

CHAPTER
SIX

THE SEMANTICS OF PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES IN ENGLISH

Affixes

Affixation is the addition of a prefix or a suffix to a word for the purpose of making another word (laugh – laugher, scholar – scholarship, rich – enrich) or another form of the same word (nice – nicer , boy – boys)

Prefixes

-un

-im

-ir

-anti

Suffixes

-ion

-ment

-less



In the case of affixation, the change usually takes place at three levels simultaneously:

At the level of morphology

At the level of syntax

At the level of semantics



In the case of (**rich – enrich**), a prefix (**en-**) is added to the base word (**rich**). This is done on the level of **morphology**.

The **adjective** (**rich**) is changed into a **verb** (**enrich**). This is done on the level of **syntax**.

The meaning of a quality indicated by the adjective (**rich**) is changed into the meaning of an action indicated by the verb (**enrich**).



R I C H



ENRICH

In some cases, a change can be noticed at the level of phonology as well, as in the case of words like (**sign – signature**) and (**public – publicity**).

It can be said, therefore, that affixation is **not exclusively a morphological phenomenon; it has its important implications for other branches of linguistics as well.**

The aim of this chapter is to highlight some of the semantic implications of affixation.

POLYSEMIC PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

Polysemic words are words which have two or more different but related meanings.

Just as there are polysemic words, there are polysemic prefixes and suffixes in English.

There are prefixes and suffixes in English which have two or more distinct but related meanings.

Affixal polysemy is the tendency for affixes to have several closely related meanings.

Examples of polysemic prefixes:

(bi-): meanings:

(a): twice in one period:

(bi-annual): twice in a year

(bi-monthly): twice in a month

(b): once in a period of two:

(biennial): once in two years

(bicentennial): once in two hundred years

(c): having two:

(bilingual): having two languages

(bilateral): having two sides

bimonthly (adj)
• happening every **two** months



biweekly (adj)
• happening every **two** weeks



biennial (adj)
• happening every **two** years



bilingual (adj)
• able to speak **two** different languages



^(a)
/baɪˈlætərəl/ - [bi·lat·er·al]
bilateral
Having two sides; arranged upon two sides; affecting two sides or two parties.

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(mega-) polysemic meanings:

(a): a prefix that denotes something big, large, or great:

(megalith): A large stone monument or structure.

(megaphone): A cone-shaped device used to amplify sound.

(megadeal): A very large business deal or transaction.

(megaflood): A catastrophic flood results from the sudden release of a large amount of water.



(b): one million

(megabyte): A unit of digital information that equals one million bytes.

(megawatt): A unit of power that equals one million watts.

(megacycle): a unit of frequency, equal to one million cycles per second.

(megaton): having the force of one million tons of TNT.

CALCULATING POWER

megawatt = 1,000,000 W

adjective
/'megə,bart/ - [meg·a·byte]

megabyte

(Computers) one million bytes; unit of computer data storage capacity equal to 1,048,576 bytes (also mega byte)

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noun
/'megə,tən/ - [meg·a·ton]

megaton

one million tons, explosive force equal to a million tons of TNT (especially referring to an atom or hydrogen bomb)

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(un-) polysemic meanings:

(a): not (in adjectives, adverbs and nouns):

**(unhappy), (unfair), (unable), (unafraid), (unaware),
(uncomfortable), (unfairly), (unfairness), (unemployment)**

(b): do the reverse of (in verbs that describe the opposite of a process):

(undress), (untie), (unwrap), (unfold), (unlock), (undo)

Examples of polysemic suffixes

(-ery):

(a): art of: (**cookery**), (**pottery**), (**archery**)

(b): place of action: (**bakery**), (**fishery**), (**refinery**)

(c): form of behavior: (**rivalry**), (**snobbery**), (**trickery**)

(-ette):

(a): diminutive of: (**kitchenette**), (**novelette**), (**cigarette**)

(b): imitation of: (**leatherette**)



(-ful):

(a): full of: (peaceful), (colourful), (powerful), (painful), (beautiful)

(b): amount that fills: (mouthful), (handful), (spoonful)

(-ish):

(a): resembling {used to form adjectives that say what a person, thing, or action is like}: (childish), (boyish), (foolish)

(b): near to / about {used to form adjectives to give the meaning to some degree; fairly}: (greenish), (twentyish), (reddish)

HOMONYMOUS PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

Homonyms are words having the same spelling and / or the same pronunciation but two or more different and unrelated meanings.

This concept of the homonymy of words can be extended to prefixes and suffixes as well because **there are prefixes and suffixes in English which have two or more unrelated meanings.**

Examples of homonymous prefixes

(a-):

(a): not / without: (**amoral**), (**atheistic**), (**asymmetrical**)

(b): in the state of: (**asleep**), (**afloat**), (**alive**), (**ablaze**)

(extra-):

(a): outside; beyond: (**extracurricular**), (**extrajudicial**),
(**extra-constitutional**)

(b): very or more than normal (informal): (**extra-large**),
(**extra-strong**), (**extra-special**), (**extra-thin**)

Examples of homonymous suffixes

(-er):

(a): doer of an action: (player), (lawyer), (employer), (teacher)

(b): comparative degree: (nicer), (harder), (smaller), (bigger)

(-ly):

(a): having the qualities of: (scholarly), (brotherly), (fatherly)

(b): every: (hourly), (weekly), (daily), (annually), (monthly)

(-y):

(a): adjectival meaning {consisting of; filled with; characterized by}:

(dusty), (sunny), (sandy), (dirty), (healthy)

(b): familiarity: (daddy), (granny), (doggy)

Thank
you

