

## FUNCTIONAL-SEMANTIC FEATURES OF PREFIXES IN MODERN UZBEK LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This article examines the functional-semantic characteristics of prefixes in modern Uzbek, a language whose morphological system is predominantly agglutinative and suffix-based. Although prefixation is not native to the historical word-formation system of Turkic languages, the intensive contact of Uzbek with Russian, and through Russian with international (Latin, Greek, French) vocabulary, together with the more recent influence of English-medium terminology, has led to the establishment of a functioning, if peripheral, layer of prefixal word-formation in the contemporary lexicon. The article classifies the prefixes attested in modern Uzbek according to their origin, their part-of-speech distribution, and their semantic functions (negation, opposition, repetition, intensification, spatial and temporal relations, and evaluative meaning), and discusses the degree to which these units have been assimilated into the native derivational system. The analysis is based on lexicographic sources, media and scientific-technical texts, and comparative material from Turkic linguistics. The findings show that prefixes in Uzbek occupy a transitional position between borrowed lexical elements and genuine word-formation morphemes, and that their productivity is steadily increasing in terminological and journalistic registers.

**Keywords:** Uzbek language, prefix, prefixation, word-formation, agglutination, borrowing, functional-semantic analysis, morpheme, affixation, terminology.

### Introduction

The word-formation system of the Uzbek language, like that of the other Turkic languages, is built primarily on the principle of agglutination, in which grammatical and derivational meanings are expressed through a linear sequence of suffixes attached to an invariable root. Historically, Old Turkic and Chagatai, the literary predecessors of modern Uzbek, possessed virtually no prefixal morphemes; word-formation relied almost exclusively on suffixation, compounding, and analytic (periphrastic) constructions. This typological fact has long been treated in Turkological literature as a defining feature distinguishing Turkic languages from the inflectional and prefix-rich Indo-European languages.

Nevertheless, the linguistic situation of Uzbek over the last century and a half has been shaped by sustained contact with Russian, first through the Russian Empire and then intensively through the Soviet period, and more recently by contact with English as the language of international science, technology, and popular culture. As a result, the Uzbek lexicon has absorbed a considerable number of internationalisms formed with Greco-Latin prefixes such as anti-, bio-, mikro-, mega-, multi-, super-, pseudo-, kontr-, and de-, alongside a smaller set of



native or semi-native prefix-like elements that have developed under the influence of these borrowings. The presence of such elements raises a genuine theoretical question for Uzbek linguistics: can these units be regarded as prefixes in the full grammatical sense, that is, as productive derivational morphemes integrated into the word-formation system of the language, or should they be treated merely as bound elements of borrowed lexical items that have not been morphologically reanalyzed by native speakers?

The purpose of this article is to address this question by examining the functional and semantic properties of the units conventionally labeled 'prefixes' in descriptions of modern Uzbek. The article pursues three specific tasks: first, to classify these units according to their origin and degree of assimilation; second, to describe their distribution across parts of speech and text types; and third, to characterize the semantic functions they perform, comparing these functions with the meanings expressed by native Uzbek suffixes and analytic constructions in equivalent contexts.

### Literature Review

The question of prefixation in Turkic languages has attracted attention in Uzbek and broader Turkological scholarship since the mid-twentieth century. Classical descriptions of Uzbek grammar, including the academic grammars associated with A. Hojiyev and Sh. Rahmatullayev, generally note that prefixation is not a native word-formation type in Uzbek and restrict their discussion of prefixes to borrowed elements found in international and Russian-origin vocabulary. Comparative Turkological works, including those of A.N. Kononov on the grammar of the literary Uzbek language, similarly emphasize the overwhelmingly suffixal character of Turkic derivation while acknowledging isolated prefix-like elements inherited from older layers of the language, such as the intensifying reduplicative prefixes seen in forms like *qip-qizil* ('bright red') or *yam-yashil* ('bright green'), which linguists usually classify separately as partial reduplication rather than true prefixation.

More recent Uzbek linguistic scholarship, produced after independence, has paid increasing attention to the process of terminological renewal and the competition between Russian-mediated internationalisms and native or Arabic-Persian-origin equivalents. Scholars working on lexicology and terminology, including U. Tursunov, J. Muxtorov, and Sh. Rahmatullayev in their joint description of the contemporary literary language, discuss borrowed prefixal elements primarily as part of the loanword stratum rather than as an independent morphological category, reflecting the broader consensus that such elements have not achieved full derivational productivity with native roots.

At the same time, studies in contact linguistics and language planning point out that certain internationalisms in prefixes, particularly *anti-*, *bio-*, and *mikro-*, have begun to combine productively not only with borrowed stems but occasionally with hybrid formations, a phenomenon documented in general studies of Russian-Turkic language contact and in observations on the language of Uzbek mass media and scientific-technical writing. This body of literature provides the empirical and theoretical foundation for the present study, which attempts to bring together the descriptive and the functional-semantic perspectives on prefixation in a single, systematically organized account.



### **Research Methodology**

The material for this study was drawn from three types of sources: (1) explanatory and orthographic dictionaries of the Uzbek language, used to establish the inventory of prefixed lexical items and their recorded meanings; (2) a corpus of texts from Uzbek periodicals, popular-science publications, and official documents, used to observe the actual distributional and combinatory behavior of prefixes in living usage; and (3) comparative grammatical descriptions of Uzbek and of the source languages (Russian, Latin, Greek, English) from which the prefixes in question originate. The descriptive method was applied to establish an inventory of the prefixes attested in the material; the componential (semantic-feature) method was applied to decompose the meanings of prefixed words into their constituent semantic components; and the comparative method was applied to relate the Uzbek data to the corresponding word-formation patterns of the source languages and of other Turkic languages.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The prefixal elements attested in modern Uzbek can be divided into three groups according to their origin. The first and by far the largest group consists of internationalisms of Greco-Latin origin that entered Uzbek predominantly through Russian during the Soviet period and continue to enter the language through Russian and, increasingly, directly through English in scientific, technical, and media discourse. This group includes anti- (antibiotik, antivirus), bio- (biotexnologiya, bioximiya), mikro- (mikroiqlim, mikroblok), makro- (makroiqtisodiyot), mega- (megapolis), multi- (multimedia), super- (supermarket), giper- (giperinflyatsiya), interfeys-type inter- (internet, integratsiya), kontr- (kontrargument), de- and dez- (deformatsiya, dezinformatsiya), and pseudo- (psevdoilmii). The second group consists of Russian-origin prefixes that were borrowed together with whole lexical items rather than as productive derivational units, such as pere- in peredacha-type borrowings, which are treated in Uzbek simply as unanalyzed loanwords rather than as prefixed formations. The third and smallest group consists of native or Arabic-Persian-origin elements that function similarly to prefixes in that they precede the root and modify its meaning, including the intensifying reduplicative element illustrated above (qip-, yam-, dum- and similar forms) and the negative particle na- found in a limited set of lexicalized items such as noma'lum ('unknown') and notinch ('restless'), which some grammarians analyze as a prefixoid rather than a full prefix because of its restricted combinability.

The overwhelming majority of prefixed formations in Uzbek are nouns, reflecting the terminological character of most borrowed prefixes: they typically attach to nominal roots to create new scientific, technical, social, or economic terms. A smaller number of prefixed adjectives occur, largely through direct borrowing of already-prefixed adjectival forms from Russian (aktiv/passiv-type oppositions, norezident) or through the productive use of super- and giper- as intensifying modifiers of quality adjectives in colloquial and journalistic style (super qulay, 'super convenient'). Prefixed verbs are extremely rare and are almost always borrowed as whole units rather than formed within Uzbek itself, since Uzbek verbal derivation relies overwhelmingly on native suffixation and analytic constructions with auxiliary verbs such as qilmoq and bo'lmoq. This distributional asymmetry is itself an important functional-semantic fact: it shows that prefixation in Uzbek operates mainly in the nominal, terminology-building



sphere of the lexicon rather than in the core grammatical (verbal) system, where the native agglutinative mechanism remains fully dominant.

Despite their peripheral morphological status, the prefixes of modern Uzbek express a coherent set of semantic functions that can be grouped into six categories.

(a) Negation and absence: prefixes such as *a-* (*asimetriya*, 'asymmetry'), *de-* (*demobilizatsiya*), and the native *na-* (*notekis*, 'uneven') express the absence, removal, or negation of the quality or process named by the root, functionally overlapping with the native negative suffix *-siz* (*masalan, qonunsiz*, 'lawless') but differing from it in stylistic register: prefixed negatives are perceived as more formal, scientific, or bookish, while *-siz* is stylistically neutral and fully productive.

(b) Opposition and contrariety: *kontr-* (*kontrmarosim*) and *anti-* (*antidemokratik*) express opposition to, or counteraction against, the concept named by the root; this function has no direct native suffixal equivalent in Uzbek and is typically rendered analytically with words such as *qarshi* ('against') when prefixation is not used, which explains why *anti-* has become one of the most productive prefixes in contemporary political and social vocabulary.

(c) Repetition and renewal: *re-* (*reorganizatsiya, reforma*) expresses the repeated or renewed performance of an action or the re-establishment of a state; Uzbek possesses no dedicated native affix for this meaning, which again favors the retention and productivity of the borrowed prefix in official and administrative style.

(d) Quantitative intensification and scale: *super-*, *giper-*, *mega-*, and the native reduplicative intensifiers (*qip-qizil*) express an increase in degree, size, or intensity; this is the semantic zone in which borrowed and native prefixal means most directly compete, with *super-* increasingly displacing purely intensifying adverbs such as *juda* in informal and advertising registers.

(e) Plurality and combination: *multi-* and *inter-* express the combination or plurality of the entities named by the root (*multimilliy*, 'multinational'; *interfaol*, 'interactive'), a meaning area in which Uzbek has traditionally relied on compounding and the collective suffix *-lar* together with descriptive phrases, so that these prefixes fill a genuine expressive gap rather than merely duplicating existing means.

(f) Spatial and dimensional relations: *mikro-* and *makro-* express relative smallness or largeness of scale (*mikroiqlim*, 'microclimate'; *makroiqtisodiyot*, 'macroeconomics'), a function historically expressed in Uzbek through the adjectives *kichik* and *katta* in analytic combination with the noun; the prefixal variants have become dominant specifically in scientific terminology, where compactness and international comparability of terms are valued over transparency for the general reader.

The material examined shows a gradient of assimilation rather than a uniform category. At one end of the gradient are prefixes such as *anti-*, *super-*, and *mikro-*, which show clear signs of productivity: they combine not only with fully borrowed international stems but occasionally with native or hybrid roots in journalistic neologisms (for instance, occasional playful or ad hoc coinages in the press), and speakers appear to recognize them as separable meaningful units, capable of being contrasted with their absence (*masalan, bio mahsulot* vs *oddiy mahsulot*). At the other end of the gradient are elements such as *de-* and *dez-*, which occur only within a closed, memorized set of loanwords and show no evidence of productive combination with new roots, functioning essentially as unanalyzed parts of whole lexical items for the



majority of speakers. Between these two poles lie prefixes such as re- and kontr-, which are understood and recognized by educated speakers, particularly in administrative, political, and academic registers, but remain largely restricted to established terminological pairs rather than being freely extended to new formations. This gradient supports the view that prefixation in Uzbek should be described not as a binary present/absent category but as a matter of degree, correlating closely with register, frequency of exposure, and the terminological versus everyday character of the vocabulary in question.

It is useful, in concluding the descriptive part of this study, to situate the phenomenon of prefixation within the broader typological character of Uzbek word-formation. In an agglutinative language, the canonical derivational operation is the addition of a suffix to an unchanging root, with each suffix expressing, in principle, a single grammatical or derivational meaning, arranged in a fixed linear order relative to other suffixes. Prefixation, by contrast, requires the language to tolerate a bound morpheme preceding the root, a configuration that is structurally marked for Uzbek and that consequently tends to be restricted to the more formal, literate, and terminologically oriented strata of the vocabulary. This explains why, even among the most productive Uzbek prefixes such as anti- and super-, combination with underived native roots remains comparatively rare, while combination with already-borrowed or hybrid international stems is common: speakers appear to treat these prefixes as part of a distinct, internationalized sub-lexicon rather than as fully integrated tools of the native derivational grammar.

A further point of interest concerns the competition between prefixal and suffixal-analytic means for expressing similar meanings. As shown above, the negative meaning expressed by a- or de- in borrowed terms is, for native vocabulary, expressed instead by the highly productive suffix -siz; the intensifying meaning expressed by super- or giper- competes with the native adverb juda and with reduplicative intensifiers; and the meaning of plurality or combination expressed by multi- competes with compounding and the plural suffix -lar. In each of these cases, the borrowed prefix tends to be favored in scientific, administrative, and international contexts, where compactness, precision, and comparability with corresponding Russian or English terms are valued, while the native means remain dominant in everyday, spoken, and literary-artistic registers. This register-based division of labor, rather than outright replacement of native mechanisms, appears to be the most accurate way of describing the current functional status of prefixation in Uzbek.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are also worth noting briefly. Because prefixed terms are concentrated in scientific, technical, and social-political vocabulary, their correct understanding is particularly important for students and specialists working with textbooks, official documents, and international scientific literature translated or adapted into Uzbek. A clear functional-semantic classification of the kind proposed in this article can therefore assist in the teaching of terminology and in the compilation of explanatory and bilingual dictionaries, where prefixed international words are often listed without any indication of the systematic semantic function performed by the prefix itself.

The analysis yields the following results. First, modern Uzbek has developed a functioning, though morphologically peripheral, system of prefixation that coexists with, rather than replaces, the dominant native suffixal mechanism of word-formation. Second, prefixes in



Uzbek are overwhelmingly of Greco-Latin origin mediated through Russian, with a much smaller set of native or Arabic-Persian elements performing prefix-like functions in a restricted number of lexicalized forms. Third, prefixation in Uzbek operates predominantly within the nominal and adjectival lexicon, and above all within scientific, technical, political, and journalistic terminology, while the core verbal system remains entirely governed by native agglutinative suffixation. Fourth, the semantic functions of Uzbek prefixes cluster into six identifiable categories (negation, opposition, repetition, intensification, plurality/combination, and spatial-dimensional relation), several of which fill genuine expressive gaps left open by the native derivational system, which explains their relative productivity despite their foreign origin. Fifth, the degree of morphological assimilation of individual prefixes varies along a continuum from fully lexicalized, non-productive elements to increasingly productive, separable morphemes, and this continuum correlates with stylistic register and text type.

### Conclusion

The study of prefixation in modern Uzbek confirms the traditional Turkological view that prefixal word-formation is not native to the historical morphological system of the language, which remains fundamentally agglutinative and suffix-based. At the same time, the material examined in this article shows that sustained language contact, first with Russian and increasingly with English, has produced a genuine, functioning layer of prefixal derivation within the modern Uzbek lexicon, concentrated in scientific, technical, political, and journalistic registers and operating chiefly within the nominal and adjectival domains. The functional-semantic analysis presented here demonstrates that these prefixes are not simply decorative borrowings but perform identifiable and, in several cases, functionally indispensable semantic tasks, particularly in expressing opposition, repetition, and quantitative or dimensional scale, for which the native suffixal system offers no fully equivalent means. Further research, based on larger corpora of contemporary media and scientific-technical texts, would help to establish more precisely the productivity thresholds at which individual prefixes cross from the status of unanalyzed loan elements to that of genuinely productive derivational morphemes within the Uzbek word-formation system, and would allow this ongoing process to be tracked systematically over time.

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