

Expletive Insertion

Course Fall 24 COSC 426A (NLP)
Instructor Forrest Davis
Your Name _____
Your Teammates' Names _____

Knowing a language involves implicit or tacit knowledge of a variety of “rules”.¹ English has a particularly fun rule that you have probably never reflected on! It’s called **expletive insertion**. Expletives are, generally, swear words, though only some can undergo expletive insertion. Namely, we will consider ‘fucking’, ‘freaking’, and/or ‘flipping’ (if you know British English, ‘bloody’ would also work).


You may have said the following while moving back into the area:

(1) **Hamil-fucking-ton** (or, Hamil-freaking-ton,
Hamil-flipping-ton, maybe even
Hamil-bloody-ton)

In your small **groups**, your task is to characterize the rule that describes our tacit knowledge of expletive insertion. This should be done with the least **stipulations** and in the form of a **general** rule which applies to the most data. Note: the most succinct rule which appears to best conform to our knowledge requires the use of some representations we will not discuss in this class (namely, prosodic structure) – just do your best 😊

But first, we need some data!²

¹ This is adapted from Problem 3 of the morphology assignment shared by the Linguistic Society of America: https://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/e-learning/80.%20F10_L1_M1.pdf

² An additional fun example is from the movie *Forrest Gump*:  Viet-fucking-nam - Forrest Gump

Data (5 points)

For the following words, discuss in your group where you think the expletive would go. Indicate with a **consistent mark** in each word the position you determine. If there is disagreement, indicate that below the word. Note: Some words may **not** work with expletive insertion. If it sounds markedly weird to place it anywhere, just indicate that.

Alabama

Louisiana

Nebraska

Arizona

Maine

Ohio

California

Maryland

Oklahoma

Montana

Massachusetts

Pennsylvania

Illinois

Michigan

Tennessee

Iowa

Minnesota

Vermont

Kentucky

Mississippi

Wyoming

Rule (5 points)

As a group, work out a rule to account for your data above. It is often helpful to do this iteratively by first grouping data together, positing a rule, looking for counter-examples, and repeating.

For the Road (no points, just fun)

Consider the following examples. Do they violate your rule?

everybody

amalgamated

hypocrite

every-fuckin-body

amalga-fuckin-mated

hypo-fuckin-crite

How might you adjust your rule to accommodate these data?