



THE SEMANTICS OF NEGATIVE AFFIXES AND THEIR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to single out, describe, compare and find the possible ways of classification of English negative affixes. We will familiarize ourselves with English negative affixes, learn how they differ semantically from each other, which affixes are used with stems of different parts of speech and what parts of speech they form (there we can also see if these affixes are able to transform words of one part of speech into another), what their functions and peculiarities of usage are, and which affixes are more productive and widely used nowadays. It is very important to know as more affixes, as possible, because many English words are formed by combining prefixes and suffixes to base words.

Key words: negative affixes, classification, English language, borrowings, formal-semantic correspondence, analogue, model.

The system of English language is an open system. That means that it is constantly added by new words. According to the Oxford Dictionary, only 7,5% words in the vocabulary of English are borrowings [7]. The vast majority of words appear through changings in the lexical units preserved in the language system, trough the word-formation. Word-formation is the process of building up new words from words of the same root, and as a result of this there is a formal-semantic correspondence between derivative and derived words [4, 56].

It should be mentioned that there are certain patterns of word-formation in English. It is the circuit, sample, analogue, model, all that fix a rule of construction of derivative words, rule, which takes into account a type of derivative bases and word-building means and general semantics, formed as a result of their interaction, of the same words. One model can also correspond to different changes of meaning and be a source of confusion and misunderstanding for foreign learners. These patterns may be productive or not in different languages. It was noticed by many scholars long ago, that one derivative pattern can give almost infinite or, at least, significant number of derivatives, others are characterized by inability to free word-building.

There are several kinds of word-formation and different kinds of them are productive in different languages. The major ways of word-formation are compounding, affixation and conversion (also called zero-affixation). Affixation remains a very productive type of word-formation in English language. Affixation is the derivation of new words by adding affixes to them, which are suffixes and prefixes.

We can study a particular word from the point of morphological and derivational analyses. Dealing with morphological analysis we simply divide the word into constitute parts. When the word is divided into its ultimate constituencies the morphological analysis is completed. While doing derivational analysis we find how the word was constructed, which is

its derivative and what means have been used to build up the word [4, 59]. So, the process of affixation should be explored within derivational analysis, not morphological. But speaking of affixes in general we are interested in both morphological and derivational analyses.

There is a certain division of morphemes within the morphemic analysis. English grammarians usually point out two criteria, which are the bases of the morphemic structure. They are the positional criterion - the location of the morphemes with regard to each other, and the semantic (or functional) criterion - the contribution of the morphemes to the general meaning of the word. So according to the first there are root-morphemes and affixal morphemes, roots and affixes. The semantic difference between them is obvious: root morphemes have the concrete, "material" meaning, while affixes just specify the main meaning, or transform the meaning of the root [4, 59].

Finally, we can see that there are several types of word-building in English pointed out by many scholars and affixation is one of the most productive. There are certain patterns of word-formation and several types of morphemes. The latter can be studied from the point of view of two complementary analyses.

The first step in our studying English negative affixes is to give a definition of the affix itself. Here is a definition given in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. Affix is a letter or group of letters added to the beginning or end of a word to change its meaning [8]. This definition takes into account only prefixes and suffixes. But it does not cover all the kinds of affixes. It is important to keep in mind that there are also different types of affixes present in the English language as well:

- **circumfix** (one portion appears at the front of a stem, and the other at the rear, like in scattered);
- **simulfix** (changes a segment of a stem, like in mouse-mice);
- **suprafix** (changes a suprasegmental phoneme of a stem, for example, the change of an like in produce (noun)-produce (verb));
- **duflifix** (incorporates a reduplicated portion of a stem (may occur in front, at the rear, or within the stem), like in teeny-weeny) [9].

So we see that the definition should be wider. So, if we also take into account that the morphemes are generally divided into root- and affixal morphemes, the definition will be the following: **affix** is a morpheme that is attached to the stem to form a new word with another meaning.

It was written much about semantics of an affix. There are heated debates in the linguistic literature, whether the affix has meaning in general, and if yes, what type of meaning. There are different points of view, frequently opposite, which, however, can be reduced to several basic directions:

- 1) The affix has no independent meaning; it only forms the external side of a word;
- 2) The affix carries out basically only transporting function, translating a basis from one lexical and grammatical class in another, and lexically "is empty";
- 3) The affix can be characterized by presence of a various sort of meanings: one affixes express a wide and various circle of lexical meanings, others - only grammatic meanings [3, 138].

It is also important to notice that "affixes specify or transform the meaning of the root. Affixal specification may be of two kinds: of lexical or grammatical character. So, according to



the semantic criterion affixes are further subdivided into lexical, or word-building (derivational) affixes, which together with the root constitute the stem of the word, and grammatical, or word-changing affixes, expressing different morphological categories, such as number, case, tense and others. With the help of lexical affixes new words are derived or built; with the help of grammatical affixes the form of the word is changed [2, 57]. One of our further aims will be to study whether English negative affixes are lexical or grammatical or they can be of both types.

On this stage of the analyses rises the question of the criterion for referring affixes to negative and what affixes can be called negative. For the answer it is better to look up the word "negative" in the dictionary first. So, the Longman dictionary gives the following definition:

- negative: 1) a: refusing, doubting, or disapproving; saying or meaning 'no',
b: containing one of the words 'no', 'not', 'nothing', 'never' etc.
2) without any active, useful or helping qualities; not constructive
3) showing the lack of what was hoped for or expected [6].

From the present definition we see that the first meaning of these words is better applicable to affixes, and this meaning should be the criteria for figuring out negative affixes.

Our next task is to see, which affixes are considered to be negative. According to the previous statement they are the following: a-, ant(i)-, dis-, dys-, in-, mal-, mis-, non-, un- [9]. From this list we can see, that they are all prefixes. So arises the question, is the negative function in English word-building performed only by prefixes. If we consult other sources we see that there is one suffix changing the meaning of the word to the opposite: -less (motionless) [3, 137]. And we also add it to this list. As for the prefixes, de- can also carry the idea of oppositeness, and il-, im- and ir- must be added too, as they are the allomorphs of in-. So let us see what their meanings are.

So if we consult Longman Dictionary of English Language and culture, the result will be the following.

a-: (showing an opposite or absence of something) not; without: amoral (=not moral).

anti-: 1) apposed to; against: antinuclear (opposing the use of atomic weapons and power).

2) opposite of: an anticlimax (an unexciting ending of the expected climax).

contra-: opposite (plants is contradiction to animals)

de-: (in verbs and nouns) (showing an opposite): a depopulated area (which all or most of the population has left).

dis-: (showing an opposite or negative): I disapprove (=do not approve).

il-: **illogical (=not logical).**

im-: immobilize

in-: (especially in adjectives and nouns) (showing a negative, an apposite, or a lack) not: insensible.

ir-: not: irregular (=not regular).

mal-: bad or badly: a malformed (=wrongly shaped) limb.

mis-: 1) bad or badly: misfortune;

2) wrong or wrongly: a miscalculation;

3) (showing an opposite or the lack of something): I mistrust (=do not trust) him.

non-: (especially in adjectives and nouns) (showing a negative) not: a non-smoker (someone who does not smoke);



un-: 1) (especially in adjectives and adverbs) showing a negative, a lack, or an opposite) not: unfair;

2) (especially in verbs) (showing an opposite): undress (take one's clothes off);

less (in adjectives): 1) without a ---: a childless couple (= who have no children); 2) that never ---s or can not be ---ed: helpless (= can not be helped) [6]

For the prefixes *il-*, *im-*, *ir-* there are no definitions in the dictionary, as they all refer to the suffix *in-*. The aspect of their difference is explained by allo-morphemic theory.

When studying morphemes, we should distinguish morphemes as generalized lingual units from their concrete manifestations, or variants in specific textual environments; variants of morphemes are called *allo-morphs*. The allo-morphemic theory distinguishes morphemes according to their concrete realization. In the study of morphemes it was developed in Descriptive Linguistic by means of distributional analysis. There are three types of distribution then: contrastive distribution, non-contrastive distribution and complementary distribution. Contrastive distribution means that morphs express different meanings in identical environments, e.g.: He starteded laughing - He startss laughing. The morphs are said to be in non-contrastive distribution if they express identical meaning in identical environments; such morphs constitute 'free variants' of the same morpheme, e.g.: learned - learnt. The morphs are in complementary distribution when they express identical meanings in different environments, e.g.: He started laughing - He stopped laughing; such morphs constitute variants, or allo-morphs of the same morpheme [4, 60-61].

Allo-morphemic theory plays an important role in the descriptive analysis of negative affixes. One of the most active negative affixes is *in-*. Its allomorphs are *il-*, *im-*, *ir-*. That means that they carry on the same meaning, but they are attached to different stems. It can be a great problem for English learners, therefore it is important to clarify the rules of allo-morphemic affixes. The *in-* changes or is assimilated to **il-** if the stem begins with *l*, as in *illuminate*; to **im-** before *b*, as in *imbibe*, before *m*, as in *immediate*, before *p*, as with *implant*; and to **ir-** before *r*, as in *irrigate*. So the distribution of the allo-morphs concerned is complementary. It is quite reasonable to give the examples to these affixes and the definitions of these words given in the dictionary.

atypical: not typical; different from what is usual: Her reaction to the drug was atypical.

antiaircraft: directed against enemy aircraft: antiaircraft missiles.

contraindication: a physical sign or condition that makes it inadvisable to take or continue taking a medicine: High blood pressure is a contraindication for this drug.

destabilize: to make less firm or steady, especially politically: a deliberate attempt to destabilize the economy of a rival country.

disclaim: to state that one does not have or accept; to deny: He disclaimed all responsibility for the accident.

illiterate: who has not learnt to read or write: (fig.) an illiterate note.

immodest: showing or tending to express a high opinion of oneself and oneself's abilities, perhaps higher than is really deserved; not modest: immodest behaviour.

inaction: lack of action or activity; quality or state of doing nothing.

irrational: not using reason; against reasonable behavior: After taking the drug she became quite irrational.

miscount: to count wrongly: The teacher miscounted the number of boys.

nonresident: a person not living in a certain place: Are nonresidents entitled to vote?

unannounced: having given no sign of being present; appear unexpectedly: He burst into doctor's room quite unannounced and started shouting at her.

countless: very many; too many to be counted: countless reasons against it. [6]

Since we have even more examples of words with the negative affixes, it is more possible to apply the definitions of the affixes to the definitions of the words with these affixes. It is becoming clear then that the meanings of the affixes given in the dictionary are quite general. It was stated above that affix has no independent meaning, so only when attached to words, affixes acquire a more specific meaning in each case. The reason for it is that affix is not an independent unit; therefore its meaning taken separately can be stated only generally.

To make the analysis more complete we should consult at least one other dictionary. So if it is Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, the result will be the following.

a-: (in nouns, adjectives and adverbs) not; without: amoral (=not moral): atheists.

anti-: 1 apposed to; against: anti-tank weapons 2 the opposite of: an anti-hero.

contra-: (in nouns, verbs and adjectives) against; opposite : contraflow.

de-: (in verbs and related nouns, adjectives and adverbs): the opposite of: decentralization.

dis-: (in adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs): not; the opposite of: dishonest

il-suffix=in.

im-=-in.

in-: (also il- im- ir-)(in adjectives, adverbs and nouns): not; the opposite of: infinite

ir-=-in.

mal-: (in nouns, verbs and adjectives): bad or badly; not correct or correctly: malpractice.

mis-: (in verbs and nouns) bad or wrong; badly or wrongly.

non-: (in nouns, adjectives and adverbs): not: nonsense.

un-: 1(in adjectives, adverbs and nouns): not; the opposite of: unable 2 (in verbs that describe the opposite of a process): unlock.

less-: (in adjectives): 1) without: treeless; 2) not doing; not affected by: tireless. [7]

Such affixes like mys- and nega-, which are present in the list of negative affixes, are not present in both Longman and Oxford dictionaries, as well as words with them, so we can make a suggestion that they are not productive nowadays, that is no words are built with it. But there are found some words beginning with dys-, like dysfunctional (=not working in a satisfactory or successful way), or dyslexia (=a slight disorder of the brain that causes difficulty in reading and spelling, for example, but does not affect intelligence). Therefore, it should be included in the list of negative affixes to make it more complete. It is obvious, that the prefix dys- really exists and has approximately the same meaning as the prefix dis-.

Analyzing the meanings given by both dictionaries we can make a conclusion that they just slightly differ in meanings in different dictionaries (for example, contra- in Longman Dictionary means "opposite", while Oxford Dictionary gives a wider definition - "against; opposite", and like), and according to the examples the meanings given there reflect the additional meaning, which they bring to the derivative word. All the negative affixes possess the meaning of either opposition or lack of something that also carries the idea of negation. The Oxford dictionary marks the word class of the word the affix belongs to, what is not always done in Longman dictionary. It is very useful for our further classificational analysis.

But it is known that some words can acquire several negative affixes and new words can seem semantically similar to language learners. It is a rude mistake to misuse the affixes. So on this stage of analysis appears a question, why some words are attached with a certain

negative affix and others are attached with others. And it is also very important to find out how not to mix up some affixes with very similar meanings. The Longman dictionary contains an article comparing prefixes un-, in- and non-, which look very much alike at the first sight. The difference between them is the degree to which they suggest the idea of the opposite rather than negative. Non- is usually just negative (for example, nonalcoholic drinks contain no alcohol), but un- is often used to suggest an opposite quality. Compare: He is applied for a nonscientific job (=not connected with science) in the Civil Service. | It was very unscientific (=showing too little attention to scientific principles) not to measure your results. Of the three prefixes (un-, in-, non-), in- tends most often to suggest opposite qualities. Compare: their inhuman (=very cruel) treatment of political prisoners | The archeologists discovered both human and non-human bones. This explanation is a great help for language learners and also for the practical purposes of our work. [6]

So, we are done with the comparative and classificational analysis. In this work we, first, managed to study different sources and to make one complete list of negative affixes. We found out that all affixes can be studied from two criteria: morphological and derivational. These two criteria were very useful in the further classificational analyses. We also studied one of the morphemic classifications and stated the place of affixes there. There are different points of view on the semantics of affixes, but most scholars agree, that they have a kind of general, additional meaning. So, sticking to this opinion, we gave the meanings of the negative affixes from different dictionaries, compared them, and observed how they are expressed in different contexts..

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