

# Infixation in English varieties over the world

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Inflection in English varieties over the world

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## Summary

Infixation is a very distinctive and an easily recognizable morphological process where an affix (which is called an infix) is inserted in the middle of a word. It differs from some other morphological processes in that it is a great deal more flexible and not strictly susceptible to many rules. There are, of course, many characteristics which are specific and distinctive and, in a way, canonical for this kind of process. However, infixation is also known for the set of irregular characteristics it has. The main purpose that infixation serves in morphology is not the formation of new words or meanings of words, but the one of stylistic and expressive manner, such as expressing humour, obscenity, vulgarity, the affiliation to a certain group of people, their habits, culture, language. This paper is concerned with what infixation actually is and how it is formed with regard to both its history and the modern period of time. The emphasis is put on the four most recognizable types of infixation: expletive infixation, *diddly*-infixation, Homeric infixation and *iz*-infixation. Each of them is exemplified and illustrated in detail, denoting where and in which way they are most frequently used. The paper is divided into four main chapters, describing infixation and its characteristics in general, types of infixation, and its popularity and representation over the world.

Key words: infixation, expressive morphology, extra-grammatical morphology, expletive infixation, *diddly*-infixation, Homeric infixation, *iz*-infixation.

## 1. Introduction

Infixation is a morphological process which is not easily described due to its unpredictability and irregularity. To understand properly all the purposes that infixation serves, one must first learn about its history, origin and characteristics. Different cultures, languages, societies and their habits have all contributed to both the emergence and development of the process of infixation. That amount of various influential factors has led to the existence of more kinds of infixations. Each is specific in its own way, with the main purpose to make a certain language more colourful and expressive. The main goal of this paper is to explain what infixation and its characteristics, types and goals are, and in what way is each of the types specific.

General characteristics of infixation as a morphological process will be explained in the first chapter. I will precisely define infixation, and at the same time offer various definitions, as well as different perspectives on the mentioned definitions. Once we get the general idea of what infixation is and how it should look like, I will illustrate its characteristics in a more detailed way. There are some characteristics which make infixation a regular morphological process, and some which make it an irregular process. Both regular and irregular characteristics contribute to the following explanation of predicability in infixation and the explanation of the criteria of well-formedness. The third chapter will be further divided with regard to how many different types of infixation I concentrate on. The most prominent ones are expletive infixation, *diddly*-infixation, Homeric infixation and *iz*-infixation. Each type will be briefly portrayed, along with their main features and examples. Finally, the last chapter will denote the general status of infixation in the world nowadays, where it is most frequent and in which languages, and where there is hardly any trace of infixation, and the reasons why that is the way it is.

## 2. Infixation in general

### 2.1. The characteristics of infixation

Before giving a detailed description of types of infixation in English varieties over the world, I would first like to state what infixation is and what its main characteristics are. Prefixation and suffixation are morphological processes which are more likely to be found in English language than infixation, which means that infixation is generally infrequent. “Furthermore, while some Indo-European and Austronesian languages like Greek and Atayal rely on infixation to signify important grammatical functions, English has infixes only within extra-grammatical morphology” (Mattiello:2013 185-186). Thus we might say that we use infixes mostly as expressive expletives and “to form deprecativ words with additional emphasis” (Mattiello:2013 186). Except for extra-grammatical morphology, according to Baldi, there are four reasons why infixation is part of expressive morphology: “1) it is used in a specific register, 2) the (obscene) meaning of the infix carries a pragmatic effect, 3) it applies to a wide range of input categories, and 4) it is typologically marginal in English” (Mattiello:2013 192).

### 2.2. The definition of infixation

According to Mattiello’s definition, infixation is described as a process where an affix (called an infix) is inserted in the middle of a word. That also means that infixes are different from affixes in the way that they “occur in the body of a base”, while affixes “appear before (e.g. *re-touch*), or after a base (e.g. *touch-able*)” (Mattiello:2013 186-187). The first type of words in the middle of which an infix can be inserted is a simplex word, for example *ah-iz-ead*, *per-bloody-haps* or *secre-ma-tery*. The second type, which is rarer than the previous one, is a complex word, for example *un-f\*\*\*ing-touchable* or *air con-friggin’-ditioner*. Lastly, an infix can also be inserted in the middle of a lexicalised phrase, such as *Jehovah bloody Witnesses*. “Sometimes infixation can be accompanied by reduplication of part of the base word, as in *mur-diddly-urder*, *parta-ma-ty*” (Mattiello:2103 186). According to the examples given, the inserted infix can also be one of the two types of morphemes, bound (*-iz-*, *-ma-*) or free (*bloody*, *friggin’*, *f\*\*\*ing*).

### 2.3. Different perspectives on the definition of infixation

An important question raised is whether infixation is a process which creates new words, and it has caused disagreement between certain scholars who had studied that phenomenon. For example, Mattiello does not agree with Plag’s attitude that infixation creates new words.

“Furthermore, Plag (2003: 101) also claims that ‘there are no bound morphemes that qualify for infix status’. This claim, however, does not take into account other types of infixation which insert segments that cannot be used in isolation, such as *–diddly-* (*ac-diddly-action*), *-iz-* (*w-iz-ork*), or *–ma-* (*underesti-ma-mate*)” (Mattiello:2013 187).

Yu, on the other hand, gives a definition of affixation looking at things from a different perspective and “considers affixation to involve infixing if the infix ‘appears as a segmentally distinct entity between two strings that form a meaningful unit when combined but do not themselves exist as meaningful parts’” (Mattiello:2013 187). For example, *-bloody-* in *abso-bloody-lutely*, when taking Yu’s definition into account, is considered an infix because it is both preceded and followed by two parts which do not have a meaning when parted (*abso* and *lutely*), but are meaningful when put together (*absolutely*). However, when talking about examples mentioned before, such as *ac-diddly-action* and *Jehovah bloody Witnesses*, we can see that, in the first example, the word *–action* which follows the infix has a meaning, and in the second example, both the preceding and the following word also have a meaning. That means that Yu’s definition should necessarily “exclude complex bases such as compounds or phrases from the input of expletive infixation, as well as those infixes which admit reduplication” (Mattiello:2013 187).

Although it does leave room for many speculations and generalisations, infixation cannot be regarded as regular word-formation process, considering that it goes against many rules of English grammatical morphology.

#### 2.4. Irregularities in infixation

The most important and the most prominent function of infixation is that it serves a stylistic purpose, with infixes serving as intensifiers, or, in other words, “‘emotive stress amplifier[s]’ (McMillan 1980: 165)” (Mattiello:2013 193). While word formation processes offer new words and new meanings of words, “infixation only obtains connoted variants” (Mattiello:2013 193). There aren’t any differences between, for example, *absolutely* and *abso-blooming-lutely*, or *action* and *ac-diddly-action*, except for the stylistic one.

The possibility of infixation allows us to note what the speaker’s attitude is, which means that it has a pragmatic meaning. “In other words, infixes like *–bloody-* or *–damned-* do not maintain their denotational lexical meanings in the insert position, but convey to the new word a special stylistic and pragmatic meaning” (Mattiello:2013 193). The process of infixation does not

change the grammatical category of a certain word, as well as its meaning. Therefore, when we insert the infix *-blooming-* in an adverb *absolutely*, *abso-blooming-lutely* still remains an adverb.

Infixation also allows a great variety of syntactic categories as bases. Some of them are: the names of places and persons (*Ala-ma-bama*, *Micha-ma-langelo*), adjectives (*fan-f\*\*\*ing-tastic*, *im-f\*\*\*ing-portant*), adverbs (*abso-blooming-lutely*, *to-bloody-gether*), verbs (*ad-bloody-vance*, *e-goddamned-vaporate*), nouns (*de-f\*\*\*ing-fence*, *hypo-bloody-crite*), pronouns (*no-bloody-body*), interjections (*halle-bloody-lujah*, *ho-bloody-ho*) and personal/place names (*Kalama-goddamn-zoo*, *Minne-bloody-sota*). Also, according to Zwicky and Pullum, “Zonnefeld (1984) has argued that there is an appropriate comparison between expletive infixation and the custom of constructing names with infixed nicknames, as in *Johnny ‘Guitar’ Watson*, *Nat ‘King’ Cole*, *Eric ‘Slowhand’ Clapton*, *Ray ‘Boom-boom’ Mancini*, etc” (Zwicky, Pullum 7). Although they do not agree completely with Zonnefeld, they do believe that infixation is a phenomenon which is not truly a grammatical rule, but an extra-grammatical phenomenon, or rather a language game.

Another characteristic of the irregularity of infixation is that it interrupts the base, “as in *terri-ma-tory*, where the infix is inserted into the base *territory*”, unlike prefixes and suffixes, “which are regularly added to a continuous base” (Mattiello:2013 193). The inserted infix can be either a free or a bound morpheme and, when talking about free morphemes, “can occur outside the base (*bloody-fantastic* along with *fan-bloody-tastic*), while others can only occur inside the base (*\*oboe-ma* vs. *oba-ma-boe*)” (Mattiello:2013 194).

#### 2.4.1. Sociological properties

When discussing sociological properties which are related to infixation, we can discuss them as sociological properties of slang in general. Slang expressions are used by speakers in order to obtain various functions, some of which are: identifying with a specific group (based on age, gender, habits, origin), denoting vulgarity, obscenity, humour, playfulness, or hiding private information. “Sociological criteria are however more fluctuating and controversial than linguistic ones” (Mattiello:2008a 213).

All the irregularities mentioned show that infixation is not analysable in terms of canonical rules and is not only a part of expressive morphology, but also of extra-grammatical morphology.

## 2.5. Regularities in infixation

Predictable infixation patterns are usually those concerning stress and infix position. “In the expletive type, the infix generally appears immediately before the syllable of the base that bears primary stress”, as in *al-bloody-míghty* and *propa-f\*\*\*in-gánda* (Mattiello:2013 195). In Homeric infixation, on the other hand, the infix comes after a “trochaic foot, as in *sáxo-ma-phone*, *sécre-ma-tery*, where the main stress is on the first syllable, or *hippo-ma-pótamus*, *Missi-ma-ssíppi*, where stress falls on the third syllable” (Mattiello:2013 195). The *-iz-* infixation is different from the previous two because the infix is placed before the stressed vowel, for example in *d-iz-óllar* and *s-iz-óldiers*. “However, syllable boundaries are not respected, in that the infix may also be inserted within a monosyllabic word, between onset and nucleus, as in *dr-iz-eam*, or even before it, as in *iz-at*, *ilz-are*, with no onset” (Mattiello:2013 195). In this case, that would be contrary to the definition of infixation because infixes, unlike prefixes, should be inserted in the middle of the word. In the *-diddly-* infixation the stress is again placed according to the main stress of the stem word, i.e. it is placed before it, as in *ac-diddly-áction* and *we-diddly-élcome*.

Another phenomenon which belongs to the regularities in infixation is the expansion of the base. It is frequent in *ma*-infixation where “disyllabic stems must be expanded in order to host the Homeric infix” (Mattiello:2013 195). In order to expand it, a schwa should be inserted to form an additional unstressed syllable before the *-ma-* infix. Therefore, if we insert the *-ma-* infix in the middle of *lively*, then *live-ma-ly* should sound like /'laɪvə-mə-lɪ/. In some cases, base expansion requires partial reduplication of the base, for example, placing the *-ma-* infix in the middle of *oboe* requires the reduplication of the sound *a*, so the result is *oba-ma-boe*. Partial reduplication is also required in *diddly*-infixation as we can see in the examples already mentioned before, *ac-diddly-action* and *wel-diddly-elcome*, where *ac* and *el* have been reduplicated. “The expletive type does not normally involve an expansion of the base word, although some words have an added syllable to make insertion possible” (Mattiello:2013 195).

When it comes to infixation, the number of the syllables in the base is also what is analysed. “For the expletive type, the minimal form in which an infix can occur is a disyllabic base, as in *ur-f\*\*\*ing-bane*, although words of three or more syllables are preferred bases in infixation, as in *im-f\*\*\*ing-possible*, and *incan-f\*\*\*ing-descent*” (Mattiello:2013 196). Naturally polysyllabic bases are also preferred in the Homeric type, but if required, “an added syllable is



obtained through either vowel insertion or reduplication”, as well as partial reduplication in the *diddly*-type (Mattiello:2013 196).

## 2.6. Predictability in infixation

As shown in the examples before, infixation is not a process constrained by many rules and “regularities are scarcely identifiable” (Mattiello:2013 196). Thus, full predictability is something which would, in case of infixation, be completely excluded, but before making conclusions, here is a table which shows some hypothetical cases of infixation.

Source word	Possible infixation
(1) probability /ˌprɒb.əˈbɪl.ə.ti/	proba-f***in-bility, proba-ma-bility, probab-iz-ility (rare)
(2) fanatic /fəˈnæt.ɪk/	fa-bloody-natic, fana-ma-natic, fan-iz-atic, fan-diddly-atic
(3) New York /ˌnjuːˈjɔːk/	New-f***in-York, New Y-iz-ork
(4) fabulous /ˈfæb.jə.ləs/	fabu-ma-lous, f-iz-abulous, fa-diddly-fabulous
(5) again /əˈgeɪn/	a-bloody-gain, aga-ma-gain, ag-iz-ain
(6) inadmissible /ˌɪn.ədˈmɪs.ə.bəl/	inad-bloody-missible, inad-ma-missible, inadm-iz-issible

### 1. Possible infixations from existing source words (Mattiello:2013 196)

The table also shows that not all words are suitable bases for infixation, in fact, some of them are quite inappropriate. “For instance, a polysyllabic base with stress on the third syllable, as in (1) (*probability*), would be acceptable in the expletive and Homeric types, but less adequate in the hip-hop type, and unacceptable in the *diddly*-type, because of an unpronounceable cluster *bd*” (Mattiello:2013 196-197).

## 2.7. Criteria of well-formedness

Unlike other extra-grammatical processes, infixation is a process where “the criteria of well-formedness identified for the other extra-grammatical processes investigated so far are not

valid” (Mattiello:2013 197). There aren’t any general criteria which can be in their entirety applied to infixation.

First of all, one of those criteria is compositionality. As I have already stated, the process of infixation does not create new words and does not give new meaning to the base words. Also, the meaning of the base word is not relevant for infixation. “The expletive type is only an emotive stress amplifier (McMillan 1980), whereas the other types are purely accessories with jocular effects” (Mattiello:2013 197).

Secondly, the criteria of pronounceability and euphony are also those which cannot apply to the parameters of infixation, “in that infixed words are often difficult to pronounce or made pronounceable by schwa epenthesis, as in *grave-ma-yard* and *live-ma-ly*, or else by the aid of partial reduplication of the base word, as in *ac-diddly-action*, *well-diddly-elcome*” (Mattiello:2013 197). You can also come across problems in pronouncing some words which contain the infix *-iz-*, as it is often inserted within monosyllabic bases, which also makes them “incomprehensible to the listener, as in *c-iz-oast*, *dr-iz-eam*, *str-iz-aw*” (Mattiello:2013 197).

The next criteria which are not applicable to infixation are the criteria of salience and recoverability. The new infixed words in fact do not have any salient parts. “On the contrary, the base words are interrupted to lodge the infix, and thus made less salient, more opaque and nearly unrecognisable, as in *emanci-motherf\*\*\*in-pator*, *Tata-f\*\*\*in-magouche*, *he-diddly-eaven*, *B-ilz-obby*” (Mattiello:2013 198).

Criteria which are also not valid for infixation are concatenation and linearity. In regular derivation or composition, infixes would normally be added to the bases, but that does not apply to infixation because the infixes are inserted in the middle of the base. That also means that infixation does not follow the rules of linearity because it involves discontinuous bases, i.e. the infixes interrupt the linearity of the source words (*ad-bloody-vance*, *Ha-bloody-waii*, *im-frigging-portant*). “They may even interrupt syllables, as in the above-mentioned *he-diddly-eaven* and *B-ilz-obby*, and are not necessarily placed at morpheme boundaries: see, e.g., *inde-goddamn-pendent* (vs. *in-depend-ent*), *underesti-ma-mate* (vs. *under-estimate*), *unsub-ma-stantiated* (vs. *un-substantiat(e)-ed*)” (Mattiello:2013 198).

Finally, analogy is the only principle which controls the process of forming infixed words because “all the above-mentioned formations are analogical with existing patterns” (Mattiello:2013 198). That means that placing the same infix within different words is possible,

as in *abso-bloody-lutely* and *fan-bloody-tastic*, but also placing a different infix of the same type within the same word, as in *abso-bloody-lutely* and *abso-blooming-lutely*. “Analogy also governs the formation of similar infixed words of the *ma*-type (*saxo-ma-phone*, *secre-ma-tary*), of the *iz*-type (*b-iz-itch*, *h-iz-ouse*), and, with partial reduplication, of the *diddly*-type (*ac-diddly-action*, *wel-diddly-elcome*)” (Mattiello:2013 198).

Also, McCawley has, in his research, got to a conclusion that certain speakers do not agree on which bases admit expletive infixation. For example, he discovered that the speakers split between *dis-f\*\*\*in-covery* and *dis-fu\*\*\*in-scovery* when asked to add the infix *-f\*\*\*ing-* in the middle of the base *discovery*. Three out of four speakers thought of the first version to be adequate, but, the fourth speaker thought it to be unnatural. Based on McCawley’s research, McCarthy has made his own assertions about the expletive infixation:

Judgements of well-formedness are normally quite robust for individual speakers and remarkably consistent across speakers. All of these facts are incompatible with any sort of true adult learning or with metalinguistic activities like language games. (McCarthy 1981, 223)

(Zwicky, Pullum 8)

### 3. Types of infixation

Since infixation is not difficult to note among some other processes, the most recognizable and the most relevant types of infixation are expletive infixation, *diddly*-infixation, Homeric infixation and hip-hop *iz*-infixation.

#### 3.1. Expletive infixation

The expletive infixation is the most widely known type of infixation in English language and it is defined as a process where an expletive or a profanity is inserted within a word, usually in order to achieve emphasis and intensification. It is also referred to as *f\*\*\*in*-infixation, from the most commonly used infix.

When it comes to which types of words or expressions undergo the process of infixation, expletive infixation is the most permissive one and has “clear applicability to phrases alongside words” and “highly expressive colloquial effect” (Zwicky, Pullum 7). Expletives may appear inside morphemes, compounds, letter and numeral words, names (many of which are made up of two words), or between bases and affixes. An interesting example of expletive infixation is *B-*

*Bloody-C*, where “the infix replaces the internal *B* of *BBC*, acting as a splinter in an intercalative blend” (Mattiello:2013 189). Also, taking into consideration that most of the infixes used are obscene words which might add a sort of a negative connotation to the understanding of certain expressions, not all uses of expletive infixes are in fact ‘deprecativ’. For example, although it might not seem like that at first, *bea-f\*\*\*ing-utiful* is a very positive word. “What they all have in common is the very informal nature of the lexical items used for infixation, some of which are considered to be swear words (hence, ‘expletive infixation’), and the fact that the infixes are intensifiers” (Mattiello:2013 258).

The insertion of expletives is not just a matter of morphology, it depends on phonological factors, too. Expletive infixation is thus observed in a way that “the insertability of such (mostly obscene) expletives as *bloody*, *blooming*, *frigging*, *f\*\*\*in(g)*, *(god)damn*, *motherf\*\*\*in(g)*, *pissing*, *sodding*, etc. into a word depends on the stress pattern of that word” (Zwicky, Pullum 1-2). When considering typical English infixation, the expletive appears to the left of a stressed foot.

#### English expletive infixation (McCarthy 1982)

togethér	to- <b>bloody</b> -gether
advánce	ad- <b>bloody</b> -vance
Bhowáni	Bho- <b>bloody</b> -wani
perháps	per- <b>bloody</b> -haps
enóugh	e- <b>bloody</b> -nough
impórtant	im- <b>fuckin</b> -portant
Kalamazóo	Kalama- <b>fuckin</b> -zoo
Tatamagóuchee	Tatama- <b>fuckin</b> -gouchee
Winnipesáukee	Winnipe- <b>fuckin</b> -saukee

(Yu:2003 5)

However, cases where infixes are placed to the right of a stressed foot are also existent. “For example, the construct state (CNS) markers in Ulwa, a Misumalpan language spoken in Nicaragua and Honduras, is affixed to the right edge of an iambic foot” (Yu:2003 6).

Ulwa construct state (Green 1999: 64)

sú:lu	sú:- <b>ma</b> -lu	‘dog-CNS2’
áytak	áy- <b>mana</b> -tak	‘paper-CNS22’
alá:kum	alá:- <b>ka</b> -kum	‘Muscovy duck-CNS3’
waráwya	waráw- <b>kana</b> -wa	‘parrot sp.-CNS33’
ká:sirá:mah	ká:- <b>ki</b> -sirá:mah	‘lizard sp.-CNS1’

(Yu:2003 6)

### 3.1.1. Misinterpretation of infixation

Irén Hegedűs, in her article named *Unlikely infix-like elements in English: Critical remarks on the use of the term infix(ation)*, states that the term of expletive “infixation (exemplified by *abso-blooming-lutely*) is a misleading term” and that it should be replaced by ‘expletive insertion’ (Hegedűs 174). She elaborates that infixation is mostly inappropriately used in various contexts. Therefore different interpretations of infixation are natural and frequent, whether you approach them “from a synchronic, descriptive linguistic viewpoint or in a historical, comparative analysis” (Hegedűs 164). The insertion of a whole word into a word base is not what Hegedűs would instantly call infixation. In fact, she thinks that that definition of infixation is equated to the one of expletive derivation, which is, according to Hegedűs, a misinterpretation of infixation.

“First, in a case of expletive derivation as *abso-blooming-lutely*, a free morpheme (*blooming*) is inserted into another free morpheme (*absolutely*), while true infixes, just like other affixes, are bound morphemes (even if they may derive from free morphemes via grammaticalization)” (Hegedűs 164). Second, the purpose of an infix, or any other affix, is to make some sort of a morphological change in a word (either derivational or inflectional), while insertion serves a purely stylistic purpose. Third, when reaffirming the impact and purpose of expletive derivation, Hegedűs refers to Zwicky and Pullum who claim that “expletive infixation, with its clear applicability to phrases alongside

words and its highly expressive colloquial effect, cannot be regarded as a part of plain morphology” (Hegedűs 164).

### 3.2. Diddly-infixation

*Diddly*-infixation is considered a novel language game and a form of expletive infixation. What makes it a language game is that “it shares with other language games the characteristic of being easily generalized by speakers to be applied to a variety of environments” (Elfner, Kimper 151). It became known and popular because of the speech of Ned Flanders, the neighbour from the television show *The Simpsons*. “The process involves infixation of the nonsense word *diddly* into a base word with initial stress as well as reduplication of the rhyme and the stressed syllable” (Elfner, Kimper 150) This type of infixation is different from the other types of expletive infixation because “the other forms can appear as independent words (*fuckin(g)*) and occur outside the base (*fuckin-fantastic*)” (Mattiello:2013 190). Also, unlike the other forms, it does not necessarily require bases with non-initial stress.

#### Canonical Examples

wélcome	→	<b>wel</b> -diddly-élcome
áction	→	<b>ac</b> -diddly-áction
múrder	→	<b>mur</b> -diddly-úrder
órder	→	<b>or</b> -diddly-órder

(Elfner, Kimper 151)

Yu states that *diddly* only ever occurs as an infix and never as a prefix or a suffix, which is also common in language games which involve infixation.

#### Obligatory Infixation

wélcome	→	*diddly-wélcome
órder	→	*diddly-órder

(Elfner, Kimper 151)

There is also a contrast with other forms of expletive infixation, as already mentioned above, which means that other infixes can stand independently, unlike *-diddly-*.

### Non-obligatory Infixation

fantastic       $\longrightarrow$     fan-f\*\*\*in-tastic, f\*\*\*in-fantastic

incredible      $\longrightarrow$     in-f\*\*\*in-credible, f\*\*\*in-incredible

(Elfner, Kimper 151)

Elfner and Kimper state “that reduplication is used as a phonological repair” (Elfner, Kimper 151). Having to place the infix *–diddly–* within the base which has an initial stress causes difficulties for stress assignment, and infixation in words with non-initial stress does not. The function of reduplication in these cases is to “allow the position of stress to remain faithful to its base form” (Elfner, Kimper 151).

When it comes to reduplication, which is frequent in *diddly*-infixation, Elfner and Kimper have, in their questionnaire studies, proven that their subjects “preferred reduplicative forms in words with initial stress (*wel-diddly-elcome*) but dispreferred reduplication when stress was non-initial (*fan-diddly-tastic* rather than *fantas-diddly-astic*)” (Elfner, Kimper 150). They argued that the reason for that was the inability of the *–diddly–* infix to appear as an independent word.

### 3.3. Homeric infixation

Homeric infixation is also called *ma*-infixation because of the insertion of the infix *–ma–* into words. This type of infixation was also popularized by the television show *The Simpsons*, precisely by its character Homer Simpson, “and has recently gained currency in vernacular American English” (Mattiello:2013 189).

Homer: Well, honey, what do you like? Tuba-ma-ba? Oba-ma-bo? That one?  
Saxa-ma-phone?

Homer: A hundred bucks? For a comic book? Who drew it, Micha-ma-langelo?

(Yu:2007 174)

Its main purpose is to achieve a kind of a humorous effect, while Yu also states that the “meaning of this construction indicates roughly attitudes of sarcasm and distastefulness, although, it can also be used as a form of language play” (Yu:2007 174).

Also, “the category of the infixed base may vary from noun (e.g. *tele-ma-phone*, *vio-ma-lin*), to adjective (e.g. *wonder-ma-ful*), verb (e.g. *under-esti-ma-mate*), participle (e.g. *unsub-ma-*

*stantiated*), and even to place/personal/river names (e.g. *Ala-ma-bama*, *Micha-ma-langelo*, *Missi-ma-ssippi*)” (Mattiello:2013 189).

The *ma*-infix is considered to be an instructive example for several reasons, first of all being the fact that it “has no obvious historical morphological antecedent in English. An understanding of its origin will therefore offer a unique window into the mechanism from which new morphological elements may emerge” (Yu:2007 174). It is very difficult to determine how or when the first constructions of this colloquialism emerged. However, it is believed that *ma*-infixation has the same roots as various filler-word constructions in English. The filler-word constructions are those used when the speaker is in need of filling certain gaps, when he is not able to remember the words which he needs to finish a thought. For example:

Fillers for moments of haste or forgetfulness: Put the *thingummy* on the *whatsit*.

Phrase words based on a question: *whadyamecallit*, *what's-his-name/face*, *whatsit*, *whoosis*.

Variants of thing: Br(itish) E(nglish) *thingie*, *thingummy*, BrE *thingummybob* Am(ericana) E(nglish) *thingamabob*, BrE *thingummyjig* AmE *thingamajig*, AmE *thinkumthankum*, *chingus*, *dingbat*, *dinglefoozie*, *dingus*, *ringamajiggen*, *ringamajizzer*, *majig*, *majigger*) extensions of do: *doings*, *doodah/doodad*, *doflickety*, *dofunnies*, *doowillie*, *doowhistle*

(Yu:2007 175)

The *ma*-infixation eventually emerges from the two accidentally similar sets of filler words: the variants of thing and the phrase words based on a question.

a. Variants of things:

*thingamabob*, *thingmabob*, *thingamajig*, *ringamajiggen*, *ringamajizzer*

b. Phrase words based on a question:

Whatdymecalli, whatchamacallit

(Yu:2007 175)

Since both of these sets of words contain the *–ma–* infix, that fact might have been the turning point at some time in the history of English language, when listeners have associated that with the meaning and the purpose of filler-words, before Homeric infixation began to indicate sarcasm. However, it is not possible to precisely trace back the *–ma–* infix to any known



historical affixes in English. Yu states that his “case study thus shows that infixes may have non-adpositional origins, although such an infix does not appear to have a peripheral distribution either. The reason appears to be that no coherent segmental pivot is identifiable in the surrounding environment” (Yu:2007 177).

When talking about stress in Homeric infixation, the Homeric infix “must come after (i.e. to the right of) a trochaic foot, as in *sáxo-ma-phone*, *sécre-ma-tary*, where the main stress is on the first syllable, or *hippo-ma-pótamus*, *Missi-ma-ssíppi*, where stress falls on the third syllable” (Mattiello:2013 195). Yu states that, by a certain subcategorization, “in the case of a disyllabic input, *-ma-* should surface after the second syllable, giving the appearance of a suffix” (Yu:2003 123). However, that kind of a prediction results in ungrammaticality, as these examples show:

oboe	*oboe-ma
opus	*opus-ma
party	*party-ma
piggy	*piggy-ma
purple	*purple-ma
scramble	*scramble-ma
stinky	*stinky-ma
table	*table-ma

(Yu:2003 123)

When the stressed syllable is closed, then schwa is inserted in order to create a disyllabic stressed foot. On the other hand, when the stressed syllable is open, in addition to the added schwa, “a consonant identical to the onset of the following syllable appears before the schwa” (Yu:2003 124). That is called partial reduplication.

oboe	oba-ma-boe	washing	washa-ma-shing
opus	opa-ma-pus	water	wata-ma-ter
party	parta-ma-ty	wonder	wonda-ma-der

piggy	p <u>ig</u> a-ma-gy	aura	aur <u>a</u> -ma-ra
purple	pur <u>p</u> a-ma-ple	music	mus <u>a</u> -ma-sic
scramble	scram <u>b</u> a-ma-ble	Kieran	Kier <u>a</u> -ma-ran
stinky	stink <u>a</u> -ma-ky	joking	jok <u>a</u> -ma-king
table	tab <u>a</u> -ma-ble	listen	lis <u>a</u> -ma-sten
tuba	tub <u>a</u> -ma-ba		

(Yu:2003 124)

The fact that the Homeric infix cannot be realised as a suffix means that it must be placed before and after something, which leads to a conclusion that it is a real, genuine infix. In order to be properly realized, Homeric infixation must satisfy two requirements: “the alignment of *–ma–* to a disyllabic trochaic foot and the need for *–ma–* to be at least one syllable away from the right edge of the word” (Yu:2003 125).

### 3.4. *Iz*-infixation

This kind of infixation has gained its popularity mostly through music, but also through spontaneous speech, and specifically in the American English hip-hop community because people usually deliberately use slang expressions in order to show their affiliation to a certain group. “Choosing the ‘right words’ therefore implies using the specific vocabulary or the group affiliates, first to maintain a bond and solidarity with them, and, second, not to conform to people who do not belong there” (Mattiello:2008a 214). The *iz*-infixation is an insertion of the infix *–iz–* in monosyllabic, bisyllabic and multisyllabic words. Like Homeric infixation, *iz*-infixation was, in the beginning, formed as a language game and then eventually became frequently used because of the great expansion in the pop culture language. Language games, similar to the examples of infixation, usually have a linguistic task to produce “distinct and hard-to-recognize forms”, most efficiently “by making use of the rule structure or rule format of ordinary language but at the same time filling in this structure or format with possibilities not exploited in ordinary language” (Zwicky, Pullum 4). Although this phenomenon has not been given a lot of attention in linguistic studies, it “has been used in hundreds of hip-hop songs during the past thirty years, and has also evolved into a construction used in spontaneous speech in certain dialects” (Lindsay 159).

The position of the *iz*-infix depends on the stress of the word in which it is inserted, and is positioned before the stressed vowel. “Thus, if the base is a monosyllabic word, *-iz-* occurs between onset and nucleus, as in *c-iz-oast*, *dr-iz-eam*, *str-iz-aw*” (Mattiello:2013 191). When it comes to disyllabic words, the infix “aligns with the stressed vowel, as in *d-iz-óllar*, *G-iz-óogle* (with stress on the first syllable) vs. *beh-iz-áve*, *eff-iz-éct* (with stress on the second syllable)” (Mattiello:2013 191). However, the *iz*-infixation is rarely present in words which have more than two syllables, for example “*m-izm-illimeter*, *t-izn-élevision*)” (Mattiello:2013 191).

Another prominent characteristic of this kind of infixation is that it is not a required part of the grammar of this language, while some other types of infixations in other languages can be. A few infixed forms have become lexicalized, though, and can be used to fulfil different kinds of purposes. “The process may be used for obscuring profanity (e.g. ‘dizamn’ for ‘damn’) or expressing ‘a hint of joviality’ (e.g. ‘Whassup in da hizzouse?’), though these are not required” (Lindsay 159).

In hip-hop music it can serve a different kind of purpose, for example, “*iz*-infixation can be used to change the meter, emphasis, or rhyme of a prosodic phrase” (Lindsay 159). There is a process connected to rhyme which is called *textsetting* and describes how speakers usually “have intuitions about where syllables of text should be aligned in time with a song or rhythmic pattern” (Lindsay 164). To understand which words are compatible to make a *perfect* rhyme, one must understand what the rhyming domain is, which Lindsay in his studies defines as “the rime of the syllable with primary stress, along with every segment that follows it” (Lindsay 164). Those segments which are crucial for the perception of the rhyme are only those within the rhyming domain, unlike those outside the rhyming domain. “Two words or phrases that are identical in their rhyming domain have a *perfect* rhyme; although many types of *imperfect* rhymes do exist, it is assumed that a speaker will always choose the output that will have as few ‘imperfections’ as possible” (Lindsay 164).

I'm still standin' **strizong** (strong)

And waitin' on my **thrizone** (throne)

And live for the **dizzay** (day) that God calls me **hizome** (home)

Until then I'll **rizzoam** (roam), the face of the **Izzerth** (Earth)

And shoot for the **stizars** (stars), on days of my **bizzerth** (birth)

—Playa Fly, “N God We Trust”

(from *Original Hip-Hop Lyrics Archive*)

(Lindsay 159)

Infixation is sometimes necessary when in creation of rhyme because it enables the rhyming domains to align properly. In the following example, each of the words in bold contributes in making of an imperfect feminine rhyme scheme, while both “*clizown* and *funkytizown* are infixed such that the stress pattern will match *smackdown*” (Lindsay 167).

and everyone wanted to **clizown**

bound for funky**tizown**

and everywhere that this cat went

like the Rock, he layed the **smack down**

(Lindsay 167)

Also, the *iz*-infixation has proven to be suitable for different kinds of syntactic categories and offers a great deal of freedom regarding to when it can occur, “even function words like *thizzan* (‘than’) or pronouns like *yizoo* (‘you’) exist in the corpus” (Lindsay 168). However, there are some cases when this kind of infixation is not applicable. “There is no instance of *iz*-infixation into a word that begins with a [z] onset in the corpus (e.g. there is no *zizoo*, ‘zoo’)” (Lindsay 170).

#### 4. INFIXATION OVER THE WORLD

The process of infixation is most commonly used across areas which include the Pacific Rim, Central/North America and Africa. “The fact that the Pacific Rim is an area with intense concentration of infixation is likely a reflection of the predominance of Austronesian and Austro-Asiatic languages in this region” (Yu:2003 267).

Northern/central Europe, South America and Northern/Central/South Asia however, are regions which note a scarcity of infixation in their language usage, probably due to the fact that “northern Europe and Northern and Central Asia region is populated predominately by the so-

called Altaic languages, which are characteristically agglutinative with rather transparent morphology” (Yu:2003 268). When it comes to the lack of examples of infixation in the region of South America, we must first realise that South American languages aren’t as well-documented as the North American and Central American languages.

There has been a “recent increase of linguistic interests in that part of the Americas”, so in the future there might be some space left for “additional cases of infixation” (Yu:2003 268). “On the other hand, this state of affair could be a reflection of an areal bias against infixation in this region of the world, analogous to what is found in Northern Europe and Northern/Central Asia” (Yu:2003 268).

## 5. Conclusion

The process of infixation and its function can fully be understood once we have looked at it from different aspects. In this paper, I have indicated how infixation can be part of not only extra-grammatical morphology, but also expressive morphology, and in which ways. The most important characteristic of this morphological process is that it is not a typical one because its main focus is on its expressiveness. Infixation aims to achieve emphasis and intensification. Although sometimes people confuse infixation with some other word formation processes (because of its flexibility), it does have distinctive features which are characteristic only for that process itself. The process follows a recognizable pattern, but there are some exceptions which stand out. I have named and represented the four most widely spread types of infixation in English language, along with their characteristics and examples of usage. To conclude, infixation is a process which is not existent in all kinds of languages or spread widely over the world, but it does have space left for further development and expansion and has gained a significant amount of popularity, especially in the modern times.

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