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Typology and diachrony of ambifixes: some preliminary observations

Ambifixes are defined as affixes that can occur both as prefixes and suffixes. For example, in Lithuanian the verbal reflexive marker *-si* occurs either before the stem if the verb contains any other prefix (*ne-**si**-maud-au* 'I do not wash myself') or after the stem and other suffixes otherwise (*maud-au-**si*** 'I wash myself'). After discussing some methodological issues related to the definition of ambifixes, I present the results of a pilot typological study based on a cross-linguistic convenience sample of ca. 50 languages. First, I outline a preliminary classification of ambifixation constructions based on the types of factors determining the position of the affix, which range from phonotactic and morphotactic constraints to morphosyntactic, lexical, and semantico-syntactic conditions. Second, despite the necessarily limited evidence, I look into the possible historical origins of ambifixes, singling out a number of diachronic pathways to ambifixation, e.g. affixalisation of variable-position clitics or univerbation of constructions containing auxiliary elements bearing an affix in the "right" position but as a whole occurring "on the other side" of the lexical element (called "counterposition" in recent work by Stump).