Analyses of English Derivatives Attached with Negative Prefixes

— *inadvisable* / *unadvisable* —

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This paper aims at presenting how different negative prefixes have been employed for producing a new 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 is only a part of my ongoing projects on English negative prefixes. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate negative-prefixed words from the viewpoint of history of English.

As most native speakers of English are already aware, it is well-known that English has some different negative prefixes such as *in-, un-, non-* and *dis-* in Present-day English. These prefixes have existed since the Middle English period regardless of their origins. It is true that *in-* and *un-* especially are said to have similar linguistic features of all the negative prefixes according to linguistic scholars. However, it is important to show not only their similarities but also their differences in order to grasp the linguistic features between *in-* and *un-*. For the native *un-*, its existence is possibly due to the fact that it can be attached extensively not only to the Germanic words but also to words of foreign origins. On the contrary, the foreign prefixes such as *in-, non-* and *dis-* can be usually found within certain foreign words as a part of the derivatives. The fact that *un-* can be attached both to Germanic words and foreign words leads to the production of coinages in which a foreign word as a base can be prefixed by the two different morphemes, *in-* and *un-*. In other words, double negative forms will be produced through the attachment of *in-* and *un-*; for example, *immoral* and *unmoral*, *disinterested* and *uninterested* are some of them.

Generally speaking, if one or the other among these derivatives is used more frequently than the others, the less frequent form will be obsolete. Considering the existence of many affixes, there must be some differences between the prefixes. In order to obtain insight with regard to the different linguistic features, a pair of English derivatives will be used along with the affixation of *in-, un-* and some others. For past examples and the frequency of the examples, the *Oxford English Dictionary 2nd edition* (*OED*) and sometimes the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) are made use of, while the British National Corpus (BNC) is used frequently for examples of modern usage.

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Through these analyses, I believe that we can recognize which prefixes will be used for making new words in the future.

2. Outline of Research

A pair of double negative forms (hereafter 'doublets') will be investigated throughout this paper. The terminology 'doublets' means that two or more different affixes are attached to a common base word as in the examples shown in the previous section. In this paper, I will show the derivatives prefixed with *in-* and *un-*, because we can see many pairs of the double negative forms of *in-* and *un-* in Present-day English. As we do not have space enough for the results of the research on the negative prefixes, only the two derivatives will be focused; *inadvisable* and *unadvisable*.

In order to investigate the differences of the two derivatives, we will follow the four steps shown below.

i.   Frequency of Occurrence shown in the British National Corpus (BNC)
ii. Sample sentences extracted from BNC
iii. Definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary 2nd edition* (*OED*)
iv. Sample sentences extracted from the *OED*

First, we will see the differences from the viewpoint of the frequency of occurrence found in the corpus, which enables us to know roughly how many times the two derivatives are used in the modern British English. Second, the actual sentences extracted from the BNC will be introduced. We will know how the derivatives are used in Present-day English. Third, the definitions of the derivatives, which will be of very importance to examine the usage of words, will be shown. In order to do it, the *OED* will be very effective since the precise definitions of the two derivatives are described. Last, based on the definitions, we will take a

look at the sentences which have been or were used in the past, especially their first appearances in English will be focused.

Morphologically and etymologically speaking, it is of great importance to examine how words were used or created at a given time, and the differences between a pair of doublet are recognized through etymological investigations.

3. How *inadvisable* and *unadvisable* are created?

Before stating the detailed results on the two derivatives, the way of generating *inadvisable* and *unadvisable* will be shortly explained below.

(1) $_{pre}[in\text{-}/un\text{-}[advise + \text{-}able]_{suf}]$

As we can see in (1), the root of the minimum element of *in-/un-advisable* is the verb *advise*. At first, the verb *advise* is attached with the adjectival suffix *-able*, which results in the production of the adjective *advisable*. Generally speaking, the negative prefixes are said to be attached to most adjectives in English, so that both *in-* and *un-* can occur to the common base adjective *advisable*. Eventually, the doublets *inadvisable* and *unadvisable* are produced and are established as the words in Present-day English.

The two different but the similar functional elements are attached to the common word and the doublets are produced in English. It is interesting to investigate the linguistic differences between *inadvisable* and *unadvisable*. From the next section on, the detailed results on the two words will be shown.

4. Investigation in BNC

Now that we know how the two

derivatives concerned here are created and are examined in this paper, let us begin the detailed statements of the research. This section has the two sub-sections; the results of the BNC and the discussion of the results. First, the BNC results will be shown. Although BNC contains only the British usages of words, it is fully enough for this investigation because the BNC contains "a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written." It means that a 100 million word collection is large enough to investigate the frequency of occurrence of modern English words. After the results of the BNC, the discussion of the results will be followed.

4.1. Results of BNC

As stated earlier, the BNC is the effective corpus to investigate the frequency of occurrence of any words. The derivatives concerned in this paper are investigated from the viewpoints of the frequency in written and spoken domains. The table (1) below shows their frequency of occurrence of *inadvisable* and *unadvisable*.

Table 1. Frequency of occurrence of *inadvisable* and *unadvisable* in BNC

	inadvisable	unadvisable
Frequency	47	2
PMW*1	0.48	0.2
Sp / Wr*2	Sp: 2 / Wr: 45	Wr: 2

*1 PMW: Per Million Word

*2 Sp / Wr: Spoken / Written

The frequency of occurrence of the two words is forty seven and two respectively. The number of *inadvisable* is more than 20 times that of *unadvisable*. In addition, the former word can appear in both domains, whereas the latter one appears in written domain only.

Based on the results above, the discussion will be made in the next sub-section.

4.2. Discussion on Results

According to the results in Table (1), it can be recognized that *inadvisable* is much frequently used in Present-day English. Although it is not deniable that the two words exist in Present-day English, it can be said that *unadvisable* is rather a rare expression, and that the adjective *advisable* is usually prefixed by not *un-* but *in-*. Moreover, we may say that *inadvisable* rarely appears in a conversation, while *unadvisable* does not occur at all. This is because *unadvisable* is not well-established as a word in Present-day English, and native speakers of English do not recognize *unadvisable* is a standardized English word.

Our attentions will be paid to the actual sentences found in the BNC, which tells us that the rare expression *unadvisable* appears twice in the written domains. Below are the two sample sentences extracted from the BNC.

(2) (EFP 952) And I consider it **unadvisable** to lay too great a strain upon one's conscience.
(3) (HXG 1513) Similarly in (19) the conditional would signifies that not building is being envisaged as a hypothesis, as something which might be done in the future, but which is **unadvisable** in the eyes of the speaker.

As we can see, the two authors do not use *inadvisable* but *unadvisable*. There seem to be some reasons why the authors use *unadvisable*. Table (2) below shows the comparison of the BNC resources in which *unadvisable* appears.

Table 2. Comparison of the BNC resources for *unadvisable*

	EFP 952	HXG 1513
Genre	Fiction	Science
Publication Date	1960 - 1974	1985 - 1993
Age of Author	25-34	Unknown
Sex of Author	Female	Male

Table (2) treats the expression *unadvisable* under the four heads; Genre, Publication Date, Age of Author and Sex of Author. According to this table, it is apparent to us that one of the two resources is different from the other in every head other than Age of Author. While it appears in Fiction written by a female author some 40 to 50 years ago, a male writer uses it in a scientific passage in the late 20th century. It is possible to state that, regardless of the genres, *unadvisable* is rarely used but not well-recognized by contemporary native speakers of English. Although it is understandable that *unadvisable* is the antonym of *advisable* because of the attachment of the negative prefix *un-*, the existence of well-established word, *inadvisable*, prevents *unadvisable* from being used in Present-day English. In short, *inadvisable* blocks the existence of *unadvisable*.

The fact that the use of *unadvisable* cannot be found in Spoken domain in BNC makes us consider that native speakers of English do not use it in their daily lives. In general, we utter words on the spot in every conversation, so that usually we do not have time for thinking which expressions are useful or appropriate in a situation. The fact of unappearance of *unadvisable* means that native speakers of English do not have any opportunities of using *unadvisable* in the daily lives because they generally use *inadvisable* when necessary.

It is necessary to continue to consider why *unadvisable* is used in the two sentences (2) and (3) above.

5. The *OED* Research

So far, we have seen the frequency of occurrence of *inadvisable* and *unadvisable* in Present-day English. Both the derivatives can be recognized by native speakers of English, because the negative prefixes *in-* and *un-* have been well-known to English speakers. For the first place, what are the definitions of the two derivatives? It is indispensable to look into the definitions for examining words. In this section, we will take a look at the definitions of the two words in the *OED* first, followed by the actual sentences in the past extracted from the *OED*.

5.1. Definitions in the *OED*

We usually use every word in every situation without paying attentions to the words coming out of our mouth. However, we recognize which words are appropriate in the situation, which means that we have our mental lexicon and can tell the proper words from improper ones. The definitions of words reflect our mental lexicon, and we can see every usage of the words. In short, knowing the definitions of our targeted-words is of great use for investigating them. The *OED* is one of the greatest resources for collecting the word definitions, and must give us a hand for the key to success for the word investigations.

The two derivatives concerned in this paper have been explained for their creation from the viewpoint of word-formation. As stated earlier, the adjective *advisable*, which can be produced with the suffixation of *-able* to the verb *advise*, can be prefixed with both *in-* and *un-*, and the doublet *in-/un-advisable* is created. According to the *OED*, the definitions of the two words are shown as follows.

(4) *Inadvisable*: <u>Not advisable; unadvisable</u>
(5) *Unadvisable*: <u>Of persons; That cannot or will not be advised; not open to advice. :Of things; Inexpedient, imprudent.</u>

Based on the definitions, we will take a close look at how different the two words are from each other along with the first appearances in English usage.

5.2. Discussion based on the definitions in the *OED*

In the previous sub-section, we can see the definitions of the two derivatives. For *inadvisable*, the *OED* states that *inadvisable* is the synonym to *unadvisable*. The sentence below is the one cited from the *OED*.

(6) 1870; ~ it was *inadvisable* at the present time to add to the taxation.

As you can see, the sentence (6), which was introduced in the late 19th century for the first time, includes *inadvisable*. It seems to me that it is possible to substitute *unadvisable* for *inadvisable* in this sentence.

For *unadvisable*, the *OED* says that it is used about persons on one occasion and about things on the other. The sentences below include the different usages of *unadvisable* respectively; one is about persons and the other is about things.

(7) 1673; Of angry persons some are··sullen, intractable, *unadvisable*.
(8) 1758; Extreme rigour would have been *unadviseable* in the beginning of a new reign.

It is certain that *unadvisable* used to be employed both about persons and things. Looking at these usages of unadvisable, we may think that *unadvisable* is an established English word. However, *unadvisable* has been out of use, and instead *inadvisable* is the established English word in Present-day English.

We have one more thing to consider the usage of the two words. Paying attention to the date of their first appearance, we notice that *unadvisable* had been used before *inadvisable* appeared in English. The first appearance of *unadvisable* is the late 17th century, whereas *inadvisable* appears in the late 19th century. It means that most native speakers of English may have thought that the antonym of *advisable* is *unadvisable*, not *inadvisable* until 19th century. It is true that both *in-* and the root *advisable* are the Latinate elements and can be connected with each other more easily than the combination of *un-*, which is originated in the Germanic, and *advisable*. However, it can be confirmed that *unadvisable* had occurred in English earlier than the appearance of *inadvisable*. This fact shows that *un-* is more productive than *in-* and, regardless of the origin, native speakers of English usually use the Germanic *un-* for the attachment to most adjectives. It is interesting that in Present-day English *unadvisable* is not accepted as an English word by native speakers of English. The reason why *inadvisable* is now frequently used lies in the situation of the Late Modern English period, when it is generally said that English usages were established.

In the Late Modern English period, Standard English was established through much effort from scholars in those days. It is prescriptive grammar, compilation of many dictionaries and so on that result in the establishment of Standard English. The Late Modern English period has much influence on the word usage and the correct usage of words was established. It has to be considered that the two derivatives will be investigated from the viewpoints of history of English closely.

6. Conclusions

So far, we have seen *in-/un-advisable* from the viewpoints of the frequency of occurrence in Present-day English and the actual sentences in which the two words are used found in BNC. In addition to the usages in Present-day English, we have also seen the usages in the past based on the definitions of the *OED*. It can be concluded as follows;

1) *Inadvisable* is more frequently used than *unadvisable* in Present-day English. However, *unadvisable* had already appeared before *inadvisable* came to be used in English in the past.

2) The situation in the Late Modern English period had much influence on the word-usage. Prescriptive grammar, the publication of various dictionaries and so on are some of them.

The discussion in this paper is just a part of my ongoing projects about the usage of English negative prefixes. I will continue to research how different the prefixes are from each other, especially *in-* and *un-*.

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