

Word Structure of Negative Prefixes in The “Wrecker” Novel

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Abstract

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Negation is an essential aspect of communication. In English, one common morphological strategy to express negation is by attaching negative prefixes to base forms. This study analyses the morphological structure of words containing negative prefixes found in the Wrecker novel (Hiaasen 2023), based on the framework proposed by Plag (2023). In the novel, we identified a total of 89 unique words containing negative prefixes; words with the prefix un- is the most prevalent. The classification of these words reveals two distinct structural patterns (that are represented as tree diagram). The first pattern consists of a root word combined with a negative prefix, negating its meaning without altering its grammatical category. The second pattern involves more complex words, where two to three morphemes are used along with a suffix, modifying both the meaning and the word class. The findings contributed to enhance understanding of morphological patterns in literary texts, encouraging future studies to broaden the scope by analysing additional works across various genres and authors to determine whether similar structures might persist or vary in different contexts.

Kata Kunci:

Morfologi, Awalan Negatif, Struktur Kata, Bahasa Inggris

Abstrak

Penegasian merupakan aspek penting dalam komunikasi. Dalam bahasa Inggris, salah satu strategi morfologis yang umum digunakan untuk mengungkapkan negasi adalah dengan menambahkan prefiks negatif pada bentuk dasar kata. Studi ini menganalisis struktur morfologis kata-kata yang mengandung prefiks negatif yang ditemukan dalam novel The Wrecker (Hiaasen, 2023), berdasarkan kerangka kerja yang diusulkan oleh Plag (2023). Dalam novel tersebut, kami mengidentifikasi total 89 kata unik yang mengandung prefiks negatif; prefiks un- merupakan yang paling umum ditemukan. Klasifikasi kata-kata ini mengungkapkan dua pola struktural yang

berbeda (yang ditampilkan dalam bentuk diagram pohon). Pola pertama terdiri dari kata dasar yang dikombinasikan dengan prefiks negatif, yang menegaskan maknanya tanpa mengubah kategori gramatikalnya. Pola kedua melibatkan kata-kata yang lebih kompleks, di mana dua hingga tiga morfem digunakan bersamaan dengan sufiks, yang memodifikasi baik makna maupun kelas katanya. Temuan ini berkontribusi dalam meningkatkan pemahaman terhadap pola morfologis dalam teks sastra, serta mendorong penelitian lanjutan untuk memperluas cakupan dengan menganalisis karya sastra lain dari berbagai genre dan penulis guna menentukan apakah struktur serupa tetap bertahan atau bervariasi dalam konteks yang berbeda.

INTRODUCTION

Communication enables humans in fulfilling their needs and conveying their ideas. Despite the variety of languages in the world, they have the same use to express the idea of main humans in order to gain what he wants. Language is an important aspect of human communication. People use various forms of language as tools to acquire and share thoughts, knowledge, emotions, information and cultural traditions within a community (Zuhdah & Firmonasari, 2024). Gunawan et al. (2025) stated that language is a structured system of spoken, written, or manual symbols which enables humans to participate and communicate in the social group. Language itself is composed of several components that contribute to its structure and function, such as morphemes, words, sentences, etc. As part of language, words have important roles in forming the language itself. Katamba & Stonham (2006: 18) define a 'word' as a unit of language that can be realized both in speech and writing. However, many people as the user still don't know how the word is formed. There are millions of words used by people in this world, and many more new words are added into human's language. The meaning of new word form is influenced by the process of forming the word, which is usually called word formation.

The English language derives a numerous number of words on a daily basis from languages worldwide. The study of morphology is the closest notion to words as it gives an idea about the source and system in coining new words. Aronoff &

Fudeman (2022: 2) mention morphology as a ‘mental system’ to the linguistics that examine words and their structure, also the way to form new word. English words were formed by several methods such as derivation, affixation, compounding, back-formation, and etc. The continuous development of English words has significantly shaped human communication and established its role as the most widely spoken language in the world.

However, the idea of communication as a medium for expressing thoughts includes both positive and negative aspects. The presence of negation is inherently tied to the nature of communication. To describe negation, Horn (2001) proposes that it is our ability to negate that is one of the distinguishing features that separates human language and animal communication. In the English language, the phenomenon of negation can be expressed in a number of different ways. It is an abstract phenomenon to indicate contradiction or opposition and can be realized grammatically or semantically. The most common way to form negation in the English language is using the negative particle not (or its contracted form n’t). In grammatical way, negation is conducted by attaching negative prefixes, such as *un-*, *im-*, *dis-*, etc in the base word (Hulse, 2011: 30). Hulse (2011) emphasizes that each negative prefix has distinct preferences in their distribution across word class. Noun, adjective, adverb and verb act as the four major word classes in the distribution of negative prefixes, each favoring specific categories while avoiding others. For instance, *dis-* appears to accompany verbs although *un-* prefixes have been accommodated in some verb forms. On other hand, *dis-* prefixes align with *non-* are least likely to be found in adverbs, while *in-* is the most commonly used in this category. Additionally, *un-* as the most productive negative prefix is more frequent with nouns than any other prefix.

As mentioned before, one significant aspect of the word's development in English is the use of affixes. According to Yule (2010), affixes are morphemes attached to a base or root word to create new words or alter their meanings. Prefixes and suffixes are the affixes that are most commonly used while infixes are rarely used in the English vocabularies. This research focuses on the analysis of words containing English negative prefixes. English negative prefixes, such as “*un-*”, “*dis-*”

”, “*in-*”, and “*non-*”, are the linguistic tools that negate or reverse the meaning of the base words to which they are attached. These prefixes enable speakers and writers to convey negation, opposition, or absence. For example, the prefix “*un-*” in “*unhappy*” negates the meaning of “*happy*,” thereby forming its opposite.

Plag (2003: 124) classified the kind of negative prefixes into several types which can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: List of Negative Prefixes

Prefix	Definition
/a(n)-/	The prefix <i>a(n)-</i> can be referred to as the absence of the base noun refers to or negation of the meaning. However, these prefixes exclusively occur in latinate adjectives. e.g; <i>asymmetrical</i> , <i>asexual</i> .
/anti-/	The prefix <i>anti-</i> can be referred to as opposition or negation and indicating something lacking the expected characteristics of X. e.g; <i>anti-hero</i> , <i>antisocial</i> .
/de-/	The prefix <i>de-</i> typically attaches to verbs and nouns to indicate reversal or removal of an action or state. e.g; <i>deactivate</i> , <i>decontaminate</i> .
/dis-/	The prefix <i>dis-</i> is used to create reversative verbs from foreign verbal bases, indicating an action that is undone or negated. It also means “not X” in adjectives. e.g; <i>dishonest</i> , <i>disloyal</i> .
/in-, im-, ir-, il/	These negative prefixes occur in Latinate adjectives and refer to negation of meaning. e.g; <i>illogical</i> , <i>irresponsible</i> , <i>imbalanced</i> , <i>indecisive</i> .
/mis-/	The prefix <i>mis-</i> indicates wrong or error in action, means incorrectly or wrongly. e.g; <i>misjudge</i> , <i>misunderstand</i> .
/non-/	The prefix <i>non-</i> indicates negation. When attached to adjectives, it means “not X,” creating opposites. When attached to nouns, it signifies either the absence of X or the lack of its defining characteristics. e.g; <i>nonviolent</i> , <i>nonexistent</i> , <i>nonsense</i> .
/un-/	The prefix <i>un-</i> carries a reversative or privative meaning when attached to verbs or nouns, indicating removal or negation. e.g; <i>unexpected</i> , <i>unreliable</i> .
/mal-/	Prefix <i>mal-</i> typically conveys a meaning related to bad, wrong, or poorly. It attaches to nouns, verbs, and adjectives, often indicating deficiency, malfunction, or an undesirable condition. e.g; <i>malnutrition</i> , <i>malcontent</i> .

This research gathered data on negative prefixes from the newly published novel *Wrecker* (2023) by Carl Hiaasen. (Sinulingga & Deliana, 2022) refers a novel as a type of literary work containing millions of words. Hence, huge numbers of word are often created in the novel. This novel is expected to provide a rich collection of new vocabulary relevant to the study. Several previous studies share similarities with this research, particularly in analyzing word formation in literary works, notable studies among them are (Fatmawaty & Anggraini, 2019), (Giyatmi et al., 2022), and (Shera, 2024) which examine aspects of word formation. Study conducted by (Sumual et al., 2022) and (Nainggola et al., 2021) are taking a closer

approach on derivational affixes. Additionally, Hulse (2011) presents a related analysis of morphological negation, while study by Gunawan et al. (2025) focuses on negative prefixes in Jakarta Post. These previous studies contribute valuable insights that help to inform and build this research. However, this study specifically focuses on the structural formation of negative prefixes and their word structure across different word classes, based on the theory proposed by Plag (2003).

METHOD

The primary data source for this study is the novel *Wrecker* (Hiaasen, 2023) which consists of twenty-five chapters and a total of three hundred twenty-one pages to be examined. It contains a wide range of vocabulary, including both common and rare words which allows for comprehensive analysis of the use of derivational affixes.

A qualitative descriptive research approach was used to analyze the collected evidence. This method was considered more appropriate for examining and describing the findings in detail in literary works such as novels. stated that some steps required to analyze data in qualitative research involved the design used in the study, sample selection, and data collection procedures. Furthermore, it also detailed the data analysis, interpretation, validation, and presentation of the potential outcome of the study. This method approached emerging questions and procedures, collecting data in the participant's setting, inductively conducting data analysis, building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher made interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell & Cresswell, 2017:51). In order to gain and present the data, several steps must be carried out:

1. The novel was read carefully while words containing negative prefixes were highlighted, as addressed in the theory proposed by Plag (2003).
2. Detailed notes were taken on dialogues in which these researched words appeared.
3. The collected data were structured into tables, categorizing the prefixes, base words, suffixes that followed, and their contextual usage. The supplementary materials containing the data are available at

<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/HU9R2>

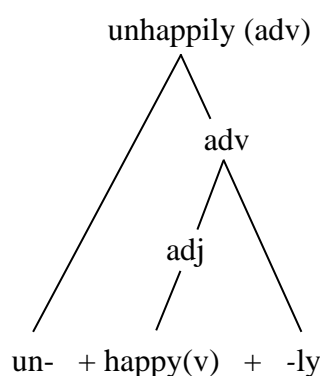
and

<https://github.com/complexico/negative-prefix-wrecker>.

4. The data and its context were converted into the form of a tree diagram to be presented.

Kroeger (2005) stated that to analyse the structure of a word or sentence, identification of the formed smaller parts and arrangement of the patterns in the word structure needed to be conducted. According to Carstairs-McCarthy (2002: 73), there are two basic approaches to represent the structure of a word. In the study, tree diagrams were used to analyse the structure of the words that occurred in the textual evidence. The analysis using tree diagram is illustrated below:

Datum 1: Unhappily



In the structure above, the word *unhappy* is categorized as an adverb. The derivational process begins from the root word “*happy*” added to the negative prefix “*un-*” which negates its meaning. Additionally, the suffixes “*-ly-*” change the word class into an adverb. The word “*unhappily*” refers to a manner without happiness or pleasure.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of *The Wrecker* novel identifies a total of 89 distinct words containing negative prefixes. Among these, *un-* is the most prevalent, appearing in 58 different words. The prefix *dis-* is found in 14 words, while *in-* is present in 5 words. Additionally, *im-*, *mis-*, and *non-* each appears in 3 distinct words to the

dataset. The prefixes *a(n)-*, *anti-*, *il-*, and *mal-* are the least common, with only one unique word each.

After categorizing the root words based on their class, the internal structure of words containing negative prefixes reveals two different patterns. The first pattern (Section 1) consists of words formed by two morphemes, where a negative prefix is added to the root word, altering its meaning. The second pattern (Section 2) involves more complex words, structured with three or four morphemes, where suffixes are added in addition to negative prefixes. These suffixes not only modify the meaning but also influence the grammatical structure of the word.

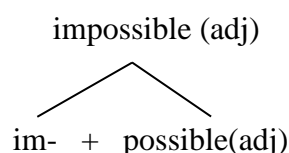
1. Negative Prefix + Root Word

This pattern involves attaching a negative prefix to a root word. The prefix negates or reverses the meaning of the root without changing its grammatical word class.

Datum 1. Negative Prefix + Root Word for Adjective

“Somebody either guessed the combination-almost impossible-or used a professional tool to line up the tumblers.” (page 165)

The structure of the word “*impossible*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*impossible*” is categorized as an adjective. The word is formed within English, by derivation.

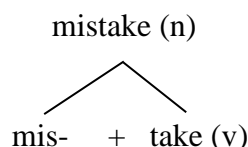


The word “*impossible*” is composed of “*im-*” and “*possible*” morphemes. The derivational process begins with the root word “*possible*” that means able to be done and then negates by adding the prefix “*im-*” which alters its meaning, referring to something which cannot be done.

Datum 2. Negative Prefix + Root Word for Noun

“Wrecker beached the speedboat exactly where he wanted, on just the right tide, and made it look like a dumb mistake.” (page 287)

The structure of the word “*mistake*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*mistake*” is categorized as a noun. The word is formed within English, by derivation.

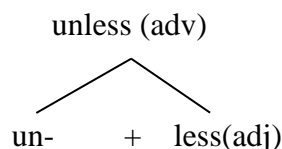


The word “*mistake*” is composed of “*mis-*” and “*take*” morphemes. The derivational process begins with the root word “*take*” which means to take a grab or acquire and then negates by adding the prefix “*mis-*” which alters its meaning, referring to an incorrect action, decision, or judgment.

Datum 3. Negative Prefix + Root Word for Adverb

*“Well, I’m here all night.” Wrecker says flatly, “**unless** it storms.” (page 118)*

The structure of the word “*unless*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*unless*” is categorized as an adverb. The word is formed within English, by derivation.

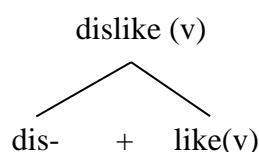


The word “*unless*” is composed of “*un-*” and “*less*” morphemes. The derivational process begins with the root word “*less*” meaning a smaller amount and added with prefixes “*un-*” that negates its meaning, synonym to except if.

Datum 4. Negative Prefix + Root Word for Verb

*“He doesn’t **dislike** Roger, but family gatherings can still get uncomfortable.” (page 60)*

The structure of the word “*dislike*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*dislike*” is categorized as a verb. The word is formed within English, by derivation.



The word “*dislike*” is composed of “*dis-*” and “*like*” morphemes. The derivational process begins with the root word “*like*” that means something pleasing or agreeable and then negates by adding the prefix “*dis-*” which altered its meaning, referring to not like or to regard with aversion.

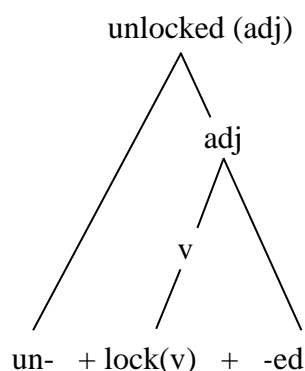
2. Negative Prefix + Root Word + Suffix

This pattern conveyed more complex words. It builds upon the previous pattern by adding a suffix after the root word, often modifying its grammatical function or forming a new word class.

Datum 5. Negative Prefix + Root Word + Suffix for Adjective

*“The cemetery gate is already **unlocked** and open.” (page 88)*

The structure of the word “*unlocked*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root + Suffix pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*unlocked*” is categorized as an adjective. The word is formed within English, by derivation.



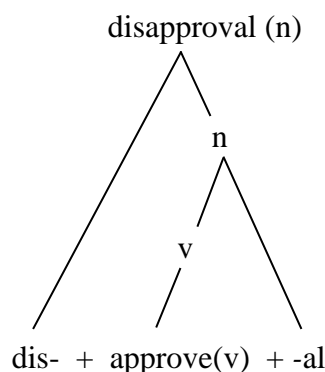
The word “*unlocked*” is composed of three morphemes which are “*un-*”, “*lock*” and “*-ed*.” The derivational process begins with the verb root word “*lock*” and then negates by adding the prefix “*un-*” that negates the meaning. The addition of the suffix “*-ed*” supposedly turns the word into its past tense. However, as the context is referring to the state of the noun, it makes the word “*unlocked*” function as an adjective.

Datum 6. Negative Prefix + Root Word + Suffix for Noun

*“Suzanne cuts in, with a fake tone of sisterly **disapproval**.” (page 181)*

The structure of the word “*disapproval*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root + Suffix pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word

“*disapproval*” is categorized as a noun. The word is formed within English, by derivation.

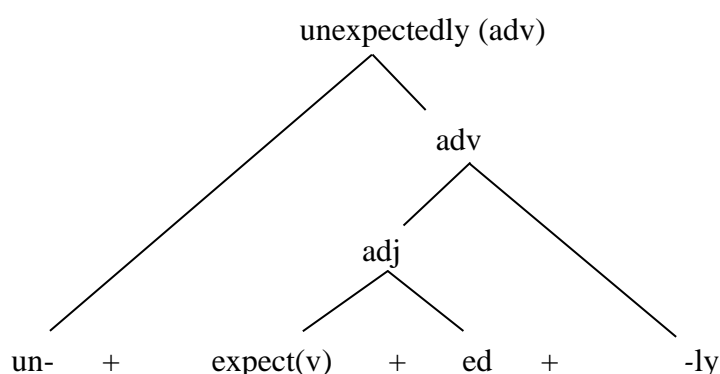


The word “*disapproval*” is composed of three morphemes: “*dis-*”, “*approve*”, and “*-al*“. The derivational process begins with the base word “*approve*” which is a verb, meaning to confirm authoritatively. By adding the prefix “*dis-*” that negates the meaning. The final step involves adding the suffix “*-al*“, which transforms the negated verb into a noun. The result is “*disapproval*” which expresses dislike, disagreement, or dissatisfaction toward something.

Datum 7. Negative Prefix + Root Word + Suffix for Adverb

“*Unexpectedly the girl begins to sing*” (page 12)

The structure of the word “*unexpectedly*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root + Suffix pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*unexpectedly*” is categorized as an adverb. The word is formed within English, by derivation.



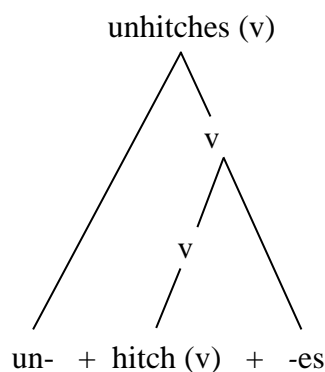
The word “*unexpectedly*” is composed of four morphemes: “*un-*”, “*expect*”, “*-ed*”, and “*-ly*“. The derivational process begins with the base word “*expect*”, which is a verb meaning to anticipate. Adding the prefix “*un-*” negates the meaning,

forming “*unexpected*,” an adjective describing something not foreseen. The suffix “-ly” then transforms adjective into adverb, resulting in “*unexpectedly*” which describes the manner in which something occurs in an unforeseen way.

Datum 8. Negative Prefix + Root Word + Suffix for verb

*“He **unhitches** the speedboat's tow rope and lets the current sweep it clear of his propeller.” (page 4)*

The structure of the word “*unhitches*” follows the Negative Prefix + Root + Suffix pattern. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “*unhitches*” is categorized as a verb. The word is formed within English, by derivation.



The word “*unhitches*” is composed of three morphemes: “*un-*”, “*hitch*”, and “*-(e)s*.” The derivational process begins with the base word “*hitch*,” which is a verb, meaning to fasten or attach. By adding the prefix “*un-*” the meaning of the word is negated, indicating the act of detaching or releasing. The final step involves adding the third person singular suffix “*-(e)s*” which indicates the third-person singular form in the present tense. The result is “*unhitches*” meaning to disengage, untie, or detach something.

Discussion

The lexical analysis of *The Wrecker* novel reveals significant patterns in the morphological construction of words with negative prefixes, confirming the relevance of derivational morphology in literary texts. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of word structure in negatively prefixed words. Based on previous studies conducted by (Gunawan, Syadiah, et al., 2025) which examined the use of negative prefixes such as *dis-*, *un-*, *in-*, *mis-*, *im-*, and *il-* found in literary

texts, researchers sought to narrow the types of negative prefixes and explore their contextual usage within specific patterns. The research identified two main categories: negative prefixes attached to single root words, and negative prefixes combined with more complex word structures containing both root words and suffixes. This study lays the groundwork for future investigations into negative prefixation and word structure, encouraging more detailed analyses across other literary works and languages.

CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes word structure of English negative prefixes in the *Wrecker* novel (Hiaasen, 2023); the novel consists of twenty-five chapters and a total of three hundred twenty-one pages to be examined. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research uses the main theory of morphology proposed by Plag (2003). The data is presented by the tree diagram and explained using description by sentence.

We identified in total 89 unique words containing negative prefixes. Findings reveal that the *un-* prefix is the most prevalent, followed by *dis-*, *in-*, *im-*, *mis-*, *non-*, *a(n)-*, *anti-*, *il-*, and *mal-*. The classification of these words based on their root word class demonstrates two distinct structural patterns. The first pattern (Section 1) consists of words formed by two morphemes, where a negative prefix is added to the root word, altering its meaning. The second pattern (Section 2) involves more complex words, structured with three or four morphemes, where suffixes are added alongside negative prefixes. These suffixes not only modify the meaning but also influence the grammatical structure of the word. The result in the study demonstrated how negative prefixes function systematically in authentic English usage, validating the theoretical framework of Plag (2003) in derivational morphology especially affixes. The identification of two structural patterns also suggested that negative prefixes frequently combine with suffixes, highlighting the complexity of word formation and its influence on grammatical roles. The findings contributed to enhance understanding of morphological patterns in literary texts, encouraging future studies to broaden the scope by analysing additional works

across various genres and authors to determine whether similar structures might persist or vary in different contexts.

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