

NUMBER PREFIXES AND THEIR VALENCY

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Rezumat

*Acest articol este dedicat cercetării prefixelor, în general, și a prefixelor ce denotă numărul, în particular, referindu-se la sensul, originea și valența lor. Prefixele cercetate sunt prezentate în ordine alfabetică: **bi-, demi-, di-, hemi-, mono-, multi-, poly-, tri-, uni-**.*

This article is devoted to the analysis of the prefixes in general and to the analysis of the, so called, **number prefixes** in particular, in terms of their meanings, origin and valency, being accompanied by a variety of examples. The investigated prefixes are presented in alphabetical order. These are the following: **bi-, demi-, di-, hemi-, mono-, multi-, poly-, tri-, uni-**. One of the well defined processes of word formation, i.e. derivation, results in the formation of new lexemes through the addition of affixes (prefixes and/or suffixes) (Lyons, 1977). Prefixes differ in their valency. Some of them can combine with the stems of only one part of speech; others are more productive in their functional use. For example:

- the prefix **ex-** is used only with the stem of **nouns**;
- the prefixes **be-** is used only with **verbs**;
- the prefixes **de-, en-, out-** are used with **verbs, nouns**;
- the prefixes **co-, contra-, dis-, intra-, mis-, pre-, post-, sub-, trans-, over-, under-** are used with **verbs, nouns, adjectives**.

Prefixes can be classified according to the nature of words in which they are used:

- **prefixes used in notional words**;
- **prefixes used in functional words**.

Prefixes used in notional words are proper prefixes which are bound morphemes; they are not correlated with any independent words, e.g. **un-, dis-, re-, mis-** in the words: *unhappy, dismiss, reread, misunderstand*. Prefixes used in functional words are semi-bound morphemes because they are met in the language as functional words (such as prepositions or adverbs), e.g. **out-, over-, up-**. Prefixes **out-, over-, up-, under-**, etc are considered as semi-bound morphemes. However, this view is doubtful because these prefixes are quite frequent in speech and like other derivational affixes have a generalized meaning. They have no grammatical meaning like the independent words. We think they are bound morphemes and should be regarded as homonyms of the corresponding independent words, for example, the prefix **out-** in the words: *outdoor, outcome, outbreak* is homonymous to the preposition *out* in: *out of door* and the adverb *out* in: *He went out*. Or, the prefix **over-** in the word *overhead* is homonymous to the preposition *over* in: *over the table*. Prefixes are polysemantic. Consider for illustration the following correlative semantic groups of prefixes implying:

- **priority: ex-, fore-, pre-** in the words: *ex-minister, forethought, prehistory*;
- **space and time relations: after-, under-, for-, post-, over-, super-** in the words: *afternoon, postposition, overspread, superstructure*;
- **repetition of an action: re-** in the words: *reread, remake*;
- **negation: in-, un-, dis-, non-, a-, de-, ir-, im-** in the words: *inapt, unhappy, disappear, non-stop, defeat, decentralize, impossible*;
- **opposition: counter-, contra-, anti-** in the words: *contradiction, antipode*;
- **locality: a-, en-, sub-, supra-, trans-, hypo-, epi-, under-** in the words: *ashore, encase, transmarine, hypodermic*;
- **reversion: de-, dis-, un-** in the words: *deform, denationalize, disconnect, dissolve, unbutton*;
- **incompleteness: demi-, hemi-, dys-** in the words: *hemisphere, dysclimax*.

Further we'll focus our attention on the characterisation of the prefixes that mean **number: bi-, demi-, di-, hemi-, mono-, multi-, poly-, tri-, uni-**. The prefix **bi-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'two', 'both'; (2) 'occurring at intervals of two'. The prefix **bi-** comes from [Lat. < *bis*, twice] and it is added to

adjectives and **nouns**, e.g. *biconcave, bicentennial, bicycle, bifocal, bilateral, bilingual, bipartisan, biped, biplane, etc.* The prefix **demi-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'half'; (2) 'part', 'partly'. The prefix **demi-** comes from [Fr. < *demi*, half < Med. Lat. *dimedius* < Lat. *dimidius*, divided in half: *dis-*, apart + *medius*, half] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *demigod, demijohn, demipension, demisec, demisemiquaver, demitasse, etc.* The prefix **di-** is a number prefix. It means 'two', 'twice', 'double'. The prefix **di-** comes from [Gk.] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *diacidic, dichotomy, dichromatic, digraph, diode, dioxide, divalent, etc.* The prefix **hemi-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'half'; (2) 'partial', 'partially'. The prefix **hemi-** comes from [Lat. *hemi-* < Gk. *hemi-*] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *hemibedral, hemicycle, hemi-cylindrical, hemimorphy, hemi-parasite, hemisphere, etc.* The prefix **mono-** is a number prefix. It means 'single', 'one', 'alone'. The prefix **mono-** comes from [ME < OFr. < Lat. < Gk. *monos*, single, alone] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *monoacid, monochrome, monochromatic, monogamy, monograph, monolingual, monolith, monologue, monoplane, monorail, monosyllabic, etc.* The prefix **multi-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'many', 'much', 'multiple'; (2) 'more than one'. The prefix **multi-** comes from [ME < Lat. < *multus*, much] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *multi-cellular, multicultural, multicoloured, multidimensional, multifamily, multiform, multilateral, multilingual, multinational, multipurpose, multiracial, multi-storey.*

The prefix **poly-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'more than one', 'many', 'much'; (2) 'more than usual', 'excessive'. The prefix **multi-** comes from [< Gk. *polus*, much, many] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *polyandry, polyatomic, polyglot, polygamy, polygon, polysemy, polysyllabic, polytechnic, etc.* The prefix **semi-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'half'; (2) 'partial'; (3) 'resembling or having some of the characteristics of'. The prefix **semi-** comes from [Lat. *semi-*, half] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *semi-automatic, semicircle, semiconductor, semiconscious, semidetached, semi-final, semi-finalist, semi-official, semiprecious, semivowel, etc.* The prefix **tri-** is a number prefix. It means (1) 'three'; (2) 'occurring at intervals of three'. The prefix **tri-** comes from [ME < Lat. (< *tres*, three) and Gk. (< *treis*, three)] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *triangle, tricycle, trident, trilingual, trimester, trimonthly, trinomial, tripartite, tripod, etc.*

The prefix **uni-** is a number prefix. It means 'single', 'one'. The prefix **uni-** comes from [Lat. < *unus*, one] and it is added to **adjectives** and **nouns**, e.g. *unicycle, unidirectional, unilateral, unipersonal, unipolar, unisex, univalve, etc.*

To sum up, the investigated prefixes **bi-**, **demi-**, **di-**, **hemi-**, **mono-**, **multi-**, **poly-**, **tri-**, **uni-** come from ME < Lat. and Gk. and mean *number*. Concerning their combinatorial valency they are added to adjectives and nouns.

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