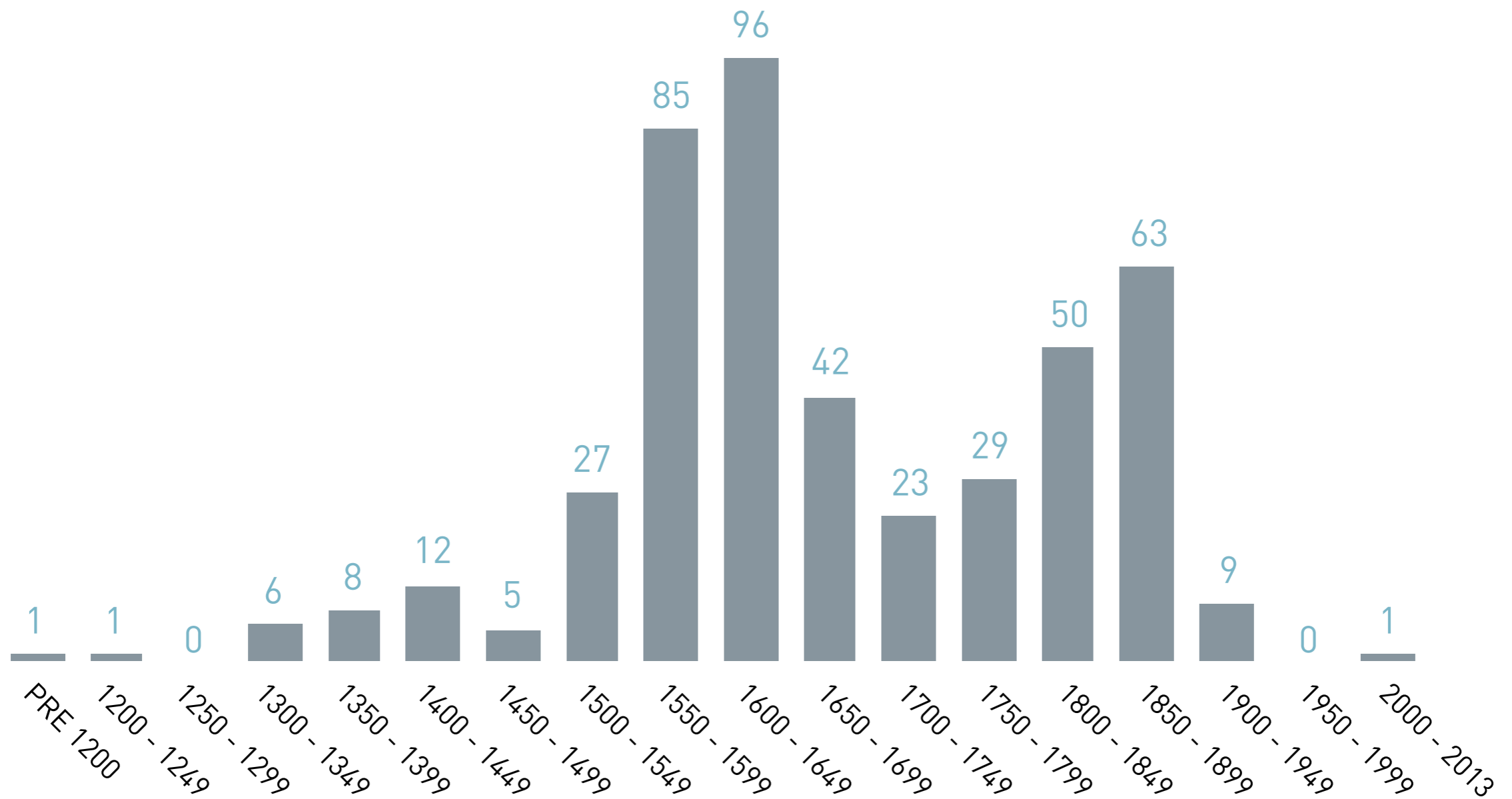
Sawbones

Turncoat

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fashion has trends,
and so does language.

THE RISE AND FALL OF CUTTHROAT COMPOUNDS



CLUMPING

Cutthroat compounds tend to describe the same few subjects again and again.

In Linguistics we call this
Clumping.

CLUMPS OF INSULTS FOR the dregs of society

Lack-Latin	1534	an uneducated person
Quakebreech	1584	a coward
Lacklooks	1618	an unattractive person
Squeeze-grape	1622	a drunkard
Clutchfist	1643	a miserly person
Spit-poison	1716	a malicious person

CLUMPS OF INSULTS FOR professions

Watch-birth	1606	a midwife
Spoil-paper	1610	a bad writer
Split-fig	1700	a grocer
Mix-metal	1811	a silver smith
Thump-cushion	1827	a boisterous preacher
Scrapegut	1837	a fiddler
Stab-rag	1870	a tailor

SOME COMPOUNDS INSULT

alcohol

Spirits

kill-devil 1590

rotgut 1632

ticklebrain 1639

strikefire 1725

tanglelegs 1860

Wine

steelback 1609

kill-priest 1811

Beer / Ale

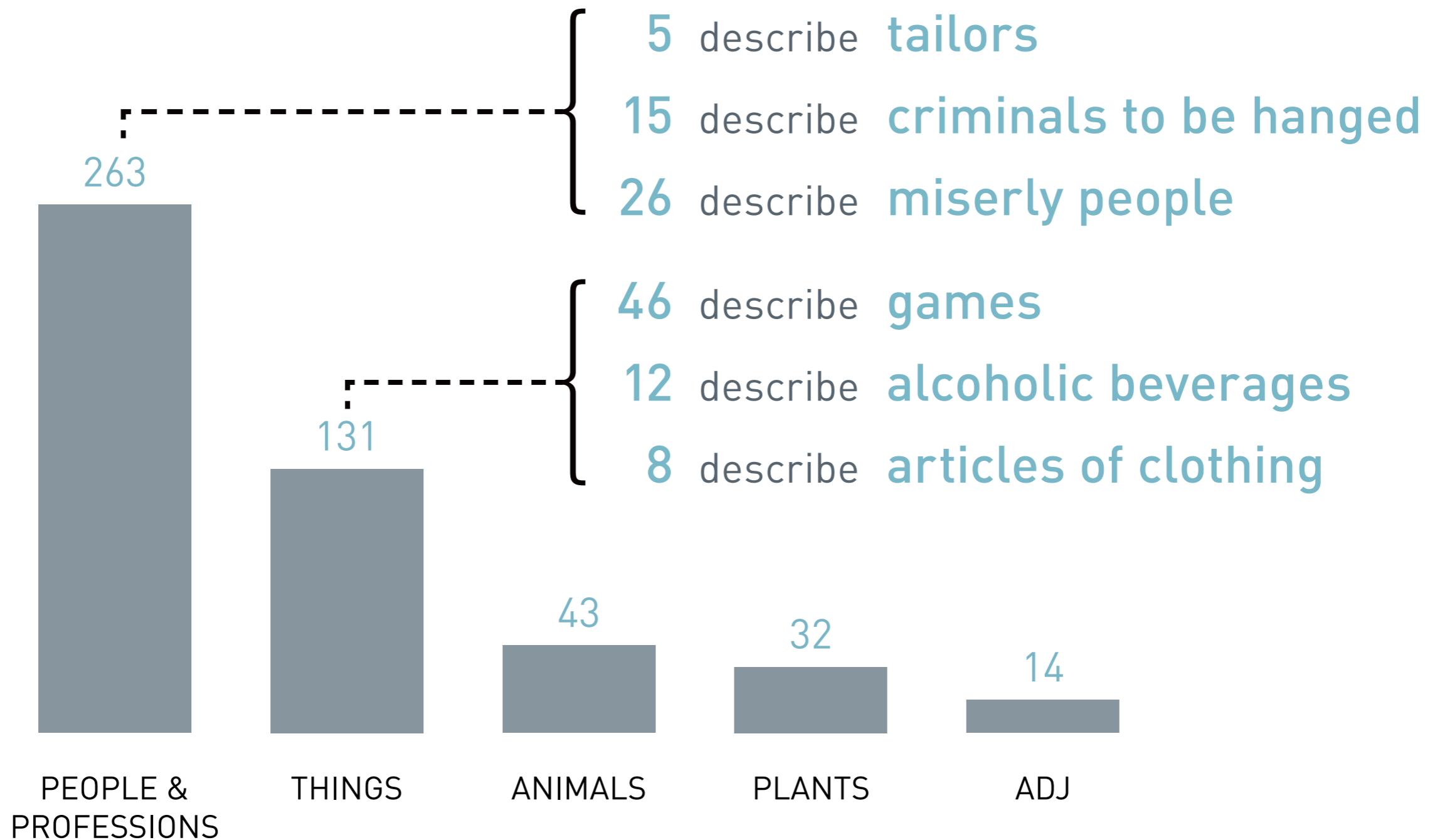
huffcap 1599

pinch-gut 1615

stitch-back 1671

whip-belly 1738

GRAPHS OF CLUMPS



CLUMPS OF VERBS

break	lack	make	pick	tear
catch	lick	mar	pinch	turn
draw	kill	nip	scrape	whip

Choke-priest 1848 a thick italian soup

Choke-dog 1870 a hard cheese

Choke-children 1885 a bony fish

Choke-sparrow 1888 bearded wheat

HOW TO BE A MAKE-WORD

1. Think of someone to insult.

2. Use a common “cutthroat” verb like:

break	lack	make	pick	tear
catch	lick	mar	pinch	turn
draw	kill	nip	scrape	whip

3. Make sure it works like this:

someone who (verbs) (nouns)

4. Try it out!

“You, sir, are a verb-noun.”

* CREATE ONE TONIGHT AND RECEIVE A PRIZE! *

HOW TO BE A LOVE-WORD

OED.com

Your Multnomah County Library Card gives you [free](#) access to the Oxford English Dictionary.

w♥rdnik

A crowd-sourced dictionary that uses online resources like Flickr and Twitter.

Etymonline.com

Quick answers for many word roots.

OneLook.com

A useful dictionary with wildcard options: *boat

Speculative Grammarian

A satirical linguistics journal / podcast.

HOW TO BE A STALK-BRIANNE

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