



Analysis of Prefixes in the Novel Always Forever Maybe

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Abstract

This study investigated the semantic functions of English prefixation in Anica Mrose Rissi's novel *Always Forever Maybe*. It employed a qualitative descriptive approach and analyzed five prefixed lexical items (*rename*, *disintegrate*, *overblown*, *Outbid*, and *unintelligible*) to examine how prefixation contributed to emotional tone, character development, and thematic depth. Data were gathered through close reading and were analysed morphologically using the frameworks of Katamba (1993) and Lieber (2009). In addition, the data were analysed by using a combination of labelled analysis, bracketing, and tree diagram techniques. The findings revealed that prefixes functioned as semantic modifiers without altering the grammatical class of the base words. They fulfilled conceptual roles such as reversal, directionality, intensity, and spatial relation. Unlike previous studies that addressed affixation more broadly, this research offered a focused perspective on the narrative utility of prefixation in literary discourse. The analysis of these prefixed words revealed that they serve as subtle yet impactful linguistic tools, enhancing literary expression by adding layers of meaning to the narrative, deepening character portrayals, and enriching thematic resonance. The study concludes that prefixation is a significant contributor to the overall literary and emotional impact of the novel.

Keywords: *prefixation, derivational morphology, semantic function, literary linguistics, narrative structure*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki fungsi semantik dari prefiksasi dalam bahasa Inggris yang terdapat dalam novel *Always Forever Maybe* karya Anica Mrose Rissi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, lima leksem berprefiks yaitu *rename*, *disintegrate*, *overblown*, *Outbid*, dan *unintelligible* dianalisis untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana prefiksasi berkontribusi terhadap nada emosional, pengembangan karakter, dan kedalaman tematik. Data dikumpulkan melalui pembacaan mendalam dan dianalisis secara morfologis menggunakan kerangka dari Katamba (1993) dan Lieber (2009). Selain itu, data dianalisis dengan memadukan pendekatan analisis berlabel, pembubuhan tanda kurung, serta teknik diagram pohon. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa prefiks berfungsi sebagai pemodifikasi semantik tanpa mengubah kelas gramatikal dari kata dasarnya, serta memenuhi peran konseptual seperti pembalikan makna, arah, intensitas, dan lokasi. Berbeda dari studi sebelumnya yang menelaah afiksasi secara umum, penelitian ini menawarkan sudut pandang yang terfokus terhadap kegunaan naratif dari prefiksasi dalam wacana sastra. Analisis terhadap kata-kata berprefiks ini mengungkapkan bahwa mereka berfungsi sebagai perangkat linguistik yang halus namun berdampak, memperkaya ekspresi sastra dengan menambahkan lapisan makna pada narasi, memperdalam penggambaran karakter, dan memperkaya resonansi tematik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa prefiksasi merupakan kontributor signifikan terhadap dampak sastra dan emosional keseluruhan dari novel tersebut.

Kata kunci: *prefiksasi, morfologi derivatif, fungsi semantik, linguistik sastra, struktur naratif*

Introduction

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that examines the internal structure of words, their formation, and the transformations they undergo within a language system (Katamba, 1993; Lieber, 2009). It provides essential insights into how words are constructed from smaller units, known as morphemes, and how these units contribute to the grammatical and semantic complexity of language. According to Katamba (1993), morphology not only explains the formation of new words but also traces how morphemes interact with phonological and syntactic structures. Lieber (2009) extends this by emphasizing the mental lexicon and how morphological knowledge shapes both comprehension and production in language use. Within this framework, prefixation emerges as a key mechanism in expanding vocabulary and expressing nuanced meanings. In English, prefixes (placed at the beginning of root words) serve to refine, negate, intensify, or redirect the meanings of base forms. Their systematic yet creative usage highlights their dual function: while grammatically rule-bound, they also adapt to diverse communicative contexts, including narrative and literary domains. This dynamic role of prefixes in shaping meaning and grammatical structure naturally leads to a deeper exploration of their semantic versatility and functional significance.

Prefixes should not be perceived as mere grammatical appendages, but rather as dynamic linguistic instruments that encode layers of meaning into lexical items. They operate on a spectrum of semantic domains (negation, temporality, direction, quantity, and intensity), each contributing a distinct conceptual nuance. For instance, prefixes like *un-* and *dis-* convey negation or opposition, altering the semantic polarity of a word (e.g., *unhappy*, *disagree*), while temporal prefixes like *pre-* and *post-* mark relative chronological placement (*preorder*, *postgraduate*). According to Lieber (2009), such prefixes function as derivational morphemes that expand the lexicon by forming semantically new but grammatically similar words, typically preserving the syntactic category of the base. This idea aligns with Katamba (1993), who explains that prefixes serve both a functional and structural role, influencing how words operate in sentences and how meaning is conveyed at the morphological level. Together, these insights position prefixes as central to understanding the interface between form and meaning in language.

Morphological flexibility becomes particularly significant in literary contexts, where the selection and placement of affixes significantly contribute to the narrative's stylistic texture. Writers often use morphological features, including prefixation, not only to build vocabulary but to create mood, voice, and symbolism. Prefixes may encode subtle emotional cues, foreshadow tension, or deepen a character's psychological complexity. For instance, recurrent use of negative prefixes like *dis-* or *un-* might mirror internal conflict or signal a deteriorating mental state. In this way, morphological choices transcend linguistic boundaries and become narrative tools that enhance both literal and metaphorical meaning. Thus, prefixation should be viewed as

an artistic device with the capacity to influence interpretation and reader response at multiple levels.

Several studies have examined affixation in both academic and literary contexts; however, few have focused specifically on the function of prefixation in shaping literary narratives. Setiari et al. (2021) analyzed derivational affixes in Indonesian short stories and concluded that both prefixes and suffixes contributed to narrative flow and stylistic construction. However, their categorization did not isolate prefixes or discuss their semantic function in depth. Similarly, Yunita (2023) explored the broader role of affixation in character development and thematic expression in Indonesian fiction but treated prefixes and suffixes as a single morphological category. Danti and Budianto (2022), working within academic English discourse, identified key semantic functions of prefixes such as pre-, sub-, and re in clarifying argumentative logic and text structure.

Yet, their findings did not engage with fiction or narrative technique. In literary texts, Rahmatiah (2023) examined derivational and inflectional morphology in the novel *Kata* by Rintik Sedu, noting the use of prefixation in emotionally charged expressions, although the analysis remained general. Likewise, Rizqieyanti et al. (2023) observed that prefixes were the most frequently used affix type in *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*, but the study lacked semantic interpretation or functional literary analysis. Collectively, these works affirm the importance of affixation but highlight the lack of focused research into how English prefixes, specifically, function in literary narratives, particularly those rooted in contemporary fiction.

Additional scholarship reinforces this analytical direction. Nurjanah and Putri (2020), in their study of morphological features in Indonesian young adult fiction, argued that affixes (especially derivational prefixes) play a crucial role in encoding psychological states, establishing character voice, and reflecting adolescent identity formation. Their findings highlight how morphological choices align with narrative goals, even when the surface function appears structural. Likewise, Agustina and Anam (2019) analyzed the rhetorical function of affixes in English short stories and discovered that prefixes such as un-, re-, and over were deliberately used by authors to emphasize polarity, intensify emotional tone, or signal character transitions. Their research underscores the idea that prefixation operates at both the lexical and interpretive levels of storytelling. Together, these studies strengthen the foundation for investigating prefixation as a literary device within the English-language narrative tradition.

This article responds to that scholarly gap by presenting a detailed investigation of prefixation in *Always Forever Maybe*, a contemporary English novel by Anica Mrose Rissi. The aims of this study are to uncover how prefixation shapes semantic nuance, supports character construction, and deepens thematic interpretation within the novel. By examining the morphological structure and narrative usage of select prefixed words, this research seeks to address the problem of limited focused analysis on how English prefixes function specifically in shaping literary narratives. This research positions prefixation not merely as a grammatical element but as a key narrative strategy that enhances expressive power and literary artistry.

Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the use and semantic functions of English prefixation in the novel *Always Forever Maybe* by Anica Mrose Rissi. The qualitative approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in interpreting linguistic features embedded within literary texts and its suitability for uncovering the deeper narrative and semantic functions of morphological structures. The subject of analysis in this study was not a human participant, but rather a textual source: the full printed version of *Always Forever Maybe*. The novel was selected through purposive sampling based on its contemporary narrative style, emotionally driven content, and its anticipated richness in morphologically complex lexical items. No other literary texts or external respondents were included in the study, ensuring a focused single-text analysis.

Data analysis was carried out by applying the morphological frameworks of Katamba (1993) and Lieber (2009). The data were analysed by using the combination of labelled and bracketing, and also a tree diagram. Lexical items were segmented into morphemes, with prefixes identified as bound derivational morphemes. Each item was analysed not only structurally, in terms of morphological construction, but also semantically, in relation to its narrative function. Particular attention was paid to how prefixation contributed to character development, mood, thematic resonance, and stylistic emphasis. All observations were documented manually without the aid of digital text analysis tools, in order to preserve a high degree of interpretive immersion and close textual engagement throughout the research process.

Result and Discussion

The following section discusses selected prefixed words from *Always Forever Maybe* that were found to carry important semantic and narrative weight. Each word is examined in terms of how its prefix shapes or shifts meaning within its specific story context. Rather than focusing solely on form, the analysis highlights how these morphological features help convey emotion, conflict, and character perspective throughout the novel. The identified data are presented both in the form of a table (Table 1) and through morphological tree diagrams (Diagram 1) to provide a clear representation of prefix structure and semantic function, followed by brief texts in paragraphs to further the findings.

Table 1. Prefix Usage in the Novel *Always Forever Maybe*.

No	Word	Prefix	Base Word	Prefix Type	Semantic Function
1	Rename	Re-	Name	Repetitive	Symbolic repetition of identity

2	Disintegrate	Dis-	Integrate	Negative/Reversative	Breakdown/separation	
3	Overblown	Over-	Blown	intensifying	Excessive or exaggerated emotional state	
4	Outbid	Out-	bid	comparative and competitive	superiority and dominance	
5	Unintelligible	Un-	intelligible	Privative	Incomprehensibility; lack of clarity	

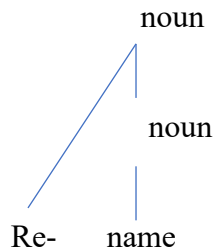
Table 1 presents a summary of prefix usage in the novel *Always Forever Maybe*. This table identifies five prefixed words that are narratively significant: *rename*, *disintegrate*, *overblown*, *outbid*, and *unintelligible*. For each word, the table details the prefix used, the base word, the type of prefix (e.g., repetitive, negative/reversative, intensifying, comparative, privative), and its semantic function within the context of the novel. The purpose of this table is to provide a clear and concise overview of how prefixes modify the meaning of base words and how these modifications contribute to narrative aspects such as identity formation, emotional conflict, and thematic depth. By presenting the data in a tabular format, readers can easily compare and contrast the various functions of prefixes found in the text

Discussion

The morphological analysis in this study is based on the framework developed by Katamba (1993) and Lieber (2009). Katamba (1993) explains that morphology not only clarifies the formation of new words but also traces how morphemes interact with phonological and syntactic structures. Lieber (2009) expands on this by emphasizing the mental lexicon and how morphological knowledge shapes language comprehension and production. Specifically, this study refers to Katamba's classification of prefixes as derivational, meaning that prefixes change the meaning or word class of the base word. Lieber provides additional insights into how prefixes encode specific semantic features, such as [+repetition] for *re-* or [-unity] for *dis-*, which helps to clarify how prefixes affect the overall interpretation of the word. This framework allows for a careful analysis of how prefixes modify the meaning of base words and how these modifications contribute to the narrative and thematic effects in the novel. The use of tree diagrams also helps to visualize the morphological structure of prefixed words, showing how each morpheme contributes to the overall meaning of the word.

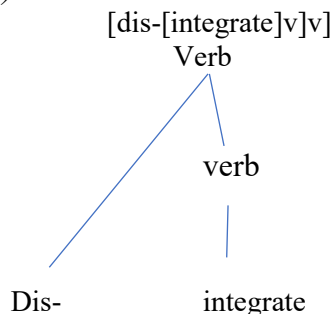
Data 1: Rename (*They should rename that class the God-Awful History of Everything Not Important*—page 16)

[re-[name]n]n



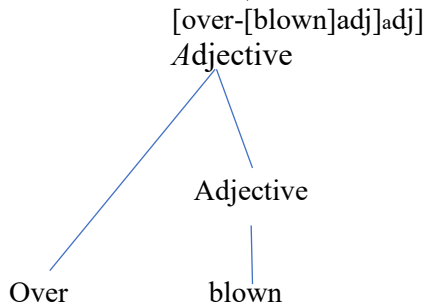
The word *rename* is formed by attaching the prefix *re* to the base name, producing a verb that means “to give a name again.” In Katamba’s (1993) framework, *re* is a derivational prefix that preserves the grammatical category, converting a noun to a verb while adding a semantic layer of repetition. Lieber (2009) identifies *re*-with the feature [+repetition], indicating that the action is being redone. In the novel *Always Forever Maybe*, the use of renaming is not merely functional, but symbolic - it reflects a deeper need for the protagonist to redefine herself or her relationships. This shows how morphology can directly support the psychological dimensions of character development.

Data 2: Disintegrate (*I will not give her the satisfaction of waching me Disintegrate* – Page 2)



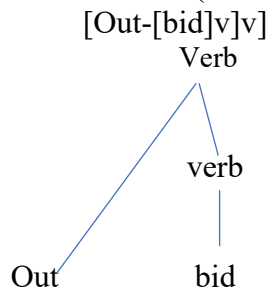
Disintegrate is constructed from the prefix *dis* and the root *integrate*, with the addition of the verb-forming suffix *-ate*. Katamba (1993) classifies this as a reversative and negative derivational prefix, signifying the undoing or negation of integration. Lieber (2009) interprets *dis* as encoding the feature [–unity], implying fragmentation or loss of cohesion. In the context of the novel, *disintegrate* conveys emotional breakdown or mental collapse, illustrating how morphological prefixation interacts with narrative tone and theme. It mirrors the protagonist’s unraveling state of mind, reinforcing a motif of psychological disassembly.

Data 3: **Overblown** (*that excitement seemed way overblown* – page 11)



In the word *overblown*, the prefix *over* combines with the past participle *blown* to form an adjective that denotes exaggeration or excessive magnitude. According to Katamba (1993), *over* is an intensifying derivational prefix, often yielding new adjectival forms. Lieber (2009) associates *over-* with the feature [+excess], pointing to over-amplification or surpassing normative boundaries. In literary usage, this term enhances dramatic effect. In *Always Forever Maybe*, it underscores how emotions, statements, or perceptions are inflated beyond proportion, revealing the intensity of the protagonist's internal struggle or emotional exaggeration.

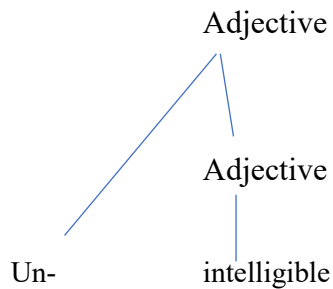
Data 4: **Outbid** (*I'll outbid him for her eBay* – page 14)



The word *outbid* belongs to the verb class, specifically a transitive verb that expresses an active action: "to offer a higher bid than another party" in a competitive context. Morphologically, it is formed by the comparative and competitive prefix *out-* combined with the base verb *bid*. As an irregular verb, *outbid* maintains the same form in the present, past, and past participle. Syntactically, *outbid* functions as a predicate that can take a direct object, such as in the sentence *She outbid her rivals*. In essence, "outbid" is a verb that conveys a meaning of dominance and superiority in a competitive situation. In morphological theory, as discussed by Katamba and Lieber, the word "outbid" exemplifies how affixation not only shapes word structure but also enriches semantic meaning. Katamba highlights that the prefix *out-* functions comparatively and competitively by adding a layer of rivalry and superiority to the base word *bid*. Meanwhile, Lieber emphasizes that such prefixes contribute to event structure and argument interpretation, where *outbid* implies bidding with the intent to surpass or defeat another party. Thus, morphologically and semantically, *outbid* reflects the role of affixes in forming meanings of dominance and competitive intent, consistent with both scholars' frameworks.

Data 5: **unintelligible** (*Jerk-off, OJ muttered, followed by something uninelligible – page 10*)

[un-[intelligible]adj]adj]



Unintelligible consists of the prefix un and the adjective intelligible, forming a word that means “not understandable.” Katamba (1993) categorizes un- as a privative prefix that negates the base adjective. Lieber (2009) aligns this with the feature [–property], stripping the subject of its intelligibility. The semantic result is a term that expresses failure in comprehension or clarity. In the novel, unintelligible signals confusion, distance, or emotional detachment, particularly in dialogue or internal monologue. This morphological choice enhances narrative ambiguity and deepens the portrayal of emotional or communicative breakdown.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how prefixation in English, as applied in *Always Forever Maybe*, functions not only grammatically but also narratively and emotionally. Through in-depth morphological analysis, it is evident that the selected prefixed words significantly contribute to the portrayal of identity, conflict, emotional tension, and psychological transformation within the text. Each prefix—whether intensifying, reversing, repetitive, competitive, or privative—serves as a subtle narrative device, enriching the reader’s interpretation of the characters’ experiences and thematic depth. By applying theoretical insights from Katamba and Lieber, this research highlights how morphological structure operates beyond syntax, shaping literary impact at the word level.

The implications of this study extend to a broader understanding of how micro-linguistic choices (such as the use of prefixes) can have a cumulative and significant effect on larger narrative constructions. By demonstrating the power of prefixes in conveying nuanced emotions and themes, this research supports the notion that morphological analysis should be an integral part of literary interpretation. Furthermore, the findings hold practical relevance for writers and editors, who can consciously employ prefixation to enhance the emotional and thematic impact of their writing.

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence that prefixation is a powerful

linguistic tool that can be used to amplify the emotional and thematic resonance of literary texts. By analyzing the use of prefixes in *Always Forever Maybe*, the research has shown how morphological structure can function beyond syntax, shaping literary impact at the word level. It is hoped that this study will inspire further research on the topic and help writers and editors better appreciate the power of prefixation.

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