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THE LEXICAL-SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF UNITS FORMED BY PREFIXATION IN THE UZBEK LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The article examines the lexical semantics of Uzbek words derived by means of the borrowed prefixal formatives *be-*, *no-*, *ser-*, *ham-*, *bad-*, *kam-*, *g'ayri-*, *bo-*, *ba*, *xush-* and their international counterparts. Working from lexicographic material and from componential analysis of the derived units, the study establishes four semantic properties that characterise this class as a whole. First, Uzbek prefixation is modificational rather than transpositional: it enriches the lexical meaning of the base without transferring it into another lexico-grammatical class. Second, the inventory is unusually strongly polarised along the evaluative axis, with the polarity residing in the formative itself rather than in the base, which makes prefixed units a preferred resource of expressive and axiologically loaded registers. Third, the class is internally stratified with respect to compositionality: the older Persian-Arabic layer shows extensive semantic drift and idiomatisation, whereas the international layer remains fully compositional, so that degree of lexicalisation functions as a reliable index of derivational age. Fourth, formatives that receive a single gloss in dictionaries prove on closer inspection to be distributionally and semantically differentiated, the clearest instance being *be-* and *no-*, whose selection is conditioned by the semantic type of the base. A semantic classification of the inventory into eleven classes is proposed, and the mechanisms of semantic shift operative in the class are described.

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Keywords: Uzbek language, prefixation, lexical semantics, derivational meaning, componential analysis, evaluative polarity, lexicalisation, semantic drift, privative derivation, borrowed affixes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lexicon of modern Uzbek contains several hundred lexemes whose derivational formative precedes rather than follows the base: bevafo ‘disloyal’, noto‘g‘ri ‘incorrect’, serhosil ‘high-yielding’, hamkasb ‘colleague’, badbaxt ‘wretched’, kamgap ‘taciturn’, g‘ayriqonuniy ‘unlawful’. In a language whose inherited morphology is exclusively suffixing, these units form a compact and clearly delimited class, and their semantic behaviour is correspondingly distinctive.

Descriptions of Uzbek derivation regularly list the formatives that produce this class and state their Persian, Arabic or Russian-international origin. What such descriptions do not generally provide is an account of what the class means — that is, of the semantic operation the formatives perform, of the way that operation interacts with the meaning of the base, and of the extent to which the resulting units remain semantically transparent. The present article is devoted to precisely these questions.

The object of study is the derived unit rather than the formative in isolation. This choice has consequences. It brings into view phenomena that a purely morphemic description overlooks: the drift of bemalol from ‘without difficulty’ to a pragmatic marker of permission, the affective charge that separates badbaxt from any compositional reading of ‘bad’ plus ‘fortune’, and the systematic difference in meaning between sersuv and suvli, both of which relate a referent to water but do so on different semantic terms.

The aim of the article is to establish the lexical-semantic properties that characterise prefixally derived units in Uzbek as a class, to propose a semantic classification of the formatives that produce them, and to describe the

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mechanisms by which such units depart from compositional meaning. The results bear directly on lexicographic practice, since they concern which readings must be recorded separately in a dictionary entry, and on the theory of derivational semantics in contact situations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The systematic description of Uzbek word formation established by A. Hojiyev [1] provides the framework within which prefixation is conventionally located, and his morpheme dictionary [2], together with the morpheme dictionary of A. G'ulomov, A. N. Tixonov and R. Qo'ng'urov [3], supplies the segmentational decisions on which any semantic analysis must rest. Sh. Rahmatullayev [4] and Q. Sapayev [5] give comparable accounts. In all of these works the semantics of prefixation is treated by means of brief glosses — be- 'without', ser- 'abundant', ham- 'co-' — which are accurate as first approximations but which conceal the internal differentiation examined below.

A. N. Kononov [6] observed that Uzbek prefixes are of foreign origin and that their combinability was initially restricted to bases of the donor languages. The reference grammars of A. F. Sjoberg [9] and A. J. E. Bodrogligeti [8], and the handbook edited by L. Johanson and É. Á. Csató [7], describe the same inventory within the general suffixing profile of Turkic, but again without a dedicated semantic analysis.

For the theoretical apparatus the study draws on the distinction between lexical and syntactic derivation introduced by J. Kuryłowicz [15] and on M. Dokulil's [16] tripartite division of derivational operations into modification, transposition and mutation. G. Booij [14] and I. Plag [13] formulate the same distinction in contemporary terms. The analysis of semantic drift in derived words relies on the general treatment of lexicalisation and idiomatisation in morphology, for which L. Bauer [12] remains the standard reference. Finally, the contact-linguistic literature on borrowed derivation — F. Seifart [10], F. Gardani, P. Arkadiev and

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N. Amiridze [11], Y. Matras [17] — supplies the framework within which the difference between the Persian-Arabic and the international stratum can be interpreted historically.

The gap addressed here is therefore a specific one. The formatives are known and their glosses are recorded; what is lacking is an account of the semantics of the units they produce, and in particular of the systematic divergence between compositional and lexicalised readings within a single derivational class.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material was drawn from the five-volume explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language [18], from which lexemes beginning with the formatives under study were extracted by systematic inspection of the relevant entries. Segmentation was verified against the morpheme dictionaries [2; 3]. Recent terminological material containing international prefixes was collected separately from specialist glossaries and contemporary usage, and is treated as a distinct stratum because of its lower degree of codification.

Three procedures were applied. Componential analysis was used to isolate the semantic increment contributed by the formative, by comparing the meaning of the derived unit with that of its base and with that of parallel derivatives on the same formative. Distributional analysis was used to establish the selectional restrictions of individual formatives, in particular by testing the acceptability of derivatives on bases of the type admitted by a rival formative. Diagnosis of lexicalisation proceeded by asking whether the recorded dictionary meaning of a unit can be computed from the meanings of its parts; where it cannot, the direction and mechanism of the shift were identified.

Judgements of unacceptability, marked below with an asterisk, reflect the absence of the form from the dictionary sources combined with its rejection in normative usage; they are not claims about absolute impossibility, since occasional expressive coinages of the relevant type do occur.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Prefixation as a modificational operation

The first and most general property of the class is that Uzbek prefixation does not transpose. Suffixal derivation in Uzbek is characteristically category-changing: ish ‘work’ yields the agent noun ishchi ‘worker’ and the verb ishla- ‘to work’; bil- ‘to know’ yields the abstract noun bilim ‘knowledge’; kitob ‘book’ yields the locative noun kitobxona ‘library’. Prefixal derivation behaves quite differently. It leaves the referential domain of the base intact and adds to it a component of evaluation, quantity or relation: vafo ‘loyalty’ → bevafo ‘disloyal’, hosil ‘yield’ → serhosil ‘high-yielding’, aniq ‘precise’ → noaniq ‘imprecise’, kasb ‘profession’ → hamkasb ‘colleague’.

In Kuryłowicz’s terms [15] the operation belongs to lexical rather than syntactic derivation; in Dokulil’s [16] it is modification, with transposition absent and mutation marginal. The single systematic departure from strict category preservation is the noun-to-adjective shift characteristic of the possessive and privative formatives, where a nominal base yields an adjective of the type ‘possessing X’ or ‘lacking X’ (g‘am ‘sorrow’ → beg‘am ‘carefree’). This is not transposition in the strong sense, since the derived adjective remains semantically anchored to the referent denoted by the base; it is better analysed as the standard output of a relational-possessive operator.

The consequence for lexical semantics is that the meaning of a prefixal derivative is, in the default case, a function of the meaning of the base and a fixed semantic operator. Where this function fails to yield the attested meaning, lexicalisation has intervened — and the extent of such failure is precisely what Section 4.3 measures.

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4.2. The semantic classification of the inventory

Applying componential analysis to the derived units yields the classification presented in Table 1, in which formatives are grouped by the semantic increment they contribute rather than by their language of origin.

Table 1. Semantic classes of Uzbek prefixal formatives and their outputs

Semantic increment	Formatives	Derived units
Privation ('not possessing X')	be-	bevafo 'disloyal', beg'am 'carefree', beparvo 'indifferent', beg'ubor 'pure', beto'xtov 'incessant'
Negation of a property	no-, g'ayri-, anti-	noto'g'ri 'incorrect', noaniq 'imprecise', noqulay 'inconvenient', g'ayrioddiy 'extraordinary', antisanitariya
Abundance ('rich in X')	ser-, bo-, ba-	serhosil 'high-yielding', serqirra 'many-sided', serquyosh 'sunny', bobarakot 'bountiful', badavlat 'wealthy'
Positive quality	xush-	xushbo'y 'fragrant', xushmuomala 'courteous', xushxabar 'good news'
Insufficiency	kam-	kamquvvat 'low-powered', kamsuv 'water-poor', kamqon 'anaemic', kamgap 'taciturn'
Negative evaluation	bad-	badbaxt 'wretched', badxulq 'ill-tempered', badbo'y 'malodorous', badnom 'infamous'
Sharedness / comitativity	ham-	hamkasb 'colleague', hamfikir 'like-minded', hamyurt 'compatriot', hamqishloq 'fellow villager', hamdard 'fellow sufferer'
Counteraction	anti-, kontr-	antivirus, antimonopoliya, kontrhujum 'counter-attack'
Intensity / excess	super-, ultra-, giper-, mega-	superkompyuter, ultrabinafsha 'ultraviolet', gipermarket, megaloyiha
Spatial-temporal relation	trans-, post-, inter-, sub-	transmilliy 'transnational', postsovet 'post-Soviet', subtropik
Scale, reversal, falseness	mikro-, makro-, re-, de-, psevd-	mikroiqlim, makroiqtisodiyot, reorganizatsiya, demontaj, psevdoilmiy

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The classification reveals a division of labour between the two historical strata. The Persian-Arabic formatives occupy the evaluative and quantitative field — privation, abundance, insufficiency, positive and negative quality, sharedness. The international formatives occupy the relational and scalar field — counteraction, spatial and temporal relation, scale, reversal, degree. The two sets are therefore complementary rather than competing, which explains both the rapidity with which the international layer was absorbed and the fact that its arrival did not displace the older layer.

A second observation concerns semantic density. Privation and negation are covered by four distinct formatives (be-, no-, g‘ayri-, anti-), abundance by three (ser-, bo-, ba-). Such redundancy is unusual in a small inventory and demands explanation. Section 4.4 shows that the apparent redundancy is only apparent: the formatives within each field are distributionally specialised.

4.3. Compositionality, drift and idiomatisation

The units of the class divide sharply with respect to semantic transparency. A large majority are fully compositional: hamqishloq is exactly ‘of the same village’, beg‘ubor exactly ‘without blemish’, kamsuv exactly ‘having little water’, mikroiqlim exactly ‘small-scale climate’. In such cases the dictionary entry can be predicted from the parts, and the unit is a derivative in the strict sense.

A substantial minority, however, have drifted. Table 2 sets out the principal instances together with the mechanism of the shift.

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Table 2. Lexicalised prefixal units and mechanisms of semantic shift

Unit	Compositional reading	Attested meaning	Mechanism
badbaxt	‘of bad fortune’	‘wretched, miserable’	Intensification of affective charge; the unit becomes a term of pity or abuse.
bemalol	‘without difficulty’	‘by all means, feel free’	Pragmaticalisation: from a property of an action to a marker of granted permission.
beixtiyor	‘without will’	‘involuntarily, spontaneously’	Adverbialisation with narrowing to unplanned physical or emotional reaction.
behuda	‘without purpose’	‘in vain, pointlessly’	Loss of the independent base huda; the unit becomes morphologically opaque.
bevosita	‘without a means’	‘directly, immediately’	Terminologisation in legal and scholarly discourse; a paired antonym bilvosita ‘indirectly’ arises.
beg‘am	‘without sorrow’	‘carefree, irresponsible’	Acquisition of a negative evaluative component absent from the base.
hamkorlik	‘state of being a co-worker’	‘cooperation’ (institutional term)	Terminologisation; the unit acquires an abstract institutional referent.
noiloj	‘without remedy’	‘having no choice, perforce’	Modalisation: the unit expresses constrained necessity rather than absence.

Three mechanisms recur. The first is affective intensification, in which a compositional evaluative reading hardens into a strongly marked one; badbaxt and beg‘am are the clearest cases. The second is pragmaticalisation and

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modalisation, in which the unit ceases to describe a property and comes to express a speaker attitude or a modal relation; bemalol and noiloj illustrate this. The third is terminologisation, in which a general-language unit is fixed as a term in a specialist domain and thereby narrowed; bevosita, bilvosita and hamkorlik belong here.

A fourth mechanism, morphological rather than semantic, deserves separate mention: the loss of the independent base. In behuda and beomad the element following the prefix is no longer an autonomous Uzbek word, so that the unit is synchronically unanalysable even though it remains historically derived. Such units stand at the endpoint of the lexicalisation cline and are best recorded in dictionaries as simplex entries.

The distribution of these phenomena across the two strata is asymmetrical and diagnostically useful. Every unit in Table 2 belongs to the Persian-Arabic layer. Not one derivative in anti-, mikro-, post- or super- has undergone comparable drift. Degree of lexicalisation therefore correlates directly with derivational age, and can be used as a criterion for dating the integration of a formative when historical documentation is lacking.

4.4. Internal differentiation: the case of be- and no-

The apparent redundancy noted in Section 4.2 dissolves under distributional analysis. The pair be- and no- receives in most descriptions a single gloss of privation, yet the two formatives are very largely in complementary distribution, and the conditioning factor is the semantic type of the base.

Be- selects bases denoting an entity, substance or quality capable of being possessed, and yields an adjective meaning ‘not possessing X’: vafo ‘loyalty’ → bevafo, g‘am ‘sorrow’ → beg‘am, parvo ‘concern’ → beparvo, navo ‘melody, sustenance’ → benavo, to‘xtov ‘stopping’ → beto‘xtov. No- selects bases that are already properties — adjectives, participles and property-denoting nouns — and negates the predication of that property: to‘g‘ri ‘correct’ → noto‘g‘ri, aniq

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‘precise’ → noaniq, qulay ‘convenient’ → noqulay, maqbul ‘acceptable’ → nomaqbul, rozi ‘content’ → norozi.

The complementarity is confirmed by the unacceptability of the crossed forms. Alongside bevafo one does not find *novafo; alongside noto‘g‘ri one does not find *beto‘g‘ri. Where both formatives appear on morphologically related bases, the semantic difference remains visible: beo‘rin is not current, whereas noo‘rin ‘inappropriate, out of place’ negates a property of appropriateness rather than denying possession of a place.

A parallel differentiation obtains within the field of abundance. Ser- is the only fully general formative, combining with bases of any origin and yielding a gradable adjective of abundance (serhosil, sersuv, serquyosh, serqatnov ‘busy, heavily trafficked’). Bo- and ba- are confined to a closed set of inherited Persian collocations (bobarakot, boadab, badavlat, baobro‘) and are no longer available for new formation. The three formatives are thus not synonyms in competition but a productive member flanked by two fossilised ones.

Finally, g‘ayri- differs from no- not in the operation performed but in register and domain. Both negate a property, but g‘ayri- is confined to codified terminology, chiefly legal and scholarly (g‘ayriqonuniy ‘unlawful’, g‘ayrioddiy ‘extraordinary’, g‘ayritabiiy ‘unnatural’), whereas no- is unrestricted. The distinction is one of stylistic and terminological specialisation superimposed on identical semantics.

4.5. Evaluative polarity as a class property

A property that distinguishes Uzbek prefixation from Uzbek suffixation as a whole is the axiological loading of the formatives. In suffixal derivation evaluation is normally contributed by the base: ishchi ‘worker’, bilim ‘knowledge’ and kitobxona ‘library’ are evaluatively neutral, and the diminutive and augmentative suffixes that do carry evaluation form a small subset. In prefixal

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derivation, by contrast, the majority of formatives are inherently polarised, and the polarity is imposed on the base rather than derived from it.

The point can be demonstrated with an evaluatively neutral base. Suv ‘water’ carries no evaluation; yet sersuv ‘well-watered’ is positively marked and kamsuv ‘water-poor’ negatively marked, and the markedness is contributed entirely by the formative. The same holds for quvvat ‘power’ (kamquvvat negative), gap ‘speech’ (kamgap mildly negative or ironic) and qirra ‘facet’ (serqirra positive). This property has consequences for register. Because prefixal derivatives arrive pre-loaded with evaluation, they are favoured in proverbs, publicistic prose, oratory and poetry, and are correspondingly disfavoured in neutral technical description, where their suffixal rivals are preferred. The international formatives constitute the systematic exception: mikro-, makro-, trans-, post- and sub- are evaluatively neutral, and it is precisely for that reason that they have entered scientific terminology without resistance.

The interaction of formative polarity with base polarity produces three configurations. Where the two agree, the result is intensification: bad- on the already negative nom ‘reputation’ yields badnom ‘infamous’, which is stronger than either element. Where they conflict, the formative wins and the base is reinterpreted: ser- on the neutral-to-negative tashvish ‘worry’ yields sertashvish ‘full of cares’, in which the abundance operator does not neutralise the negativity of the base but quantifies it. Where the base is neutral, the formative supplies the polarity outright, as in the suv examples above. In no configuration is the polarity of the formative cancelled, which indicates that it is a lexical property of the formative and not a contextual effect.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis supports four conclusions about the lexical semantics of prefixally derived units in Uzbek.

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The operation performed is modificational: it enriches the meaning of the base with a component of evaluation, quantity or relation and preserves its referential domain, in contrast to the largely transpositional character of Uzbek suffixation. The meaning of a prefixal derivative is accordingly compositional by default, and departures from compositionality require separate explanation.

The inventory is semantically organised into eleven classes which divide between two historical strata along functional lines, the Persian-Arabic layer occupying the evaluative and quantitative field and the international layer the relational and scalar field. The complementarity of the two is the reason the second could be absorbed without displacing the first.

Departures from compositionality are confined almost entirely to the Persian-Arabic layer and proceed by four identifiable mechanisms: affective intensification, pragmaticalisation and modalisation, terminologisation, and loss of the independent base. Degree of lexicalisation therefore serves as an index of derivational age.

Formatives that share a dictionary gloss prove to be distributionally specialised. Be- and no- are conditioned by the semantic type of the base, ser- is the sole productive member of the abundance field, and g'ayri- is no- restricted to codified terminology. Apparent redundancy in a small inventory is thus not redundancy at all.

Two further lines of enquiry follow. A corpus-based study of the frequency and contextual distribution of the lexicalised units in Table 2 would allow the stages of semantic drift to be dated more precisely. And a comparison with the corresponding units in Tajik, the principal donor language, would establish which of the shifts described here occurred within Uzbek and which were inherited with the loanword.

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