

The *-meister* builder: generative processes in nickname formation

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Two nickname formation strategies are suffixation with *-ster* or *-meister*. The suffix *-ster* has a long history according to the OED, dating from the use of *-estre* in OE to form feminine agent nouns. There is no mention, however, of the more recent use of *-ster* in nickname formation. The OED attributes *-meister* as having US origin as a final element in compounds; the first attested example dates from 1975 and labels Paul McCartney as a “schmaltzmeister”. The more restricted use of this suffix in nickname formation is often attributed to a sketch on Saturday Night Live from 1990 in which Rob Schneider plays a photocopier operator who refers to himself as the “Richmeister”. One UK source (<http://www.dfxhost.net/asse/assefaq.html>) credits British use of the *-meister* suffix to Ricky Gervais’ character David Brent in *The Office* from 2001, who frequently refers to himself as “the Brentmeister”.

However, a moment’s introspection reveals that not all names are amenable to suffixation with *-ster* or *-meister*, and of those that are, some are more satisfactory than others. Here we report on the results of a survey of nickname suffixation strategies and acceptability judgements of the resulting nicknames.