Pied-fucking-Piping: English Expletives aren't Infixes, but Stress is

Heather Newell (UQAM) & Shanti Ulfsbjorninn (MUN)

The Puzzle: The literature is of two minds about whether English Expletive Infixation (EEI) (*abso-fucking-lutely*) is really infixation (Yes: McCarthy 1982, Hammond 1999, Yu 2007; No: Bauer 2015, Hegedűs 2013). The debate centres around the non-affixal nature of the infix involved. This puzzle is presented here and we argue it offers crucial insight into infixation in general.

Proposal: The curious nature of EEI is due to it piggybacking on the infixal nature of stress. This is confirmed by the typological patterns of segmental infixation (Yu 2003:195).

Argument: Affixes may be prefixes, suffixes, or infixes, but infix placement is universally determined phonologically, after vocabulary insertion as either a prefix or suffix (Kalin 2022). EEI also shows this property, freely alternating with an external form (1a vs. b), however, it differs from other cases in that its infixation is not obligatorily. Stress is often phonologically best analysed as the insertion of empty syllabic space: a CV unit (Larsen 1998). This 'Stress CV'

> (1) a. That's *fucking* amazing!
>   b. That's a-*fucking*-mazing!

mirrors infixation precisely. Though always edge-based, the Stress CV is infixed at precisely the same positional pivot points as other infixal morphology (infixes, reduplication…), thereby generating a fixed stress typology: initial, final, peninitial, penultimate and antepenultimate. It has been further demonstrated that the Stress CV is inserted either to the left or the right of its pivot. In English it is to the left. This dictates the distribution of aspiration: /po**ta**to/ → [pəˈtʰeɪɾoʊ] 'potato' and the distribution of [h]: [bəˈhiːmiən] 'bohemian' (Scheer 2000:143), which emerge under gemination into the preceding empty CV (Ségéral & Scheer 2008). In the case of EEI, expletives are linked to morphosyntactic Force/Focus (Carrilho 2008, Ahn et. al. to appear). This is evidenced by the special distribution of EEI – it may modify any focused element (N, V…), and may be attracted by non-canonical stress (*appárent-fucking-LY*). We take Focus stress to be an autosegmental (CV) morpheme in $Force^0$ and *fucking* is merged as a modifier to $Force^0$ (2a). The CV of $Force^0$ must be infixed to the left of its

> (2) a. [*fucking* [$Force^0$ *CV*] [amázing]$_{AP}$]$_{ForceP}$
>   b. [*fucking* [$Force^0$ *CV*] [am**CV**ázing]$_{AP}$]$_{ForceP}$
>   c. [*fucking* [$Force^0$ *CV*] [a*fuckingCV*mázing]$_{AP}$]$_{ForceP}$

stress pivot, the stressed syllable in the word it scopes over (2b). If it pied-pipes *fucking*, the latter will be realized in the immediately preceding position (2c).

Independent evidence: Since stress-infixation piggybacks on phonological stress, we expect its position to be determined by the regular stress algorithm. A preliminary survey of languages with stress-pivot infixes (Chamorro, Ulwa, Halkomelem, Nakanai, Amharic; Yu 2003, Sande 2014) confirm that the site of infixation matches the position of stress effects

> (3) ai. ˈtakatʃ   'lazy'   aii. jəˈ**mar:**aq   'he blesses'
>   bi. ˈta.katʃ-otʃ: 'lazy.pl'   bii. jəmaˈ**rar:**aq. 'he blesses.pl'

in the language: pre-stress infixation e.g. consonantal effects, post-stress infixation = e.g. vowel lengthening). For example, in Amharic, geminates attract stress, hence it precedes them (3a) and correspondingly, infixes in the language also precede the geminates (3b). This typological prediction can only be made in a theory of stress where the position of stress is linearly determined.

Conclusion: EEI is triggered by the relationship of expletives to Focus stress and is intimately linked to the infix-like behaviour of stress in English. Evidence from true infixing languages supports not only the well-known proposal that stress is a pivot, but that the locus of infixation relative to its prominence pivot matches the phonological directional characteristics of stress in that language, since stress-pivot infixes and stress are *both* infixed to a pivot.

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