

# A Relation between English Adjectives and Selection of Negative Prefixes

— *inquiet / unquiet / disquiet* —

Akira OKADA\*<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this paper is to present how different negative prefixes have been in use to a common base word for a long time. In order to investigate the frequency of occurrence of the targeted derivatives, some corpora will be of great importance. In addition to the corpora, dictionaries will be used for the definitions of the words not only in Present-day English but also in the past.

KEYWORDS : Negative Prefixes, The Oxford English Dictionary, British National Corpus

## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with the negative prefixed words. As one might already be aware, English has many negative prefixes such as *in-*, *un-*, *dis-* and *non-* in Present-day English (PE). These prefixes have existed since foreign affixes came into English in the Middle English (ME) period. Even though foreign prefixes such as *in-* and *non-* are attached to words, the *un-* prefixation can occur with the words instead of the foreign prefixes. As a result, both Germanic *un-* and foreign *in-* and *dis-* are used in English by native speakers of the language. Generally speaking, if one or the other among these prefixes is used more frequently than the other, the less frequent form will be obsolete. Considering the existence of many prefixes, the questions will arise.

What is the main factor for choosing one negative prefix among various choices?

In order to obtain insight with regard to the

question above, a certain English word will be used along with the prefixation of *in-*, *dis-* and *un-*. For past examples and the frequency of the examples, the *Oxford English Dictionary 2nd edition (OED)* is made use of, while the British National Corpus (BNC) is used frequently for examples of modern usage.

## 2. Methodology

In order to research the question in the previous section, we will go through the following procedures.

- 1) Negative prefixes will be attached to the base word *quiet*.
- 2) Research in the frequency of occurrence in PE will be made with BNC.
- 3) Research of the negative prefixed-words will be made with the *OED* for past usages.

First of all, the attachment of the negative prefixes to *quiet* will be carried out. The prefixes which are attached to *quiet* are the

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\*1 一般科 (Dept. of General Education), E-mail: akira.ok@oyama-ct.ac.jp

Germanic *un-* and the Latinate *in-*, and *dis-*. Through the derivational process, the three words *unquiet*, *inquiet*, and *disquiet* will be generated.

Second, the frequency of occurrence of the three derivatives will be investigated with the BNC. As a detailed investigation, two different domains, spoken or written, will be referred to. In addition to the simple frequency of occurrence, the syntactic categories will be looked into.

Last, through the *OED*, the past usages of the three derivatives will be examined. The syntactic categories and the first appearance will be researched.

### 3. Attachment of negative prefixes to *quiet*

From the viewpoint of morphology, especially derivational word-formation rules, every negative prefix co-occurs with adjectives, so that the prefixes concerned in this paper can be attached to the base word *quiet*. Through the process of the prefixation, *inquiet*, *unquiet* and *disquiet* can be generated on a theoretical basis. That is, the attachment of the three different prefixes occurs at the front of a common word *quiet*, and these so-called “triplets” can exist in PE.

We will confirm the existence of these three derivatives in PE with the BNC.

#### 3.1. BNC research

As we already know, since *quiet* is frequently used, we consider it a well-established word in English. Our attention will focus on the frequency of occurrence of the three derivatives in this section. The table below shows the frequency of the derivatives found in the BNC.

**Table 1.** Frequency of the three derivatives in the BNC

	Adjectives	Nouns	Verbs
<i>quiet</i>	6259	186	31
<i>inquiet</i>	0	0	0
<i>unquiet</i>	15	0	0
<i>disquiet</i>	0	165	26

According to the results of the BNC, it is surprising that *inquiet* is not used in Peat all. Instead, *unquiet* and *disquiet* occur. Interestingly, the register of *unquiet* is as an adjectives only, whereas *disquiet* occurs as a noun and a verb. That is, native speakers of English make proper use of negative prefixes according to syntactic categories. There is another table below, in which each of PMW (Per Million Words) in *unquiet* and *disquiet* is compared to that in *quiet*.

**Table 2.** Comparison of PMW

	Adjectives	Nouns	Verbs
<i>quiet</i>	63.66	1.89	0.32
<i>unquiet</i>	0.15	0	0
<i>disquiet</i>	0	1.68	0.26

From the viewpoint of PMW, it is hard to affirm that the counterpart of adjectival *quiet* is *unquiet*, because there is quite a big difference between the PMWs of *quiet* and *unquiet*. However, because of the fact that we cannot see a big difference between the PMWs in nouns and verbs, respectively, the negative counterpart of the nominal and the verbal *quiet* can be considered as *disquiet*.

Table 1 and 2 above show that, even if every negative prefix can be attached to *quiet* on a theoretical basis, *in-* is prevented from doing so. In addition, for adjectival usage of *quiet*, *un-* might be used with *quiet* to coin *unquiet*, which does not frequently appear in PE. *Disquiet* plays the two roles in the counterparts of *quiet*; one is the noun and the other is the verb. In short, each of the negative

prefixed-counterparts of *quiet* varies from the syntactic categories in PE.

We will take a close look at past usages in order to investigate whether the results obtained in the research of the BNC for PE usage are also found or not in the next section.

### 3.2. OED research

The BNC research reveals the non-existence of *inquiet* in PE, whereas *unquiet* and *disquiet* are used as the negative counterparts of *quiet*. We will investigate with the *OED* whether these facts hold true of the past or not. The table below shows the first appearances of the three derivatives found in the *OED*.

**Table 3.** First appearances of the derivatives in the *OED*

	Adjectives	Nouns	Verbs
<i>quiet</i>	1382	1330	1398
<i>inquiet</i>	1382	1684	1413
<i>unquiet</i>	1526	1551	1382
<i>disquiet</i>	1587	1574	1530

First of all, let us discuss syntactic categories. All the prefixes used to have their own usages in every syntactic category. This phenomenon is completely different from usage in PE. It is especially interesting that the *inquiet* which does not exist in PE was used not only as an adjective but also as a noun and a verb in the past. The following sentences are extracted from the *OED* along with the definitions, the authors and the periods.

- (1) Adjective; Restless, turbulent, troublesome. *Obs.*  
1382 *Bible* (Wycliffite, E.V.) 2 Thess. iii. 7 How it bihoueth for to sue vs. For we weren not *inquiet* among 3ou.

- (2) Noun; Absence of quiet; inquietude; disquiet.

a1684 R. Leighton *Serm. in Wks.* (1868) 410 Sinful liberty breeds *inquiet*.

- (3) Verb; To prevent (a person) from living in peace and quietness; to annoy, molest, harass.

1413 *Pilgr. Sowle* (1483) iv. xxxv. 83 Tho that wyllen be besy for to *inquieten* and letten the peple by theyr malyce oute of reste and pees.

It can be proved with these actual sentences that *inquiet* used to exist in the past and be employed by some authors as adjectives, nouns and verbs. According to the periods in the sentences above, the first appearance of *inquiet* is as an adjectival usage in the bible of 1382 by Wycliffe. This period coincides with the first appearance of the adjectival *quiet*. The following sentence including the adjectival *quiet* is cited from the *OED*.

- (4) Adjective; Peaceable or tranquil by nature; placid, gentle; reserved.

a1382 *Bible* (Wycliffite, E.V.) (Bodl. 959) 2 Paralip. xiv. 6 He bilde vp strengþid cytes in Juda, for *quyeet* [a1425 *L.V.* in reste; *L. quietus*] he was, & none in his tyme batailes risen.

It is interesting that this sentence is also written by Wycliffe, which means that he might be the first English person that used the adjectival *inquiet* as the counterpart of *quiet* in the same bible. In addition to this, table 3 shows us the word which occurred for the first time in 1382. It is the verbal *unquiet*, which is shown in the sentence below.

- (5) Verb; To disturb the quiet of; to disquiet. Common c1525–1625; also occurring in recent use.

1382 *Bible* (Wycliffite, E.V.) Acts xv. 19 For which thing I deme hem..for to be

not *vnquyetid*, or *disesid*.

This sentence, as we can see, is written by Wycliffe, too. These facts suggest that Wycliffe drew a sharp line between a nominal usage and a verbal usage for prefixation to *quiet*. If *quiet* is used as an *adjective*, its counterpart is *inquiet*, while if a verb, its counterpart is *unquiet*. In the course of time, *inquiet* became obsolete and disappeared from the English vocabulary. Likewise, the verbal usage of *unquiet* was out of use before PE.

Last, the order of the first appearances of the syntactic categories in each derivative is focused on. The table below shows the order of the first appearances of the three derivatives (the base word *quiet* is in the table just for the comparison with the derivatives).

**Table 4.** Order of the first appearances of the derivatives

Adjectives	Nouns	Verbs
<i>quiet</i> (1382)	<i>quiet</i> (1330)	<i>quiet</i> (1398)
<i>inquiet</i> (1382)	<i>unquiet</i> (1551)	<i>unquiet</i> (1382)
<i>unquiet</i> (1526)	<i>disquiet</i> (1574)	<i>inquiet</i> (1413)
<i>disquiet</i> (1587)	<i>inquiet</i> (1684)	<i>disquiet</i> (1530)

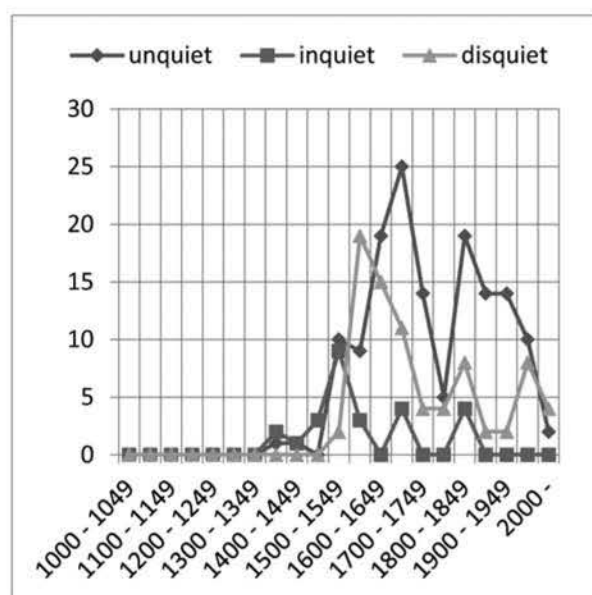
Let our attention go to *unquiet* in every syntactic category. The adjectival *unquiet* came in 1526, the ModE period, after *inquiet* in 1382. Since the difference between the periods is about 150 years, it seems that the adjectival *inquiet* was already accepted as an English word. In spite of that, *unquiet* and *disquiet* were coined in the ModE period, and eventually *unquiet* has survived. This phenomenon results from *un-* being more acceptable than *in-* in the productivity in English. As for nouns and verbs, *unquiet* came out earlier than *inquiet*. However, neither *unquiet* nor *inquiet* is used in PE because of the other negative prefix *dis-*. That is, *dis-* is more productive than the other two prefixes, *in-* and *un-* for nouns and verbs.

We know that although the *un-* prefixation

usually occurs with an adjectival usage and the *dis-* prefixation with the noun and the verb in PE, every negative prefix used to be attached to *quiet* in the past. The table and the figure below show the frequencies of occurrence of the three derivatives from the historical viewpoint from 1000 to 2000.

**Table 5.** Frequencies of occurrence in the OED with every fifty years

	<i>unquiet</i>	<i>inquiet</i>	<i>disquiet</i>
1000 - 1049	0	0	0
1050 - 1099	0	0	0
1100 - 1149	0	0	0
1150 - 1199	0	0	0
1200 - 1249	0	0	0
1250 - 1299	0	0	0
1300 - 1349	0	0	0
1350 - 1399	1	2	0
1400 - 1449	1	1	0
1450 - 1499	0	3	0
1500 - 1549	10	9	2
1550 - 1599	9	3	19
1600 - 1649	19	0	15
1650 - 1699	25	4	11
1700 - 1749	14	0	4
1750 - 1799	5	0	4
1800 - 1849	19	4	8
1850 - 1899	14	0	2
1900 - 1949	14	0	2
1950 - 1999	10	0	8
2000 -	2	0	4
	143	26	79



**Figure 1.** Frequencies of occurrence of three derivatives with every fifty years

It is apparent that *un-* as a whole is more frequent than the other prefixes in almost every period. A remarkable increase of *un-* occurs in the late 17th century, while *dis-* begins to decrease in the late 16th century. *Inquiet* has its peak in the early 16th century, followed by the case in which the frequency of occurrence keeps dropping and eventually disappears in the late 19th century. That is, during the 19th century, not *in-* but *un-* and *dis-* became the proper prefixes for the prefixation to *quiet*.

The results of the research of the *OED* show that every negative prefix used to be attached to *quiet* regardless of the syntactic categories, which is different from PE. The remarkable differences of the frequency of occurrence between the prefixes can be seen in the ModE period, especially after the late of 16th century. It is not too much to say that this change of the occurrence in the ModE period has an effect on PE in which only *un-* and *dis-* are attached to *quiet*.

## 4. Conclusion

We have seen the negative prefixed-words, *inquiet*, *unquiet* and *disquiet* throughout this paper. Even though every negative prefix can theoretically occur with *quiet*, the prefixation of *in-* with *quiet* cannot be seen in PE, so that *inquiet* is not regarded as an established word. On the contrary, both *unquiet* and *disquiet* are accepted as English words in PE, and the former is the negative counterpart of the adjectival *quiet* and the latter of the nominal and the verbal *quiet*.

Looking at the usages found in the *OED*, we recognize some differences between PE and the past. All the prefixes used to be prefixed to *quiet* regardless of the syntactic categories. *Inquiet*, which does not exist in PE, was used in every syntactic category from the 14th century. Since the ModE period, the frequencies of occurrence of the three different prefixes *in-*, *un-* and *dis-* have been differentiated apparently.

It can be concluded that some negative prefixes can be attached to a common word, but it can also be assumed that a certain derivative may become obsolete or rare, and another may survive. In this case, *inquiet* is not accepted as an English word in PE any more, even though it used to be. The factor of selecting one prefix among more than one depends on the consciousness of native speakers of languages, that is, word-formation rules. We do not care for the theory of creating a new word, but native speakers can create a new word unconsciously with the rule. It is important to consider how a new word will be produced by native speakers.

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