

Expletive infixation is a phenomenon occurring in English that inserts an expletive (*bloody, freakin'*) into the word. While it may seem that this phenomenon has no explicit pattern, the detailed analysis below will show that it behaves quite regularly along the metrical characteristics of the language

Of great importance will be the metrical parameters. The following words will be considered when determining these parameters:

Unbelievable	America	Disenfranchise
Irretrievable	Unrelatable	Universal
Impossible	Photography	Romania
Di/hydrogen	Endowment	Available

Words in this language are right-headed. This is most easily seen comparing words of varying length. Consider the word *impossible*, which is syllabified *im.pó.ssi.ble*, with stress on the penultimate syllable; the word *unbelievable*, with is syllabified *un.be.líe.va.ble*, contains one more syllable than *impossible*, and sees the main stress move rightward. The foot containing the main stress, then, must towards the right edge of the word.

English demonstrates extrametrical behavior. Consider the word *photography*, syllabified *pho.tó.gra.phy*, contains stress on the antepenultimate syllable. The underlying representation of this word, /fə.tə.grə.fi/, shows that this word contains only light syllables. As English is right word-headed, trochees built in either direction across the word would return **pho.to.grá.phy*; likewise, iambs built across the word in either direction would return **pho.to.gra.phý*. Notice that the word *hydrogen*, syllabified *hý.dro.gen*, contains stress on the first syllable. As such, it is not the first syllable that is extrametrical, but the last.

PR: *pho.to.grá.phy	PR: *Pho.to.gra.phý
Feet: Ft _a Ft _b	Feet: Ft _a Ft _b
Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a (σ ₃ σ ₄) ^b	Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a (σ ₃ σ ₄) ^b
PR: Pho ¹ .to ² .gra ³ .phy ⁴	PR: Pho ¹ .to ² .gra ³ .phy ⁴

Also consider *hydrogen* when determining the foot structure of this language. As the stress falls on the initial syllable, English must have a trochaic foot structure. An iambic foot structure would yield **hy.dró.gen*.

PR: hý.dro.gen	PR: *hy.dró.gen
Feet: Ft _a	Feet: Ft _a
Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a σ ₃	Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a σ ₃
PR: hy ₁ .dro ₂ .gen ₃	PR: hy ₁ .dro ₂ .gen ₃

English must build feet from right to left. Consider: of *hydrogen*'s three syllables, the first is stressed. This stress moves in words of four syllables. Consider: *America*, syllabified *A.mé.ri.ca*, contains stress on the second syllable. This word's underlying representation, /ə.mɛ.ɹɪ.kə/, reveals that it contains only light syllables. Trochees built from left to right would assign stress to the first syllable. A foot built from right to left, however, will correctly assign stress to the antepenultimate syllable. Notice that the last syllable is extrametrical, and will be ignored when feet are built across a word.

PR: A.mé.ri.ca	PR: *Á.me.ri.ca
Feet: Ft _a	Feet: Ft _a
Syllables: σ ₁ (σ ₂ σ ₃) ^a σ ₄	Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a σ ₃ σ ₄
PR: A ₁ .me ₂ .ri ₃ .<ca ₄ >	PR: A ₁ .me ₂ .ri ₃ .<ca ₄ >

This language is quantity sensitive. Compare: the word *disenfranchise*, syllabified *di.sen.frán.chise* contains stress on its penultimate syllable. The stressed foot has an underlying representation of /fɪæn/, and is heavy. The word *impossible*, syllabified *im.pó.ssi.ble*, stresses its antepenultimate syllable. The underlying representation of its stressed foot, /pɑ.sə/, contains only light syllables. English must thus consider a heavy syllable to warrant its own foot, and does not build **di.sén.fran.chise*. Also consider *universal*, syllabified *u.ni.vér.sal*, contains stress on its penultimate syllable.

PR: di.sen.frán.chise	PR: *di.sén.fran.chise
Feet: Ft _a	Feet: Ft _a
Syllables: σ ₁ σ ₂ σ₃ σ ₄	Syllables: σ ₁ σ₂ σ ₃ σ ₄
Mora: μ ₁ μ ₂ (μ₃) ^a μ ₄	Mora: μ ₁ (μ₂μ₃) ^a μ ₄
PR: di ₁ .sen ₂ .fran ₃ .<chise ₄ >	PR: di ₁ .sen ₂ .fran ₃ .<chise ₄ >

The parameters of English are given below. While incomplete, no other parameters are crucial in the analysis of expletive infixation.

- Foot-headedness: Trochaic
- Directionality: Right-to-left
- Word-headedness: Right
- Sensitivity: Quantity sensitive
- Extrametricality: final syllable

Expletive infixation occurs when a speaker inserts an expletive within a word. This expletive, usually words such as *freakin'* or *bloody*, shades the language of the speaker, and has attitudinal implications. Consider: The word *universal* becomes *Uni-fuckin-versal* when expletive infixation is applied. Consider their occurrence in conversation:

“I hate this remote. I wish it weren’t universal!”

“I hate this remote. I wish it weren’t uni-fuckin-versal!”

Notice the expletive’s insertion within the word and the additional effect it has on the attitude of the sentence. However, it can be seen that this insertion cannot occur anywhere in the word. Consider: both **U-fuckin-niversal* and **Univer-fuckin-sal* are ungrammatical. Also compare: *Romania* becomes *Ro-fuckin-mania*; but **Roma-fuckin-nia* and **Romani-fuckin-a*

“I had the absolute worst trip to Romania”
 “I had the absolute worst trip to Ro-fuckin-mania”

Universal is syllabified *U.ni.ver.sal*, and Romania is syllabified *Ro.ma.ni.a*. As English builds feet above these words, their stress will fall as follows:

PR: Ro.má.ni.a	PR: U.ni.vér.sal
Feet: Ft _a	Feet: Ft _a
Syllables: σ ₁ σ₂ σ ₃ σ ₄	Mora: σ ₁ σ ₂ σ₃ σ ₄
Mora: μ ₁ (μ ₂ μ ₃) ^a μ ₄	Syllables: μ ₁ μ ₂ (μμ ₃) ^a μμ ₄
PR: Ro ₁ .ma ₂ .ni ₃ .<a ₄ >	PR: U ₁ .ni ₂ .ver ₃ .<sal ₄ >

Now consider expletive insertion, where the element *freakin* is inserted: *Ro-freakin-mania* and *Uni-freakin-versal*

And the syllabification of both returns *Ro.frea.kin.má.ni.a* and *u.ni.frea.kin.vér.sal*. Notice that *freakin* occurs before only the stressed syllable. As seen above, placing it anywhere else returns an ungrammatical form.

Expletive infixation, then, must apply before the stressed syllable.

PR: Ro.frea.kin.má.ni.a
Feet: Ft _a Ft _b
Syllables: σ ₁ σ ₂ (σ ₃) ^a (σ₄ σ ₅) ^b σ ₆
Moras: μ ₁ μ ₂ (μμ ₃) ^a (μ₄ μ ₅) ^b μ ₆
PR: Ro ₁ .frea ₂ .kin ₃ .ma ₄ .ni ₅ .<a ₆ >

PR: *Ro.má.ni.frea.kin.a
Feet: Ft _a
Syllables: σ ₁ σ ₂ σ ₃ σ ₄ (σ ₅) ^a σ ₆
Moras: μ ₁ μ ₂ μ ₃ μ ₄ (μ ₅) ^a μ ₆
PR: Ro ₁ .ma ₂ .ni ₃ .frea ₄ .kin ₅ .<a ₆ >

Expletive infixation will return the following forms, taken from the word bank above:

Di(fu.ckin)(hý.dro)<gen>
A(frea.kin)(mé.ri)<ca>
Pho(fu.ckin)(tó.gra)<phy>
En(bloo.dy)(dów)<ment>
(U.ni)(fu.ckin)(vér)<sal>
Ro(bloo.dy)(má.ni)<a>
A(fu.ckin)(vái.la)<ble>

This pattern becomes more complicated, however, in the presence of words containing prefix. Consider:

Be(fu.ckin)(líe.va)<ble>
Un.be(frea.kin)(líe.va)<ble>
Un(frea.kin)be(líe.va)<ble>

Where *unbelievable*, syllabified *un.be.líe.va.ble*, would seem to allow infixation to ONLY occur before syllable <lie>. However, in the third form above, it is allowed to occur between the appended prefix and the base. Expletive infixation, then, is not ungrammatical between a base and a prefix. Also compare:

Re(fu.ckin)(lá.ta)<ble>
Un.re(frea.kin)(lá.ta)<ble>
Un(bloo.dy)re(lá.ta)<ble>
I(fu.ckin)re(tríe.va)<ble>
I.rre(frea.kin)(tríe.va)<ble>
Un(frea.kin)a(vái.la)<ble>
Un.a(bloo.dy)(vái.la)<ble>
Di(fu.ckin)(hý.dro)<gen>

Notice the insertion in the form *dihydrogen*. The prefix *Di-* has been appended to this word; removing this affix from the base form will yield *hydrogen*. Syllabified *hý.dro.gen*, this word contains stress on the initial syllable. The following form, however, is still grammatical: *(fu.ckin)(hý.dro)<gen>*. Also compare: *(fu.ckin)(pá.tho)<gen>*, *(frea.kin)(mi.mi)<cry>*, *(bloo.dy)(tá.xa)<ble>*. These best function in sentences:

- “The reaction didn’t have enough fuckin-hydrogen”
 “The doctors can’t find the fuckin-pathogen”
 “I am tired of this bully’s freakin-mimicry”
 “I thought this purchase order wasn’t freakin-taxable”

Expletive infixation, then, may occur before a stressed syllable—even an initial syllable—and may occur between a prefix and the base. However, notice expletive infixation in words of particular length: *prestidigitation*, syllabified *pre.sti.di.gi.tá.tion*, can undergo expletive infixation to return *pre.sti.di.gi.fu.ckin.tá.tion*. But consider the grammaticality of the following forms: *pre.sti.fu.ckin.di.gi.tá.tion* and *fu.ckin-pre.sti.di.gi.tá.tion*. Also consider: *introductive*, syllabified *in.tro.duc.tive*, may become *in.tro.frea.kin.duc.tive* or *frea.kin-in.tro.duc.tive*. Consider the foot structures:

PR: Pre.sti.di.gi.tá.tion
Feet: Ft _a Ft _b Ft _c
Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a (σ ₃ σ ₄) ^b (σ₅) ^c σ ₆
Mora: (μ ₁ μ ₂) ^a (μ ₃ μ ₄) ^b (μμ₅) ^c μμ ₆
PR: Pre ₁ .sti ₂ .di ₃ .gi ₄ .ta ₅ .<tion ₆ >

PR: in.tro.dúc.tive
Feet: Ft _a Ft _b
Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a (σ₃) ^b σ ₄
Mora: (μμ ₁ μ ₂) ^a (μμ₃) ^b μμ ₄
PR: in ₁ .tro ₂ .duc ₃ .<tion ₄ >

Notice that, in expletive infixation within long words, the expletive may be inserted as a foot edge (In like these, English can be seen to be iterative). This foot edge must be a left foot edge. Consider the ungrammaticality of **introductive-freakin*, which is the result of an expletive at a right foot edge, and the grammaticality of *freakin-introductive*, which has an expletive at the left edge of the leftmost foot.

PR: in.tro.dúc.tive
Feet: Ft _a Ft _b
Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a (σ₃) ^b σ ₄
Mora: (μμ ₁ μ ₂) ^a (μμ₃) ^b μμ ₄
PR: <i>freakin</i> .in ₁ .tro ₂ .duc ₃ .<tion ₄ >

PR: in.tro.dúc.tive
Feet: Ft _a Ft _b
Syllables: (σ ₁ σ ₂) ^a (σ ₃) ^b σ ₄
Mora: (μμ ₁ μ ₂) ^a (μμ ₃) ^b μμ ₄
PR:in ₁ .tro ₂ . <i>freakin</i> .duc ₃ .<tion ₄ >

Perhaps, then, expletive infixation is not infixation at all, but rather a form of prefixation. Expletives may be inserted as a prefix to the left edge of any foot. The expletive tends towards the foot containing the main stress, however. Again, it may also appear between a prefix and a base.

Because expletives are possible to align into a word, foot alignment of these elements must take precedent when ordered amongst alignment constraints.

In.tro.duc.tive	AlignExp-Left(Ft)	Align (Exp, R; ‘σFt, L)
☞ Candidate: in.tro.fu.ckin.duc.tive		*
Candidate: In.tro.duc.fu.ckin.tive	*	

But notice the following interactions:

In.tro.duc.tive	AlignExp-Left(‘Ft)	AlignExp-Left(Ft)
☞ ☞ Candidate: in.tro.fu.ckin.duc.tive		*
☞ Candidate: fu.ckin- in.tro.duc.tive	*	*

While the first of these candidates seems to be the “better” candidate, note that the second candidate is still valid. Thus, these constraints, even if ranked with respect to each other, will not alone yield an ungrammatical candidate.

Note that either of these must be ranked above Dep, because elements are being inserted.
Thus:

AlignExp-Left('Ft) >> Dep

And AlignExp-Left(Ft) >> Dep

In.tro.duc.tive	AlignExp-Left('Ft)	AlignExp-Left(Ft)
☞☞ Candidate: in.tro.fu.ckin.duc.tive		
☞ Candidate: fu.ckin- in.tro.duc.tive	*	

Pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion	AlignExp-Left('Ft)	AlignExp-Left(Ft)
☞☞ Candidate: Pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion		
☞ Candidate: Pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion	*	

Pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion	AlignExp-Left('Ft)	AlignExp-Left(Ft)
☞☞ Candidate: Pre.sti.di.gi.frea.kin.ta.tion		**
☞ Candidate: Pre.sti.frea.kin.di.gi.ta.tion	*	**
☞ Candidate: Frea.kin- pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion	*	**

An “ideal” candidate would contain an expletive at each left foot edge; however, this seldom—if ever—occurs. Another constraint may be posited to account for this, where it is violated after the first inserted expletive:

Pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion	OneExp	AlignExp-Left('Ft)	AlignExp-Left(Ft)
☞☞ Candidate: Pre.sti.di.gi.frea.kin.ta.tion			**
☞☞ Candidate: Pre.sti.frea.kin.di.gi.ta.tion		*	**
☞☞ Candidate: Frea.kin- pre.sti.di.gi.ta.tion		*	**
Candidate: Frea.kin- pre.sti.frea.kin.di.gi.ta.tion	*	*	*
Candidate: Frea.kin- pre.sti.di.gi.frea.kin.ta.tion	*		*
Candidate: Frea.kin- pre.sti.frea.kin.di.gi.freak.in.ta.tion	**		

Appendix

English is a language that has seen great use worldwide. It is an official language in several nations. English is a member of the Germanic language family, alongside other tongues such as Frisian, Dutch, and Yiddish.

While there are several varieties of English, many dialects draw from a similar phonological inventory. Below is an inventory for American English:

Consonants

m			n			ŋ	
p b			t d			k ɡ	
				tʃ dʒ			
	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
			r		j	w	
			l				

Vowels

i:	ɪ			u:	ʊ
	ɛ		ə	ɔ:	
	æ		ʌ	ɑ:	

English has a maximal syllable template of CCCVVCCC, found in the word *strengths* /stɹɛŋθs/. This is uncommon, however, and many words in English will demonstrate a smaller syllable structure.

PR: stɹɛŋθs
Syllables: σ ₁
CV Skel: CCCVVCCC ₁

With thanks to *Prosodic Structure and Expletive Infixation* authored by John J. McCarthy, appearing in the September, 1982 edition of the journal *Language*.

With contributions from fellow students who took a brief survey about their use of expletive infixation. The survey requested opinions on forms involving expletives placed within various parts of a word. They were then asked to rank along a three-tiered system of “impossible,” “maybe,” and “absolutely.” Example sentences were given alongside these in which this word would occur. An example question on the survey:

“He’s a terrible spokesperson. He is so damn unrelatable.”

“He’s a terrible spokesperson. He is so damn:

Unrelatable	
Impossible	Unrela-fucking-table
Absolutely	Un-fucking-relatable
Absolutely	Unre-fucking-latable

These specific answers provided by Briana Quinn