

APPARENT IRREGULARITIES IN THE DOMAIN OF DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGY

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Abstract: In this paper I investigate the affixation pattern of the Latinate suffix *-iço* in Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BP) that derives adjectives and nouns in this language. Adjectives formed with *-iço* are, in general, well-behaved. They are mostly derived from participial forms and have a dispositional modal interpretation, reminiscent of *-(a)ble* forms (see Moreira 2015). Nevertheless, some adjectives and nouns formed with *-iço* seem to be more idiosyncratic. The suffix also attaches to verbs, adjectives, and nouns, and in this case the derived form displays a wider range of possible semantic interpretations, including a diminutive and a pejorative sense. In this paper this (ir)regularity is captured in a syntacticocentric approach to word formation. I analyze the suffix as a single evaluative (stative) head expressing propensity. I derive the various semantic interpretations from the attachment of the suffix to different bases. The generalization is that *-iço* forms derived from participles are uniformly adjectives with a predictable dispositional meaning (“a propensity for”). And *-iço* forms derived from other bases, in turn, classified both as adjectives and/or nouns display a wider range of meanings, subsumed under the evaluative sense. I conclude that seemingly disparate meanings can be explained in a principled way. Ultimately this paper contributes to the description of derivational processes in BP and to the support of a syntactic view of word-formation.

Keywords: derivational morphology, Brazilian Portuguese, dispositions, adjectives, nouns

1 Introduction

In this paper I investigate the affixation pattern of the Latinate suffix *-iço* in Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BP) that derives adjectives and nouns in this language.² The study is part of a larger investigation into modal adjectives in BP, namely *-vel* adjectives—analogueous to English *-(a)ble*, and German *-bar* adjectives—that have a dispositional interpretation (see Moreira 2015). A related and understudied suffix in BP that also derives words with a dispositional meaning is *-iço*. These two suffixes are exemplified in (1).³

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) a. <u>SUFFIX -vel</u> | b. <u>SUFFIX -iço</u> |
| quebrável | quebradiço |
| break.SUF | broken.SUF |
| ‘capable of breaking easily’ | ‘brittle, liable to break easily’ |

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² The Houaiss Dictionary lists 124 entries for adjectives ending in *-iço*, and 62 entries for nouns ending in *-iço*, with an overlap of 12 entries classified both as an adjective and as a noun, totaling 174 words.

³ Abbreviations: DIM = diminutive, EVAL = evaluative, FEM = feminine, PEJ = pejorative, SUF = suffix.

Whereas *-vel* is a highly productive suffix in BP, *-iço* is much less productive.⁴ I use the term ‘productive’ here to refer to frequency (in other words, *-vel* forms are more frequent than *-iço* forms), as well as to the degree to which BP speakers derive new words using a particular suffix or morphological process. New coined words with the suffix *-vel* are relatively common in BP (e.g., *Instagramável* ‘Instagrammable’, among others), but not with *-iço*. In turn, words derived with this suffix are generally more common in written form, and some are labeled as archaic or as obsolete.⁵ Nevertheless, many are still currently used in contemporary spoken BP, such as *quebradiço* ‘brittle’, from *broken*, or *irritadiço* ‘cranky, irritable’, from *irritated*.

According to the Houaiss Dictionary, the suffix *-iço* is derived from Latin *-icius* or *-itius* and has two main functions in BP, as illustrated below.⁶

(2) SUFFIX *-iço*

- (i) forming adjectives from past participles with a certain frequentative connotation, somewhat pejorative, depreciative, but certainly expressing propensity (such as *movediço* ‘able to move freely or easily, mobile’, from “moved.SUF”).⁷
- (ii) forming adjectives and nouns from adjectives, nouns or verbs (that is, not from past participles), in general, as a diminutive (such as *caniço* ‘1. a thin/small stick of sugar cane, 2. a skinny person’, from “sugar cane.SUF”).

This allows us to further subdivide the derived forms into two main classes. One class is regular, formed from participles, consisting of adjectives with a dispositional interpretation. Informally, they express “a propensity for x”, “prone to x”, “susceptible to x”, in which *x* is the base for affixation. This class is called ‘regular’ because the derived form is highly predictable from its base, as shown below—see also (1b).

⁴ The Houaiss Dictionary lists 2500 adjectives ending in *-vel*, and 174 entries ending in *-iço* (cf. note 1).

⁵ I avoided these whenever possible in the examples I present throughout this paper.

⁶ Another related suffix in BP is *-ício*, which forms erudite Latinate words. I leave this suffix outside of the present discussion.

⁷ According to the Houaiss Dictionary, the adjective *movediço* derives from the participle *movido* under its root form *moved-* + *-iço*. This lowering is also attested in other forms, such as *corrediço* ‘that runs with ease’ from the participle *corrido*, under the root form *corred-* + *-iço*.

(3) alagadiço

flooded.SUF

‘flooded, flood-prone overflowing (a surface or area)’

The other class, in turn, shows that some *-iço* forms (derived from nouns, adjectives and verbs) classified both as a noun and/or as an adjective are more idiosyncratic.⁸ These irregular forms are much less predictable, as exemplified in the sample below, in which (4a) and (4c) are nouns, and (4b) behaves both an adjective and a noun.⁹

(4) a. aranhico

spider.SUF

‘1. a small spider, 2. a skinny person’

b. literatico

literate.SUF

‘(of an) individual with no literary talent’

c. sumico

disappear.SUF

‘disappearance’

As the glossed examples show, these derived words display a wider range of semantic interpretations in which *-iço* functions as a diminutive (4a), a pejorative suffix (4b), or simply a nominalizer (4c).

In this paper, based on a corpus study of *-iço* forms from the Brazilian Portuguese Houaiss Dictionary (2020), the (ir)regularity of derived nouns and adjectives ending in *-iço* is captured in a syntacticocentric approach to word formation (Embick 2004, Bruening 2014). I analyze the suffix *-iço* as a single evaluative head expressing PROPENSITY. I derive the various semantic interpretations from the attachment of the suffix to different bases. The generalization is that *-iço* forms derived from participles are uniformly adjectives with a predictable dispositional meaning (“a propensity for”). In turn, *-iço* forms derived from other bases classified both as adjectives and/or nouns display a wider range of meanings subsumed under the evaluative sense. I conclude that seemingly disparate meanings can be explained in

⁸ The suggestion that (5c) is verb-derived will be reviewed in the next Section.

⁹ As the English form *literate* can behave both as an adjective and as a noun (i.e., a literate person).

a principled way. Ultimately this paper contributes to the description of derivational processes in BP and to a syntactic view of word-formation.

2 Background on theories of word-formation

Lexicalist theories of word-formation (Aronoff 1976, Wasow 1977) assume a division between lexical and syntactic processes. From this theoretical perspective, derivational morphology (e.g., nominalizations, adjectival passives, *-able* adjectives) is handled in the lexicon and displays a number of (expected) idiosyncrasies when compared to inflectional morphology (assumed to be handled in the syntax). Aronoff (1976: 47), for instance, proposes the Unitary Base Hypothesis, according to which a derivational suffix selects a base for attachment based on its category: “the base is always specified syntactically. So, for example, the rule which attaches the suffix *#ness* (*redness*, *porousness*) operates only on adjectives.”

Further evidence for this type of selection comes from the suffix *-able* in English. According to Aronoff (1976: 48), it strictly select for verbs (e.g., *accept*, forming *acceptable*).

Counterexamples, such as *fashionable* or *sizeable*, are explained by positing a homophonous suffix that would select for nouns (i.e., *fashion* and *size*). Under this view, English would have two homophonous suffixes, N#*able* and V#*able*.¹⁰ This is undesirable, if we can have a unified, more economical, analysis.

Lexicalist claims have been evaluated against a large body of data, and its basic tenets have been rejected by syntactic theories of word-formation. According to Marantz (1997: 14), “The failure of lexicalism was a noble empirical failure— it made false predictions”.¹¹ Syntactic theories, such as Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993), in turn, offer an alternative view, according to which there is no division between lexical and syntactic processes of word-formation. Both inflectional and derivational morphology is syntactic, and a single component (Syntax) is responsible for putting together words and sentences.

Idiosyncrasies and apparent irregularities are then handled in a different fashion. The two places assumed by lexicalist theories for deriving words are replaced by two attachment sites for the affix: a categorized word (N, V, A) or an uncategorized root. This idea is explicitly

¹⁰ In Napoli’s (1995) term, this suffix is ‘promiscuous’, as it does not select a unique base for attachment.

¹¹ See also Bruening (2018) for conceptual and empirical arguments against lexicalism.

formulated by Arad (2003: 747): “roots are assigned an interpretation in the environment of the first category-assigning head with which they are merged. Once this interpretation is assigned, it is carried along throughout the derivation.”

Ultra-Massuet (2014), adopting the framework of DM, proposes that *-(a)ble* is in fact a single suffix that attaches to different structures. According to this proposal, we would have high and low attachment of the suffix. High *-(a)ble* attaches to a verbal structure, and low *-(a)ble* attaches to uncategorized roots.¹² Indeed this is the type of analysis that Embick (2004) proposes to account for the well-known distinction between adjectival passives and verbal passives. Embick (2004: 355) explores “the different heights at which aspectual morphemes attach in a verbalizing structure”.

Following this line of research, I propose that in BP there is a single suffix *-iço*. The present analysis derives so-called regular and irregular classes from different height of attachment of the suffix.

3 One suffix, different structures

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the Houaiss Dictionary lists 174 entries ending in *-iço*. From these, only 125 derived words are considered relevant for the present discussion.¹³ These words belong to two main classes, regular adjectives (mostly) derived from participles (totaling 107 words, from which 95 come from participles and 12 from nouns and adjectives), and 18 irregular nouns and adjectives based on nouns, adjectives and verbs (or verbal roots, as we will see in this section).

The sample in (5) below further exemplifies regular adjectives formed with *-iço*—see also (1b) and (3). They are mostly derived from participial forms, as is clear from the presence of participial morphology, *-d-* (Medeiros 2008). This class expresses a disposition (propensity, susceptibility or tendency).

¹² Moreira (2015) proposes a different syntactic implementation in which the suffix in question attaches to an non saturated projection of Voice/Initiator, building on Ramchand (2008) and Bruening (2014). Regardless of the implementation, the gist of these analyses is that a single suffix is enough to account for apparent morphological irregularities (e.g., the selectional properties of the suffix and the semantic interpretation of the derived form).

¹³ I have not considered words of controversial or obscure origin; obsolete words; words ending in *-iço* that could not be traced back to the Latin forms *-icūs* or *-itūs*; and “duplicated” word-pairs, such as *contentadiço/descontentadiço* from ‘contented’, in which we have a single form prefixed with *de-* (expressing removal or reversal) or unprefixated.

(5) a. *corredição*

ran.SUF

‘that runs with ease’

d. *dobradiço*

folded.SUF

‘folding, able to be bent, flexible’

b. *elevadiço*

elevated.SUF

‘capable of being elevated’

e. *encharcadiço*

soaked.SUF

‘easy to soak’

c. *escorregadiço*

slipped.SUF

‘easy to slip, slippery’

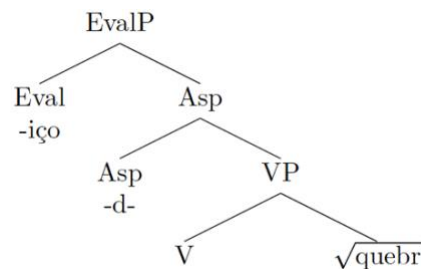
f. *irritadiço*

irritated.SUF

‘easy to be irritated, irritable’

To account for this pattern, I analyze the suffix *-iço* as an evaluative (stative) head expressing PROPENSITY, as shown in (6), attaching to a participial form.

(6) REGULAR FORMS (e.g., *quebradiço*, *dobradiço*...)



Irregular forms, in turn, need not receive a separate analysis. It is well-known that diminutivization plays a role in affectionate and pejorative uses, as exemplified below with data from BP.

(7) *queridinha*

dear.DIM.FEM

‘dear’

The noun *queridinha*, for instance, can be a term of endearment, used in a positive, affectionate and friendly way (i.e., a dear person, a dear friend), or in a negative, pejorative (passive-aggressive) way (i.e., in reference to a person one dislikes). I would like to tentatively suggest that the role of the suffix *-iço* when attached to non-participles is that of a

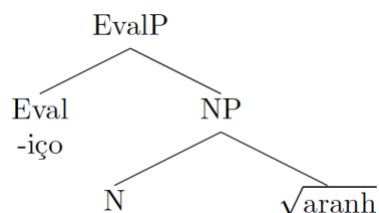
diminutive, and that the pejorative interpretation is associated with this role (i.e., it is a by-product of diminutivization).

The relationship between evaluation (i.e., dispositionality/propensity) and diminutivization (and, consequently, a negative evaluation) needs further motivation. This is an issue I leave open for future research.

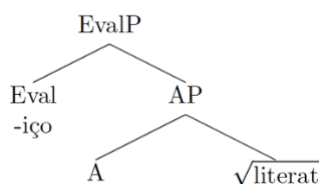
For the purposes at hand it will suffice to represent this idea for the irregular class of derived nouns and adjectives, as in (8).

(8) IRREGULAR FORMS

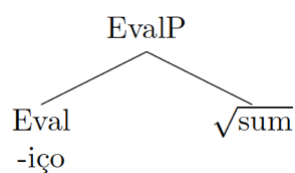
a. *aranhiço* (diminutive)



b. *literatiço* (pejorative)



c. *sumiço* (nominalizer)



To account for this irregular pattern, I propose that the evaluative suffix attaches to a noun, *aranha* ‘spider’ in (8a), yielding the diminutive form *aranhiço*; to an adjective in (8b), yielding the pejorative form *literatiço*;¹⁴ and, finally, to an uncategorized root (potentially a verbal root) in (8c), deriving the totally idiosyncratic form *sumiço*.

¹⁴ There is a question as to whether this is really an adjectival base, since the form *literato* in BP can be used both as a noun or as an adjective (same as in English). I leave this issue for future work.

4 Summary and outlook

This paper has investigated the affixation pattern of the Latinate suffix *-iço* in Brazilian Portuguese and identified two subclasses of derived forms ending in *-iço*. A major, regular class of adjectives derived from participles (reminiscent of dispositional adjectives formed with *-vel*). And a minor, irregular class of adjectives and/or nouns that derive from different bases (nouns, adjectives or roots), allowing a wider range of semantic interpretations. These idiosyncrasies were accounted for by the proposal that the suffix in question is an evaluative (stative) head expressing propensity that attaches to different bases. When the base is a participle, we have a predictable dispositional interpretation (“prone to”, “susceptible to”). When the base is a “non-participle”, we have a wider range of interpretations (e.g., diminutive, pejorative). I have suggested that these two notions are related to an evaluative sense.

The present analysis leaves open an important question regarding the categorization pattern of the derived forms. That is, when does this evaluative head is realized as an adjective or as a noun. It also leaves open a more explicit and motivated account of the relationship between diminutive, pejorative, and evaluative uses. I leave these issues for future work.

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