MORPHOLOGY-SYNTAX INTERFACE: THE RELATION BETWEEN PREFIXES OF BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE AND ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

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The fact that bound morphemes can be responsible for the introduction and relation of arguments in the argument structure can be evidenced by complex word formation. Complex words confirm the idea that the composition of words is directly related to the composition of sentences (transparent interface between syntax and morphology). Under this approach, the complex morphological and syntactic objects can be treated as the output of the same generative system: the syntax (Halle & Marantz 1993, Embick & Noyer 2006).

Recent works have been pointing out and discussing the status of derivational affixes and particles and their role in argument structure building (Hale & Keyser 2002; Marantz 2009; Svenonius 2004; Markova & Padrosa-Trias 2008). This paper aims to show that the empirical distinction between lexical (strict lexical or inner) and superlexical prefixes (Svenonius 2004, Markova & Padrosa-Trias 2008) can be treated in terms of phases (Chomsky 2001) in word formation (Marantz 2001) by investigating Brazilian Portuguese verbal prefixes a-, en- and es- and the final argument structure of the complex verb they form.

Prefixes a-, en- and es- adjoin to different categorial internal structures: adjectival ((1) to (3)), nominal ((4) to (6)), bare roots ((7) to (9)), and can also occur as prothetic forms in popular spoken language ((10) to (11)). However, they are restricted to adjoin to simple bases or bare roots; i.e. they do not occur with already prefixed or suffixed bases. This fact is especially important since it is an evidence for the idea that these particles are structural internal; idea which we will pursue on this paper. In relation to argument structure, when attached to adjectives and nouns, they seem to help introducing an internal argument, creating transitive verbs. Moreover, these prefixes seem to be exclusively involved in the verbalization process as soon as they only occur with nouns and adjectives in contexts of deverbal derivation, especially in adjectival participial and eventive nouns formations, the last with the addition of the suffixes -ment and -tion.

(1) a-vermelh-a-r\(^1\)
   \[\text{PREF-red-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to redden”}\]

(2) en-fraqu-ec-e-r
   \[\text{PREF-weak-SUF-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to white”}\]

(3) es-vazi-a-r
   \[\text{pref-empty-tv-inf} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to empty”}\]

(4) a-proveit-a-r
   \[\text{PREF-advantage-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to take advantage”}\]

(5) en-garraf-a-r
   \[\text{PREF-bottle-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to bottle”}\]

(6) es-faqu-e-a-r
   \[\text{PREF-knife-SUF-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to knife”}\]

(7) a-grad-a-r
   \[\text{PREF-\textendash}grad-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to please”}\]

(8) en-gren-a-r
   \[\text{PREF-\textendash}gren-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to gear”}\]

(9) es-cav-a-r
   \[\text{PREF-\textendash}cav-TV-INF} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to dig”}\]

(10) a-levantar
    \[\text{PREF-stand} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to stand up”}\]

(11) en-cobrir
    \[\text{PREF-cover} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to cover”}\]

(12) (se) esbater
    \[\text{(REFL) PREF-bater} \quad \text{INF} \quad \text{“to beat (yourself)”}\]

In addition, the transformation of an adjectival or nominal base into a verb always has as purpose the expression of an event. In general, the resulting

\(^1\) For notation purposes we represent verbs out of context in infinitive forms.
event expresses some kind of change or transference whose start and end points are
defined by inherent aspects that prefixes carry: a- and en- carry themselves ingressive
aspect and es- final oriented event aspect. Because of that, they integrate achievements
and accomplishments verbs, being related to a punctual temporal event structure.

By showing these behaviors, prefixes a-, en-, es- contrast to prefixes like
circum-, com-, super-, re-, between others, which are not directly related to properties of
argument structure and internal aspectuality.

In order to investigate the status of these prefixes in complex verb formation, we
investigate two proposals for the treatment of prefixes crosslinguistically within the
Generative framework. The first is a lexicalist theory of word formation that suggests
that prefixes can be classified as those being formed in lexicon, with no contribution to
sentence structure (lexical prefixes), and those operating some kind of syntactic
influence (Svenonius, 2004; Markova & Padrosa-Trias 2008). The second proposal is a syntactic
theory of word formation for which the empirical differences between lexical and prefixes and lexical prefixes can be explained by
locality restrictions, in other words, the notion of phases in word formation.

We choose the latter alternative. According to this view, the mythical relations "stored" between morphemes are indeed constrained by local
conditions determined by capturing information within phases (Marantz 2001).

Within this framework we suggest that prefixes a-, en- and es- can behave like
root attaching prefixes inside vP (examples (7) to (9), structure in (13)) leading to
special interpretation and no influence in argument as well as aspectual structure, or
can behave like first level categorizing prefixes, cases in which these particles are
responsible for changes in argument, semantic and aspectual structure within vP
(examples (1) to (6), structure in (14)). Moreover, these prefixes never work as event
modifiers, what seems to be the case for re- (repetition), circum-, super- or com-, called
compositional prefixes scoping above v. Examples of prosthetic forms ((10) to (12))
seems to be a pure phonological phenomenon since there are no changes in
morphological and syntactical structure.

We can conclude that in structures like (14) these prefixes function as
verbalizers together with v; in other words, they are active in argument (introduction
of internal argument), semantic (change or transfer) and aspectual (telicity)
structure. For the moment, we label them as p, but there is a possibility of labeling it
Asp or some other verbal category which we are still investigating. Differently, in
structures like (13), these prefixes are vP internal showing no contribution to
argument, semantic and aspectual structure. Two advantages are straightforward
from this proposal: there is no need to assume that there are two different prefixes
with the same phonological form and there is no need to postulate a two place
theory of word formation.

2 IA=Internal Argument; TV = Theme Vowel.
References


Marantz, Alec (2001). 'Words and Things'. Ms., MIT.

