

Deriving word internal negation. Antonymic Pairs in Brazilian Portuguese

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My focus in this paper is to discuss the word formation process in Brazilian Portuguese (BP), more specifically, I discuss the properties of negation affixes in this language. I look at the word internal negation to examine three different negation affixes in BP: *des-* as in *descansar* (to rest), *in-* as in *infeliz* (unhappy) and *a-* as in *anormal* (abnormal), further, I propose that this affixation can be accounted syntactically.

For explaining the different meanings triggered by these prefixes, I base my analyses mainly on Distributed Morphology framework. In this theoretical approach to word formation, words, as well as bigger unities, are built in the syntax (Halle & Marantz, 1993). No phonological content is present at syntactic derivation (Marantz, 1997; Pfau, 2000). Besides this technical apparatus of Distributed Morphology, I work with the notion of antonymy. Antonyms as they are understood in this work are a relation between two terms in such a way that the negation of one term implies the negation of a second term, and the inverse is not true (Lyons, 1977).

The data analyzed show that *in-*, *des-* and *a-* produce antonymic pairs in BP.

(1) *infeliz* : *feliz* (unhappy : happy);

desleal : *leal* (unloyal : loyal)

anormal : *normal* (abnormal: normal)

Further, it can be shown from the data that *des-* is an ambiguous morpheme as it has two different meanings: ‘absence of a characteristic’ (2) or ‘change of state’ (3).

(2) *desleal* (‘not having loyalty’)

(3) *destrancar* (unlock, ‘stop being locked’)

I propose that the difference in interpretation and phonology, when it applies, from these affixes can be explained syntactically based on the category that each prefix has scope over. There are different syntactical positions to each one of these affixes, and their difference in meaning relies on the position where each prefix appears. I show then that the semantic difference among the affixes, included the ambiguity of *des-* is due to syntactical issues.

Since there are three different negation affixes in BP, it is necessary to posit an explanation on what distinguishes them. In my proposal, the difference is in the specification of the vocabulary items. This specification is enough for accounting for which affix is realized in

each position. The prefix *in-* takes scope over an adjective, and so the vocabulary item is specified for this syntactical environment. As the prefix *a-* normally takes a noun, it is specified for occurring in nominal contexts.

The analyses for *des-* is supported by the Subset Principle (Halle, 1997: 128), according to which one phonological expression can be underspecified in syntactical and semantic features to the position it realizes. I claim that the vocabulary item *des-* is underspecified for the syntactical environment it appears, and thus it accounts for the two interpretations it has.

To conclude, I show that the word internal negation is prefixed to the word and that the prefixes *in-* and *des-* form contrary and contradictory antonymic pairs. Further, it was seen that prefix *in-* form contrary antonymic pairs and is attached to an adjectivized root, while *a-* form contradictory antonyms and is attached to a nominalized root. Finally it was seen that prefix *des-* form contrary and contradictory antonymic pairs whether or not it is attached to a categorized root (i.e. a stem or a word).

References

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