

Interfixes Preserve Syllables and Word Roots

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Interfixes Preserve Syllables and Word Roots  
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The interfix has recently been defined by Malkiel (1970: 12) as an element "typically devoid of any clearly circumscribed meaning and in many instances serving no immediately recognizable purpose, which appears wedged in between the radical and the word-final derivational suffix." We can extend this definition further and state that the interfix has no meaning and fulfills one of several phonological purposes that result in the preservation of word roots and syllables. We want to posit an observable phonological function for interfixes as the best answer to critics who reject the interfix entirely. These critics (Baumann 1971 and Lázaro Carreter 1972) prefer an analysis with root + suffix rather than root + interfix + suffix. Such an analysis would describe Spanish polvareda 'dust cloud' as polvar=eda or polv-areda; that is, either the root would be complex, since polv-o is the word for 'dust,' or the suffix -areda would contrast with many other suffixes ending in -eda. In a better analysis, -ar- is an interfix.

Arguments may be made in favor of the interfix on the basis of theoretical economy (Malkiel 1970: 12). Without the interfix, we would be forced to posit multiple forms of the root, which would be difficult to justify semantically, or many long suffixes with all the attested permutations of interfixes and suffixes combined; this would complicate the grammar and the lexicon too much. However, this paper will not deal with the issue of theoretical economy, but rather with a study of the structure of word roots and of syllables under the influence of interfixes.

By simple definition, we could say that the interfix preserves word roots from having alternative forms for one semantic idea, or that the interfix keeps roots from phonological contamination by suffixes. But we are interested in the means by which the interfix preserves the root from phonological contamination by suffixes and adjusts the stress to prevent or remedy the rise of allomorphic forms of the root. If there were direct contact between the root and the suffix, diphthongization and assimilation would occur in many words.

A language that contains many examples of interfixes is the Cabraniego dialect of Asturian in Northern Spain. A list of Cabraniego nominal interfixes shows that the majority, or 17 out of 25, have the form -VC-, and many others have the form -VCC- (Malkiel 1970: 12-15). Since these were attached to nominal roots ending in a consonant before a suffix beginning with a vowel, these

interfixes do not change the basic CV syllable structure. Only one of the twenty-five interfixes consists of a single consonant. Since these interfixes preserve, rather than alter, the prevailing syllable structure, why are they used in the first place? Why does not Cabraniego simply attach the suffixes directly to the nominal roots in these instances?

A few of these interfixes protect the root-final consonant by separating a velar from a palatalizing vowel, as in the following compound (Malkiel 1970: 13-15):

picu            'woodpecker'  
pic-an-iellu    'wagtail'

Another interfix plays a dissimilatory role between repeated suffixes and thus prevents haplology (Malkiel 1970: 15):

porc-on-z-ón    'big hog'

Aside from such obvious examples, where the environment for assimilation is blocked by the interfix, the phonological motivation for an interfixed syllable is to assure that the root syllable gets some degree of stress even though the primary stress falls on the suffix. Thus, the pattern of root + suffix is replaced by root + interfix + suffix, where the grave accent indicates secondary stress.

Several scholars have already noted that an interfixed syllable between a word-root and a stressed suffix allows a secondary stress to arise in the word-root. Pottier (1960: 86) says that, due to the interfix, the first syllable as well as the suffix is stressed in Spanish flór-ec-íta 'little flower.' Migliorini (1935: 66) has mentioned the similar effect of intercalated syllables in Italian; this accentual pattern shows up in stàmp-at-éllò 'printing.' In more general terms, Lausberg says that the purpose of this type of interfix is rhythmic. That is to say, a syllable placed after a pretonic root and before a stressed suffix produces the following change (Lausberg 1953: 229):

X -  $\acute{X}$  X —  $\grave{X}$  - X -  $\acute{X}$  X

This explanation is likely since variations in stress play an important role in the development of Romance vowels, and vowel allophones conditioned by stress occur synchronically in such languages as Catalan. To relate secondary stress on the root with other functions of the interfix, we can say that the interfixed syllable rearranges the stress to preserve the word root.

Another function of the interfix is to make stress uniform in a paradigm and thus reduce or limit allomor-

phic roots to a single form. In Romance languages, a common development is the regularization of allomorphs of verb roots that arose from stress alternations within the Latin paradigm. Thus, the alternating stress in Latin AMĀS/AMĀTIS results in two separate Old French allomorphs aimes/amez, and these are regularized into a single root morpheme in Modern French aimes/aimez. Old French offers numerous examples of such pairs of allomorphs:

root-stressed	ending-stressed
ai <u>mes</u> 'you (sg.) love'	ame <u>z</u> 'you (pl.) love'
tr <u>ou</u> ves 'you (sg.) find'	trou <u>ve</u> z 'you (pl.) find'
po <u>is</u> es 'you (sg.) weigh'	pe <u>s</u> ez 'you (pl.) weigh'
l <u>é</u> ves 'you (sg.) wash'	lave <u>z</u> 'you (pl.) wash'

For most of the verbs, the unstressed root was generalized so that French now has trouv-, lav-, and a form of pes- throughout the paradigm. Rarely, as with aimer, the stressed form was generalized. Where the alternation remains in Modern French, the verbs are classified as irregular, like the following forms:

root-stressed	ending-stressed
me <u>u</u> rs 'you (sg.) die'	mo <u>u</u> rez 'you (pl.) die'
vi <u>en</u> s 'you (sg.) come'	ve <u>n</u> ez 'you (pl.) come'
bo <u>is</u> 'you (sg.) drink'	bu <u>ev</u> ez 'you (pl.) drink'

This kind of alternation is common in such other Romance languages as Spanish:

root-stressed	ending-stressed
pi <u>en</u> so 'I think'	pen <u>s</u> ar 'to think'
cu <u>en</u> to 'I count'	con <u>t</u> ar 'to count'
s <u>ien</u> to 'I feel'	sen <u>t</u> ir 'to feel'
du <u>er</u> mo 'I sleep'	dor <u>m</u> ir 'to sleep'
pu <u>ed</u> o 'I can'	pod <u>er</u> 'to be able'

Such alternation in the verb root can be resolved by addition of an interfixed syllable which then keeps the stress from the verb root, as in golp-é-o/golp-e-ár 'to hit' and flor-ésc-o/flor-ec-er 'to flower' in Spanish. This occurs very often in Catalan and almost as often in Spanish:

	Cat. inf.	pres. ind.	Sp. inf.	pres ind.
'to flower'	florir	floreixo	floreçer	florésco
'to beat'	colpir	colpeixo	golpear	golpéo
'to reverse'	invertir	inverteixo	invertir	inviérto

The above examples show that Catalan uses the interfix eix where Spanish has a cognate interfix, a different

interfix, or two allomorphs of the root. By using an interfix that creates a paradigm with columnar stress, which means stress in the same place with respect to the root and endings, Catalan resolves irregularities present in Spanish invertir/invierto. Thus, an interfix may preserve a uniform word-root by keeping the stress from alternating between root and ending.

Finally, a single interfixed consonant before the initial vowel of a suffix can preserve the final syllable of the preceding root. Thus, the final root syllable remains closed in both Spanish mujer 'woman' and the diminutive mujer-c-ita, as well as in jardín 'garden' and jardín-c-ito, because of the intercalated c (Pottier 1960: 86). A similar function is performed by c in French éclair-c-ir 'brighten,' noir-c-ir 'blacken,' and obscur-c-ir 'darken.' Even more importantly, an interfixed consonant can separate two vowels, thus preventing the formation of a diphthong and keeping the word-root distinct from what follows. For example, French inserts t in a-t-il, the inverted form of il a 'he has.' The same interfix occurs after continuant consonants, as in aime-t-il 'does he love' and parle-t-il 'does he speak.' Similarly, Spanish has dramático and problemático, which could be analyzed with an interfixed t. However, to satisfy the objections of Lázaro Carreter, we can analyze these forms as drama + at + ico and problema + at + ico with appropriate elision of the root-final a's. It would then be easy to have a consistent analysis for fri-át-ico 'foolish' and bob-át-ico 'silly,' which Lázaro Carreter (1972: 257) offers as counter-examples. With either analysis, the interfix separates the root-final vowel from the i in -ico to avoid forms like \*drama-ico.

In summary, interfixes preserve syllables and verb roots by preventing consonant assimilation, separating vowels, and, most importantly, altering stress. This has two interesting theoretical implications. For one, it unites previously separate phonological developments in a complementary fashion. For example, interfixed syllables either create columnar stress as in the verb system, or they allow the root to have secondary stress as in many nouns and adjectives. Another implication is that the interfix serves to minimize allomorphy by halting divergent developments of roots in paradigms and derived words. Kiparsky (1974: 334) states, "No unequivocal evidence exists for considering minimization of allomorphy as a separate motivating factor in linguistic change." Such evidence lies in the interfix, which has different forms and phonological effects tending toward the same aim--preservation of roots and syllables, and thus, avoidance of allomorphy.

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