
CHAPTER 3

Semantic Relevance of a Few Select Assamese Prefixes

3.1 Negative Prefix: An Introduction

The affixes selected for the study contain both prefixes and suffixes. Six prefixes are selected for investigation under the prefix category. Despite being derivational morphemes, prefixes primarily function at the semantic level and usually have little effect on the word class. Different prefixes may carry different semantic values. Negative prefixes, or prefixes that indicate a negative connotation to the resulting words, have been chosen for this productivity study. Although these prefixes may have meanings other than those associated with negativity, for the purposes of this study, only the words created by these six prefixes that expressly convey negativity are taken into consideration. As a result, only these words are recorded in the database. Prefixes may express other senses along with conveying negativity; hence, it is important to make clear at this point that some prefixes may be more or less productive than others when compared in general. For instance, when its functions are not limited to one (i.e., only to negativity), the prefix *bi-* may appear more productive than some other prefixes, but when it is compared to other negative prefixes, it may not be as productive. Productivity of the prefixes is therefore specifically stated as the productivity of negative prefixes. Based on this specific sense, the productivity is examined in the prefixes, excluding any other meanings they may convey.

The study uses the following negative prefixes: *ɔ-*, *ɔpɔ-*, *ku-*, *dur-*, *bi-* and *ni-*. According to the preliminary analysis, there are considerably fewer positive prefixes in Assamese than ones that are negative. Only the prefixes *xu-* and *bi-* can properly be classified as positive prefixes, as per our investigation. Out of the two, only *xu-* may be regarded as a genuine positive prefix since it does not have any other meaning. However, the positive prefix *bi-* has further uses. It functions as a negative prefix in addition to other senses; because of which it is one of the subjects of the present study. This prompts us to investigate the possible reasons of this irregular occurrence. It is realized that most of the words inherently bear a positive or affirmative or neutral sense. According to Laurence and Heinrich (2015), “not only are negative statements less informative, they are morpho-syntactically more marked (all languages have negative markers while few have affirmative markers) Many philosophers, linguists and psychologists have

situated this asymmetry in logic or semantics, as in the claim that every negation presupposes a corresponding affirmative and not vice versa.” They further continue that “one consequence of formal markedness asymmetry is that a negative statement embeds its affirmative counterpart within it...”. It has been shown that whereas affirmation or positivity is not marked in most languages, negativity is. A general non-affixed word, in most cases, does not have a negative sense; it might appear neutral or not even connote something necessarily positive. In such situations, negativity must be denoted by additional linguistic symbols. Because of this, using a positive affix is often redundant. However, in order to exhibit negatives, we might require to display them explicitly.

For example:

biswax ‘believe’ vs. *ɔbiswax* ‘distrust’

zor ‘pair’ vs. *bizor* ‘ill-matched’

The first two words of both pairs, *biswax* and *zor*, are unmarked and do not refer to anything unfavourable to the listener. They express negativity only after being preceded by the prefixes *ɔ-* and *bi-*, respectively.

Again, the word ‘negative’ generally conveys the idea that something is lacking or contrary to our expectations. There are numerous facets of negativity. In general, negativity refers to something that is undesired, bad, or not positive. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, it is “an attitude that is not hopeful or enthusiastic”. As a result, a negative affix is any affix that negates, denies, or acknowledges the absence of something. Negatives can be realized in the form of contradictory opposites, contrary opposites, reversive, binary antonyms or non-gradable, gradable etc.

It has already been stated that not all the prefixes chosen for this study have solely negative connotations; some may also have other semantic implications. They may serve various purposes, such as to intensify the sense of the bases, or some may be employed in formal settings, etc. Usually, when one hears an established word, he or she immediately understands what it means. There will be words in a language that describe negative characteristics as well as words that describe good or positive things, senses, situations, etc. For example, *kɔlɔŋkɔ*, this means taint or stigma. *Hemkosh* describes its meaning as

“a spot, a mark, a stain, a blot, infamy, disgrace”. Again, there is a negative prefixed word *ɔpɔkɔlɔŋkɔ*. The prefix *ɔpɔ-* is attached to the base *kɔlɔŋkɔ*. We see that the base already carries a negative connotation; the negative prefix *ɔpɔ-* here is intensifying that sense or emphasizing the intensity of the emotion to draw more attention to the negative aspect; or it can also be thought of as *ɔpɔ-* making the context formal. The role of the prefix is not to change what the base means. We can say that a prefix plays a negative role or that it should be regarded as a negative prefix in this context if, in the absence of a prefix, the base carries an affirmative, positive, or neutral meaning. We adhered to this principle when gathering the data for this study and only considered words that convey negativity solely after prefixation.

3.2 Etymological review

Among the selected prefixes, some of them are considered of Sanskrit origin. Sanskrit has had an indisputable impact on Assamese from the beginning, just like it has on all other Indo-Aryan languages. While some words entered the language directly from Sanskrit, some words entered through a variety of steps known as *tatsam*² and *tadbhav*³. In addition to some Sanskrit words or parts of words making their way into Assamese through various changes, their meanings also sometimes undergo partial or complete changes. Twenty Sanskrit prefixes are said to be present in Assamese, in their estimation. (Bora 2009, Hakacham 2015, Deka and Deka 2009, Goswami 2015, Patgiri 1999, Morol 1974). Among the selected negative prefixes of this study, *ɔpɔ-*, *ni-*, *dur-* and *bi-* are thought to originate from Sanskrit and *ɔ-* and *ku-* are regarded as Assamese prefixes. The prefixes that have been incorporated into Assamese after undergoing phonetic and semantic changes are also said to qualify as Assamese prefixes. (Deka and Deka, 2009). However, some linguists classify a few of these Sanskrit prefixes as Assamese prefixes. In this manner, the prefixes are separated into three groups based on their origin.

Firstly, the Sanskrit prefixes: *ɔpɔ-*, *ni-*, *dur-*, *bi-*

² The words which are taken from Sanskrit without any changes

³ Those words of Sanskrit which change their meaning and pronunciation with time and circumstances

Secondly, prefixes that are considered Assamese, but they have entered the language through some changes, or the prefixes whose roots are believed to be found in Sanskrit: *ni-*, *dur-*, *bi-*

Thirdly, Assamese prefixes: *ɔ-* and *ku-*

Given that the prefixes *dur-* and *ni-* have additional phonetic variations in the language, a few aspects about them need to be made clear. These two are regarded as Sanskrit prefixes, while occasionally they are also thought of as Assamese prefixes. However, both phonetically and semantically, they went through change over time.

In the case of *ni-*, it is said that it may convey a different meaning when joined to a verbal root in Sanskrit, but in Assamese, it only denotes ‘no’, ‘don't have’, or ‘disappear, vanish’ (Patgiri, 2014). Additionally, Patgiri claims that the prefix *ni-* used in Assamese is actually the Sanskrit prefix *nir-*. There are two other phonetic variations of *ni-* and these are *nir-* and *nih-*. Although they may appear to be different prefixes, they are all variations of the same prefix. Satyanath Borah (2009) cites examples of *nidhani* or *nirdhani* ‘not rich’ and *nijan* or *nirjan* ‘silence’. It indicates that *ni-* and *nir-* are originally the same prefix. He also states that *ɔ* ৰ at the end of *nir-* নিৰ- takes the form of *bisarga* ০%. For example, *nih-* নিঃ-. Deka and Deka (2009) say that *ni-* and *nir-* are used to express the same meaning ‘do not have’ or ‘disappear’. Patgiri (2014) states that although *ni-* and *nir-* are considered separate prefixes in Sanskrit, it has lost the distinction in Assamese. She says, “Sanskrit prefix *nir-* takes the form of Assamese prefix *ni-* as in *nirogi* ‘without disease’. Although in Sanskrit this form is not permitted, in Assamese it is used as an accepted form”. Hakacham (2015) provides the meaning as ‘used in the opposite sense’ and cites the same examples for these three variations under the single heading as *ni-/nir-/nih-*. All these sufficiently indicate that the prefixes *ni-*, *nir-*, and *nih-* share the same origin. As a result, in addition to the words created by *ni-*, the other words are also counted that contain *nir-* and *nih-* while preparing the database. The same is true for *dur-*, according to Borah (2009), who claims that *ɔ* of *du-/dur-* takes the form of *bisarga* ০%. Hakacham (2015) proposes the meanings ‘derogatory’ for *du-/dur-* and ‘sense of

oppositeness' for *duh-/dur-*, similar to *ni-/nir-/nih-*. It also evinces that *dur-* has other phonetic variations *du-* and *duh-* and while creating the database, all the words created by these three are included in the list.

Furthermore, during the data extraction process, we came across a prefix, *ɔn-* which is attached to the same kind of base as *ɔ-*. Therefore, it was difficult to determine the precise prefix for many words, as it was seen that both *ɔ-* and *ɔn-* appear in the similar environment. Hemkosh registers many words (e.g., SET 1) with vowel initial bases, where *-ɔ* is attached. But, again for other similar kinds of words, where *ɔ-* can be attached to the bases, it provides the segmentations as *ɔn+base* (SET 2).

SET 1:

1. *ɔnɔd^hikari* 'Having no authority'
ɔ+ɔd^hikar+i
ɔ+rights+adj
2. *ɔnudweg* 'peace, tranquility'
ɔ+udweg
ɔ+anxiety
3. *ɔnɔpɔrad^h* 'guiltlessness'
 humble'
ɔ+ɔpɔrad^h
ɔ+offence
4. *ɔnɔlɔx* 'aborious'
ɔ+ɔlɔx
ɔ+lazy

SET 2:

1. *ɔnɔpɔkari* 'non-harmful'
ɔn+ɔpɔkar+i
ɔn+harm+adj
2. *ɔnunnɔt* 'backward'
ɔn+unnɔt
ɔn+eminent/high
4. *ɔnɔb^himan* 'modest,
 humble'
ɔn+ɔb^himan
ɔn+pride
4. *ɔnɔxɔn* 'fasting'
ɔn+ɔxɔn
ɔn+eating

These inhomogeneous occurrences create dilemmatic situation in deciding the appropriate prefix for a large number of words, whose segmentations are not provided anywhere. As this distribution has no regularity in the dictionary, for systematic delineation and regularity in listing of words, an explanation is made based on the phonetic environment of *ɔ-* and *ɔn-*. It is observed that the bases starting with vowel sound take *ɔn-* prefix and other than this, all other words take *ɔ-* as a prefix. Therefore, considering this as a phonetic condition, *ɔn-* is treated as an allophonic variation of *ɔ-*, and data are collected accordingly.

3.3 Semantic relevance of the negative prefixes

Based on the meaning, contexts and the domain in which they are used, the semantic relevance of the selected prefixes is discussed in this section. The data that is used as a reference is gathered from dictionaries and corpora while accomplishing this.

3.3.1 ɔ- ʌ-

Hemkosh describes ɔ- as “placed before a word, it signifies a negative word and is equivalent to *un-*, *in-*, *dis-* etc.” It is used to show contradiction and dissimilarity which conveys a number of senses within negativity. The most prominent sense of the prefix is that (a) it indicates the ‘absence of the quality or the feature described by the root’ or ‘unlike the qualities described by the root’. It also ‘nullifies the existence of an idea, concept, situation or state’. While doing so, it does not necessarily impose the value judgment on the derived word. Instead, it shows the oppositeness of the concept or quality mentioned in the root and merely informs the state of being absent. In this case, the resultant words are non-gradable or binary. For example, *ɔrini* means a person or situation that is free from *rin* ‘debt’ or absent of *rin*, *ɔkɔtʰor* indicates a quality which is away from being *kɔtʰor* ‘harsh/strict’. Similarly, *ɔbjɔbɔxaji* refers to a person who is not a *bjɔbɔxaji* ‘a business person’ or who is not involved in *bjɔbɔxai* ‘businesses’.

ɔ- merely shows the absence of elements or the state referred to by the root or simply the oppositeness of the state without attaching value judgment can best be explained by the existence of a few words such as *ɔprɔbaxi* ‘not away from own country’, *ɔnarixulɔbʰ* ‘unfeminine’, *ɔnupɔkari* ‘harmful, malign’ etc. The bases after removing the prefix of these words are *prɔbaxi* ‘one who lives in a foreign country’, *narixulɔbʰ* ‘feminine’ and *upɔkari* ‘helpful’ respectively; In the language, however, there are separate terms to refer to the opposite states of these un-prefixed bases and these are *bidexi* ‘foreigner’, *purux-xulɔbʰ* ‘masculine’ and *ɔpɔkari* ‘harmful’ respectively, which are synonymous with the prefixed words. However, words have their own semantic domain, even the most synonymous words have their own distinct connotations. Even words that are almost identical might serve slightly distinct functions. The words *ɔprɔbaxi*, *ɔnarixulɔbʰ* and *ɔnupɔkari* are synonymous with *bidexi*, *purux-xulɔbʰ* and *ɔpɔkari* respectively. But while using prefixed words, the situation or state is not

perceived independently; rather, it is examined in light of the quality or object described in the root. When the word *ɔnarixulɔb^h* is uttered, the qualities of being a *nari* ‘woman’ is kept in mind, and then another situation is viewed where this quality is absent. While doing so, the focus is primarily given to the ‘lack of quality’ in the new formation. The new formation amplifies the qualities or elements that have been made as a reference point to create the new words. Whereas, in the word *purux-xulɔb^h*, a whole new term is assigned for a set of distinct qualities and in this process, focus is not given on the absence, i.e., what it does not have or a set of qualities is not being made as a reference point to coin this term. Both *purux-xulɔb^h* and *narixulɔb^h* have separate individual recognition; the *ɔnarixulɔb^h* is produced keeping in mind the absence of what it feels like to be *narixulɔb^h*. Similar is the case with *ɔprɔbaxi* and *ɔnupɔkari* mentioned above. It shows that -ɔ is often used to create new words to amplify the absence of qualities mentioned in the root. And this absence again, may not mean the adversity of the situation.

(b) ‘Without the thing or absence of the thing referred to by the root’ or ‘free from a state or situation concerned’. In this case, the suffix is attached to the bases which are concrete.

For example, *ɔrin* means free of *rin* ‘debt’, *ɔkɔntɔk* means free from *kɔntɔk* ‘thorn’. Further examples include *ɔpɔtnik* ‘unmarried’, *ɔmanuh* ‘inhuman’, *ɔxɔriri* ‘bodiless’ etc. However, a few of these words having a base which is concrete are invariably used in the abstract domain. That is, although they use a concrete base, the meaning is often extended from concrete to abstract. *ɔg^hɔr* has the base *g^hɔr* ‘house’, which is concrete, but *ɔg^hɔr* does not mean without a *g^hɔr* ‘house’, rather it means not having the qualities of a family that lives in a house, or not having the qualities of a home. Similarly, *ɔkɔntɔk* means without any obstacles or hindrance or free of enemies.

(c) ‘Ethically improper’, ‘the quality of being bad or adversity of an action’.

Example, *ɔk^hjati* ‘disrepute’ means the condition of having lost *k^hjati*, i.e., honour or good repute. *ɔkɔrmɔ* → *ɔ* + *kɔrmɔ* ‘deed’ means misdeed, bad or improper action. Unlike the previous senses, here *ɔ-* does not only mean oppositeness of what is mentioned in the base, but also assigns value judgment of how it is. Similar examples are

කැලකා 'misfortune' → ක + කැලකා 'welfare', කැකරකා 'an improper act' → ක + කැකරකා 'activity', කහිත 'harmful' → ක + හිත 'goodness', කකැදා 'dishonest' → ක + කැදා 'saint' etc.

(d) 'Incapability, unfavorability, unsuitability, unacceptability of performing an activity or incapability of the doer mentioned in the root.' The suffix, in this case, is attached to adjective bases.

For example, කකැතකරකා → ක + කැතකරකා 'utterable' means not suitable to speak, කකැරකරකා → ක + කැරකරකා 'doable' means something not favourable to do. Some other examples are කගැහැතකරකා 'not likely to be happen' → ක + ගැහැතකරකා 'possible to happen', කගැරකරකරකා 'unacceptable' → ක + ගැරකරකරකා 'acceptable', කසිකිතකරකා 'untreatable' → ක + සිකිතකරකා 'treatable', කබැහැරකරකා 'inedible' → ක + බැහැරකරකා 'edible' etc.

In less frequent cases, ක- is used in reversing the action mentioned in the root. For example, කකැකැරකරකා → ක + කැකැරකරකා 'greening' tells us the process of degreening. Similarly, කකැකැරකරකා has the base කැකැරකරකා which means certain, inevitable, something which is going to happen surely. When it is prefixed with ක-, it changes the direction towards the opposite. It then, means something which is not going to happen. Peripheral use of ක- can also be observed in indicating 'absence or non-performance of an action or activity' as in කකැතකරකරකා → ක + කැතකරකරකා 'conversation', meaning the shunning of conversation. Although the real-life usage of this word is hardly observed, Hemkosh (2016 ed.) has registered this word under the noun category.

3.3.2 කප- অপ-

කප- is considered a Sanskrit morpheme. It implies sacrifice, disregard or negligence, disrespect, distortion, clumsy, opposite etc. *Hemkosh* defines it as "a prefix signifying inferior etc., bad, violent". Unlike ක-, instead of displaying oppositeness or absence of what is meant by the base, it shows the adverseness of a state or situation. It is an evaluative suffix and informs the speakers about the quality of degrading, inferior or bad. For example, කපකරකරකා 'An accidental death'. It does not indicate the opposite meaning of the base *mritju* 'death', rather it states about the nature of death which is not natural or which is unexpected. කපකරකරකා 'infamy, disrepute', here the base is *කරක*

‘reputation’. However, the role of the prefix *ऽप-* is not to describe the mere absence of reputation or a neutral situation that has nothing to do with fame. Rather, it talks about the state of having a bad or evil reputation which endures a clear negative impact. Again, we can find examples of words sharing the same bases, but different prefixes, such as, *ऽपऽभजि* and *ऽभजि* having the same base *भजि* ‘expenditure’. However, while *ऽपऽभजि* means something which is spent wastefully or which is spent for a bad purpose, *ऽभजि* simply means something which is not spent without passing evaluative judgement on it. For example, if someone spends money on gambling, it can be considered as *ऽपऽभजि*. But the same person, if he or she has money without being spent, it is said as *ऽभजि*.

The prefix is generally used when something happens, and occurs against the established norms or expectation that adheres to the belief of ‘should not’. It indicates deviation from the expected path or expected ethical behaviour, which may not involve the criticality of intentional or direct wrongdoings. It can be best understood by comparing it with another prefix *कु-*, which is discussed below.

3.3.3 *कु-* कृ-

The words formed by this Sanskrit prefix describe or confirm about the negative element present in them. It means, according to *Hemkosh* “bad, evil, contemptible, vile, inauspicious, and indecent”. *कु-* is mostly used to signify qualities that are considered bad. It critically evaluates and offers value judgment for the words referring to demeanour such as behaviour, conduct, manner, practice, etc. When the prefix is attached to a base, a sense of deception, deceitfulness, cunningness or dishonest trick is realized in the newly formed word. This often appears to be harmful or hurtful, sometimes intentional, or direct. Instead of signalling deviation from the expected qualities or absence of something; it directly informs about the malefic presence.

For example, *कुकर्म* means an act of wrongdoing that is a manner of conduct. Instead of referring to the non-conduct of prescribed *कर्म* ‘deed’, it says about the *कर्म* which is considered vicious or sinful. Similarly, *कुसिन्ता* means evil thoughts. The prefix *कु-* is attached to the base *सिन्ता* ‘thought’ not to show deviation from the state of

speculative thoughts or absence of thoughts in mind, but to denote the thoughts which are harmful or hurtful for one.

Now, as we have said in the above discussion, the exact impact of *ku-* can be explained by comparing it with other prefixes such as *ጋጋ-* and *ጋ-*. While *ku-* imposes the quality of being ‘evilish’ more directly, *ጋጋ-* considers the situation as a deviation from the quality mentioned in the root. *ጋጋ-* keeps the expected quality as a reference point and views the situation as a divergence of it.

For example, *kupጋጥ፡፡* ‘A wrong path’ → *ku* + *ጋጥ፡፡* ‘path’ vs. *ጋጋጋጥ፡፡* ‘Wrong way’ → *ጋጋ* + *ጋጥ፡፡* ‘path’. The first word *kupጋጥ፡፡* means a path that is filled with wrongful elements and that certainly has bad consequences along with it. However, when we say *ጋጋጋጥ፡፡*, we unconsciously visualise the qualities of a right path, which the word *ጋጥ፡፡* inherently carries and then understand how it is getting deviated from it, which is considered morally unacceptable. *kupጋጥ፡፡* carries the nature of being bad or evil without being indirect, while *ጋጋጋጥ፡፡* means that a path is chosen instead of the designated one which one actually ‘should not’. Similarly, *kukጋጦጦጋ* ‘An evil deed’ → *ku* + *ጋጦጦጋ* ‘deed’ vs. *ጋጋጋጦጦጋ* ‘A misdeed’ → *ጋጋ* + *ጋጦጦጋ* ‘deed’. *kukጋጦጦጋ* refers to a deed that is sinful and it directly indicates the presence of vices. But in the case of *ጋጋጋጦጦጋ*, a sense of ethics is being attached to the new word, because of which we feel that something has been done that is not proper and right, and has slipped away from the doable acts.

kupጋጦጦጋ ‘bad publicity’ → *ku* + *ጋጦጦጋ* ‘to publish’ vs. *ጋጋጋጦጦጋ* ‘False propaganda’ → *ጋጋ* + *ጋጦጦጋ* ‘to publish’. Here, *kupጋጦጦጋ* means that something is telecasted/broadcasted/spread where some harmful or hurtful contents are being published deliberately which definitely have a damaging effect. *ጋጋጋጦጦጋ* means publishing anything else other than the one that has to be circulated, because of which people might get misled. In this case, there is a chance that *kupጋጦጦጋ* has a more devastating effect than *ጋጋጋጦጦጋ*, because the former intentionally and directly spreads harmful information, while the latter is a deviation from the things that have to be published.

kupatrɔ ‘wrong person or place’ → *ku* + *patrɔ* ‘vessel’ vs. *ɔpatrɔ* ‘Not deserving’ → *ɔ* + *patrɔ* ‘vessel’. Between these two words, we view the first word, *kupatrɔ* more negatively than *ɔpatrɔ*, because *kupatrɔ* carries the feeling of aversion more than the latter. While *ɔpatrɔ* simply means that the considering person is not deserving from the speaker’s perspective (it might be deserving in some other place), but when it is said *kupatrɔ*, the speaker is being critical about the quality present in the person or the place and offers an evaluative judgement about it.

3.3.4 *dur-* दूर-/दुर्-

dur- is also a Sanskrit prefix that indicates insult, scarcity, sorrow, pain, prohibition, or hindrance etc. Hemkosh describes it as “a prefix signifying vile, inferior, difficult etc.” It also acts as an intensifier in the negative sense. This suffix, unlike the other suffixes, does not only indicate ‘the quality of being bad’, rather it adheres the sense of ‘audacity’ to the base, which evokes the sense of incapability, insult etc. For example, *durdantɔ* ‘indomitable’ → *dur* + *dɔm* ‘to control’. *durdɔmɔnijɔ* ‘indomitable or incapable of being controlled’ → *dur* + *dɔmɔnijɔ* ‘controllable’. The sense evoked here is that something is tried to be controlled in all possible ways, but it goes beyond the capacity.

This prefix means something that is beyond our control, beyond our imagination, or out of our sphere. The prefix differs from the other suffixes primarily because it tends to create a sense of force or pressure, giving the impression of an uncontrollability of a situation. Such uncontrollability or force is not viewed from an appreciative standpoint. In other words, when the intense energy or the force has to be described negatively, or when the intensity, energy or force of doing something is given a negative connotation, this prefix is used. For example, *durakaṅkʰja* → *dur* + *akaṅkʰja* ‘desire’ means the desire for something which is merely impossible to achieve⁴. Along with the impossibility of attaining, the want itself is a daring task that is viewed negatively. *durbadɔl* → *dur* + *badɔl* ‘cloud’ means heavy as rain, great or noisy, *duraroigjɔ* → *dur* + *arogjɔ* ‘cured’ which cannot be cured easily or which is beyond our capacity to cure, *durbaikjɔ* → *dur* +

⁴ *dur* + *akaṅkʰja*

baikjo ‘sentence, utterance’ means something which is ethically not right, saying of which is treated like a sin. It does not only mean saying something evil, it also refers to the audacity of pronouncing such words which is considered offensive. *dur-* provides the sense of grievousness.

3.3.5 *bi-* বি-

bi- is considered a Sanskrit morpheme whose meaning is described by *Hemkosh* as “a prefix equal to English *ex-*, *dis-*, *in-*, *un-*”. It evokes the sense of ‘away or different from the thing referred to by the root’, ‘deviated from the sense expressed by the root’.

However, unlike *ap-*, *ku-*, *dur-*; it does not offer evaluative judgment strongly, and does not inform us of the absence or missing qualities or entities. Instead, it describes the oppositeness or differentness from the sense of the base. For example, *bizotua* → *bi* + *zat* ‘caste’ + *ua* ‘Adj suffix’ means someone or something deviating from the qualities of their own tribe. *bikarxon* → *bi* + *karxon* ‘to pull’ means a push in the opposite direction, *bidexi* which means someone who is not *dexi* ‘native’, or one who is a foreigner.

The prefix is also used to offer formal connotations to new words and can be used creatively to form words with the intention of drawing the attention of hearers or readers. For example, the word *uttar-oupṇiwexikṭabad* উত্তৰ-ঔপনিবেশিকতাবাদ is used to denote post-colonialism period, where *uttar* means ‘post’ and *oupṇiwexikṭabad* means ‘colonialism’. However, it is not an opposite term of *oupṇiwexikṭabad*, it denotes the period after colonial rules and not the absence of colonialism. To fill this gap in Assamese vocabulary for denoting the opposite state or condition of *oupṇiwexikṭabad*, the term *bioupṇiwexikṭabad*⁵ বিঔপনিবেশিকতাবাদ ‘decolonisation’ is created by attaching *bi-* to the base *oupṇiwexikṭabad* ঔপনিবেশিকতাবাদ. The probable reason for choosing this prefix over others is that it does not attach evaluative judgment on the new word, as the purpose of creating this word is to denote a concept opposite to colonialism, instead

⁵ The term was coined during a departmental discussion, Tezpur University

of offering any evaluative judgment regarding the consequences or effect of it. Using this suffix, again, provides a formal connotation to it as well.

3.3.6 *ni-* নি-

Hemkosh mentions this prefix as “a negative prefix meaning scarcity, inferior or outside”. *ni-* refers to ‘non-presence of the quality referred to by the root’, ‘without the thing or free or away from the entity referred to by the root’. Rather than adhering to colloquial usage, this suffix, like *bi-* tends to have a more formal connotation. While showing absence or oppositeness, it does so without imposing value judgment. For example, *nirb^hul* → *nir* + *b^hul* ‘error’ means free from error or mistake, *nixohai* → *ni* + *xohai* ‘help’ means lack of a helping hand, friendless. Like *bi-*, the prefix *ni-* is often used in formal contexts or in creative usage. There is a word in both the samples, *nirbinijozon* নিৰ্বিনিয়োজন → *nir* + *bi* + *nijozon* ‘investment’ which means disinvestment, a terminology which is found in the context of financial planning, i.e., *nirbinijozon niti* নিৰ্বিনিয়োজন নীতি ‘disinvestment policy’. It is a unique case where we can find the attachment of two prefixes *ni-* and *bi-* together with the same base *nijozon*. As the initial phoneme of the base is the same as the prefix *ni-*, there is a probability that the prefix *bi-* is chosen over *ni-* at first, although it was possible to form the word without *ni-*. However, to give more emphasis on the meaning or to highlight the sense of the word, *ni-* is attached together with *bi-*. This indicates that these two prefixes are closely related and are possible to use interchangeably in similar contexts. Another point is that, the above-mentioned word is coined creatively with the purpose of fulfilling the need for a financial term that should inevitably draw the attention of the hearers. Therefore, the usage of this term is more formal or domain-specific rather than being colloquial. The choosing of these two prefixes over others again proves the fact that the prefixes have formal usage.

3.4 Prefixal construal

As we have already stated that the prefixes taken for the study are negative prefixes, therefore, when we keep them under the blanket term, ‘Negative prefix’, all of them, by default, become rival prefixes. However, they are conceptualised in different

ways depending on different contexts and demands. The same base may take different prefixes depending on the requirements of the speakers and what they want to convey. It can be called as *construal* of the prefixes. “Construal is the cognitive ability to conceptualise a different situation in different ways and choose the appropriate prefixes to represent them in different discourses” (Hamawand, 2011). We have tried to explain the prefixes depending on different construal below:

3.4.1 Descriptive vs. Evaluative

When prefixes provide an account of what something is like, they act as descriptive prefixes; while evaluative prefixes judge what someone or something is. Descriptive prefixes state the unlikability or oppositeness of the situation without being partial, therefore resultant words generally have *contradictory* values. On the other hand, evaluative prefixes offer partial judgment because of which they result in words of *contrary* values.

a. *zat* ‘caste’ - *ɔzat* – *biɔzat* - *ɔpɔzat*

b. *xik^hja* ‘education’ - *ɔxik^hja* - *ɔpɔxik^hja* - *kuxik^hja*

c. *mɔrmijal* ‘loving’ - *ɔmɔrmijal* - *nirmɔrɔmijal*

d. *niti* ‘rules’ - *ɔniti* – *durniti* - *kuniti*

In (a), *ɔzat* means not born, a person who has no caste or has been removed from the caste. *biɔzat* means different from the *zat* ‘caste’ or not adhering to the quality of a particular caste. On the other hand, *ɔpɔzat* means deviating from degraded virtues or former excellence or high standards. It also means low birth, degenerate.

Similarly, in (b), *ɔxik^hja* means not having education, but *ɔpɔxik^hja* means education that is improper and deviated from the desired qualities. In Assamese, it is popularly said that *ɔpɔxik^hja* *ɔxik^hjat-koiu b^hɔjɔŋkɔr* অপশিক্ষা অশিক্ষাতকৈয়ো ভয়ংকৰ ‘ill education is dangerous than no education’, meaning *ɔpɔxik^hja* ‘bad education’ is more dangerous than *ɔxik^hja* ‘no education’. It shows that while *ɔxik^hja* means absence, *ɔpɔxik^hja* evaluates the type of education. Again, *kuxik^hja* means the type of education or learning that is immoral or

vile, it is a negative polarity word against its positive counterpart *xuxik^hja* ‘Good education’.

In (c), *ɔmɔrmijal* means unloving, lack or absence of love. On the other hand, *nirmɔrɔmijal* gives the impression of someone who is unkind or hard-hearted.

From here, we can conclude that while *ɔ-* is descriptive in most of the cases, the other prefixes *bi-*, *ɔpɔ-*, *ku-*, *ni-* mostly work as evaluative prefixes.

3.4.2 Gradability vs. Non-gradability

Non-gradability means something that has a binary occurrence without having a position in between. On the other hand, gradability means being able to occur in varying degrees, i.e., non-binary. Again, within gradability, we can find the *degree of adversity*, i.e., higher or lower.

In the previous examples in (a), *ɔzat* and *bizat* are non-gradable words, because there is no assessment involved. As we mentioned, *ɔzat* means one who has no caste and *bizat* means different from caste. They only describe what it is. On the other hand, *ɔpɔzat* is a gradable, as the degradation of virtues can vary depending on the situation or person. There is no specific level of degradation, it may be more or less depending on various factors.

In (b), *ɔxik^hja* is non-gradable because it means having no education and it does not necessarily talk about the quality, while *ɔpɔxik^hja* and *kuxik^hja* are gradable as they talk about the degraded quality of learning or education which again, does not have a set level. Between *ɔpɔxik^hja* and *kuxik^hja*, the *degree of adversity* is more in *kuxik^hja* than *ɔpɔxik^hja*. Because, while saying *kuxik^hja*, there is an inconsideration or uncompromising attitude in the imposition of negativity which is more intense than *ɔpɔxik^hja*. Also, as we have already said that *ku-* is the polar opposite of *xu-*, which also emphasizes the fact that it sits at the extreme end of the adversity scale.

3.4.3 Formal vs. Informal

When words are used in formal contexts, literary platforms, or to create jargon or domain-specific terminologies, they are coined in a creative way to stand out from the mundane language. When any prefix is used in these contexts, the function of it can be considered as formal. On the other hand, the prefixes which are used in colloquial contexts or non-formal situations are informal prefixes.

For example,

- a. *b^hɔi* ‘fear’ - *nirb^hɔi* ‘without fear’ - *ɔb^hɔi* ‘Assurance, trust, fearlessness’
- b. *prɔjɔzɔn* ‘need, necessity’ - *nisprɔjuzɔn* ‘unnecessary’ - *ɔprɔjuzɔn* ‘not necessary’
- c. *nidra* ‘sleep’ - *binidra* ‘sleeplessness’ - *ɔnidra/ɔnidra* ‘without sleep’
- d. *rɔx* ‘taste, moisture’ - *birɔx* ‘not having moisture’ - *ɔrɔx* ‘tasteless’

In the above examples (a), (b), (c) and (d), while both prefixed words almost mean the same, the former is more likely to be used in a formal setting, conversation or writing, while the latter is used in a general context. For example (d), we could find a poetic piece of Assamese where the use of *birɔx* can be observed, which indicates its use in literal or formal contexts.

কিহৰ দুখত আমনজিমন,
কিয় নো জননি, বিৰস বদন?⁶

*kihɔr duk^hɔt amɔn-zimɔn,
kijɔnu zɔnɔni, birɔx bɔdɔn?*

“What woes make you morose,
Why the drained face, o mother?”

3.4.4 Intentional vs. Unintentional or Accidental

In our day-to-day conversation or in colloquial conversation, certain words are produced more generally to fulfil an immediate need. Often these words are created less consciously or unintentionally or sometimes accidentally. On the other hand, some other words are created consciously to grab the attention of the hearers or the targeted mass.

⁶ A stanza taken from the poem titled ‘Zilikani’ composed by Anandachandra Agarwala

Some are created as jargon, or some are created under terminology to have an equivalent term of another language. In such cases, the targeted coinage is aimed at establishing as an accepted word for common usage. The words which are used to create in such contexts are created intentionally.

The words we have discussed as formal words in the above section are created with the intention of drawing attention, while the words used in colloquial or informal contexts are created unintentionally during the flow of the conversation.

For example, *nirbinijozɔn* নিৰ্বিনিয়োজন → *ni* + *bi* + *nijozɔn* ‘investment’ vs. *ɔnijozɔn* অনিয়োজন → *ɔ* + *nijozɔn* ‘investment’ here, both means disinvestment. But the former is created consciously to fill the gap of a financial terminology in the language, the latter is used simply to mean the opposite state of *nijozɔn* ‘investment’. Similarly, *nirgjan* নিৰ্জ্ঞান → *ni* + *gjan* ‘knowledge’ vs. *ɔgjan* অজ্ঞান → *ɔ* + *gjan* ‘knowledge’, both means ‘ignorant, unconscious,’. The first word *nirgjan* is not usually used in colloquial conversation, it is used in a formal setup with the intention of differing it from the mundane language. However, in the case of *ɔgjan*, it is commonly used elsewhere.

3.4.5 Considerate vs. Inconsiderate

Among the prefixes which show the adverseness of a situation, depending on the intensity and perspective of the speakers, different prefixes are used. While the prefix *ɔpɔ-* gives the sense of ethically improper or not right, *ku-* directly imposes the sense of being evil or sinful without leaving grey areas. In the case of the former, the attitude of the speaker can be observed as considerate, while in the case of the latter, speakers show an uncompromising or inconsiderate attitude while posing a judgment or describing a situation.

a) *ɔpɔkɔrmɔ* অপকৰ্ম → *ɔpɔ* + *kɔrmɔ* ‘duty’

kukɔrmɔ কুকৰ্ম → *ku* + *kɔrmɔ* ‘duty’

duskɔrmɔ দুষ্কৰ্ম → *du* + *kɔrmɔ* ‘duty’

b) *ɔpɔbjɔbɔhar* অপব্যৱহাৰ → *ɔpɔ* + *bjɔbɔhar* ‘treatment’

kubjɔbɔhar কুব্যৱহাৰ → *ku* + *bjɔbɔhar* ‘treatment’

durbjɔbɔhar দুৰ্ব্যৱহাৰ → *dur* + *bjɔbɔhar* ‘treatment’

c) *ɔpɔbjak^hja* অপব্যাখ্যা → *ɔpɔ* + *bjak^hja* ‘explanation’

kubjak^hja কুব্যাখ্যা → *ku* + *bjak^hja* ‘explanation’

By referring to a deed as *ɔpɔkɔrmɔ*, one means that something is done which is a deviation from the expected norm or assigned deed. The act is not appreciated or an act that does not contribute to the wellness of an action. However, the harshness of adversity is quite less in *ɔpɔkɔrmɔ* than in the word *kukɔrmɔ*. In *kukɔrmɔ*, there is no scope to think about how negative the act is, it assigns the label of being ‘bad’ outright. Again, in the case of *duskɔrmɔ*, the inconsideration is reflected as the conducted deed is viewed as sinful and to do this, one dares to act against the established rules or beliefs consciously.

Similarly, in the case of *ɔpɔbjɔbɔhar*, it is understood that one is not being treated rightly or something is used in a wrong way which is against our expectation. This creates disappointment in us. But, when we say *kubjɔbɔhar*, the act of wrongdoing is clearly denoted which is associated with a disgusting view. In the case of *durbjɔbɔhar* again, not only the treatment is bad, but one shows the audacity to act that way because of which one becomes inconsiderate in describing such manners.

Again, in the case of *ɔpɔbjak^hja*, the base *bjak^hja* which means ‘explanation’, and *ɔpɔ-* changes the meaning from being neutral to an explanation which is misled, where the intensity of negativity is less than that of *kubjak^hja*. In *kubjak^hja*, it is more vividly meant that the given explanation can be harmful or an intentional act of wrongdoing.

3.5 Negativity colour spectrum

In the discussion of the semantic relevance of each prefix, we have analysed their semantic importance and the senses they usually project. We get to know how each prefix is slightly or majorly different from each other semantically. We have also observed that

prefixes have more than one sense, while a few prefixes have limited functions or roles, some others have multiple functions. However, among these senses, for each prefix, one or two senses are primary and others are non-primary or peripheral.

Now, based on these senses and their intensity explained in the earlier sections, in this section, a negativity spectrum is proposed that is represented through colours. It tries to visually represent the intensity of meaning by categorizing them into different sections which are represented by different colours (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). In Table 3.1 different meanings are assigned for different colours. In Table 3.2, each suffix is entrusted with colours of Table 3.1 based on their projected meaning.

Table 3.1 Assigning of meaning against each colour




















Colours					
Connotation	Absence, Oppositeness, Incapability	Non-ethical, Morally unacceptable	Evil, Bad, Devilish	Audacity, Power, Force, Authority, Ambition	Formal or literal Creativity

Table 3.2 Assigning of colours for each prefix based on their senses

<i>o-</i>			
<i>op-</i>			
<i>ku-</i>			
<i>dur-</i>			
<i>bi-</i>			
<i>ni-</i>			

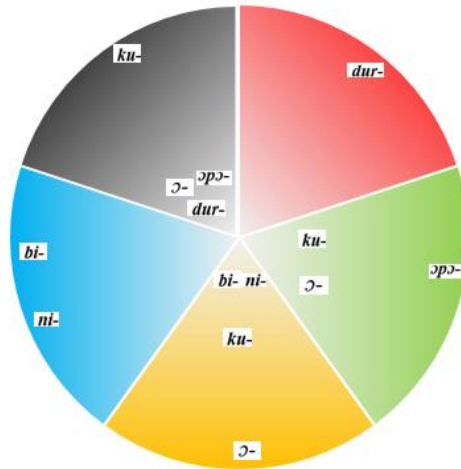


Fig 3.1 Placement of the prefixes within negativity spectrum based on their senses

Different colours are used to show the negativity range instead of showing it through a scalar way. The reason is that although all are negative prefixes, they have different roles to play semantically. Therefore, it is problematic to say which prefix is more ‘negative’ and which is less. For example, while showing absence we may prefer to use *ɔ-*, but to indicate adversity we are more likely to use *ku-* or *ɔpɔ-*. In that case, although both are negative prefixes, both can be equally negative based on their respective roles. That is why, instead of keeping them in a scale, different aspects of negativity are being represented by different colours and within the colour spectrum, the position of the prefixes according to their intensity level is shown.

However, as all the prefixes fall under ‘negative’ prefixes, there is no strict boundary among the senses they denote. Although the prefixes adhere to more than one sense, the prefixes do not provide equal weight to each sense. Amongst them, one or two are primary or vital, while the other senses are less prominent or intense for the same prefix. Or we can say that all the prefixes may display all the senses, but one or two senses are primary, i.e., one or two senses are more intense, while for others the intensity is less or they can be considered as peripheral senses.

Now, in the circular color spectrum, which is separated into *five* portions based on *five* fundamental meanings, each of which is represented by a different color, we see that the color is darker on the edge or toward the periphery and lighter toward the center. It is

the visual representation of the intensity of meaning, the darker side denotes more intensity and the lighter side means less intensity. That means at the edge, the sense is the most intense and gradually it is fading away towards the center which denotes that the sense is also becoming less intense. Accordingly, the prefixes that are placed on the darker side mean that the particular meaning is primary or the most intense for that prefix. On the other hand, the prefixes that are situated towards the lighter side mean that the meaning is less intense or secondary for the prefixes.

In Fig 3.1, the *yellow* section, which denotes primarily absence, oppositeness, and incapability, contains four prefixes. The prefix *ɔ-* sits at the darkest shade, meaning it prominently reflects these senses. In other words, these senses are primary senses for the prefix *ɔ-*. On the other hand, *bi-* and *ni-* are found almost at the end of the light side which tells us that although they express these senses, but minimally. However, the prefix *ku-* is placed towards the lighter side but before *bi-* and *ni-*. *ku-* dominantly means adversity which also acts as the polar opposite of *xu-*, a positive prefix of Assamese. Although *ku-* does not convey oppositeness without entrusting value judgment like *ɔ-* does, it does so when an exclusively positive sense requires to be negated. For example, *kup^hɔl* ‘bad result’ is the polar opposite of *xup^hɔl* ‘good result’. Hence, the intensity of the sense of oppositeness expressed by *ku-* is less than *ɔ-*, but it is more than *bi-* and *ni-*. For example, when we look for the opposite term of *kɔrmɔ* ‘deed’, there is an equal chance that *ɔkɔrmɔ* ‘non-deed’ and *kukɔrmɔ* ‘bad deed’ both can be pronounced as the opposite of it. However, *niskɔrmɔ* ‘without deed’ and *bikɔrmɔ* ‘without action’ are less likely to come into our mind.

Similarly, the *green* section which denotes non-ethical and morally unacceptable behaviour or attitude bears *ɔpɔ-* at the darkest side as it is the primary sense of the prefix and *ku-* and *ɔ-* towards the lighter shade, indicating their peripheral sense. In the *red* segment, *dur-* is placed towards the darkest end indicating the high intensity of that particular sense for the prefix. The *black* portion which means ‘evil, bad’ has *ku-* at the darker side, which denotes that this sense is most strongly expressed there. On the other hand, *ɔ-*, *ɔpɔ-* and *dur-* sit on the lighter side which means that they just slightly convey this notion. At the last, the *blue* section which denotes formal or creative usage has *ni-*

and *bi-* towards the darker edge. It means that both the prefixes are prominently used for this purpose and this particular usage separates them from the rest.