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

BASSANI, Indaiá
University of São Paulo - Brazil

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 prosthetic forms in popular spoken language ((10) to (11)). However, they are restricted to adjunction 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 this 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 adjective participial and eventive nouns formations, the last with the addition of the suffixes *-ment* and *–tion*.

(1) a-vermelh-a-r[1]
    PREF-red-TV-INF
    "to redden"

(2) en-fraqu-ec-e-r
    PREF-weak-SUF-TV-INF
    "to white"

(3) es-vazi-a-r
    pref-empty-tv-inf
    "to empty"

(4) a-proveit-a-r
    PREF-advantage-TV-INF
    "to take advantage"

(5) en-garraf-a-r
    PREF-bottle-TV-INF
    "to bottle"

(6) es-faqu-e-a-r
    PREF-knife-SUF-TV-INF
    "to knife"

(7) a-grad-a-r
    PREF-√grad-TV-INF
    "to please"

(8) en-gren-a-r
    PREF-√gren-TV-INF
    "to gear"

(9) es-cav-a-r
    PREF-√cav-TV-INF
    "to dig"

(10) a-levantar
    PREF-stand
    "to stand up"

(11) en-cobrir
    PREF-cover
    "to cover"

(12) (se) esbater
    (REFL) PREF-bater
    "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.
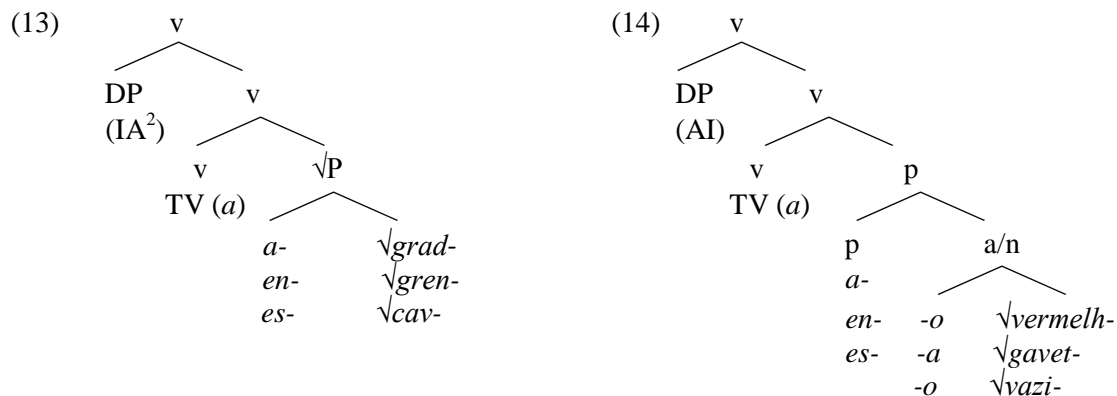
event expresses some kind of change or transference whose start and end points are defined by inherent aspects that prefixes carry: *a-* and *en-* carry themselves ingressive aspect and *es-* final oriented event aspect. Because of that, they integrate achievements and accomplishments verbs, being related 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 $\sqrt{P}$ (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.

(13)
```
                v
              /   \
          DP        v
          (IA²)    /  \
                  v     √P
                TV(a)  /  \
                      a-    √grad-
                      en-   √gren-
                      es-   √cav-
```

(14)
```
                v
              /   \
          DP        v
          (AI)     /  \
                  v     p
                TV(a)  /  \
                      p     a/n
                      a-   /   \
                      en- -o    √vermelh-
                      es- -a    √gavet-
                          -o    √vazi-
```

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 $\sqrt{P}$ 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

Embick, David & Rolf Noyer (2006). Distributed Morphology and the Syntax-Morphology Interface. In: Ramchand, G. and Reiss, C. (Eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Interfaces. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 289-324.

Halle, Morris & Alec Marantz (1993). Distributed morphology and the pieces of inflection. The View from Building 20, edited by K. Hale & S.J. Keyser, 111–176. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Hale, Ken. & Jey Keyser (2002). Prolegomenon to a theory of argument structure. MIT Press.

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

Marantz, Alec (2009). Roots, re-, and affected agents: can roots pull the agent under little v? Ms. Roots in Stuttgart.

Markova, Angelina & Susanna Padrosa-Trias (2008). Some remarks on prefixation: Evidence from Bulgarian, Catalan and. English. Interlinguística 19.

Svenonius, Peter (2004). Slavic prefixes inside and outside VP. Nordlyd 32:2, p. 205-253.