

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Semantic Transformation of Units Formed by Prefixation In Uzbek And English

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Abstract

The article compares the semantic transformations that a base undergoes when a prefix is attached to it in Uzbek and in English. Five types of transformation are distinguished: negation and privation, reversal, intensification and attenuation, spatial and temporal reorientation, and evaluative reinterpretation. Each type is examined in both languages, and the comparison shows that the inventory of transformations is largely shared while the means of expressing them differ systematically. English possesses a rich inherited and Latinate prefix system in which several formatives may compete for the same semantic slot, as with un-, in-, non- and dis-; Uzbek expresses the same meanings partly by the borrowed prefixes be-, no- and anti- and partly by the suffix -siz and by analytic constructions, so that prefixation and suffixation stand in complementary distribution. The article also examines lexicalisation, in which the meaning of a prefixal formation ceases to be derivable from its components, and shows that lexicalisation proceeds faster in the older Iranian layer of Uzbek prefixation than in the recent international layer.

KEY WORDS

Prefixation, semantic transformation, negation, privation, intensification, lexicalisation, contrastive analysis, Uzbek language, English language, compositionality.

INTRODUCTION

Prefixation is usually described as a word-formation process that leaves the grammatical class of the base unchanged and modifies only its meaning. This description is broadly accurate for both English and Uzbek, and it makes prefixation a particularly convenient object for semantic study, since the effect of the operation can be observed without the interference of categorial change. The modification, however, is not of a single kind. When a prefix is attached, the resulting unit may deny the property expressed by the base, reverse the action it denotes, increase or reduce its degree, relocate it in space or time, or evaluate it, and these operations differ from one another in their logical structure and in their consequences for the compatibility of the derived word with

its context [1].

Comparison of the two languages is instructive precisely because their structural types differ. English is a language with a large inherited Germanic prefix inventory supplemented by an even larger Latinate one, in which a single semantic slot is often occupied by several competing formatives whose distribution is determined by the etymology and the phonological shape of the base: the negation of an adjective may be expressed by un-, in- with its allomorphs, non- or dis-, and the choice among them is largely lexically fixed [2]. Uzbek, an agglutinative language of the Turkic type, has no inherited prefixes at all and expresses the same range of meanings by a combination of borrowed prefixes from Iranian

and international sources, native suffixes, and analytic constructions. The result is that a semantic category realised by a single technique in English may be distributed across two techniques in Uzbek.

The aim of the article is to establish and compare the types of semantic transformation produced by prefixation in Uzbek and English. The tasks are to classify the transformations, to describe the formal means available for each in the two languages, to determine where the two systems converge and where they diverge, and to examine the process of lexicalisation by which a prefixal formation loses its compositional meaning. The material consists of prefixal formations from dictionaries and contemporary texts of both languages; the methods applied are componential analysis, contrastive analysis and the analysis of derivational paradigms.

METHOD

The first and most productive type of transformation is negation together with the closely related operation of privation. Logically these are distinct: negation denies that the base predicate holds of the referent, whereas privation asserts the absence of an entity that the referent might be expected to possess. English expresses negation chiefly by *un-* and *in-*, as in *unhappy*, *unclear*, *incorrect* and *impossible*, and by the contradictory *non-*, as in *non-standard* and *non-verbal*; privation is expressed less by prefixation than by the suffix *-less*, as in *powerless* and *homeless*. The distinction between contrary and contradictory negation is systematically marked: *unhappy* asserts the opposite quality, whereas *not happy* merely denies the quality, and *non-* formations behave like the latter, which is why they are preferred in technical and legal registers [3]. Uzbek reproduces this distinction with different means: *no-* and *be-* express contrary negation in *noaniq*, *nohaq*, *noto'g'ri* and *beadab*, whereas privation is expressed by the native suffix *-siz*, as in *kuchsiz*, *uysiz* and *aqlsiz*.

The complementary distribution of *no-* and *-siz* in Uzbek is worth examining in detail, because it shows how a borrowed prefixal technique is accommodated within a suffixing system. The two elements are not free variants: *-siz* attaches without restriction to native Turkic stems, while *no-* and *be-* are preferred with stems of Iranian, Arabic and international origin, so that *kuchsiz* and *nostandard* are both normal while the reverse combinations are marked or impossible. Where both are admissible, a semantic difference appears: the

suffixal formation tends to denote the simple absence of a property, whereas the prefixal one tends to denote its defective presence, so that a *besamar* undertaking is one that has failed to produce a result rather than one that has no result at all. The borrowed prefix has thus not displaced the native suffix but has occupied a semantic and etymological niche beside it, and the two form a single functional system.

The second type of transformation is reversal, which differs from negation in applying to actions rather than to properties: the derived verb denotes the undoing of the action denoted by the base. English marks this operation clearly by *un-* and *dis-* with verbal bases, as in *untie*, *undo*, *unpack*, *disconnect* and *disassemble*, and the resulting formations are transparent and productive, so that new verbs of this type are coined freely in technical registers. The prefix *de-* performs the same function with Latinate bases, as in *decode*, *decentralise* and *demilitarise*. Uzbek has no native means of expressing reversal by prefixation and uses instead either a lexical opposite, as *bog'lamoq* against *ychmoq*, or an analytic construction, or, in international terminology, the borrowed prefix itself, as in *dekodlash*, *demontaj* and *detsentralizatsiya*. Reversal is therefore the point at which the two systems diverge most sharply: it is a fully grammaticalised operation in English and a lexical or borrowed one in Uzbek.

The third type is intensification and its counterpart attenuation, that is, the increase or reduction of the degree of the property or quantity expressed by the base. English expresses intensification by *over-*, *super-*, *hyper-*, *ultra-* and *arch-*, as in *overproduction*, *supermarket*, *hypersensitive* and *ultramodern*, and attenuation by *under-*, *sub-* and *semi-*, as in *underestimate*, *substandard* and *semi-official*. Uzbek possesses in the Iranian layer a genuine intensifying prefix *ser-*, as in *serunum*, *sersuv*, *sershovqin* and *serqatnov*, and an attenuating *kam-*, as in *kamquvvat*, *kamsuv* and *kamgap*, and these are among the few prefixal formatives of the language that remain productive with native stems. Alongside them the international formatives *super-*, *giper-*, *ultra-*, *mikro-* and *makro-* have been adopted, and their distribution is terminological rather than stylistic: *giper-* and *gipo-* belong to medical vocabulary, *makro-* and *mikro-* to economic and physical vocabulary [4].

The fourth type is spatial and temporal reorientation, in which the prefix locates the referent of the base relative to some point in space, time or a conceptual sequence. English is rich in prefixes of this type, including *pre-*, *post-*, *ante-*, *fore-*,

inter-, intra-, trans-, sub-, super- in its spatial sense and circum-, as in prewar, postgraduate, foresee, international, transcontinental and subterranean. The semantic contribution of these prefixes is more concrete than that of the negative ones, and their formations are correspondingly less liable to lexicalisation. Uzbek expresses the same relations predominantly by postpositions and case forms, which is the expected pattern for a language with postpositional syntax, and admits the corresponding prefixes only within borrowed terminology, as in postsovet, transmilliy, interfaol and submodul. This is a systematic asymmetry: the languages agree in the semantic categories they encode and differ in whether the encoding is prefixal or postpositional [5].

The fifth type is evaluative reinterpretation, in which the prefix does not alter the descriptive content of the base but assigns to it a positive or, far more frequently, a negative evaluation. English employs mis-, mal-, pseudo- and quasi- in this function, as in misinterpret, malfunction, pseudo-scientific and quasi-legal, and the evaluative component is part of the conventional meaning rather than a contextual implication. Uzbek uses the corresponding borrowed formatives psevd- and kvazi- in scholarly registers, as in psevdoilmiy and kvazihuquqiy, but these remain restricted to borrowed bases and are stylistically marked. In non-scholarly registers the same evaluation is conveyed lexically, by the adjective soxta or by a corresponding modifier, which again illustrates the general pattern: where English grammaticalises the operation as a prefix, Uzbek either borrows the prefix into a narrow terminological domain or expresses the meaning by a free word.

Across all five types the semantic contribution of a prefix is expected to be compositional, that is, the meaning of the derived word should be computable from the meaning of the prefix and the meaning of the base. In practice compositionality is a matter of degree, and many established prefixal formations have undergone lexicalisation, acquiring a conventional meaning narrower or simply different from the compositional one. In English, understand has no synchronic connection with either under or stand; withdraw and overlook are only partly analysable; and inflammable famously means the opposite of what its prefix would suggest to a naive analysis [6]. In Uzbek the same process is observable in the Iranian layer: bebaho does not mean lacking a price but priceless in the evaluative sense, behuda has acquired the specialised sense of futile, and bemalol has moved from its

compositional meaning to the discourse sense of freely or without difficulty.

The comparison of lexicalisation rates in the two layers of Uzbek prefixation is instructive. The Iranian formatives entered the language many centuries ago, and a substantial proportion of the formations built with them are lexicalised to some degree, which is precisely what accounts for their appearance in dictionaries as unanalysed lexical entries and for the traditional reluctance of grammarians to treat them as products of a living word-formation process. The international formatives, by contrast, have entered recently and their formations remain almost fully compositional: mikroqarz, kiberxavfsizlik and ekomahsulot mean exactly what their components predict. Lexicalisation is therefore a function of time and frequency rather than of the formative itself, and the recent layer may be expected to develop idiomatic formations as it ages, in the same way as the older one has done [7].

A final observation concerns the relation between semantic transformation and the productivity of a formative. The five types are not equally productive in either language, and the ranking differs between them. In English the most productive types are negation and reversal, both of which generate new formations freely in technical and administrative registers. In Uzbek the most productive types are intensification, through ser- and the international formatives, and evaluative or domain-specific modification through anti-, eko-, kiber- and mikro-, while reversal remains unproductive as a prefixal operation. This difference has a straightforward explanation: the operations that Uzbek performs productively by prefixation are those for which the language possessed no established suffixal or analytic means, whereas those already served by suffixation or by postpositions have not been transferred to the prefixal technique [8].

The five types of transformation are not independent of one another, and several of them interact within a single formation. Negation and evaluation frequently coincide, since denying a positive property implies a negative evaluation, and this is why nostandart is rarely neutral in Uzbek and non-standard is rarely neutral in English despite the descriptive character of the formatives. Intensification interacts with evaluation in the opposite direction, since an excess is normally evaluated negatively when the base denotes something undesirable and positively when it denotes something desirable, so that serunum is favourable while sershovqin is not, and the evaluation is contributed by the

base rather than by the formative. Spatial reorientation interacts with temporal reorientation through the familiar metaphorical extension by which spatial relations are used to express temporal ones, which accounts for the double reading of English pre- and post- and for the exclusively temporal use of the borrowed post- in Uzbek postsovet. These interactions show that the classification proposed above is a classification of the operations, not of the formatives: a single formative may perform more than one operation depending on the base to which it attaches [9].

The consequences of these observations for the description and teaching of the two languages are direct. A learner of English who has been taught that un- negates will produce impossible and illegal, because the rule is stated without the etymological restriction that assigns Latinate bases to in-; the rule must therefore be taught together with its distributional conditions, which are lexical rather than semantic. A learner of Uzbek faces the mirror-image difficulty: the semantic categories are familiar from English, but their realisation is divided between a prefix and a suffix, and the learner must acquire the etymological criterion that determines whether no- or -siz is appropriate. Contrastive description is of practical value here precisely because the semantic inventory is shared: the learner does not need to acquire new concepts, only new mappings from concepts to forms. This is the general finding of contrastive work on derivational morphology, in which the difficulty is regularly located in the distribution of formatives rather than in their meanings [10].

A separate question is whether the semantic transformation performed by a prefix is the same when the formation is borrowed as a whole and when it is built within the receiving language. In borrowed formations the transformation is not performed by the speaker at all: antibiotik and disfunksiya entered Uzbek as unanalysed units, and their meaning was learned directly rather than computed from the components. In formations built within Uzbek the transformation is performed each time the word is produced or understood, and it is only in these that the semantic contribution of the formative can be observed operating. The distinction matters for the description of productivity, because a formative attested in many borrowed words but in no domestic formations has not in fact been acquired as a semantic operator, however frequent it may be in the lexicon. On this criterion anti-, mikro-, eko- and kiber- are genuine operators in Uzbek, since they produce new formations on Uzbek bases,

whereas arxi-, dez- and kvazi- remain elements of borrowed vocabulary that speakers recognise but do not use to derive.

The same criterion applied to English yields a different picture, and the difference is again a consequence of contact history. English borrowed its Latinate prefixes over several centuries and in sufficient quantity for every one of them to become a productive operator, so that pre-, post-, inter-, sub- and anti- combine freely with native Germanic bases as well as with Latinate ones, as preheat, postwar, interlock and anti-theft show. The Germanic prefixes, by contrast, have partly lost productivity in the opposite direction: for- in forbid and forget and with- in withstand and withhold are no longer available for new formations and survive only in lexicalised items. English thus illustrates both possible outcomes of the process that Uzbek is currently undergoing, a borrowed formative becoming fully productive and an inherited one ceasing to be so, and the comparison suggests that the productivity of a formative depends on the size and coherence of the series it belongs to rather than on its origin.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of Uzbek and English prefixation shows that the inventory of semantic transformations is largely shared between the two languages while the formal means of realising them differ systematically. Five types have been distinguished: negation and privation, reversal, intensification and attenuation, spatial and temporal reorientation, and evaluative reinterpretation. English realises all five by prefixation, drawing on both its Germanic and its Latinate inventories, and frequently offers several competing formatives for a single semantic slot. Uzbek realises them by a division of labour between borrowed prefixes, native suffixes and analytic constructions.

The clearest instances of this division of labour are the complementary distribution of the prefix no- and the suffix -siz in the expression of negation and privation, in which the etymology of the base determines the choice and a semantic difference has developed between defective presence and simple absence; and the expression of spatial and temporal relations, which English encodes prefixally and Uzbek encodes by postpositions, admitting prefixes such as post- and trans- only within borrowed terminology. Reversal is the point of sharpest divergence, being a fully productive prefixal operation in English and a lexical or borrowed one in Uzbek.

Lexicalisation affects both languages but proceeds at different

rates in the two layers of Uzbek prefixation. The Iranian formations built with be- and no- have accumulated idiomatic meanings over centuries, which explains why grammarians have treated them as lexical items rather than as derivational products; the international formations built with mikro-, kiber- and eko- remain almost fully compositional because they are recent. The recent layer may be expected to develop idiomatic meanings as it ages. The productivity of each transformation type in Uzbek is inversely related to the availability of an established suffixal or analytic alternative, which suggests that prefixation is being integrated into the language not as a rival to suffixation but as a means of filling the gaps that suffixation leaves.

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