
WARNING: CONTAINS POSSIBLY OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE

Serious-ass morphology: The anal emphatic in English

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This paper will examine the current trend in American English to use words associated with scatology as an emphasizing particle (e.g. ‘-ass,’ ‘butt-,’ ‘n’ shit,’ etc.), which I will henceforth refer to as the “anal-retentive hypothesis (ARH).”⁹

In the case of ‘-ass,’ the most overwhelmingly productive of the intensifiers, ‘ass’ is used as a suffix, which attaches to adjectives: *big-ass*, *dumb-ass*, *ugly-ass*, *weird-ass*, *whack-ass*, *crazy-ass*, *lame-ass*, and *stoopit-ass* being among the more common, but virtually any adjective can serve as the base: *tasty-ass* (‘This is one *tasty-ass* donut!’), *curly-ass* (‘Those are some *curly-ass* fries!’), and *hairy-ass* (‘That’s one *hairy-ass* ass!’) Mono- and bi-syllabic adjectives are the most frequent bases for the ‘-ass’ affix; however, though marked, tri+-syllabic adjectives are not ungrammatical: *reflective-ass* (‘Oo-ie! That’s one *reflective-ass* mirror!’) or *Wisconsin-ass* (‘Woof! That’s some *Wisconsin-ass* cheese!’)

Although the origin of the ‘-ass’ suffix is unclear, it would seem to have spread from a more restricted nominalizing morpheme, which attaches not only to adjectives, but also to verbs: *bad-ass* (‘Check the dude in the leather jacket - he’s a total *bad-ass*!’), *hard-ass*, *slack-ass*, *whup-ass* (‘If you don’t shut up, I’m gonna open up a big can of Texas-style *whup-ass* on ya.’), *lazy-ass*, *stupid-ass* and *kiss-ass*, for example. Note that many of these can also be used as emphatic adjectives (*stupid-ass*, *lazy-ass*, *slack-ass*, *hard-ass*).

One interesting case is the word *backward*. There are several variants with this particular base, including *bass-ackward*, *backasswards* (infixation), or the **prefixed** *ass-backward*. This latter variant can potentially be explained as an iconic reversal; that is, putting the normally suffixed ‘-ass’ in a prefixed position is in itself **backward**. It is possible to have the attributive variant *backward-ass* (‘That’s one *backward-ass* idea’), however, this particular construction cannot occur as a predicate adjective: *‘That idea is *backward-ass*.’

In some dialects of American English, these adjectives can be inflected as past participles. The most common example of this is *half-assed*, as in ‘This was a totally *half-assed* attempt at humor.’ This form seems to be attested most often in a past-tense context, although it is not restricted to this context; i.e. ‘This **is** a totally *half-assed* attempt at humor’ is not ungrammatical.

There is also an allomorph of the suffix ‘-ass,’ which is much more restricted in usage: the prefix ‘butt-.’ This prefix is limited to pejorative connotations; for example, it is possible to express *ugly-ass* as *butt-ugly* and *stupid-ass* as *butt-stupid*. Yet ‘butt-’ is not productive: *crack-ass* but **butt-crack*; *candy-ass* but **butt-candy*.

Finally, I would like to comment briefly on the collective suffix ‘n’ shit.’ This is a fairly productive form, e.g. ‘We went to the zoo, and there were all these lions and tigers *n’ shit*,’ ‘So he was all freaked out *n’ shit*,’ etc. The implication being that there were not only lions and tigers at the zoo, but a wide variety of other exotic and wonderful animals, and that aside from being freaked, this person was experiencing a vast array of other (disturbing) emotions.

⁹ Thanks to Meredith Hassall, Kristin Lovrien and Mike Lind for many insightful discussions and insights into this topic.

It would seem that, in accordance with the proposed ARH, scatological morphology is increasingly pervasive in American English informal speech. Further research is needed to follow up on some recent pieces of data from other anal-retentive languages. (For example the German prefix *arsch-* ‘ass,’ as in the form *arschlangsam* ‘ass-slowly,’ which, based on preliminary study, seems to be adverbial: *Man, aber er fährt arschlangsam!* ‘Man, does he drive extremely slowly!’)

“This is a bunch of ass.”
-John Cleese, *Fawlty Towers*

The Mora You Drinka: Quantity and Liquid Vocalization

Meredith Hassall

That alcoholic beverages have a tendency to speak is well known. It occurs in a broad range of languages. The paper examines this phenomenon in modern terms and shows the loquaciousness of certain liquids to be directly proportional to the quantity that has been consumed. Further, this is shown to be secondarily related to timing: vocalization is less likely to occur when consumption is extended over a long period of time. Quantity and timing bring about vocalization; quality plays no role. The presentation includes a hands-on segment during which participants are invited to convince themselves of the validity of these findings. The implications of these findings will be of interest to linguists in many disciplines, particularly those prone to auditory hallucinations.

WARNING: CONTAINS WAY OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE, LOTS OF IT

“The Lord is my *whore and my comfort”: Morphological and lexical blocking of lenition in colloquial Dutch

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The only recent work on lenition worth a shit (Holsinger in progress, 1998 a-z, 1997) analyzes consonant weakenings in Dutch, as in other languages, as prosodically driven. A set of positional markedness constraints may limit the occurrence of certain features to 'strong' positions within a prosodic domain and may prohibit marked features from other sites within a prosodic domain. The features and domains vary cross-linguistically, and there is some shifting of the domains in which certain constraints apply even within languages, i.e. in fast speech forms.