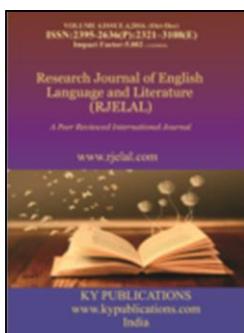




## NEGATIVE PREFIXES: PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF IN-, UN-DIS- AND NON-

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### ABSTRACT

The subject of Derivational Morphology in general and Morphological Rivalry in particular has captured somewhat the attention of theoretical paradigms dealing with language structure. This study aims at the investigation of the linguistic features of English negative prefixes, *in-*, *un-*, *dis-* and *non-* from the viewpoint of phonology. It can be said that phonological features in the English negative prefixes are of importance in order to analyze other linguistic properties. Basically, phonology is the foundation for other branches of linguistics, for the phoneme which is a minimal unit to distinguish one sound from another connects with each other to produce the morpheme which is the minimal distinctive unit of morphological grammar. Based on the descriptions of other linguists, this study focuses on two phonological aspects of assimilation and stress shift of the prefixes, and shows some distinctive or similar features of the prefixes.

Keywords: Phonological, Negative Prefixes, Morpheme, Assimilation, Stress Shift, Word Formation.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Prefixation in middle English, referred to a situation when prefixation was no longer a very prominent means of word-formation, as many of the old English prefixes were no longer productive and the new Romance prefixes were not yet fully established. Middle English was thus a period of transition characterized, on the one hand, by the loss of many native prefixes but, on the other hand, also by the influx of vast numbers of new lexemes from French, which subsequently gave rise to foreign prefixes entering the derivational system of the English language. The extensive borrowing during the middle English period did, therefore, not only result in an enrichment of the English vocabulary but also changed the derivational morphology of the language. English has different negative prefixes such as *in-*, *un-*, *dis-* and *non-* in

presentday English. In order to make the differences clear, it is necessary to investigate the linguistic features from the viewpoints of phonology. What lies in the center of language study is phonetics and phonology, which are well-studied areas in linguistics? Phonological analysis of the four prefixes in question is inevitable for us to recognize the distinctive features.

For the present analysis the four prefixes *dis-*, *in-*, *non-* and *un-* were chosen and studied with the aim of illustrating and clarifying the following points:

- How the native prefix *un-*, which had already existed in the old English period, survived into Middle English and met the introduction of several foreign prefixes belonging to the same semantic group.

- How the foreign prefixes *dis-* and *in-* entered the English language and slowly established themselves after the Norman Conquest.
- To what extent the productivity of the native prefix *non-* was borrowed.
- How far these four prefixes can be said to have been productive in middle English.
- In this paper, certain phonological features of the three prefixes will be presented from a viewpoint of assimilation and stress shift.

### Main Thrust

#### I. Negative Prefixes

**1. Contradictory opposition:** In English, the most common and frequently used negative prefix is *un-*, attached mostly to native English, but also to certain Latinate words. As for the categories, it is equally used with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. It is undoubtedly used for opposition, and this type of opposition contradicts one of the two existing terms. Thus, one is always true, and consequently, the other always false. In most cases, this result is achieved with the prefix *un-*. Some typical examples are: unreasonable-opposite of reasonable, unfair - opposite of fair, unable - opposite of able. The productivity of *un-* is obvious in the formation of adjectives with present and past participles as well like unfeeling - opposite of feeling, unthreatening - opposite of threatening. When it comes to nouns, the use and result are the same. Adverbs also take this prefix like unwisely - opposite of wisely, unfortunately-opposite of fortunate. Taking into consideration the fact that when this prefix is used with verbs, we do not deal with contradiction any more, but privative or reversal meanings of the prefix. Yet, in all these examples, the base is contradicted by using the word with the negative prefix. But, some words are not about negation, that is, in the case with improve we are not dealing with negation of prove. We mention it here to draw attention to words which seem to be negative, when, as a matter of fact, the word does not consist of a prefix and base, and has nothing to do with negation, but it is a simple lexeme instead. For those cases when the negative prefix is really attached to the base of the word, and the lexeme appears to be negative in form, but pragmatically speaking has a positive meaning. Another negative prefix used in

contradiction is *dis-*; it is a negative prefix of Latin origin that means 'not': disorder - opposite of order, dishonest - opposite of honest. The prefix *non-* is less frequent than *un-* and it picks out the set of things that are not in the category denoted by the stem to which it is attached. It occurs more freely with nouns than many of the other prefixes do. These lexemes show contradictory opposition because there are only two terms, and by negating the positive element, we come to its negative counterpart, which is the only left of the two opposing poles.

**2. Contrary opposition:** The examples and the analysis will illustrate the scalarity of this type of opposition and its manifestation in the language. Firstly, for example dislike - it is not the case that something has been liked and now the action is reversed, nor is it the case that expresses contradictory opposition. It simply negates the element on the other end of the scale, but there are other terms in between. Thus, we can like, dislike something, or have neutral feelings and be reserved about it. With unhappy, it is not that the person can be either happy or unhappy; he/she can display other feelings and be in a state between these two ends. Unhappy equals miserable or sad, and a person can be more or less happy. Contrary opposition is expressed with another Greek prefix *anti-*, which does not merely mean 'not', but 'against', as shown in continuation. The explanation is that a person can be for something, against something, but can also have neutral feelings and attitudes and not take one stand specifically. There is a crucial distinction among the formations with *non-*, *anti-*, and *un-*. If somebody is nonreligious, then that person is not for religion or against religion, but simply has nothing to do with religion, that is, he or she is neutral. With *anti-* the opposition is contrary; anti-smoking campaign is openly against smoking, and very similar to this, since untrue is quite opposite of true and equals false, it is on the other end of the pole. As *un-* is a very productive negating prefix in English, it can actually attach to stems with a wider range of meanings, and it is the most preferred one when new words are coined. Many words can form negations with both *non-* and *un-*, which gives near

synonymous pairs like nonreligious / unreligious, nonproductive / unproductive, and so on.

**3.Privative or reversal meaning:** Negative prefixes show privative meaning when by adding the negative element to the base i.e base is deprived of the thing expressed with the basic element. In other words, with the negatively prefixed word we take the thing denoted with the assertive item. The reversal meaning is usually conveyed with verbs when the word with the prefix means to perform an action by which the action with the base word will be reversed, actually the newly derived – prefixed word denotes an action after which the result will be condition or state before the action of the base word has been performed.

**II. Assimilation:** Assimilation is a phonological change caused by a consonant. As far as prefixation is concerned, the final sound of a prefix becomes more like the first sound of a root, if the articulation of the two sounds is quite close. This assimilation, however, does not always occur although two sequential sounds are under a phonological environment for assimilation. Among these three prefixes, *in-* has conspicuously different assimilation behavior from the other two. This prefix assimilates to /im/ before bilabials /p/, /b/ and /m/, to /il/ before alveolar /l/, and to /ir/ before alveolar /r/, and these are reflected in the spellings *im-*, *il-* and *ir-* respectively. While *in-* shows a conspicuous tendency for assimilation, the other negative prefixes *un-* and *non-* do not change. *un-* and *non-* does not show phonological influence to the derived words. *Dis-* came into English during the Middle English period, along with many Latin and French words. The prefix *dis-* is related to *bis*, (two), and can be used in the sense of separation. In the course of centuries, distinctions between *un-* and *dis-* have blurred. Sometimes the prefixes are interchangeable and sometimes not. Some argue against the distinction on historical grounds, but the perceived difference in modern usage is a useful one.

**III. Stress shift:** Describing stress shift, it is necessary to demonstrate the stress patterns shown by adding *in-*, *un-* and *non-*. The prefixes on which stress falls are *in-* and *non-*. While primary stress falls on *in-*, secondary stress is given to *non-*. These types of stress patterns are not found in *un-*. Both the stress

patterns of the three prefixes are, in fact, more variable than this. The stress pattern of each prefix may be primary stress on one occasion, and secondary stress on another. For example, primary stress does not fall on *in-* in the word *impossible*, although the phonological environment of *in-* prefixation to possible is the same as *impious*. Similarly, *un-* never takes primary or secondary stress on itself, there are, however, some words in which secondary stress falls on *un-*. We can recognize that many *un-* words take secondary stress on the prefix *un-*, for example, *unpolluted*, etc. The stress pattern of *non-* which does not take primary stress according to some linguist while according to some the derived word, nonentity, as containing *non-* with primary stress. Each linguist has slightly different views of the stress behavior of *in-*, *un-* and *non-*. Generally speaking, all the three prefixes usually take weak or secondary stress, and it is an exceptional pattern to take primary stress.

#### IV. Conclusion

In this study, the phonological features of Negative Prefixes *in-*, *un-* and *non-* have been argued from the viewpoint of assimilation and stress shift. In fact, *in-* has another phonological feature, which is called 'Deletion'. The second phonetic sound of the variant forms (*im-*, *il-* and *ir-*) caused by assimilation process is deleted as in *immoral*. We saw that the negative prefix can be an exponent of two types of opposition, and it is logic that has to be employed in analyzing the meaning and determining the type of opposition, not the prefix itself. The rational reasoning will help the participants in the study decide whether the negative element expresses contradictory or contrary opposition, and if the negative verbs display privative or reversal meaning. On the other hand, not always does the negative word denote an opposite of the positive, but it can show something both similar and dissimilar at the same time. For *non-* prefixation, it is often the case that a hyphen is inserted between the prefix and the root. The loose combination of *non-* results in non-occurrence of assimilation and stress shift, and the prefix itself has always its own stress even in derived words, being similar to compound words. *Un-* prefixation has not as strong connection with roots as *in-* prefixation,

and does not lead to assimilation and stress shift. Since *non-* can attach to compound words (e.g. non-baseball player), the stress behavior is similar to that of other words. However, a more comprehensive study comprising other middle English prefixes still needs to be conducted in order to broaden our understanding of English word-formation.

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