

# TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF AMBIFIXES

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## INTRODUCTION

**Definition:** Ambifixes are affixes that act as prefixes in some instances and as suffixes in others.

San Francisco del Mar Huave (Huavean, Guatemala; Kim 2008)

- a. *t-a-jch-ius* ‘I gave’  
CP-TV-give-1 prefix
- b. *pajk-a-t-u-s* ‘I laid face up’  
face.up-V-CP-ITR-1 suffix

Since the term had been introduced by Hamp (1959), the phenomenon has attracted only limited attention from theoretical morphologists, see Crysmann & Bonami (2016), Stump (2017), still less from typologists.

### **Problems:**

- Distinguishing from homonymy (possibly former ambifixes)
- Distinguishing from suffixes attached to material preceding the “main root”, as in

Tanti Dargwa (East Caucasian, Russia; Sumbatova & Lander 2014): Elative marker *-r* suffixing to the locative prefix/adverb *gu-*

- a. *gu-r-ha-is:-an*  
UNDER-EL-UP-take.IPF-POT  
‘(he) took it from underneath’
- b. *niš:i-c:e weh-ik’-ar*  
we:OBL-INTER call-(M)LV.IPF-T  
*gu-r-ha.le*  
under-EL-UP  
‘He called us from underneath.’

**Aim:** To provide a preliminary typology of ambifixes based mostly on conditions governing the distribution of a morpheme.

**Data:** An unbalanced convenience sample of 25 languages (to be expanded).

## PHONOTACTIC CONDITIONS

Various verbal affixes in Afar (Cushitic, Ethiopia): prefixed to roots beginning in vowels except /a/ and suffixed to roots beginning in /a/ or consonants:

Afar (Fulmer 1991)

- a. *t-okm-è* ‘You/she ate.’  
2/3SG.F-eat-PFV
- b. *yab-t-à* ‘You/she speak(s).’  
speak-2/3SG.F-IPF

## MORPHOTACTIC CONDITIONS

Reflexive marker in Lithuanian (Indo-European): suffix in prefixless verbal forms and prefix in forms containing other prefixes

Lithuanian (personal knowledge of P.A.)

- a. *maud-au-si* ‘I wash/bathe.’  
wash-PRS.1SG-RFL
- b. *pri-si-maudži-au* ‘I bathed a lot.’  
PVB-RFL-wash.PST-1SG

## WORD CLASS-BASED CONDITIONS

Agreement markers in Walman (Torricelli, New Guinea): prefixes with verbs and suffixes with adjectives

Walman (Dryer 2019: 177, 176)

- a. *pelen y-aykiri* ‘The dogs are barking.’  
dog 3PL-bark
- b. *nypeykil lapo-y* ‘big trees’  
tree.PL big-PL

## (PURELY) MORPHOSYNTACTIC CONDITIONS

**(Clearly) paradigmatically conditioned ambifixes**

Negation marker in Abkhaz (Northwest Caucasian): the position depends on the TAM form of the verb

Abkhaz (Chirikba 2003: 44)

- a. *də-r-ga-wa-m*  
3SG.H.ABS-3PL.ERG-carry-IPF-NEG  
‘They do not carry him/her.’
- b. *d-rə-m-ga-jt*  
3SG.H.ABS-3PL.ERG-NEG-carry-DCL  
‘They did not carry him/her.’

**(Apparently) syntactically conditioned ambifixes**

Class markers in Ut-Ma’in (Atlantic-Congo, Nigeria): suffixed to the noun in some syntactic environments and prefixed in others.

Ut-Ma’in (Paterson 2019: 104)

- a. *móngòr-tə àzgə-s:-tè*  
mango.fruit-C6 pour-ITR-PRF  
‘Mango fruit rolled out (of the basket).’  
(subject)
- b. *wā ká-n ət-móngòr*  
C1.SBJ pluck-DIST C6-mango.fruit  
‘He picked mango fruits.’ (object)

## SEMANTIC CONDITIONS

Indicative marker in Gyumri Armenian: suffix in predicate focus sentences, prefix in narrow (argument/adverb) focus sentences

Gyumri Armenian (Bezrukov, Dolatian 2020: 5)

- a. *šun-ə vazze-gə*  
dog-DEF run-IND  
‘The dog is running.’
- b. *šun-ə kə-vazze*  
dog-DEF IND-run  
‘The DOG is running.’

## FURTHER ISSUES

The borderlines between different types are not always clear-cut. E.g.:

- Can syntactically conditioned ambifixes be treated as contextual inflection (i.e. as a kind of paradigmatically conditioned ambifixes)?  
– Depends on the theory?
- Can semantically conditioned ambifixes always be treated as paradigmatically conditioned ambifixes?  
– Not obvious. Probably, depends on the language.

Other typologically relevant contrasts: e.g., ambifixation restricted to specific morphemes vs. involving whole classes of morphemes (mainly agreement/cross-reference markers).

References: Bezrukov N. & H. Dolatian. 2020. Mobile affixes across Western Armenian: Conflicts across modules. *UPenn Working Papers in Linguistics*, 26; Chirikba V. 2003. *Abkhaz*. München: LINCOM; Crysmann, B. & O. Bonami. 2016. Variable morphotactics in information-based morphology. *Journal of Linguistics*, 52. 311–374; Dryer M. S. 2019. Gender in Walman. In: Fr. Di Garbo, Br. Olsson, B. Wälchli (eds.), *Grammatical Gender and Linguistic Complexity: Volume I: General issues and specific studies*. Berlin: Language Science Press, 171–196; Fulmer S. L. 1991. Dual-position affixes in Afar: an argument for phonologically-driven morphology. *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 189–203; Hamp E. P. 1959. Zura Berber personals. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 22.1, 140–141; Kim Y. 2010. Phonological and morphological conditions on affix order in Huave. *Morphology*, 20, 133–163. Paterson, R. 2019. Nominalization and Predication in Ut-Ma’in. PhD Dissertation, University of Oregon; Stump, G. T. 2017. Rule conflation in an inferential-realizational theory of morphotactics. *Acta Linguistica Academica*, 64.1, 79–124. Sumbatova, N.R. & Yu.A. Lander. 2014. *Darginskij govor selenija Tanty. Grammatičeskij očerk. Problemy sintaksisa*. Moscow: LRC.