

UDK 811.111'366

Primljeno: 16. 02. 2019.

Pregledni rad

Review paper

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CLASS-CHANGING PREFIXES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

It is claimed that English prefixes do not generally change the class of a base to which they are attached. The aim of this paper is to probe the hedge word “generally” from the previous sentence, and establish which prefixes do change the class of their base and how productive they are. Thus, seven prefixes (*a-*, *be-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *en-*, *non-*, and *un-*) are described in terms of their origin, meaning, productivity and bases to which they can be attached.

Key words: word-formation; derivation; prefixes; word class change; English language

1. INTRODUCTION

Affixation is a very productive word-formation process in the English language, and it generally involves the use of two types of affixes – prefixes and suffixes. In English, suffixes usually change the class of a base to which they are attached, but prefixes generally do not do so.

Now, more often than not, any claim made when discussing linguistic issues involves the use of a hedge – hence the two tokens of the word *generally* and one token of the word *usually* used in the four claims made in the preceding paragraph. The first token of the word *generally* refers to the fact that there is a borderline case of infixation in English. Although there are no morphemes that qualify as infixes in English, expletives like *bloody* can be inserted into certain words, e.g. *Singa-bloody-pore*, *kanga-bloody-roo* (Plag 2003: 101). The word *usually* used in the third claim points to the case of suffixes like *-dom*, *-hood* or *-ship* (e.g. *king-dom*, *brother-hood*,

friend-ship) which do not change the class of the base (N + suffix = N), but do change the subclass of the nouns involved in the process from concrete countable to abstract uncountable (Bauer 1983: 220-1). And the second token of the word *generally* covers for the fact that there is a small set of class-changing prefixes in English, and the goal of this paper is to list those prefixes and give a concise overview of their properties. The scope of the paper does not allow an exhaustive treatment of the topic.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

First of all, it is necessary to define prefixes in the English language, and to give an overview of their properties. However, it is equally important to distinguish derivation from neo-classical compounding, or more precisely, to set prefixes apart from ICFs – *initial combining forms* (Bauer 1983: 214). These topic are dealt with in the next three sections, but not necessarily in the same order as listed above.

2.1. Definition of a prefix

The first step in defining a *prefix* is actually defining its hyperonym *affix*. All the authors consulted agree that an affix is a bound morpheme, i.e. it cannot stand on its own and has to be attached to another element (Adams 2001: 2; Carstairs-McCarthy 2002: 20; Katamba and Stonham 2006: 44; Plag 2003: 10). Since his definition aims to cover other languages and not just English, Bauer (1983: 17-18) defines affixes as “bound morphs which do NOT realize unanalysable lexemes.” By *realizations of unanalysable lexemes* he implies bound forms like *am-* in the Latin verb form *amo* “I love”. In other words, affixes do not constitute the lexical core of a word. Moreover, Matthews (1991: 131) insists that the form of an affix is constant although the element to which it is attached varies. However, this claim should come with a hedge since Carstairs-McCarthy (2002: 52) points out that the prefix *in-* has different allomorphs indicated by “variant spellings of *il-*, *ir-* and *im-*, as in *intangible*, *illegal*, *irresponsible* and *impossible*.” These variants were borrowed from Latin as such (Adams 2001: 46), but they are variants nevertheless.

A *prefix* is set apart from other affixes by the fact that it precedes the element to which it is attached – the element being a *root*, a *base*, or a *stem*.¹ Other affixes are: *infixes*, *suffixes*, *circumfixes* and *superfixes* (Trask 1993: 10). An *infix* is inserted into a discontinued root, a *suffix* follows the base, a *circumfix* or *ambifix* surrounds the base being a co-occurrence of a prefix and a suffix (a discontinued morph), and a *superfix* or *suprafix* is an affix whose morph consists of a distinction in stress or tone. Mel'čuk (2006: 299-300) gives the most detailed classification of affixation processes which he divides into four classes. He names the first class *confixation* in which “affixes do not interrupt roots and are not interrupted themselves,” and the class consists of prefixation, suffixation and interfixation. An *interfix* links two roots as in Bosnian compounds *žut-o-zelen* “yellow-green” and *grad-o-načelnik* “mayor” (lit. “town-chief”). The second and the third classes are *infixation* and *circumfixation* respectively. In the former a root is interrupted by an affix which is not interrupted; while in the latter it is the other way round. The fourth class is *transfixation* where both a root and an affix are interrupted by each other's material, e. g. in the Arabic word *q-a-t-a-l(+a)* “he has killed” consonants (CCC) constitute the root and vowels (VV) a *transfix*. Mel'čuk (2006: 301) treats *suprafixation* as a process separate from affixation due to its non-concatenative nature. However, for the English morphology only prefixes and suffixes are relevant – generally.

2.2. *Prefixes versus ICFs*

When considering concatenative word-formation processes a distinction is made between affixation and compounding. On one hand, affixation involves combining affixes (bound morphemes) with elements which carry the core meaning of a word and which are mostly free – a root, a base or a stem (Adams 2001: 2). Compounding, on the other hand involves combining at least two free elements “the first of which is either a root, a word or a phrase, the second of which is either a root or a word”

¹ A *root* is defined by Katamba and Stonham (2006: 42) as “the irreducible core of the word, with absolutely nothing else attached to it.” Bauer (1983: 20-21) defines a base as “any form to which affixes of any kind can be attached” and stem as a base for adding inflectional affixes, and Katamba and Stonham (2006: 46) agree with him. For Matthews (1991: 64) both a *root* and a *stem* are “form[s] that underlie ... at least one paradigm or partial paradigm” which again puts stems into the realm of inflectional morphology, and the only difference between a *root* and a *stem* is that the former is simple and the latter complex. The concept of a *stem* as defined by these authors is not as useful for English as it is for some other languages like Ancient Greek or Sanskrit where roots are expanded into stems before the addition of inflectional affixes, and therefore Plag (2003: 11) dismisses it from use in his work. However, in order to make use of it in the English morphology, Adams (2001: 2) defines a stem as a bound base as in *dent-al*, *hol-ism*, *amorph-ous*.

(Plag 2003: 135). However, it is not always easy to make a clear-cut distinction between the two since there is a grey area in-between. This area is occupied by *neo-classical compounds*, which do not actually qualify as compounds since they consist of *combining forms* (Bauer 1983: 39). These are “non-lexical roots” (Booij 2007: 30) of Greek or Latin origin which have a clearly identifiable meaning (e.g. *biblio-graphy*, *geno-cide*, *bio-logy*). But most importantly, *combining forms* can combine with each other to form new words. Neither affixes nor bound roots can do that (Plag 2003: 156). It would be awkward to analyse *theo-logy* as consisting of a prefix and a suffix without an intervening lexical root. Terminologically, these elements are identified as ICFs (*initial combining forms* like *astro-*, *electro-*, *geo-*, *hydro-*, etc.) and FCFs (*final combining forms* like *-cracy*, *-itis*, *-morph*, *-phobe*, etc.).

2.3. Properties of English Prefixes

Some general properties of prefixes are listed within this section to avoid their repetition when discussing individual prefixes. However, those properties are usually stated in relation to suffixes.

2.3.1. The Number of English Affixes

Generally, there are more suffixes than prefixes in the English language, although it is hard to give a precise number. Marchand (1969), whose approach is encyclopedic and historical, gives individual descriptions for 65 prefixes and 81 suffixes – 146 in total, the *Index of Word-Elements* in Adams (2001) lists 81 prefixes and 125 suffixes – 206 in total, and in their research performed on Cobuild corpus Hay and Baayen (2002) deal with 26 prefixes and 54 suffixes – 80 in total. However, Carstairs-McCarthy (2002: 71) says that “in English derivational morphology, suffixes heavily outnumber prefixes.” In the above mentioned numbers it is clear that prefixes are outnumbered, but not heavily. The answer to this discrepancy lies in the frequency of use which is higher for suffixes. So, in describing individual affixes Plag (2003: 86-101) deals with 41 suffixes and only 8 prefixes.

2.3.2. Prefixes and Prosody

Suffixes, especially the ones with initial vowels, tend to affect the prosodic structure of the base, and thus change the pronunciation of the resultant derivative. Prefixes

“have no effect on the stress patterns of their base words” since the base word stays intact as a prosodic unit (Plag 2003: 79). As a consequence of this property of prefixes, there is a possibility of *gapping* – coordination of two prefixed words with omission of one base as in *de- and recolonization* or *pre- and post-war* (Plag 2003: 84). Both Plag (2003: 85) and Bauer (1983: 124) agree that prefixes of Germanic origin (e.g. *a-*, *be-*, *en-*) do not take any stress, while other prefixes take some degree of secondary stress. Primary stress can be placed on a prefix for emphatic reasons, and apart from that Marchand (1969: 138-139) lists seven sets of circumstances under which some prefixes take primary stress. For example, the following prefixes always take primary stress: *ante-*, *anti-*, *counter-*, *fore-* and *step-*.

2.3.3. *Multiple Affixation*

In terms of multiple affixation, there are two points to consider – recursivity and combining prefixes or suffixes. English suffixes are very often combined, but they are not recursive. For Plag (2003: 134) “[r]ecursivity seems to be absent from [English] derivation” apart from marginal examples like *great-great-great-grandfather*, but Bauer (1983: 67-68) is not ready to dismiss it so easily in prefixation. He gives attested examples like *re-remake* or *meta-meta-theory*, but also gives an introspective account of declining acceptability of derivatives such as *re-remarry*, *re-repaint*, *re-reclimb*. Bauer (ibid.) does not put theoretical limitation to prefixation, but a practical one in terms of the listener’s processing abilities, and adds that “English appears to shows great reluctance in combining prefixes.”

2.3.4. *Right-Headedness in Affixation*

As stated in the introduction to this paper English suffixes easily change the class of a base to which they are attached, but prefixes generally do not do so. While explaining this claim Carstairs-McCarthy (2002: 71-72) draws a parallel between compounding and derivation. Namely, most English compounds are right-headed which means that the rightmost element will determine the syntactic properties of the whole compound (e.g. *green*_{Adj} + *house*_N = *greenhouse*_N). He extends this fact to derivation by showing that a suffix is the actual head of a derivative (e.g. *teach*_V + *-er*_N = *teacher*_N) and dismisses the problem of left-headed derivatives and compounds

on the account of their small numbers. Plag (2003: 180-184), however, treats this issue as a theoretical problem of morpheme-based morphology, because, apart from left-headed derivatives and compounds, “in English, most phrases are left-headed,” e.g. [_{VP}go [_{PP}to [_{NP}the station]]]. The issue of left- or right-headedness stays open as linguists put forth new and new propositions.

3. CLASSIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

There are different ways to classify English prefixes, and one of them is, of course, a division between class-changing or class-maintaining prefixes. However, Lyons (1977: 521) objects to the notion of class-maintaining affixation since the derivative will belong to the different subclass within the same lexical category of verbs, nouns or adjectives. For example, words *friendly* and *unfriendly* are both adjectives, but they do not belong to the same subclass since *friendly* can serve as a base for prefixation by *un-* and *unfriendly* cannot (e.g. **unfriendly*). In other words, for Lyons (ibid.), only recursive affixation (e.g. *meta-meta-theory*) is truly class-maintaining. However, in this paper, the terms *class-changing* and *class-maintaining* refer only to general lexical classes of words (e.g. *adjectives, nouns, verbs, etc.*), and not to their subclasses.

Other grounds for classification of prefixes relate to their semantic classes, origin, and bases to which they are attached. In the two following paragraphs semantic classes and origin of native prefixes are addressed. Bases to which class-changing prefixes are attached are discussed along with individual affixes.

In terms of their semantic classification, Plag (2003: 98-99) divides prefixes into four classes, or four plus one, where the extra class is the miscellanea meant for those prefixes that could not be classified otherwise. These are: (a) quantitative prefixes like *uni-*, *bi-*, *di-*, *multi-*, *poly-*, *semi-*, *hyper-*, etc. (e.g. *unification, bifurcation, ditransitive, multilateral, polysyllabic, semi-conscious, hyperactive*); (b) locative prefixes like *circum-*, *counter-*, *endo-*, *inter-*, *retro-*, *trans-*, etc. (e.g. *circumscribe, counterbalance, endocentric, intergalactic, retroflex, transmigrate*); (c) temporal prefixes like *ante-*, *pre-*, *fore-*, *post-*, *neo-*, etc. (e.g. *antedate, preconcert, foresee, postmodify, neoclassical*); (d) negative prefixes like *a-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *in-*, *non-*, *un-*, etc. (e.g. *asymmetrical, dethrone, disagree, inactive, non-commercial, unwrap*); and others like *mal-*, *mis-*, *pseudo-*, *vice-*, etc. (e.g. *malfunction, mistrail, pseudo-archaic, viceregal*). Adams (2001: 41-42) also recognizes four semantic classes of prefixes. Three of these

are the same as in Plag (2003: 98-99): quantitative, locative and negative; but instead of the temporal class, she introduces a reversative class. However, there is no clear-cut division between these classes since some prefixes belong to multiple classes. For example, the prefix *un-* is reversative in *unlock-ed*, and negative in *un-locked*;² and *dis-* is reversative in *disconnect*, but negative in *disloyal*. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1683-1691) group prefixes into two major categories with negatives and reversatives on one side, and prefixes of location in time and space on the other. The category of negatives and reversatives is further subdivided into sections on negation, reversal, removal, and opposition. Quirk et al. (1985: 1540-1546), in accordance with their attention to detail, classify prefixes into nine categories: negative prefixes, reversative or privative prefixes, pejorative prefixes, locative prefixes, prefixes of degree and size, prefixes of orientation and attitude, prefixes of time and order, number prefixes, and miscellaneous neo-classical prefixes. The last two are separated as neo-classical items.

Marchand (1969: 129) lists only six prefixes as being of native origin: *a-*, *be-*, *fore-*, *mid-*, *mis-*, and *un-*; while all others are mostly of Latin and Greek origin related to particles or quantifiers from those languages (Adams 2001: 41). Since prefixes *a-*, *be-*, and *un-* are class-changing prefixes, they will be dealt with in subsequent sections. Prefix *fore-* originates from a locative particle meaning “before”. In the Old English period (henceforth OE) it was attached to verbs as an inseparable temporal prefix and to nouns adjunctively (Marchand 1969: 166). Prefix *mid-* was an adjective which was “the first-word of compounds” in OE, and prefix *mis-* has dual origin – it was a prefix in OE that will later merge with the French prefix *mes-* of the same sense (Marchand 1969: 176).

3.1. *Class-Changing Prefixes*

This section describes individual class-changing prefixes, and it is based on descriptions and examples given in Adams (2001: 41-50), Bauer (1983: 217), Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1687-1691), Lieber (2005: 383-390, 390-403), Marchand (1969: 129-208), Minkova and Stockwell (2009: 101-105, 200-215), Plag (2003: 98-101) and Quirk et al. (1985: 1540-1546).

² Hyphenation added for distinctive emphasis.

3.1.1. Prefix *a-*

It is important to note that there are three homonymous prefixes *a-*. One of these is of Greek origin, and it is class-maintaining since it is added to adjectives to produce adjectives. It has two meanings the first being “not X”, where X stands for a base, with examples like *amoral*, *apolitical*, or *asymmetric*. The second meaning is “without / devoid of X” with examples like *atemporal* “timeless” or *achromatic* “without colour”.

Another *a-* is a reduced form of Latin *ad-* “to, toward” when placed before <sc>, <sp>, <st> as in *ascribe*, *aspire*, and *astringent*.

The third homonym is of interest to the topic of this paper. It is derived from OE *on* or *an* “on” and it is attached to adjectives, nouns and verbs to produce adjectives with meaning “in a state or position of X”. Quirk et al. (1985: 1546) point out that affix *a-* (along with *be-* and *en-*) mainly has class-changing function and thus “little discrete semantic power”. Its meaning is comparable to that of the progressive (e.g. *aglow* = *glowing*). Some of the examples are *ablaze*, *abroad*, *aside*, *asleep*, and *atop*. All the adjectives formed in this way are used exclusively in a predicative position as in examples (1) and (2).³

(1a) *Half of the block was the time we got down.*

(1b) *A dozen cars have been stolen and set **ablaze** in the past six weeks.*

(2a) *He'd been **asleep** in the backseat.*

(2b) *I've fallen **asleep** in a live show quite a few times.*

Many derivatives of this type have to do with maritime life like *adrift*, *awash*, *ashore*, *astern*, and *asea*. However, many of the derivatives of this type listed by Marchand (1969: 139-140) are not to be found in contemporary dictionaries of English. Bauer (1983: 217) says this affix is still productive with examples such as *aclutter*, *aglaze*, *asquish*, *aswivel*, and *awhir*, but 19th century was the era when its productivity peaked (Marchand 1969: 140). Adjective *ajar* is an interesting example of a derivative which is no longer transparent. Namely, *ajar* means “slightly open” and the base is the now obsolete *jar* which comes from *char* (OE *cerr*) “a turn, return”.

³ Examples (1a) and (2a) are taken from the COCA (The Corpus of Contemporary American English available at: <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>), and examples (1b and 2b) and the BNC (The British National Corpus available at: <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>).

3.1.2. Prefix *be-*

Prefix *be-* is the unstressed form of the particle *by*, and in was used as a verbal prefix in OE. Its meaning was locative “about, around”, but later on it lost its semantic distinctiveness. It is attached to adjectives, nouns and verbs to form transitive verbs. When added to verbs (e.g. *bedazzle*, *bestir*), there is no change of lexical class, but the intensification of meaning is achieved. With nouns there is a class-changing function (e.g. *bedew*, *befriend*, *bespatter*, *bewitch*), but there is also the intensification of meaning which usually has a pejorative effect. When this prefix is attached to nouns, it can be further combined with *-ed* to form adjectives with intensified meaning (e.g. *bewigged*, *bespectacled*, *befathered*, *beribboned*), and here the pejorative effect is even stronger carrying a shade of ridicule. This prefix is no longer productive.

It is interesting to note that due to changes in meaning, a number of verbs with this prefix has lost semantic connection with its unprefix base (e.g. *become*, *beget*, *befall*, *behold*, *belabour*). And some derivatives are no longer transparent since their unprefix counterparts have since become obsolete (e.g. *begin*, *believe*, *bequeath*, *betray*).

3.1.3. Prefix *de-*

English started borrowing Latinate words with the prefix *de-* in the 16th century (e.g. *depopulate*, *defecate*), but the pattern was formed much later. Namely, in the late 18th century, there were great numbers of verbs in French ending in *-iser* which acquired the prefix *de-*, and “English adopted the derivational pattern, [but] not words” (Marchand 1969: 153-154).

This prefix is attached to nouns and verbs to form verbs, so it has both the class-changing and class-maintaining functions respectively. When added to nouns, which are usually short and of native origin, two semantic patterns are discernable – privative and ablative, and when added to verbs, which are usually foreign and affixed, the meaning is usually reversative.

In denominal derivatives like *debug*, *deforest*, *degrease* or *deice* the meaning is *privative*⁴ expressing the notion of “remove X from ~” where tilde stands for an object from which something is removed. However, since the derivatives are verbs their meaning can be seen as causative expressing the notion of “cause to be without X”.

⁴ Trask (1993: 218) defines the term *privative* in relation to affixes as “expressing the notion ‘without’.”

Having these two meanings in mind, the overall meaning of this type of derivatives can be defined as negative causative. This type “most often denote[s] a technical or semi-technical process” (Adams 2001: 23).

In denominal derivatives like *deplane*, *derail* or *dethrone* the meaning is *ablative*⁵ expressing the notion of “remove ~ from X” where tilde stands for an entity being removed.

When attached to denominal verbs, usually ending in *-ise*, *-ify* and *-ate* (e.g. *deregister*, *demilitarize*, *declassify*, *desegregate*), the meaning is reversative expressing the notion of “undo X”. However, there are examples where this pattern is not so straightforward because to *decompose* does not mean “to undo the creative work of a musical composer” (Carstairs-McCarthy 2002: 54).

This prefix is still productively attached to denominal verbs, especially the ones ending in *-ise* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1689), and it is the only “productive verb-forming prefix” in English (Lieber 2005: 402). It is also productive with nouns.

This prefix is also involved in creation of parasynthetic⁶ formations such as *de-Stalinize*, *de-nazify* or *decaffeinate*, where the bases are unusual because they are unattested (e.g. **caffeinate*) or their status is somewhere between nonce words and (disused) neologisms.

3.1.4. Prefix *dis-*

The prefix *dis-* comes from French *des-* which was later Latinized to *dis-*, but in some cases [s] was lost leaving just *de-* in words such as *deface* and *defeat* (Marchand 1969: 158).

It is attached to adjectives, verbs and nouns, and there are several different patterns regarding semantic effects which depend on the base selected. Only with nouns does it have the class-changing effect, but not with all nouns.

- a) With lexicalized adjectives this prefix appears with the negative meaning of “not X” (e.g. *dishonest*, *disloyal*, *disproportional*, *dissimilar*).
- b) With foreign verbal bases the meaning of the prefix is generally reversative (e.g. *disassemble*, *disassociate*, *discharge*, *discontinue*, *disorientate*, *disqualify*).

⁵ *Ablative* denotes “a case form which typically indicates the source of movement” (Trask 1993: 2).

⁶ The term *parasyntesis* is usually defined as “a type of word formation in which a phrase is combined with an affix, as in *red-haired*” (Trask 1993: 198), but here it is used in a sense given in the Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary) – “the formation of words by adding a derivative ending and prefixing a particle (as in *denationalize*)”.

- c) With “some established verbs, chiefly with stative verb bases” (Adams 2001: 44) this prefix negates the verb in the same way clause negation does as exemplified in sentences (3) and (4)⁷ below. This is an uncommon situation since English verbs generally do not allow affixal negation. Examples include *disallow*, *disbelieve*, *dislike*, *disregard*, *disrespect*, etc.
- d) In some complex nouns, the order of affixation cannot be determined with a satisfying degree of certainty. Thus, it remains unclear whether the base for adding *dis-* was a noun or a verb as in *dis-organization* versus *disorganiz-ation* (Plag 2003: 100).
- e) With a small number of nouns the prefix conveys the meaning of “absence of X” or “faulty X” without changing their class as exemplified by *disanalogy*, *disfluency*, *disinformation* (Plag 2003: 100).
- f) With some nouns the prefix changes the class of the base to produce verbs with the meanings of “remove X from ~” (e.g. *dismast*, *dismember*) and “remove ~ from X” (e.g. *disbar*, *displace*). Some of the examples which fall into the latter category do so due to their metaphorical sense (e.g. *disgrace*, *dishonour*).

(3a) *Why did you **disobey** me and your uncle?*

(3b) *Paul **did not obey** their commands.*

(4a) *If you **dislike** the aroma, you have only wasted a tiny amount of essential oil.*

(4b) *If you **do not like** a certain food, do not eat it.*

This prefix is still productive, and some of the latest derivatives appearing at the Word Spy web page⁸ are *disconnectionists* (2013), *disingenuflect* (by blending *disingenuous* and *genuflect*, 2008), *disintermediation* (1989) and *disattention* (1988).

3.1.5. Prefix *en-*

Prefix *en-*, cognate with *in*, came to English via French loanwords during the Middle English period. It has an allomorph *em-* before /p/ and /b/ as in *empower* and *embank*. At first, it could be attached to verbal bases to form verbs (e.g. *enclose*), but later on it was attached only to nouns (e.g. *enthroned*) and some adjectives (e.g. *ennoble*) to produce transitive verbs.

⁷ Examples (3a) and (3b) are from the COCA and (4a) and (4b) from the BNC.

⁸ The web page is available at: <https://www.wordspy.com/>. The numbers in parentheses following the examples are the years of the earliest appearance of the word.

One of the meanings obtained by adding this prefix is defined by Carstairs-McCarthy (2002: 55) as “cause to become X” (e.g. *enslave*), and the other is defined as “cause to possess or enter X” (e.g. *encage*, *enrage*, *entomb*). Thus, both meanings are causative. The first type is no longer productive, while the other is “barely if at all productive” (Lieber 2005: 402).

A special case occurs when the bases are adjectives *bold* and *live*. Here, the prefix *en-* co-occurs with the suffix *-en* producing verbs *enbolder* and *enliven*. Usually, the suffix *-en* produces verbs on its own when attached to adjectives (e.g. *deepen*, *tighten*). This example of simultaneous affixation (*en-X-en*) constitutes the only “plausible candidate for a circumfix in English” (Carstairs-McCarthy 2002: 74). However, it also causes a theoretical problem for binary branching within tree diagrams.

3.1.6. Prefix *non-*

The prefix *non-* was widely used in the legal register of Latin, and consequently in Old French from which it came into English (Marchand 1969: 179).

Non- is a negative prefix attached to non-suffixed noun bases (e.g. *noncitizen*, *non-violence*), adjectives (e.g. *nondetachable*, *non-violent*), and open-class adverbs (e.g. *non-technically*). For all these bases it has a class-maintaining function. Only when attached to non-suffixed verbs (e.g. *non-stick*) does it have a class-changing function, which turns the verbs into adjectives (e.g. *non-crush*, *non-dazzle*, *non-iron*, *non-skid*, *non-slip*). Derivatives with this prefix very often stay hyphenated.

This prefix is productive. The latest formations recorded on the Word Spy web page are *non-ism* (1990) and *nontroversy* (by blending *non-* + *controversy*, 1998).

3.1.7. Prefix *un-*

The prefix *un-* is a negative prefix with the meaning “not” which is the same as in Old Greek *a-* or *an-* and Latin *in-*, and Marchand (1969: 201-204) classifies it as *un-fair type*. It is attached freely to adjectives (e.g. *unclear*, *unwise*) and participles (e.g. *unassuming*, *unexpected*) with the meaning “not X” or “the converse of X”. It can also be added to a small class of abstract nouns with the meaning “lack of X” (e.g. *unbelief*, *unease*, *untruth*). In all these cases it does not change the class of the base.

Another type of the *un-* prefix is the one Marchand (1969: 204-207) classifies as *untie type* which comes from OE *and-* and *ond-*, corresponding to German *ent-*. It is attached to two kinds of bases:

- a) When attached to verbs it produces verbs with the reversative meaning, and the examples are *unbolt*, *unbutton*, *undress*, *unlock*, *unpin*, etc. Due to reversative meaning, it can only be attached to the verbs whose action is resultative and can be undone.
- b) When attached to nouns, it produces verbs with the meaning of “remove or release from X” or “deprive of X”. The examples are *unearth*, *unsaddle*, *unhorse*, etc.

The problem in analyzing these two cases is in determining the class of the base. As it is observable from the listed examples, it is ambiguous whether the base is a noun or a verb due to the phenomenon of conversion of zero-derivation. The prefix *un-* is highly productive, but for the same reason of zero-derivation, it is hard to say whether the prefix *un-* is productive as a class-changing prefix or not.

4. CONCLUSION

The seven class-changing prefixes discussed in this paper can be grouped in different ways. However, in Table 1 they are grouped according to their productivity (the second column) with prefixes *a-*,⁹ *be-* and *en-* listed first as unproductive ones. Apart from productivity, three other pieces of information are given and analysed henceforth for each of the prefixes: a class-changing pattern,¹⁰ their meaning and some examples of the resulting derivatives.

⁹ Here, the reference is made to the prefix *a-* derived from OE *on* or *an*.

¹⁰ All the patterns which do not change the class of the base have been excluded from this table. Prefixes *be-* and *en-* also change some adjectives to verbs, but these are not discussed here since these subclasses are very small (e.g. *belittle*, *ennoble*).

Table 1 – WF patterns and meanings of class-changing prefixes in English

Prefix	Prod.	Pattern	Meaning	Examples
<i>a-</i>	Barely	N → Adj	“in a position of X”	<i>atop, ashore, asea</i>
		V → Adj	“in a state of X”	<i>ablaze, adrift, asleep</i>
<i>be-</i>	No	N → V	intensification	<i>bedew, befriend, bewitch</i>
<i>en-</i>	No	N → V	“cause to become X”	<i>enslave</i>
			“cause to possess/enter X”	<i>encage, enrage, entomb</i>
<i>de-</i>	Yes	N → V	“remove X from ~”	<i>debug, defrost, degrease</i>
			“remove ~ from X”	<i>deplane, derail, dethrone</i>
<i>dis-</i>	Yes	N → V	“remove ~ from X”	<i>disbar, displace</i>
<i>un-</i>	Yes	N(?) → V	“remove/release from X”	<i>unearth, unhorse, unsaddle</i>
			“deprive of X”	
<i>non-</i>	Yes	V → Adj	negative	<i>non-stick, non-slip</i>

The prefix *a-* has a locative meaning when attached to nouns, and when attached to verbs the meaning of the derivative corresponds to that of a corresponding progressive (e.g. *ablaze* = *blazing*). However, resulting adjectives from the both patterns are used exclusively in a predicative position, which can be seen as a limiting factor for productivity. All the examples listed in Table 1 for the prefix *be-* have the unprefixed counterparts with the same meaning, but formed by conversion (e.g. *friend*_V = *befriend*_V “to act as a friend”). However, prefix *be-* has an intensifying meaning and a possibility to express a pejorative meaning. A similar situation can be observed for the prefix *en-* where the verb *tomb* has the same meaning as the verb *entomb*, but the latter has a clear causative meaning. So, all the unproductive class-changing prefixes have some feature of meaning that cannot be achieved just by conversion.

These extra semantic features are even more pronounced with the four productive class-changing prefixes listed in Table 1. The prefix *de-* is classified as reversative, and the prefix *non-* as negative. These two display a higher productivity in the area of creating technical vocabulary (e.g. *defrost*, *non-slip*), which is nowadays very prominent. Prefixes *dis-* and *un-*¹¹ are classified both as negative and reversative.

¹¹ Although, *un-* is a very productive prefix, due to zero-derivation it is extremely difficult to determine what is the class of the base for the so-called *untie type* (e.g. *unbutton*←*button*, V/N). Thus, the conclusion about its productivity in regards to the class-changing function cannot be reached with a satisfying degree of certainty.

Again, these semantic features cannot be expressed by conversion, which is the most productive word-formation process in the English language in terms of changing the class of a base – and possibly at all.

It seems that class-changing prefixes still have a role to play in the English word-formation system, although the role appears to be a minor one. However, a more exhaustive research of this issue is required before definite conclusions can be drawn.

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ENGLISKI PREFIKSI KOJI MIJENJAJU LEKSIČKU KATEGORIJU SVOJE BAZE

Sažetak:

Često se nailazi na tvrdnju da engleski prefiksi općenito ne mijenjaju leksičku kategoriju baze na koju su dodani. Cilj ovoga rada je da sazna šta se krije iza riječi „općenito“ iz prethodne rečenice i da utvrdi koji prefiksi mijenjaju leksičku kategoriju riječi na koje su dodani te koliko su produktivni. Stoga se opisuje sedam prefiksa (*a-*, *be-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *en-*, *non-* i *un-*) i to po pitanju njihovog porijekla, značenja, produktivnosti kao i vrsta baza na koje mogu biti dodani.

Ključne riječi: tvorba riječi; derivacija; prefiksi; promjena leksičke kategorije; engleski jezik

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