



SEMANTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE SELECTED ENGLISH SUFFIXES

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ABSTRACT:

Evolution contributes significantly in every aspect of life, especially human life. Natural languages which are an indispensable part of human species cannot be barred from the evolutionary processes. Actually, language is like a living species. It comes into existence, grows and extinguishes in the course of time. It survives till its last user exists. After its inception as system of social communication, language undergoes changes at every point in its peregrination. The advancement of English as the language of the globe is the result of its evolution and peregrination. Along with its free morphemes it has developed a great number of affixes of English which allow their classification mostly into prefixes and suffixes. Nothing goes meaningless in language. The bound morphemes of English attribute considerably to meaningful linguistic transactions. Semantically they too bear vital importance, as they are the cause of the majority of the derivations in English. There is always a kind of stir in the field of affixes in English, as this language works in all walks of life across the world. A common user of English does not pay much attention to the semantics of the affixes in English as they get used to them subconsciously. The English derivational suffixes carry meaning though they are grammar-centric, unlike the prefixes which are meaning-centric. Remarkably, they too bear the semantic implications such as synonymy, antonymy and polysemy, etc. The present paper is an attempt to explore the semantic implications of the English derivational suffixes.

Keywords: evolution, grammar-centric, meaning-centric, affixes, suffixes, semantics.

The evolutionary nature of language enables it to undergo variety of changes which make it a non-monolithic entity, a living species. It comes into existence, evolves and extinguishes. Phatic (Leech and et all, 1982) is one of the

major functions of language. Accordingly, multitude of users are exposed to it and these users of language bring about changes in the linguistic system as per their abilities and requirements. Hence, after its inception as a system of social communication, every language undergoes changes at every point in its peregrination. In fact, language is not a system that can be evolved instantly. It has a very long tradition. A rich language has a long tradition.

English as the global language is the result of its traversing from a language of a small country to a language of the British colonies across the globe. At present English language has a pan-global user. People across the globe are found making contact in English and the very act of contact has brought about the evolution in English language. To make contact easy, it has borrowed words from almost all the major languages of the world. Along with its free morphemes, English language has developed, in fact, amassed a great number of bound morphemes. The bound morphemes i.e. affixes, of English are classified mostly into prefixes and suffixes. Affixation is the major source of derivations in English. New words are generated by attaching affixes to the base. Alexander Humez (1983) registers 4405 English affixes, out of which 2860 are prefixes and word-initial elements and 1545 are suffixes and word-final elements. This fairly indicates the significance of affixes in English word-formation.

Affixation has always been considered as the closed system. It is realized by taking into account the inflectional suffixes. They are purely grammatical and can easily be associated with the structure words i.e. the closed classes in the view of Geoffrey Leech et al (1982). They are utilized to designate the grammatical concepts like NUMBER, TENSE, CASE and DEGREE. There can be no addition to or deletion in the number of inflectional suffixes in English. Literally they do not carry much meaning. All that they bear are the grammatical attributes.

This means nothing goes meaningless in language. The bound morphemes of English have a specific linguistic significance. The derivational affixes in English bring about the majority of the word formations. Hence, they cannot be put under the closed classes, as it can be done with the inflectional suffixes. Semantically, they too bear vital importance. All the prefixes in English are

derivational. And all the English suffixes, except the inflectional suffixes (the plural, third person singular subject present tense, past tense, present participle, passive participle, perfect participle, possessive case, comparative degree and superlative degree), are derivational. However, prefixes are meaning-centric. On the other hand the derivational suffixes are more grammar-centric than meaning-centric. That is why, English prefixes are semantically classified and English derivational suffixes are classified as per their ability to derive words of different classes. Subsequently, there are noun-forming, adjective-forming, adverb-forming and verb-forming suffixes. Still the derivational suffixes are used to derive new words which signify something other than their respective bases signify.

With Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of linguistic sign, the structuralists conceive the words as signs. These words are free morphemes. They are independent semantically. Hence, they exhibit semantic implications. The derivational affixes also bear meaning. They bring about not only grammatical but also semantic changes in the words to which they are affixed. Though they, like free morphemes, are not semantically independent, they too exhibit semantic implications such as synonymy, antonymy, polysemy and others. This is fairly discernible, as far as English derivational suffixes are concerned. The present paper is an endeavour to explore the semantic implications of the English derivational suffixes. For that sake, the selected English derivational suffixes are considered. The common users of English are supposed to be familiar with most of these derivational suffixes.

If affixation is the most common way of building new words in the languages across the world, suffix is the commonest of affixes. Languages like Basque, Finish, Quechua, and several other use no other types of affix but suffixes. Hence, Marchand (1960) refers to the suffix as the obligatory bound morph *par excellence*.

The word 'suffix' is taken from Latin '*suffix-us*', perfect and passive participle of Latin, *suffigere*, 'to fix beneath, on'. To Hans Marchand (1960: 157), "a suffix is a derivative final element which is or formerly was productive in forming words. A suffix has a semantic value, but does not occur as an

independent speech unit". A suffix, in general, is an affix attached after the base (Bauer, 1983, 1988; Carstairs-McCarthy, 2009; Plag, 2003; Quirk et al., 1972). Suffixes may be either derivational or inflectional. In the words of Arnold, "suffixes may be derivational or functional (inflectional) as per their meaning and function" (1986: 77). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006) defines suffix as 'a letter or group of letters added to the end of a word to make another word'. The above definitions exhibit considerable disagreement of terms but all seem agreeing upon the position of the suffix in a word.

As English derivational suffixes, like free morphemes, have semantic, syntactic and phonological properties, there would be nothing wrong in treating them as linguistic signs. So that it would be easy to highlight some of the semantic implications of English derivational suffixes.

English suffixes can be classified on the basis of their origin (Marchand, 1960). Some suffixes have emerged or evolved out of native words. The other suffixes are the result of borrowing. The borrowed or foreign suffixes came into English as parts of loan words and were made part of English morphology. Many of these suffixes are not restricted to English. They are found in other languages too. Hence, they are international (Arnold, 1986).

The **Suffixes of Native Origin** which are developed out of Old or Middle English are: *-d*, *-dom*, *-ed*, *-en*, *-er* (as in *hatter*), *-fold*, *-ful*, *-hood*, *-ing*, *-ish*, *-less*, *-ly*, *-ness*, *-ship*, *-some*, *-ward(s)*, *-wise*, *-y* (as in *muddy*), *-ey* (as in *clayey*), and others.

The **suffixes of foreign origin** are: *-able/-ible* (Latin), *-acy/-cy* (Latin), *-age* (Latin), *-al* (Latin), *-an/-ain* (Latin), *-ance/-ence* (Latin), *-ancy/-ency* (Latin), *-ant/-ent* (Latin), *-ard* (German), *-arian* (Latin), *-ary* (Latin), *-ate* (Latin), *-ion/-ition/-ation/-sion/-tion/-xion* (Latin), *-ative* (Latin), *-ee* (French), *-eer* (Latin), *-er* (Latin, as in *furrier*), *-ery/-ry* (French), *-ese*, *-esque* (German), *-ess* (Latin and Greek), *-ette* (Romance language), *-ic* (Latin), *-ian* (Latin), *-ify/fy* (Latin), *-ism* (Greek), *-ist* (Greek), *-ite* (Greek), *-ity* (Latin), *-ive* (Latin), *-ize* (Greek), *-let* (French), *-ment* (Latin), *-or* (Latin), *-ory* (Latin), *-ous/-eous* (Latin), *-ure* (Latin), *-y* (Latin and Greek, as in *entreaty*), and others.

Both together make a considerable bulk that provides some space to explore their semantic implications.

Semantics is the study of meaning. Nida (1975) has rightly pointed out,

The most intriguing aspect of language is meaning but we have only begun to explore the intricacies of its structure and its relations to communication. In some respects we are like the scuba diver who, when he first visits a coral reef, is amazed, bewildered, and intrigued by the abundance of life forms and their intricate interrelations. At first we are almost overwhelmed by what we discover in the semantic structures of language, but once our explorations have begun, there is no turning back. Each discovery is only a prelude to more varied and greater discoveries (09).

Semantics is the systematic study of what meaning is and how it operates. In the words of DamodarTahkur (1999),

Semantics is serious academic discipline like any other branch of theoretical knowledge. It aims at providing a clear understanding of how language operates at the level of meaning. It is, in other words, a serious and systematic study of how meaning is structured, expressed and understood in the use of language (03).

Suffixes are BOUND morphemes. Derivational suffixes are attached to both free words and bound roots. They have semanticandcollocational restrictions also. However, they are not as restricted as the inflectional suffixes are. Surprisingly, some of the English derivational suffixes are used as independent words. Hence, it would be proper to term them PARA-FREE-MORPHEMES instead of referring to them as BOUND morphemes. Actually, PARA-FREE-MORPHEMES would be a suitable term for all the derivational affixes. If in a language paralinguistic features like gestures, facial expressions and some physical actions are contextually meaningful. Hence, purely linguistic items like derivational affixes are inevitably meaningful. The term, *paramorpheme* was earlier used by Trager. He uses the term “to name morphemes that constitute a set of inflectional suffixes in a paradigm”(Quoted

from Onysko&Lichel: 11). But here PARA-FREE-MORPHEMES mean similar to the free morpheme but not fully qualified to be one.

English derivational suffixes exhibit the following semantic implications:

I. Synonymy

Synonymy implies sameness of meaning. If it is observed in regards to words that absolute synonymy is almost never found, then the same principle goes with affixes too. The English derivational suffixes exhibit synonymy in the following manner:

Synonymous suffixes

1. *-age* (bondage), *-al* (survial), *-ancel-ence* (acceptance), *-ancyl-ency* (compliance, inconsistency), *-cy* (bankruptcy), *-dom* (freedom), *-hood* (childhood), *-ion* (confusion), *-ity*(humanity), *-ness* (happiness), *-ship* (friendship) are synonymous as they imply ‘state, quality or process of being ...’.

2. *-age* (baronage), *-cy* (captaincy), *-dom* (caesardom) mean ‘rank or office of ...’.

3. *-ate* (passionate), *-edl-d* (talented / diseased), *-ful* (joyful, forgetful), *-ish* (childish), *-ive*(descriptive), *-ative* (talkative), *-like* (childlike), *-ly* (friendly), *-ous*(humourous), *-some* (fearsome), *-y* (lucky), and others mean ‘full of...; having the qualities...; tending to...’.

4. *-ic* (angelic), *-al* (herbal), *-ary* (disciplinary), *-alia* (kithenalia) have the sense ‘connected with... / related to...’.

5. *-age* (spoilage), *-ism* (criticism), *-ment* (agreement), *-ure* (pleasure), *-th* (growth), and others mean ‘the action or result of ...ing’.

6. The suffixes like *-ette* (kitchenette), *-let* (booklet), *-ling* (duckling), *-een* (poteen), *-kin* (napkin), *-en* (chicken) are similar in meaning as they mean ‘small...; diminutive of...’ It must be noted that *-een*, *-kin*, *-en* in this sense are not active currently.

7. *-er* (Londoner), *-ian/-an* (Canadian, Indian), *-ish* (British), *-ese* (Japanese), *-ite* (Israelite), *-i* (Hindustani) mean ‘a person belonging to/ inhabitant of/ native of...’. The suffix *-i* is considered an English nationality forming suffix by Laurie Baure (1983).

8. *-ess* (hostess), *-ette* (majorette), *-enne* (comedienne), *-ine* (heroine), *-trix* (excutrix), *-woman* (policewoman) signify ‘female’.

9. *-ard* (dullard), *-er* (speaker), *-eer* (auctioneer), *-ist* (artist), *-ista*(fashionista), *-ite*(socialite), *-or*(actor), *-ster*(gangster), and others imply ‘a person who is...’, ‘a person who is follower of...’ or ‘a person whos’. In addition to these suffixes, final combining forms like *-crat* (autocrat), *-meister* (horror-meister), *-phile* (bibliophile), *-phobe* (biblophobe) also mean ‘a person who...’. All these signify the concept of person.

10. *-en* (strengthen), *-ify/-fy* (beautify), *-ize* (liberalize) mean ‘to make...’.

11. *-ward(s)* (homeward), *-ways* (sideways), *-wise* (clockwise) imply ‘in the direction of...’.

12. *-ese* (journalese), *-esque* (statuesque), *-ian* (Miltonian), *-like* (childlike), *-oid* (humanoid), *-ly* (fatherly) mean ‘in the manner of... / similar to ...’.

The suffixes in the above sets have more or less the same meaning but only sometimes they qualify the test of substitutability and can have the same antonyms.

For example, *-ist* and *-ite* mean the same i.e. a person who supports and they can occur with the same base like *social*, as in *socialist* and *socialite*. Both these words mean the same, but the word with *-ite* has the deprecatory or derogatory tinge. Same is the case with *-er* and *-ese* in *Japaner* and *Japanese*.

As far as patterns of synonymy are concerned, the affixes of English exhibit two patterns. Synonymous pairs having one affix of native origin and the other affix of foreign origin, as it is exemplified in: *fore-* (Native) ~ *pre-* (Foreign), *-ness* (Native) ~ *-ity*(foreign), *-ful*(Native) ~ *-ous*(foreign). Hence, it can sometimes be seen that words like *clearness* and *clarity*, *beautiful* and *beauteous*, and many others are found in the usage.

There are also synonymous pairs of suffixes that differ mainly from the point of view of their emotional overtones and evocative effects. The suffixes like *-ist*~*-ite*, and *-er*~*-ese* exemplify such features.

II. Antonymy:

Antonymy is the next paradigmatic relationship found among lexemes. It implies oppositeness of meaning. If the lexemes have opposite meanings, they are called antonyms.

Antonymous Suffixes

As far as the semantic relation of antonymy is concerned, suffixes of English almost do not exhibit it. There is only one pair of suffixes which is antonymous:

-ful X –less: harmful X harmless, careful X careless

Two pairs of final combining forms are also antonymous. They are :

-phile X –phobe: Anglophile X Anglophobe

-philia X –phobia: paedophilia X xenophobia

III. Polysemy:

Polysemous free morphemes have more than one meaning. English derivational suffix also exhibit polysemic relations. Some suffixes have two or more different still related meanings.

Polysemous suffixes of English

The following are the polysemous suffixes of English:

-able, (calculable, comfortable) *-(i)an*(Indian, mathematician, Dickensian,), *-ant/-ent*(servant, different), *-ard*(dullard, Leonard), *-arian*(humanitarian, legedarian), *-dom* (freedom, kingdom, officialdom), *-ee*(employee, absentee, townee), *-en*(strengthen, golden), *-er* (writer, Londoner, geographer, hatter, high-schooler, jailer, three-wheeler, slicer), *-ese*(Chinese, journalese, Tyrolese), *-ful*(beautiful, masterful, handful), *-hood*(childhood, priesthood), *-ic*(Arabic, horrific), *-ish*(Irish, childish, reddish, twentyish), *-ist*(atheist, dentist, violinist, plagiarist), *-ite*(Israelite, socialite), *-ify*(purify, terrify, speechify, Frenchify), *-ize*(privatize, criticize, hospitalize), *-less*(harmless, tireless), *-ly*(happily, scholarly), *-ship*(friendship, citizenship), and other suffixes.

The above examples clearly show that some suffixes are polysemous. They have many subtly related meanings. The polysemy of *-er* and *-ee* and *-ist* is much discussed (Lieber, 2004; Booij, 2007; Marchand, 1960; Baure, 1983; Lehrer, 1995, 1998; and others). As far as derivational affixes are concerned, it seems that polysemy is the norm and only few affixes have only one meaning.

IV. Homonymy:

Homonymous morphemes have same written and spoken/ written or spoken form but they differ semantically i.e. they have different and unrelated

meanings. In fact, homonymy is the result of accidental phonological and orthographic identity (Lehrer, 2000) of morphemes. Both polysemy and homonymy imply more than one meaning, but in polysemy the meanings of a morpheme are related in a subtle way and in homonymy a morpheme has many (at least two) different unrelated meanings. It is possible to extend this concept to English derivational suffixes, though there are very rare homonymous suffixes. The following examples may justify the point:

Homonymous suffixes of English

English has homonymous suffixes. Some of them are exemplified the table below:

Table 1 : Homonymous suffixes

| Sr. No. | suffix | Meanings with examples |
|---------|--------|---|
| 1. | -age | A state/condition of : <i>bondage</i> |
| | | A set/ group of : <i>baggage</i> |
| | | The cost of : <i>postage</i> |
| | | A place where: <i>anchorage</i> |
| 2. | -ate | Full of : <i>passionate</i> |
| | | To cause to become: <i>activate</i> |
| | | Rank or degree of a ...: <i>doctorate</i> |
| 3. | -ed | Having: <i>talented</i> |
| | | Makes past-tense, and PP forms of verbs: <i>walked</i> |
| 4. | -er | Person who ... : <i>maker, Japaner, etc.</i> |
| | | Comparative form of adjectives: <i>taller</i> |
| 5. | -ery | The state / character of being...: <i>bravery</i> |
| | | A place where something is ...: <i>bakery, orangery</i> |
| | | The group or class: <i>greenery</i> |
| 6. | -ette | A female...: <i>majorette</i> |
| | | A small...: <i>kitchenette</i> |
| | | Made of not real...: <i>leatherette</i> |
| 7. | -ing | The action/process of ...: <i>swimming</i> |
| | | The place where ...: reading, <i>dinning</i> |
| | | Present participle of verbs: <i>walking</i> |
| 8. | -let | A small ...: <i>booklet</i> |
| | | An article worn on ...: <i>armlet</i> |
| 9. | -ly | In the ... manner : <i>happily</i> |
| | | At intervals of...: <i>weekly</i> |
| 10. | -ory | That does ...: <i>explanatory</i> |
| | | A place for ...: <i>observatory</i> |
| 11. | -y | Full of ; having the quality of..: <i>dusty, sleepy</i> |
| | | The action or process of ...: <i>inquiry</i> |
| | | In Nouns showing affection: <i>lovey</i> |

V. Collocations

Words show collocations or selectional restrictions. They are semantically independent and habitually co-occur with certain other words. Affixes are bound morphemes that are semantically dependent. They become meaningful, only when they occur in the company of a free morpheme to derive new words.

As per the argument of linguists like Lieber (2004), Booij (2007), Lehrer (1995), and others, affixes can be accepted as linguistic signs. As pointed earlier, affixes exhibit semantic relations like synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, and hyponymy. Moreover, they exhibit selectional restrictions also.

A word collocates with certain other word(s). Collocation is a kind of syntagmatic relationship that exists between the words and it is conventional. An affix does not collocate with other affix(es), but with the base to which it is affixed. For instance, suffix, *-ant* collocates with the bases like *assist*, *observe*, and others to form agentive nouns, *assistant* and *observant* which mean ‘a person who ...s’. However, it does not collocate with the bases like *receive*, *produce* and the like, as it would violate the selectional restrictions. Hence, there cannot be derivations like *receivant** or *producant**.

Though suffixes *-ify* and *-ize* mean the same, there cannot be words like *realify** and *classize**. Similarly, *-ful* collocates with *youth* to derive *youthful* but *youthly** would be ‘illegal’ derivation (Lardiere, 2006). The examples of such kind would be as many as the number of affixes of English.

Collocations are conventional and they assert the conventional feature of language. It can be observed that the affixal collocations are syntactosemantically motivated. For instance, *-er* suffix is not just polysemous but homonymous also. When *-er* is affixed to a verbal or nominal base, a noun is derived, as in *maker*, *prisoner*; and when it is affixed to an adjectival base, the comparative form of adjective is formed, as in, *taller*, *bigger*, and many others.

Last, but not least, is an idea of having componential analysis of English affixes. It would be a step towards determining the status of the derivational affixes as linguistic signs. Free morphemes are attributed the semantic components. These components make up the meaning of a word. Similarly, affixes can be attributed the semantic components. John Lyons (1995) calls

componential analysis a lexical decomposition. It is usually used to understand the meaning of a word by analyzing its semantic components. As it is pointed out earlier, the affixes are also linguistic signs, as they have unitary meanings like words; and as they exhibit paradigmatic and syntagmatic features.

However, it is very difficult to frame componential analysis of affixes in the traditional manner. Eugene Nida (1975) considers affixes under a problem for analyses. As it is pointed out earlier, componential analysis is the method that analyzes primitives of which a lexical item is formed. The meaning of a word is interpreted on the basis of its components. Even the semantic components of a word, it can be observed, give the idea of the word. For instance, 'boy' is realized by the formula: +HUMAN -ADULT +MALE. Similarly, if given the formula like, +HUMAN +ADULT -MALE, one can guess the item being defined is 'woman'.

Naturally, new primitives can be developed to make clear formulae. Still, applying componential analysis in terms of traditional domains to describe affixes may have difficulties, as affixes are not semantically independent. Basically, they are a grammatical class that exhibits their inherent meaning in the company of other lexical items which are semantically autonomous. Moreover, it is very difficult to show the semantic kinds of entities, events, abstracts or relationals, the affixes are supposed to signify. Consequently, the traditional genus-species-subspecies type of componential analysis may not work or be suitable for affixes.

That is why linguistic semanticists like Pinker (1989), Dowty (1979), Verkuyl (1972), Lieber (2004, 2005) Booij (2004, 2007) selected features which are broadly cross-categorial and can be used to describe not only words but also the affixes in the form of skeletons. Lieber, for instance, considers the most basic categories like *material*, *dynamic*, *location*, [B] i.e. *bounded*, and [CI] i.e. *composed of individuals* suitable for affixal skeletons.

The category of *material* comprises SUBSTANCES / THINGS / ESSENCES; and that of *dynamic* comprises SITUATIONS. Furthermore, the categories are presented in terms of binary opposition i.e. [±material] , [±dynamic], and the like.[+material] shows the presence of materiality i.e. the affixes is used to create terms denoting concrete substances / things/ essences.

[-material] indicates abstract features of item, i.e. the affix is used to create terms denoting abstract substances / things/ essences.

Similarly [+dynamic] shows EVENT and [-dynamic] indicates a STATE, i.e. affixes are used to generate terms denoting situations which supposed to be either an event or a state.

[+Loc] shows presence of position of place or position and [-Loc] asserts the lack of position or place. [+ B] shows that the item has time or space limits and [-B] shows absence of time or space limits. [+CI] shows that item has plurality feature and [-CI] indicates that the item is single or homogeneous.

Accordingly, affixal skeletons are designed, for example, the skeleton for *-er*, *-ee*, and the like is [+material, dynamic ([],<base>)]. The skeleton for plural affix *-s* is [-B, +CI (<base>)] Lieber (2004).

Such skeletons, it can be seen, work like formulae used in the componential analysis. However, their suitability and applicability is again a matter of controversy. No doubt they are abstract. But it must be considered that they are being used to define the linguistic items which cannot be used independently in real communication. Moreover, it must be noticed that the skeletons allow some semantic analysis of affixes and their semantic components which was not attempted earlier.

To conclude, the English derivational suffixes are morphemes with some restrictions. Though semantically they are not independent, they do bear certain semantic features. English, during its peregrination, is witnessing a substantial addition to not only the free morphemes but also to the affixes. English derivational suffixes are bound morphemes but they are not as bound as the inflectional suffixes which have just the grammatical functions. The English derivational suffixes have semantic, syntactic and even phonological functions. That is why, the researcher terms them 'para-free-morphemes' which means similar to the free morphemes but not fully qualified to be one.

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