

Features of the Metalinguistic Approach to Affixal Morphemes

Batura Ziyaddin Aliyeva ¹

¹ *Azerbaijan National Academy of Science, Institute of Linguistics named after Nasimi*
115 H. Cavid Avenu, Baku, Azerbaijan

DOI: [10.22178/pos.117-23](https://doi.org/10.22178/pos.117-23)

LCC Subject Category: PE1001-1693

Received 25.04.2025

Accepted 25.05.2025

Published online 31.05.2025

Corresponding Author:
baturaaliyeva@anas.az

© 2025 The Author. This article is licensed
under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
License 

Abstract. In the modern era, the approach to linguistic phenomena from different prisms is noteworthy for its relevance. Among these approaches, the anthropocentric and psycholinguistic approaches stand out for their weight. While using language, a person demonstrates metalinguistic ability when they separate the form of words from the meaning, break the word into parts, think about its components, and come up with their own "etymology".

The article explores the nuances of the metalinguistic and psycholinguistic approaches to affixal morphemes as a grammatical category, emphasising the need for a multidisciplinary approach to linguistic phenomena. The metalinguistic role of affixes is important in shaping how meaning is constructed and conveyed in language. By modifying words, expressing relationships, and focusing on the interpretation of concepts, affixes facilitate a deeper understanding of language and its function, extending beyond the mere combination of sounds or letters. They allow for the expression of more abstract, complex, and nuanced ideas in communication.

In general, affixes not only perform grammatical functions but also provide metalinguistic information for the expression and understanding of language itself. This provides language users with additional information about meaning, structure, and social function. The article also analyses the issues of grammatical conceptualisation, which involves the formation of various knowledge states by the stages of human cognitive development and pays attention to the metalinguistic role of affixes as an important aspect that allows for a deep analysis of language and the communication process.

Keywords: affixal morphemes; anthropocentric approach; metalinguistics; psycholinguistics; grammatical conceptualisation.

INTRODUCTION

The metalinguistic approach to linguistic phenomena and interest in this problem is based, first of all, on the central triad of linguistic views in the modern era - "personality - language - culture". In the linguistic context, this triad can be presented as a cognitive component of the metalinguistic approach. Although interest in issues related to the structure of language and the mechanism of its functioning has increased in the field of linguistics in recent times, some issues remain unresolved. The concepts of "metalinguistic flexibility" and "metalinguistic knowledge", which are expressed in various terms concerning conceptual and em-

pirical relationships, are also of this type. The author [3, 199], evaluating the metalinguistic function as a secondary function of language and accepting the language itself as content, classifies this function as an activity consisting of the ability to talk about language.

The author [1, p. 81] defines metalinguistic ability as follows: "... the ability to rise above language, to think about it, to abstract, by simply using language in our reasoning and observations".

The first "meta" component in this term expresses a broader approach, indicating the content of "transition to something else" - to something that is outside, to a dimension that goes beyond the practical use of language. Metalinguistic thinking

means "observing that the speech flow, starting from acoustic signals and ending with the meaning that the speaker wants to convey, can be evaluated from a rational point of view and taken as a separate object for analysis" [6, p. 2].

The author [4, 88] N. I. Lepskaya defines the metalinguistic approach as the ability to "pay attention to language facts and turn them into the subject of one's statements", to turn "language facts into the subject of speech".

When using language, a person demonstrates metalinguistic ability when they separate the form of words from the meaning, break the word into parts, think about its components, and come up with their own "etymology".

Thus, metalinguistic activity is an integral element of human thinking. The author [3, 201] identified the metalinguistic function as one of the six main functions of language, among which are communicative, appellative, poetic, expressive and phatic functions. The scientist refers to the existence of two levels of language: the so-called object language, which is used to describe the external world, and the actual "meta-language" that we use in everyday communication when discussing the language itself, including when misunderstandings arise between interlocutors.

The metalinguistic approach is interpreted in various ways in the linguistic and psychological literature. Thus, from the point of view of psychology, the metalinguistic approach is the ability to consciously work with language (as an object of activity - B. A.), to recognise language as an object of evaluation and to control speech activity. In linguistic literature, scientists propose to associate the term "metalinguistic" primarily with the metalinguistic function of language [3, p. 203].

As we have noted, according to the model of speech communication developed by R. Jakobson, which comprises six functions of language, the metalinguistic function is manifested in the use of language to describe oneself, including explaining or clarifying speech. In other words, the metalinguistic function has a direct connection with the language code, which is important not only for communicative purposes for the language learner but also for the preparation of professional personnel in language teaching. This function can be implemented only through deep assimilation of knowledge about systematic linguistic properties and an understanding of the categorical subjects of science, which are presented and studied in a

concentrated form within their internal content as the basis of meta-activity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditionally, from a linguistic point of view, language acquisition is considered in phonetic, lexical and grammatical directions without taking into account purposeful differentiation. Consideration of the metalinguistic approach is aimed at the systematic acquisition of language, including the classical view. When discussing the cognitive component of the metalinguistic direction at various language levels, it is essential to consider the system as a whole. As the author [5, 8] noted, "...there is an organised system of morphological, lexical and syntactic units that participate in the acquisition of the temporal structure of reality in language by a person. These language units are diverse in composition and manifest themselves both in content and in functional terms".

As in other language levels, the metalinguistic approach has a special role in clarifying many points at the grammatical level. When describing the grammatical level of the metalinguistic approach, it is essential to keep in focus the grammatical aspect of communication, which is based on two types of mechanisms: the communicative and cognitive directions. The first component contributes to the mastery of speech activity, while the second reflects one of the most important processes of human cognitive activity: conceptualisation. This activity involves perceiving, processing, analysing, and memorising the expressed information, leading to the formation of concepts in thinking. It is known that the most important concepts are encoded in the language. It is the grammatical classification that creates the basis for the systematic distribution of all conceptual material expressed lexically. That is, grammar reflects the concepts that are most important for a particular language. The most important part of conceptual information, at various levels of complexity, is recorded in the grammatical structure of the language in the form of grammatical concepts, which are reflected in grammatical forms, categories, and syntactic structures, among others [2, p. 43].

Grammatical conceptualisation involves the formation of various knowledge states by the stages of human cognitive development. This is a gradual process, each stage of which has "intermediate", and "transitional" moments, that is, a set of rules

that ensure the formation and recognition of a text and sentence at the final stage.

The metalinguistic approach can be defined as a multi-component phenomenon that reflects the ability to perform speech activities, possessing knowledge of a certain linguistic system and the terminological apparatus of the field of linguistics. Like other grammatical phenomena, affixes, as a structural unit of language, can be approached from a metalinguistic perspective since they are one of the elements of particular importance in terms of people's understanding of existing concepts in the language and their application in speech. This process also reflects how the language is adapted to social and cultural contexts. In general, the linguocognitive properties of affixes show how not only syntactic and morphological but also cognitive and cultural aspects of the structure of the language are interconnected. This helps to understand how both simple and complex aspects of language are adapted to people's thinking and reasoning.

The metalinguistic role of affixes is a crucial aspect that enables a profound analysis of language and the communication process. As is known, affixes (prefixes, suffixes, infixes, etc.) are added to the structural units of the language, changing the meanings or grammatical functions of words. In addition, affixes can also provide information about the language's typological and stylistic features by performing metalinguistic functions within the language. The metalinguistic role of affixes is manifested in the following aspects:

Changing the meaning of a word. Affixes can direct a word from a general meaning to a specific or different meaning. For example, the affix "-çı" can be added to the word "demir" to become "demirçi", which provides information about a certain social group related to a profession or field of activity.

Expressing grammatical functions. Affixes change the grammatical category of a word. For example, person and tense indicators or case suffixes are expressed by affixes. This forms the metalinguistic functions of the language, indicating which person, tense and situation the speaker is expressing.

Providing information about the language. Affixes reflect information about the structure of the language and help us understand the structure of the language. For example, the affix "-lıg" performs a metalinguistic function, indicating that an object or characteristic belongs to something (for example, "friendship" - the state of being a friend).

Meaning of expression of certain points related to word forms. Affixes also indicate how language is used and how a word can be used. For example, a past tense affix can indicate that an action has already been completed but is still related to the time in which it is spoken.

Indication of social and cultural context. Some affixes are used only in a specific geographical or social context, thus revealing the social aspect and cultural codes of the language. For example, the addition of a regional affix can demonstrate a local or informal form of that language.

Changing meaning. Affixes (prefixes, suffixes, infixes) are added to base words to change meaning. They may indicate tense, person, or other grammatical features, but they also have metalinguistic significance by clarifying how words function in context. The addition of an affix helps the speaker or listener interpret the word at a higher level of abstraction.

Creation of word classes. Derivational affixes change the word class of the base word, often converting it into a different grammatical category, for example, turning a verb into a noun or an adjective into an adverb. This metalinguistic transformation helps to classify words within a sentence or discourse.

Nominalisation. Some affixes create nouns from verbs or adjectives. The transformation of a verb or adjective into a noun changes the syntactic and semantic role of the word, indicating a shift from action or quality to concept.

Indicating relationships and dependencies. In addition to primarily serving grammatical purposes such as number, case, or tense, affixes in inflected languages also contribute to metalinguistic certainty by indicating the relationships between words in a sentence.

Conveying nuances of meaning. Clarity of meaning: Some affixes convey subtle shades of meaning, helping speakers communicate more precisely and nuancedly, allowing them to make distinctions at a deeper level.

Focus and Emphasis. Some affixes in different languages can emphasise aspects of a word, allowing speakers to emphasise, negate, or tone down the meaning of the main word. For example, in Japanese, affixes can indicate levels of formality, making the language more suitable for specific social contexts.

Cultural and conceptual significance. Affixes can also have cultural significance. For example, some affixes in languages mark aspects of social status, formality, or politeness (as in honorifics in Japanese, Korean, and other languages). These affixes allow speakers to manipulate social hierarchies and cultural nuances.

Discourse coherence. Affixes help connect ideas in discourse. For example, certain prefixes (such as "ri" in Italian for "again") can signal the continuation, repetition, or return of actions or concepts. This metalinguistic feature enables listeners and readers to understand the structure of an ongoing situation or argument, thereby creating a sense of unity and continuity in language use.

Marking Syntactic and Semantic Relationships. Affixes themselves can serve as a means of talking about syntax and meaning. By using these affixes, speakers can think about how words are related to each other in terms of roles (e.g., agent, action, object).

Affixes reflect internal semantic load, such as metaphor or metalinguistic forms of humour. Some affixes play a metalinguistic role, especially in the form of humour, irony, or metaphor, in artistic style, linguistics, or social commentary. For example: "-ology" (the study of something) or "-phobia" (the fear of something) can be applied humorously or figuratively to create new terms that discuss social phenomena (e.g., "blogology" to refer to the study of blogging). Affixes such as "-ism" or "-ist" often reflect social or political ideologies and can be used to discuss and criticise these actions in a metalinguistic context.

Affixes as markers of language change or innovation. Affixes are sometimes used to create neologisms that express linguistic change or novelty. The way these affixes are spread and adopted can reflect the evolution of the language itself. For example, New slang is often represented by new suffixes or prefixes, in which case it is sometimes noticeable that existing affixes in the language have meanings beyond their original grammatical function.

Affixes can help to shape linguistic identity and group membership. For example, the use or avoidance of certain affixes can signal membership in a dialect or a specific linguistic community. Regional dialects or social groups may have different affixes, and recognising these can indicate awareness of metalinguistic aspects of language use.

Thus, the metalinguistic role of affixes is important in shaping how meaning is constructed and conveyed in language. By modifying words, expressing relationships, and focusing on the interpretation of concepts, affixes facilitate a deeper understanding of language and its function, extending beyond the mere combination of sounds or letters. They allow for the expression of more abstract, complex, and nuanced ideas in communication.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, affixes not only perform grammatical functions but also provide metalinguistic information for the expression and understanding of language itself. This provides language users with additional information about meaning, structure, and social function.

The metalinguistic nature of affixes refers to their ability to change the meaning or function of words by reflecting various grammatical or semantic relationships. Affixes are morphemes that attach to the root of a word, changing its meaning, grammatical category, or structure. They can play an important role not only in grammar but also in studies of meta-thinking about language.

In a metalinguistic context, affixes act as units that mark or clarify speech categories (Affixes can change the part of speech of a word), regulate meaning and context (For example, in some cases, affixes can affect the meaning of a word and clarify its meaning. In some cases, the suffix in words not only changes the part of speech but also indicates the person performing a certain role, the person acting), participating in the formation of metalinguistic constructions (For example, affixes can be used to create words that express processes related to the language itself. The metalinguistic aspect of affixes is not only that these morphological elements play a functional role in the creation of new words or grammatical structures but also allow speakers and listeners to think, analyse, and discuss the language itself. This can happen by knowing how affixes change meaning, how they can be used creatively to create new forms, or even how they help to describe the structures that shape communication. For example, the suffixes in the words "linguistics" or "stylism" (i.e., nouns that denote theories or phenomena related to language concepts).

The metalinguistic role of affixes is manifested in their ability to alter the grammatical forms of

words, as well as in their contribution to the formation of terms that describe processes, structures, and phenomena related to the analysis and use of language. Affixes play a crucial metalinguistic role in language by influencing or modifying the meanings of words and expressions at a more abstract level. The metalinguistic role of affixes demonstrates how they help structure, categorise, and convey meaning in subtle nuances that extend beyond the basic lexical function of a word.

Thus, the metalinguistic aspect of affixes illuminates how the structure and use of language provide speakers with tools for thinking about meaning, social context, and cognitive processes. Affixes allow speakers to manipulate language in ways that carry not only grammatical but also cultural, evaluative, and emotional weight. In this way, affixes do more than change words – they provide a window into deeper layers of how the Italian language functions as a vehicle for communication, reflection, and identity.

REFERENCES

1. Benveniste, E. (1974). *Obshhaja lingvistika* [General Linguistics]. Moscow: Progress (in Russian).
2. Boldyrev, N. (2002). *Kognitivnaja semantika* [Cognitive semantics]. Tambov (in Russian).
3. Jakobson, R. (1975). *Closing Statement: Linguistics and poetics*. Retrieved from https://monoskop.org/images/8/84/Jakobson_Roman_1960_Closing_statement_Linguistics_and_Poetics.pdf
4. Lepskaya, N. (1997). *Jazyk rebenka: ontogenezrechevoj kommunikacii* [Language of the child: Ontogenesis of speech communication]. Moscow (in Russian).
5. Tahirov, I. (2008). Temporal lexika [Temporal lexicon]. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339044636_Temporal_leksika_Azrbaycan_v_ingilis_dillrinin_materiallari_uzr (in Azerbaijani).
6. Edwards, H. T., & Kirkpatrick, A. G. (1999). Metalinguistic Awareness in Children: A Developmental Progression. *Journal of Psycholinguist Research*, 28, 313–329. doi: 10.1023/A:1023275214000
7. Horgan, D. (1981). Learning to tell jokes: A case study of metalinguistic abilities. *Journal of Child Language*, 8, 217-224.
8. van Kleeck, A. (1982). The emergence of linguistic awareness: A cognitive framework. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 28, 237–265.