Morpho-pragmatic faithfulness interacts with phonological markedness: A quantitative and qualitative analysis of Appalachian English *a*-prefixing

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Introduction: I present an Optimality-Theoretic (OT) analysis of variable *a*-prefixing (e.g., *She's a-making good money now*) in Appalachian English (AppE). Building on results from a VARBRUL analysis, I argue that prefixed forms express the morpho-pragmatic feature [MIRATIVE], encoding speaker surprise. Setting aside non-mirative *-ing* forms, I suggest the mirative progressive has two allomorphs: *a*-X-*ing* and *Ø*-X-*ing*. When phonological constraints on prefixation are satisfied, variable insertion of the prefix occurs. However, when insertion of *a*-X-*ing* violates phonological markedness, morpho-pragmatic faithfulness loses out, and the allomorph *Ø*-X-*ing* is inserted. This conflict between morpho-pragmatic correspondence and phonological markedness suggests morpheme selection occurs in the same component in which phonological constraints are active.

Background: Wolfram and Christian (1976) show AppE *a*-prefixing occurs only if syntactic and phonological conditions are met. For instance, the prefix attaches only to verbal (not homophonous nominal) *-ing* forms, and the prefix is found only with consonant-initial verbs possessing initial stress (*a-jumping*, but not **a-asking* or **a-discovering*). Based on descriptions of the prefix as expressing an elusive but strongly affective meaning (Wolfram and Christian 1976; Feagin 1979; Christian et al., 1988; Wolfram 1988; Montgomery, 2009), I hypothesized that *a-* is a morpho-pragmatic marker (a morphological exponent of pragmatic meaning; cf. Dressler and Barbaresi (1986, 1987, 1994)). More specifically, I analyze the form as an exponent of speaker surprise: a mirative marker (DeLancey 1997). DeLancey (2001) posits that while mirative markers are neither modals nor evidentials, they possess both modal and evidential components, reflecting a speaker's attitude toward and evidence for a proposition.

Data: VARBRUL analyses were performed on recently collected data from two areas of Appalachia: Dante, VA and Mountain City, TN. Sentences containing progressive verbal *-ing* were extracted. Presence/absence of the *a*-prefix was the dependent variable. All tokens were coded for factors consistent with or discordant for speaker surprise, as the independent variables. (Also coded for were social, syntactic, and phonological factors.) Based on work by DeLancey (*ibid*), I posited that the *a*-prefix, as a mirative, should be favored in evidential and modal contexts, since these contexts favor mirativity. Thus, among the factors coded for were embedding under a verb of perception (e.g., *I **heared** a baby* a-*screaming*), co-occurrence with a necessity modal (e.g., *'Cause he known everybody **[WOULD]** be a-looking for us*) and overt indication of speaker doubt (e.g., *I **don't know** what he's doing).*

Results: VARBRUL results provided indirect support for the *a*-prefix as a mirative: the prefix is favored in contexts with a necessity modal (e.g., *must*) and embedded under a verb of perception (e.g., *see*, *hear*); furthermore, the prefix is disfavored in contexts we expect to be anti-mirative (e.g., when a speaker expresses doubt concerning a proposition).

Analysis: Data submitted to VARBRUL as well as all data from published literature were accounted for in an Optimality-Theoretic analysis. Because phonological constraints block faithful mapping of the morpho-pragmatic prefix, thereby suggesting morphological and phonological forms are selected in the same component, I appeal to Wolf's (2008) Optimal Interleaving (OI). In OI, lexical insertion occurs in the phonological grammar, predicting morphological faithfulness can be violated to satisfy phonological markedness.

Two Morpheme-IO constraints are posited, one for [MIRATIVE] and one for progressive [INTERVAL], the latter assumed to be mapped by /-ɪn/:

(1) MAX-M[INT]: No deletion of the morpho-syntactic feature [INTERVAL]
(2) MAX-M[MIR]:No deletion of the morpho-pragmatic feature [MIRATIVE]

If phonological constraints are satisfied, the mirative is (variably) selected (below, P is a cover constraint for phonological markedness):

(3) Morphological faithfulness selects 'a-jump-ing' when P satisfied

INPUT: [JUMP] – [MIR, INT]	MAX-M {INT}	P	MAX-M {MIR}
{MIR} 'jump' {INT} a. → ə ʤʌmp ɪn			
'jump' {INT} b. ʤʌmp ɪn			*
'jump' c. ʤʌmp	*!		*

However, to avoid a violation of phonological markedness, MAX-M{MIR}is violated. Data show prefixation occurs with tense-vowel-initial bases (a-*aiming,* a-*eating,* a-*ironin'*), though not lax-vowel-initial bases. As the prefix is a lax vowel ([ə]), I appeal to an Obligatory Contour Principle constraint on lax vowel sequences. Thus, in (4), morpho-pragmatic faithfulness is sacrificed to avoid a violation of OCP-V[LAX]:

(4) Phonological markedness compels morpho-pragmatic feature violation

INPUT: [ASK] – [MIR, INT]	OCP-V[LAX]	MAX-M { MIR}
'ask' {INT} a. → æsk ɪn		*
{MIR} 'ask' {INT} b. ə æsk ɪn	*!	

Conclusions: A combination of quantitative VARBRUL analyses and qualitative OT analyses account for morphology-phonology interactions in AppE *a*-prefixing. The data exhibit conflict between phonological markedness constraints and morpho-pragmatic faithfulness constraints. Because phonological factors block prefixation, this suggests morphological and phonological selection occur in the same component of the grammar. Importantly, the *a*-prefixing data illustrate that morpho-pragmatic selection (and not only morpho-syntactic or morph-semantic selection) can interact with phonological markedness.