The usefulness of add-ons (Part 1)

One of the many fascinating aspects of language study is morphology – the structure of words. As with other formal language study (like pronunciation and grammar) morphology is useful for the tutor to know something about, but isn't at all necessary to study formally with a learner.

English is particularly good at making use of *affixes* – add-ons - to words, and your learners will come into contact with them as soon as they begin to learn English. The tutor's challenge is to help the learner *notice* affixes while keeping them (the affixes) firmly in the context of everyday communication.

Patterning is one good way to help a learner notice a language feature. You do this when you model language where the feature appears in context.

> *"You remember we moved house last week? Well, we had to **unpack** lots of boxes and **unlock** the garage so we could store things. We even had to **reconnect** the phone!"*

Prefixes make a difference to the meaning of words.

The most useful and common are those that mean "not". Sometimes the spelling changes depending on the sound that follows.

Safe – unsafe
Polite – impolite
Legible – illegible
Edible – inedible
Relevant – irrelevant
Engage – disengage

> *I was sadly **disenchanted** by that new library book, Petunia.*
>
> *How sad, my dear Hyacinth. I was perfectly **enchanted** by the sequel.*

As always in English, there are exceptions to watch out for.
- Sometimes ***in-*** acts as an intensifier*: Flammable – inflammable , valuable – invaluable*
- In- can also mean in or into: ***in**dentation, **im**print*
- Sometimes the prefix has become part of the word*:* ***im**portant*, ***dis**gruntled* (unless you have come across a gruntled person lately)

*Is a *disbeliever* the same as an *unbeliever?*
*Do *uninterested* and *disinterested* mean the same? (not sure? Ask Elaine!)

Most other prefixes are used with words that come from Latin and Greek. These tend to be more formal, academic or technical words, not commonly used in spoken language.

Try working some of the following into an everyday sort of conversation!

Trans - (across)……….   translate, transpose
Sub – (under) ………..   subterfuge
Com-, con- (with)…….   congregate, communication
Ante – (before)……….   antenatal
Anti – (against)………..   antibodies
Inter – (between)……… internet, interchange
ex- (out of)……….........   extension

Such prefixes are probably best dealt with as vocabulary items if and when your learner asks. Until then, they can be safely *ignored, s*o as not to **over**whelm a learner with **super**fluous material!

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