

A Comparative Study of the Prefixal Differences in Pashto and English: A Case Study of the Prefixes of Quantity

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Abstract

Word formation is a crucial aspect of every language spoken around the world, and understanding the role of prefixes, particularly those indicating quantity, can reveal significant insights into how different languages construct meaning. This study aims to examine the similarities and differences in prefixes of quantity used in English and Pashto, thereby shedding light on their respective word formation processes. The researchers employed a qualitative research approach to conduct a comparative analysis of these prefixes in both languages. The findings indicate that quantity prefixes in Pashto differ from those in English. In Pashto, these prefixes change in both spelling and pronunciation when used with nouns due to their gender-specific nature. In contrast, English prefixes are not gender specific. Future researchers can compare Pashto with other languages to explore the differences between gender-specific and gender-neutral prefixes used for quantity.

Keywords: Prefix of Quantity, Word Formation, Nouns, English, Pashto.

Introduction

Language is the primary medium of communication for people around the world. Different words come together to form meaningful sentences, allowing speakers to effectively convey their thoughts. Each language has its own system for word formation, which includes prefixes. Prefixes are defined as forms added to the beginning of a root word, altering its form and meaning (Bauer, 2003; Fromkin & Rodman, 2003; Swan, 2005; Templeton, 2011). They bring change to a word's meaning when attached at the initial position.

There are several types of prefixes. According to Plag (2002), four main types can be identified:

1. Quantified prefixes that quantify nouns.

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2. Locative prefixes that indicate location when added to nouns.
3. Temporal prefixes that denote time when attached to nouns.
4. Negation prefixes that confer a negative connotation to words.

Languages differ from one another in their lexicon, grammar, and syntax. Morphology, a branch of linguistics, plays a crucial role in every language as it deals with the processes of word formation through various methods. New words can emerge in a language through compounding, clipping, blending, backformation, and affixation (Yule, 2022). A prefix helps in the formation of new words in language. The current study in this regard is of utmost importance as it examines quantified prefixes. Prefixes of quantity serve to modify nouns by indicating amounts or degrees, enhancing the clarity of communication. In English, common quantity prefixes include "less," "little," and "much," which are used with both countable and uncountable nouns.

Given the significance of prefixes in language, several studies have investigated their nature across different languages. Mena and Saputri (2018) conducted a significant study that analyzed prefixes in the writing of English and Indonesian students. Their comparative analysis revealed the presence of quantitative, temporal, locative, and negative prefixes in students' English texts. In contrast, the Indonesian texts displayed prefixes that generated different verbs, adjectives, and nouns when placed at the beginning of root words.

Additionally, Bose (2024) compared the prefixal differences between English and Albanian languages, finding more similarities than differences in the prefixes present in both. Based on these reviewed studies, the researchers of the current study noted a lack of research on the prefixal differences and the nature of prefixes in English and the regional languages of Pakistan. Pakistan is a multilingual country with many regional languages, each possessing its own processes of word formation. For example, Pashto, spoken in various regions of Pakistan, has its own unique morphological and syntactic structure.

Purpose of the Study

The current study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the quantity prefixes in English and Pashto to identify the similarities and differences between the prefixes of both languages.

Research Question

1. What are the similarities and differences in prefixes of quantity between English and Pashto?

Research Methodology

Research Design

The researchers employed a qualitative research approach, conducting a descriptive analysis of the collected prefixes through observation of the selected languages.

Data Collection

The researchers conducted long-term observations to analyze the use of prefixes with both countable and uncountable nouns in English and Pashto. A comprehensive list of the most relevant and well-suited words was selected for analysis. This focused selection allowed for a clearer demonstration of the differences in prefix usage between the two languages, highlighting the unique linguistic characteristics and patterns that define each.

Results and Discussion

In light of the research question, the researchers analyzed the prefixes "less," "little," and "much" when used as quantifying prefixes with selected uncountable nouns in English. Additionally, they examined quantifying prefixes like "one" and "many" with chosen countable nouns in English. Similarly, the researchers analyzed the equivalent quantifying prefixes in the Pashto language, such as "lag" (لږ), "laga" (لږه), "lage" (لږې), "der" (ډیر), "dera" (ډیره), "Dere" (ډیرې), as well as "yao" (یو) and "yawa" (یوه), which occur with both uncountable and countable nouns.

Comparative Analysis of the Quantified Prefixes Used with English and Pashto Uncountable Nouns

Table 1: Prefixes of quantity used with the selected uncountable nouns in English and Pashto

Uncountable Nouns in English	Prefixes of Quantity used in English	Uncountable Nouns in Pashto	Prefixes of Quantity used in Pashto
Milk	Little milk More milk	Pae (پی)	Lag pae Der pae
Sugar	Little sugar More sugar	Cheeni (چینی)	Lag Cheeni Der Cheenay
Salt	Less salt Much salt	Malga (مالگه)	Laga malga Dera malga
Sand	Little sand	Shaga (شگه)	Laga shaga

	Much sand		Dera shaga
Water	Little water Much water	Oba (اوبه)	Lage oba Dere oba
Coldness	Less cold Much cold	Yakhni (يخني)	Laga yakhni Dera yakhni
Dark	Less dark Much dark	Tiara (تياره)	Laga tiara Dera tiara
Handsome	Less handsome More handsome	Khaista (خايسته)	Male: Lag khaista Male: Der Khaista Female: Laga Khaista Female: Dera Khaista

By conducting a comparative analysis of the quantity prefixes listed in Table 1, the researchers found that the English prefixes "less," "little," and "much" are gender-neutral, meaning they do not specify gender. In contrast, the Pashto language uses gender-specific prefixes of quantity, such as "lag," "laga," "lage," "der," "dera," "deray," "yao," and "yawa," which are used with uncountable nouns. For example, in English, the prefix "little" is gender-neutral when used with nouns like "milk," "sugar," "sand," and "water." However, in Pashto, this prefix changes according to the gender of the noun. This can be seen in the following examples: "lag pae" (little milk) and "lag cheeni" (little sugar) are masculine, while "lage oba" (little water) and "laga shaga" (little sand) are feminine. Additionally, the prefixes "Der" and "Dere," which indicate a large quantity of uncountable nouns, also exhibit gender distinctions in the Pashto language.

Another important quantified prefix in the English language is "less," which is used to modify adjectives. For example, in phrases like "less handsome," "less dark," and "less cold," the prefix "less" indicates the degree of the adjective. This prefix is also gender-neutral in English. However, in Pashto, the pronunciation and spelling of the equivalent prefix (lag/laga) change depending on the agreement between the adjective and the noun in the sentence.

Laga Yakha Kamra and Lag Yakh Kor

Laga Tora Jenai and Lag Tor Halak

Comparative Analysis of the Quantified Prefixes Used with English and Pashto Countable Nouns

The researchers have investigated quantified prefixes used with selected countable nouns in both English and the Pashto languages, in addition to examining uncountable nouns. They discovered that the quantified prefixes "one" and "many" are the primary quantifiers for countable nouns. In English, these quantifiers are applicable to all countable nouns and are gender neutral. In contrast, in Pashto, the equivalents such as "yawa" (يوه) for "one" and "der" (ډير) or "dere" (ډيری) for "many" must change to reflect the gender of the countable nouns.

Table 2: Prefixes of quantity used with the selected countable nouns used in English and Pashto

Countable Nouns in English	Prefixes of Quantity Used in English	Countable Nouns Used in Pashto	Prefixes of Quantity Used in Pashto
Man	One man Many men	Saray سړی	Yao saray Der sari يو سړی او ډېر سړي
Woman	One woman Many women	Khaza بنځه	Yawa Khaza Dere Khaze يوه بنځه او ډېرې بنځي

The examples provided in Table 2 clearly demonstrate that the quantified prefix "one" used with countable nouns is gender-neutral in English. In contrast, the prefix in Pashto varies depending on the gender of the countable noun. In Pashto, the prefix "يو" (yao) is used exclusively with singular masculine countable nouns, while "يوه" (yawa) is used with singular feminine countable nouns.

يو سړی	Yaw Saray	One man
يوه بنځه	Yawa Khaza	One woman

The prefix "many" in English is gender-neutral, as demonstrated by examples such as "many men," "many women," "many boys," and "many girls." In contrast, the Pashto language uses this prefix with distinct masculine and feminine forms. As shown in Table 2, the prefix "der" (meaning

"many") is used in the masculine form when paired with "sari" (men) and "alaakaan" (boys). Conversely, the prefix "dere" is used in the feminine form with nouns like "khaze" (women) and "jeenakay" (girls).

ډیری بنځي	Dere khaze	Many women
سري ډپر	Der sari	Many men

Conclusion

In light of the research question posited in this study, the researchers have discovered notable distinctions between the prefixes of quantifiers in English and Pashto, particularly concerning their gender specificity. Through a detailed analysis of the prefixes utilized in both languages, it has been concluded that all prefixes of quantifiers in English are inherently gender neutral. In contrast, the Pashto language exhibits a fascinating complexity; the prefixes adapt according to the gender of the nouns or adjectives they modify. This gender distinction is readily perceptible when spoken, allowing listeners to promptly discern the gender of any noun in context.

This study significantly enhances our understanding of the grammatical complexities present within Pashto, illuminating the specific prefixes associated with different genders. By elucidating these structures, this research provides valuable insights for readers and language learners, equipping them with the knowledge necessary to recognize and accurately interpret the gender of nouns used within a variety of conversational contexts.

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