

Verbal morphology from Latin to Ladin: the functional recycling of an infixation mechanism.

The verbal paradigm of the Romance languages is characterized by the presence of remnants of two Latin infixes: on the one hand, the well-known infix *-i/esc-*, which arises, for instance, in French and Italian fourth conjugation verbs in *-ir(e)* (e.g. Fr. *fin-iss-ons* ‘we finish’, It. *fin-isc-o* ‘I finish’); on the other hand, the more obscure and unknown infix *-idi-*, appearing in the first conjugation of Rumanian (e.g. *lucr-ez* ‘I work’) and in most of the vernacular idioms of Italy (e.g. *consum-e-a* ‘(he) consumes’ in Veneto, *stur-é-ja* ‘(he) hurries’ in Naples, *lacrem-ejj-e* ‘(he) weeps’ in Abruzzo, etc.) (Zamboni 1980/81). In Classical Latin both infixes operate as lexical formatives involved in verbal derivational processes: either in the so-called ‘inchoative’ constructions with *-esc-* (e.g. *cal-ēsc-ēre* ‘to grow warm’ vs. *calēre* ‘to be warm’) or in the iterative and factitive verbs in *-idiāre/izāre* (e.g. *baptidiāre* ‘to baptize’, *amarizāre* ‘to make bitter’). In their transition to Proto-Romance, the infixes have been incorporated into the inflectional system, creating a new productive conjugational pattern for respectively fourth and first conjugation verbs: pres.ind. 1. **fin-isc-o*, 2. **fin-isc-is*, 3. **fin-isc-it*, 4. *finīmus*, 5. *finītis*, 6. **fin-isc-unt* and pres.ind. 1. **vindic-ěj-o*, 2. **vindic-ěj-as*, 3. **vindic-ěj-at*, 4. *vindicāmus*, 5. *vindicātis*, 6. **vindic-ěj-ant* (Rohlf's 1966-1969). The reason for the limitation to these particular forms (pres.ind./subj. 1, 2, 3, 6) is that speakers gradually adapted the infix to a new function, viz. the establishment of a regular accentual pattern in which stress falls consistently after the stem (Allen 1980). In the evolution to the modern Romance languages, the phenomenon of verbal infixation poses a twofold ‘distributional’ problem: (1) How to explain the *inner-paradigmatic* distribution of the infixes in the modern Romance languages? Why did some languages deviate from the original proto-Romance pattern, while others remained faithful to it? ; (2) How to explain the external *lexical* distribution of the infix? Which factors determine if a particular verb is conjugated with or without the infix?

In our talk, we will explore these two issues focusing on the appearance of the infix *-idi-* in the verbal morphology of the Dolomitic Ladin (Rhaeto-Romance) dialects spoken in the valleys of the Dolomite mountains in Northern Italy. With regard to (1), the *inner-paradigmatic* distribution of the infix, these dialects have preserved the proto-Romance scheme. According to the Ladin grammars at our disposal (Valentin 2004, a.o.), the segment *-ēi-* (< **-idi-*) is inserted in the rhizotonic or stressed-stem forms (i.e., pres.ind./subj. 1, 2, 3, 6) of the verbal paradigm: 1. *amir-ēi-i*, 2. *amir-ēi-es*, 3. *amir-ēi-a*, 4. *amirún*, 5. *amirēis*, 6. *amir-ēi-a*. The stressed infix does not only regularize desinential stress throughout the verbal paradigm, but also serves in this aspect as a buffer against stress-driven stem allomorphy. With respect to (2), the *lexical* distribution of the infix, the analysis of the dictionary of Mischì (2001) revealed that the Ladin repertory of first conjugation verbs can be subdivided into three groups: (a) verbs that insert the infix in the rhizotonic forms of their paradigm (e.g. *abité* ‘to live’); (b) verbs that do not insert the infix in the rhizotonic forms of their paradigm (e.g. *splighé* ‘to explain’); (c) verbs of which the rhizotonic forms can be conjugated with or without the infix (e.g. *strinidlé* ‘to sneeze’). On the basis of the data gathered during our recent (summer 2008) linguistic fieldwork in the Ladin Dolomites, we will show that the assignment of a particular first conjugation verb to one of the above-mentioned groups is not random, but rather determined by a complex grid of linguistic (etymology and prosodic structure of the verb) and social (mother tongue and valley/village of residence of the speaker) factors. Moreover, most of the verbs belonging to the ‘grey’ zone (c) seem to present a semantic-aspectual difference of habitual nature (Bertinetto 1986, 150) between the form with infix and the corresponding form without infix: e.g. *al se lamēnta ćiodì al à na fan da lu* ‘he complains because he’s hungry’ vs. *al se lament-ēi-a dagnora* ‘he’s always complaining’. An additional (electronic) survey revealed that the semantic import of the infix in particular contexts is accompanied by its paradigmatic extension / (re)lexicalization to other, arrhizotonic forms of the paradigm (e.g. ind. pres. 4. **lament-ēi-un* ‘we (always) complain’). Such being the case, the functional metamorphosis of the infix from Latin to Ladin can be summarized as follows: from a lexical formative of factitive / iterative verbs in Latin, to an inflectional morpheme in Proto-Romance, to a partially relexicalized habitual marker in Ladin.

References

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