

THE PLACE OF PREFIXATION IN THE WORD-FORMATION SYSTEM OF THE UZBEK LANGUAGE

Narzullayeva Muborak Sherzod qizi

Independent Researcher, Gulistan State University, Uzbekistan

E-mail: narzullayevamuboraksherzodovna@gmail.com

Abstract

Uzbek belongs to the most consistently suffixing group of the world's languages, yet its modern lexicon contains a stable and codified layer of units built with word-initial derivational formatives. The article determines the position occupied by this layer within the general architecture of Uzbek word formation. It is argued that prefixation is not a derivational type on a par with affixation and compounding but a subtype of affixal derivation which is peripheral in quantitative, genetic and structural terms while remaining functionally non-redundant. A set of five criteria — free-word status, semantic bleaching, independent stress, codified solid spelling, and attachment to inherited Turkic bases — is proposed for delimiting prefixes from adjacent categories, and its application yields a gradient with three zones: prototypical prefixes, prefixoids and combining forms. The study further shows that the prefixal slot is strictly root-adjacent and non-recursive, that prefixation feeds suffixation but never the reverse, and that the resulting template has been integrated into the inherited agglutinative structure without disturbing it. The native reduplicative intensifier of the type qip-qizil, sap-sariq is analysed as a form-building rather than word-forming device and is accordingly excluded from the prefixal inventory. Consequences for orthographic codification are drawn.

Keywords: Uzbek language, prefixation, word formation, derivational typology, agglutination, prefixoid, combining form, affix versus compound, morphological template, orthographic codification.

Introduction

Uzbek is classified in typological surveys as strongly suffixing in inflectional morphology, in common with the Turkic family as a whole [19]. Its derivational machinery matches this profile: new words are formed by the sequential addition of monofunctional formatives to the right edge of the stem, and the inventory of such formatives is measured in the hundreds. Against this background the existence of a set of word-initial derivational formatives — be-, no-, ser-, ham-, bad-, g'ayri-, kam-, and the international anti-, super-, mikro-, post- — presents a structural question that is not answered simply by noting that these formatives are borrowed. The question is where they belong. Three positions are possible in principle. Prefixation may be a derivational type of its own, parallel to affixation and compounding in the standard

classification of Uzbek word formation. It may be a subtype of affixal derivation, differing from suffixation only in linear position. Or it may not be derivation at all, the formatives in question being first components of compound words rather than affixes. Each position has been maintained, explicitly or implicitly, in the descriptive literature, and each carries different consequences for grammatical description, for lexicography and for orthographic codification. The practical stakes are visible in codification practice. Whether *kam suv*, *kam-suv* or *kamsuv* is correct, whether *onlayn savdo* is a phrase or *onlaynsavdo* a word, and whether *g'ayri qonuniy* should ever be written separately are questions that cannot be settled by convention alone: they are questions about the morphological status of the initial element, and a stable answer requires a prior determination of that status.

The aim of this article is therefore to establish the systemic position of prefixation in Uzbek word formation, to propose operational criteria for delimiting prefixes from adjacent categories, and to describe the structural properties of the prefixal slot within the Uzbek word template.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Hojiyev's systematic description [1] distinguishes morphological (affixal), syntactic (compounding), lexical-semantic, morphological-syntactic and phonetic types of word formation, and identifies affixation as the leading and most productive type. Prefixation is located within the affixal type, but is treated briefly, with emphasis on the foreign origin of the formatives. The morpheme dictionaries [2; 3] encode segmentation decisions that bear directly on the present question, since the choice to list an element as a bound morpheme rather than as a word is itself a determination of status. Sh. Rahmatullayev [4] and Q. Sapayev [5] follow the same general line. A. Berdialiyeu's study of complex word-forming affixes [6] is relevant for the treatment of affix combinability.

A. N. Kononov [7] noted the restriction of prefixal combinability to bases of the donor languages, an observation whose weakening over time turns out to be the key diagnostic used below. Within Turkological scholarship the reference grammars of A. F. Sjoberg [10] and A. J. E. Bodrogligeti [9] and the handbook edited by L. Johanson and É. Á. Csató [8] describe the inventory and situate it in the suffixing profile of Turkic, and M. S. Dryer's typological survey [19] supplies the cross-linguistic baseline against which Uzbek is anomalous.

The delimitation of affixes from compound members has been addressed in general morphology by L. Bauer [12] and G. Booij [13], who converge on the view that the boundary is gradient and that intermediate categories — affixoids, combining forms — are required for an adequate description. The contact-linguistic literature contributes the decisive diagnostic: F. Seifart [11] argues that the productive attachment of a borrowed formative to inherited native stems, producing hybrid formations, distinguishes a formative that has been integrated into the recipient system from one that has merely been imported inside ready-made loanwords. This criterion, developed for the study of affix borrowing generally, has not previously been applied to Uzbek prefixation, and it proves to be the most reliable of the five criteria proposed here.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The inventory was established from the five-volume explanatory dictionary [17] and checked against the morpheme dictionaries [2; 3]. Orthographic evidence was taken from the current spelling rules and from the practice recorded in the dictionary; stress judgements follow the descriptions in the reference grammars [9; 10]. Contemporary material containing recently borrowed formatives was collected from specialist terminology and current usage.

The method is criterial. Five properties were selected as diagnostics of prefixal status, each of them independently observable: (i) whether the formative occurs as an independent word in modern Uzbek; (ii) whether it is semantically bleached relative to its meaning in the donor language; (iii) whether it bears independent stress; (iv) whether codified orthography writes it solid with the base; and (v) whether it attaches to inherited Turkic bases, producing hybrid formations. Each formative was evaluated against all five, and formatives were then grouped by their profile of results.

Structural properties of the prefixal slot were established by inspecting the linear order of formatives in polymorphemic words, by testing the recursion of prefixes, and by testing the possibility of attaching a prefix outside a derivational suffix. Forms marked with an asterisk are unattested in the sources and rejected in normative usage.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Prefixation is a subtype of affixal derivation, not a separate type

The first result is negative but necessary. Prefixation does not constitute a derivational type parallel to affixation, compounding and the other types recognised in the standard classification [1]. A derivational type in that classification is defined by the nature of the formal means employed — affixal, syntactic, semantic, phonetic — and prefixation employs affixal means. It differs from suffixation in linear position and in the source of its inventory, but not in the kind of operation performed. Positing a separate type on the basis of linear position alone would require, by parity of reasoning, that infixation and circumfixation be types as well, which no description of Uzbek proposes.

The correct statement is therefore that Uzbek affixal derivation has two positional subtypes, of which one is inherited, large and central, and the other borrowed, small and peripheral. The remainder of this section characterises the peripherality precisely.

4.2. Three respects in which prefixation is peripheral

Prefixation is peripheral in quantitative terms. The suffixes participating in Uzbek word formation number in the hundreds; the prefixes, on the strictest definition, comprise fewer than a dozen units of Persian-Arabic origin together with a larger but still bounded set of international formatives. The proportion of the lexicon derived by prefixation is correspondingly small.

It is peripheral in genetic terms. No Turkic prefix is inherited into Uzbek. Every formative in the inventory arrived through contact — with Persian and, through Persian, with Arabic; later with Russian and, through Russian, with the international scientific vocabulary; and most

recently with English. Prefixation in Uzbek is thus in its entirety a contact phenomenon, and its history is a history of successive borrowings rather than of internal development.

It is peripheral in structural terms, and this is the most consequential of the three. Prefixes do not participate in the long linear chains characteristic of Uzbek suffixation, in which four or five formatives may follow one another. They are non-recursive: no prefix may be stacked on itself (*bebeg'am), and stacking of distinct prefixes is restricted to ready-made international formations (antidemokratik). And they occupy a single slot immediately to the left of the root, with no positional variation.

4.3. The respect in which prefixation is central

Peripherality in these three senses is compatible with functional indispensability, and the two must be kept apart. Prefixation is the language's principal device for modificational derivation on the evaluative axis, and no suffix covers its territory exactly.

The point is established by examining the cases in which a prefixal and a suffixal derivative are formed on the same base. The inherited caritive suffix -siz, the possessive -li and the sociative -dosh produce forms that stand in near-synonymy with derivatives in be-, ser- and ham- respectively. If the prefixal formations were functionally redundant, one would expect these pairs either to be in free variation or to have been eliminated in favour of the inherited member. Neither has occurred. In every case the pair is differentiated, and the differentiation is systematic: beg'am has drifted to 'carefree, irresponsible' while g'amsiz remains compositional; serhosil is the agronomic term while hosilli is the general-language form; hamkasb is stylistically neutral while kasbdosh is elevated. A borrowed subsystem that survives centuries of coexistence with an inherited rival, and that specialises rather than disappears, is by definition performing a function the inherited system does not perform.

4.4. Delimitation: five criteria and three zones

The boundary between prefix, compound member and independent modifier is best treated as a gradient. Applying the five criteria of Section 3 to the inventory yields the distribution set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Application of the five delimitation criteria

Formative	Not a free word	Bleached	No own stress	Written solid	Hybrids on Turkic bases
be-, no-, ser-, ham-, bad-, g'ayri-	+	+	+	+	+ (beto'xtov, noo'rin, sersuv, serquyosh, serqatnov, hamyurt, hamqishloq)
kam-, xush-, sar-, bosh-, o'rta-	- / ±	±	±	±	± (kamsuv, kamgap)
avto-, avia-, bio-, foto-, video-, elektro-	+	-	±	+	- (combine chiefly with bound elements)
anti-, super-, mikro-, post-, trans-, eko-	+	+	+	+	+ (antiqadriyat, mikroiklim, ekotizim)
kiber-, onlayn-, veb-, smart-	±	±	±	- (unstable)	± (increasing)

Three zones emerge. The prototypical prefixes — be-, no-, ser-, ham-, bad-, g'ayri-, together with the established international formatives anti-, super-, mikro-, post-, trans-, eko- — satisfy all five criteria. None occurs as an independent word, all are bleached, none bears independent stress, all are written solid, and all form hybrids on inherited Turkic bases. The last of these is decisive. In Seifart's terms [11], hybrid formation shows that a formative has completed the transition from importation inside ready-made loanwords to independent productivity within the recipient system. A formative that produces sersuv, serquyosh and serqatnov — with Turkic suv, quyosh and qatnov — is no longer merely present in Uzbek loanwords; it is a unit of Uzbek grammar.

The prefixoids — kam-, xush-, sar-, bosh-, o'rta- — fail at least one criterion. Kam is a free adjective (kam odam 'few people'), so that kamsuv and kamgap are equally analysable as compounds; bosh- and o'rta- are transparently the free nouns bosh 'head' and o'rta 'middle'; xush survives only in fixed collocations. These units are structurally unstable, and their instability is not a defect of the analysis but a property of the material.

The combining forms — avto-, avia-, bio-, foto-, video-, elektro-, radio- — are bound in Uzbek but correspond to independent stems in the source languages, combine preferentially with other bound elements, and typically enter as parts of complete loan compounds (avtomobil, aviatsiya, biologiya, fotosurat). They should be excluded from the prefix inventory proper, though they contribute to the impression that word-initial derivation in Uzbek is expanding.

4.5. The prefixal slot within the Uzbek word template

The structural integration of prefixation can be stated precisely. Prefixation feeds suffixation without restriction: be-g'am → beg'am-lik, ham-kor → hamkor-lik → hamkorlik-da-gi, g'ayri-qonuniy → g'ayriqonuniy-lik, ser-qirra → serqirra-lik → serqirra-lig-i. The reverse order is never attested: a prefix cannot be attached outside a derivational suffix, and forms of the type *be-ishchi-lik in the intended reading are impossible.

The template is therefore PREFIX – ROOT – DERIVATIONAL SUFFIXES – INFLECTIONAL SUFFIXES, with exactly one prefixal position, no recursion in that position, and unrestricted expansion to the right. Three consequences follow.

First, the borrowed technique has been absorbed at minimal structural cost. Because prefixation was confined to a single root-adjacent slot, it required no modification of the inherited agglutinative machinery: the suffixal chain operates on the prefixed stem exactly as it would on a simplex root. This is a general point about contact morphology worth stating explicitly — a typologically alien derivational technique is absorbed most easily when it can be accommodated in a position that the recipient template leaves vacant.

Second, the asymmetry between the two positions is itself typologically revealing. Uzbek has borrowed prefixes but has never borrowed a suffix into competition with its own suffixal inventory in the same way; the suffixal position was already densely occupied, whereas the prefixal position was empty. Availability of a slot, rather than structural similarity between donor and recipient, appears to be the relevant condition.

Third, the strict root-adjacency of the prefix accounts for the absence of the ordering paradoxes familiar from languages with rich prefixation. Since only one prefixal slot exists and it is closest to the root, no question of relative prefix scope arises.

4.6. The native reduplicative intensifier

One phenomenon must be excluded from the inventory explicitly, because it is the only word-initial device in Uzbek that is genetically Turkic. Adjectives of colour and of certain physical properties form an intensive by reduplicating the initial segments of the base and adding a closing consonant: qizil 'red' → qip-qizil 'bright red', sariq 'yellow' → sap-sariq, ko'k 'blue' → ko'm-ko'k, yashil 'green' → yam-yashil, oq 'white' → op-poq, qora 'black' → tim-qora, to'g'ri 'straight' → to'p-to'g'ri.

Formally this is a word-initial element, and it has occasionally been described as a native prefix. The description is mistaken on two grounds. The element has no constant phonological shape: it is copied from the base, so that there is no morpheme with an invariant form to be listed in an inventory. And, more importantly, the operation is not word-forming but form-building: qip-qizil is not a new lexeme distinct from qizil but an intensive grammatical form of it, in the same way that a comparative is a form rather than a new word. The device therefore belongs to the morphology of gradation and not to derivation.

The exclusion confirms the generalisation stated in Section 4.2: Uzbek possesses no inherited derivational prefix, and the entire prefixal inventory is contact-induced.

4.7. Consequences for orthographic codification

The gradient established in Section 4.4 explains the distribution of orthographic uncertainty in current Uzbek practice. Uncertainty is negligible in the prototypical zone: no one hesitates over bevafo, noto'g'ri, serhosil or hamkasb, all of which are uniformly written solid. It is concentrated in the prefixoid zone and in the emergent zone, that is, precisely where the criteria diverge.

This suggests a codificational principle rather than a list of exceptions. A word-initial element should be written solid where it satisfies the criteria of Section 4.4, and separately where it does not; hyphenation should be reserved for the intermediate cases in which a formative is bleached and stressless but still corresponds to a free word. On this principle kamsuv and kamgap, which are lexicalised, are written solid, while kam odam, in which kam is an ordinary attributive adjective, is written separately — and the apparent inconsistency turns out to reflect a real difference in status.

For the emergent formatives the principle predicts that solid spelling will become established as hybrid formations on Uzbek bases accumulate. This is a testable prediction, and it can be checked against the successive editions of the codified spelling rules.

5. CONCLUSION

Prefixation in Uzbek is a subtype of affixal derivation and not a derivational type in its own right. It is peripheral in quantitative terms, since the prefixal inventory is a small fraction of the suffixal one; in genetic terms, since no Turkic prefix is inherited and the entire inventory is contact-induced; and in structural terms, since prefixes are non-recursive and occupy a single root-adjacent slot.

It is nevertheless functionally non-redundant. Where prefixal and suffixal derivatives coexist on the same base, they specialise rather than compete to extinction, which shows that the prefixal subsystem performs work the inherited suffixal system does not perform.

The delimitation of prefixes from adjacent categories requires five criteria, of which the formation of hybrids on inherited Turkic bases is the most diagnostic. Their application yields a gradient with three zones — prototypical prefixes, prefixoids, and combining forms — and the distribution of orthographic uncertainty in current practice corresponds exactly to this gradient, which supports the analysis and suggests a principled basis for codification.

The Uzbek word template contains exactly one prefixal position, immediately to the left of the root and non-recursive; prefixation feeds suffixation but never the reverse. The borrowed technique has thus been integrated into the inherited agglutinative structure without disturbing it, which suggests more generally that the availability of an unoccupied structural position is a significant condition on the borrowing of derivational morphology.

Finally, the native reduplicative intensifier of the type qip-qizil is a device of form-building rather than word formation and does not belong to the prefixal inventory. Uzbek therefore has no inherited derivational prefix whatever.

A comparison with Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uyghur, which have undergone comparable but not identical contact histories, would establish whether the structural accommodation described here is specific to Uzbek or is a general Turkic outcome.

REFERENCES

1. Hojiyev, A. (2007). O'zbek tili so'z yasalishi tizimi [The word-formation system of the Uzbek language]. Toshkent: O'qituvchi. 167 p.
2. Hojiyev, A. (1992). O'zbek tilining morfem lug'ati [Morpheme dictionary of the Uzbek language]. Toshkent: O'qituvchi. 225 p.
3. G'ulomov, A., Tixonov, A. N., & Qo'ng'urov, R. (1977). O'zbek tili morfem lug'ati [Morpheme dictionary of Uzbek]. Toshkent: O'qituvchi.
4. Rahmatullayev, Sh. (2006). Hozirgi adabiy o'zbek tili [Modern literary Uzbek]. Toshkent: Universitet.
5. Sapayev, Q. (2009). Hozirgi o'zbek tili: morfemika, so'z yasalishi va morfologiya. Toshkent.
6. Бердалиев, А. (1970). O'zbek tilida so'z yasovchi qo'shma affikslar [Complex word-forming affixes in Uzbek]. Avtoref. dis. ... kand. filol. nauk. Toshkent.
7. Кононов, А. Н. (1960). Грамматика современного узбекского литературного языка. Москва–Ленинград: Издательство АН СССР.

8. Johanson, L., & Csató, É. Á. (Eds.). (2022). *The Turkic Languages* (2nd ed.). London & New York: Routledge.
9. Bodrogligeti, A. J. E. (2003). *An Academic Reference Grammar of Modern Literary Uzbek*. Munich: LINCOM Europa.
10. Sjoberg, A. F. (1963). *Uzbek Structural Grammar*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
11. Seifart, F. (2015). Direct and indirect affix borrowing. *Language*, 91(3), 511–532. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2015.0044>
12. Bauer, L. (2001). *Morphological Productivity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13. Booij, G. (2012). *The Grammar of Words: An Introduction to Linguistic Morphology* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Gardani, F., Arkadiev, P., & Amiridze, N. (Eds.). (2015). *Borrowed Morphology*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
15. Haspelmath, M., & Tadmor, U. (Eds.). (2009). *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative Handbook*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
16. Matras, Y. (2009). *Language Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
17. O'zbek tilining izohli lug'ati [Explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language] (2006–2008). 5 vols. Toshkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi.
18. Plag, I. (2018). *Word-Formation in English* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
19. Dryer, M. S. (2013). Prefixing vs. suffixing in inflectional morphology. In M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (Eds.), *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <https://wals.info/chapter/26>