Latin synthetic compounding and Distributed Morphology

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ABSTRACT

The theory of Distributed Morphology (DM) has been applied to English synthetic compounds by Harley (2009), who proposes an analysis as incorporation structures. After a short introduction on the passage from lexicalism to DM in Latin morphology (par. 1), I will try to extend Haley's analysis to Latin synthetic compounds, suggesting some revisions (par. 2). In the first place, I will argue for the necessity to introduce verbal features in the structure of a compound like *agricola*, in order to explain the special meanings associated to the root √COL, that is the fact that the verbal head introduces a dynamic event, and that the nominalized root √AGR is interpreted as undergoing a change of state (par. 3). This suggestion is confirmed by comparing the structures of verb phrases, e.g. *colere agrum*, noun phrases with nominal derivatives, e.g. *cultor agri*, and synthetic compounds, e.g. *agricola*, where the crucial observation is that in Latin, unlike English, there is no overt agentive suffix in the compound, such as *-er* in *taxi driver*: in Latin synthetic compounds we do not find the typical agentive suffix *-tor* (par. 4). I will conclude with some general observations on the relationships between morphology and syntax (par. 5).

1. LATIN MORPHOLOGY FROM LEXICALISM TO DISTRIBUTED MORPHOLOGY

For a long time, morphology and syntax were considered two distinct areas of grammar. It seems obvious to say that morphology deals with word formation, while syntax deals with sentence formation. However, in generative grammar this distinction has been questioned since the very beginning. The theoretical focus has always been on syntax, and

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initially morphology was only a small and almost unnoticed syntactic field[1].

A generative interest in morphology was first found in the short article *Remarks on Nominalization* (Chomsky 1970), where the so-called "Lexicalist Hypothesis" was formulated. According to this hypothesis, transformational rules cannot operate within the internal structure of words, but a special sub-system must be postulated, which is called the Lexicon. The lexicalist hypothesis gave origin to a new flowering of studies, starting from Aronoff (1976), up to Booij (1977), Scalise (1984), Di Sciullo and Williams (1987), only to quote the first books of some scholars, who specialized in this field of studies. The first book which applied this theory to Latin compounding was Oniga (1988).

In the same year, however, the lexicalist hypothesis began to be questioned by Baker's (1988) theory of incorporation. In the following decades, generative research has divided into several trends, such as "Construction Morphology" (Booij 2018) and "Nanosyntax" (Baunaz *et alii* 2018). In particular, the so-called theory of "Distributed Morphology" (DM) spread more and more, due to the activity of scholars such as Marantz (1997), Embick and Noyer (2007), Embick (2010), and Bobaljik (2012). According to this view, a morphological component of grammar is not necessary, and word formation is distributed over other components, essentially phonology and syntax. Hence, it may be said that morphology is the syntax of morphemes (Embick 2015), while syntax in the proper sense is the syntax of words, phrases and sentences[2].

[1] Cf. Mateu – Oniga (2017) for an overview on the history of generative research on Latin syntax.

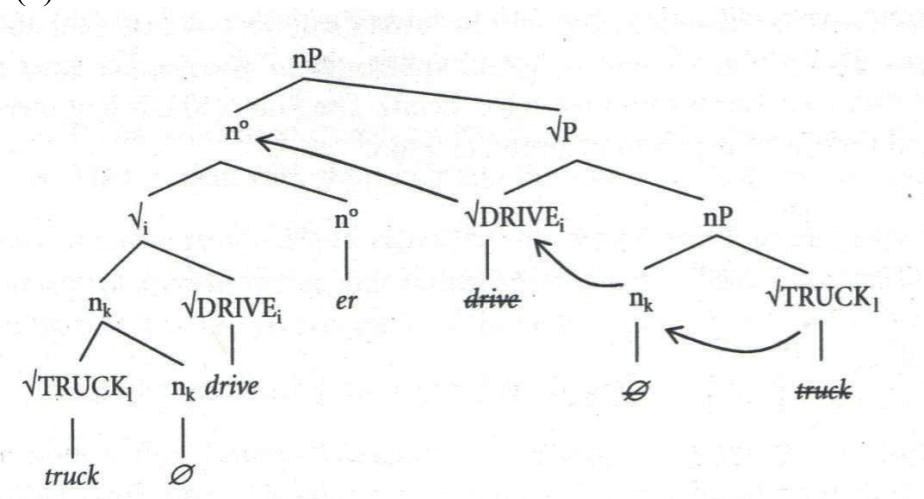
[2] As rightly observed in Siddiqi – Harley (2016: 538), the debate between lexicalist and non-lexicalist models remains still open. The state of the art in theoretical morphology research is found in recent handbooks as Lieber – Štekauer (2009); Müller *et alii* (2015-2016); Hippisley – Stump (2016); Audring – Masini (2019), and from an historical point of view Lindner (2011-2018).

As far as Latin is concerned, the theory of DM recently provided to be useful to approach the syntax of argument structure, as in the works by Acedo-Matellán (2016) and Mateu (2017a; 2017b), as well as the syntax of deponent verbs (Migliori 2016; Pinzin 2017). We will then try to understand if it can also be useful for the analysis of Latin compounds.

2. Harley's (2009) Proposal for English Synthetic Compounds

In a DM framework, Harley (2009) proposed a new analysis for English synthetic compounds like *truck driver*[3]. The structure is summarized by Harley in the following tree:

(1)



The first step (from right to left) is a merging operation, which involves the root of the first member TRUCK and an abstract head (a little *n*); the second step is a vacuous head-movement between these

[3] The bibliography on the subject is very large: cfr. Lieber (2016) for a recent survey, which puts into question many traditional intuitions and concludes that the research is still open.

elements[4]. Two more steps are then postulated: «this structure merges as the argument of √DRIVE, and incorporates into it» (Harley 2009: 136). «Finally, the complex head $[[[\sqrt{\text{TRUCK}}]_{\sqrt{}}\text{n}]_{\text{nP}}\ \sqrt{\text{DRIVE}}]_{\sqrt{\text{P}}}$ merges with the categorizing agent-flavoured n°, and head-moves into that, creating the complex head $[[[[\sqrt{\text{TRUCK}}]_{\sqrt{}}\text{n}]_{\text{nP}}\ \sqrt{\text{DRIVE}}]_{\sqrt{\text{P}}}\ \text{n}]_{\text{nP}}$ which is then realized by Vocabulary Insertion as *truck-driver*» (*ibid.*).

As has been rightly observed, this quite complex analysis raises a problem, that is, the statement that internal argument selection is a property of roots, as part of their encyclopaedic information, a view which «is incompatible with the DM's claim that accessing encyclopaedic information requires that a phase is sent off to PF and LF, and that phases are established after a root is categorized» (Padrosa-Trias 2010: 65). As Marantz (2013: 155-156) clearly says, it is the little "v", not the root, that may take an internal argument as a complement.

3. An Analysis for Latin Synthetic Compounds

If we try to apply this analysis to Latin, we can highlight some interesting phenomena[5]. In a synthetic compound like *agricola* "farmer", lit. "cultivator of land", the first member differs from the second member in its morphological nature: the former (*agr-i-*) is a noun stem formed by a root and a linking vowel, that is a short *-i-*, while the latter (*-col-a-*) is a noun stem formed by a root and a thematic vowel. The compound *agricola* is inflected according to the regular paradigm of the nouns with an *-a* stem (e.g. *agricolae*, *agricolam*, etc.), because the inflection of the compound is the inflection of its second member, as is demonstrated by participial compounds (e.g. *frugi-ferens*), where the second member does exist also as independent word (*ferens*).

[4] Harley (2009: 136): «the complement of √DRIVE is first created by merging √TRUCK and a nominalizing n° head; I assume head-movement into n° from its complement».

[5] For an updated overview on the state of the art in the research on Latin nominal compound, cf. Fruyt (2002); Brucale (2012); Oniga – Re (2017).

Notice that the linking vowel *-i-* is not an inflectional element of the first member: although from a diachronic point of view it is the relic of a thematic vowel, from a synchronic point of view it is only a phonological buffer between the two members of the compound, in order to avoid the clash between two consonants, as it generally happens in Latin phonology (e.g. Steriade 2016: 137). In fact, the linking vowel is inserted even if the stem of the first member is athematic, e.g. in *ped-i-sequ-us*, where the stem of the first member is *ped-* (cf. nom. *ped-s* > *pes*):

(2) *ped-s* > *pes*
**ped-sequus*
ped-i-sequus

Conversely, if the root of the second member begins with a vowel, this *-i-* is not admitted in the compound, even if the stem of the first member is an *-i* stem, as in the case of *fun-i-s* in *fun-ambul-us*:

(3) *fun-i-s*
**fun-i-ambulus*
fun-ambulus

Hence, a first point that emerges from the morphology of Latin synthetic compounds is that the first member has the morphological form of a noun stem without inflection.

This analysis can be extended to English in (4), where we can admit that the difference between a word and a stem is that only the former must be fully fledged for inflection:

(4) a. John drives trucks.
b. John is a truck driver.
c. *John is a trucks driver.

The ungrammaticality of (4c) demonstrates that the first member of the compound *truck driver* is not a fully fledged word, but a noun stem

without inflection. The stem can exceptionally surface without inflection because it is a word-internal element.

The structure of Latin synthetic compounds then confirms the starting point of Harley's analysis of English synthetic compounds. The traditional analysis is that the first member of these compounds in Latin is an abstract word, without inflection. This confirms the hypothesis that the first member is a nominalized root, so that the first phase for the compounding process is the merging of the root of the first member with a nominalizing head and the subsequent head-movement, which gives origin to a noun stem, without any inflection.

As for the second member, a crucial problem arises from the above mentioned observation that roots can hardly take arguments and form a root phrase, without a functional structure[6]. According to Harley's analysis, the stem of the first member $[[\sqrt{\text{AGR}}]\text{n}]_{\text{nP}}$ merges with the root of the second member $[\sqrt{\text{COL}}]$ and is incorporated into it. This analysis faces the problem that we expect the presence of verbal semantics, to introduce the special meanings associated to the root $\sqrt{\text{COL}}$, that is the fact that it introduces a dynamic event with an agentive semantics, and that the root $\sqrt{\text{AGR}}$ is interpreted as undergoing a change of state.

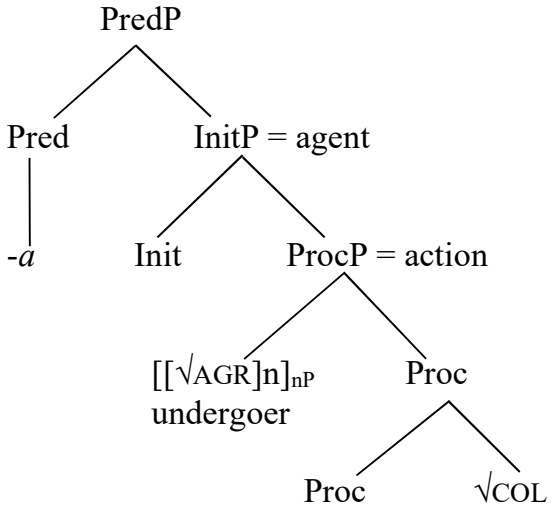
Let's also remember that, in the long tradition of linguistic studies, starting from the Neogrammarians, compounds like *agricola* are interpreted as involving verbal government[7]. The terminology introduced by Delbrück (1900: 139) and Brugmann (1906: 52) is *verbale Rektionskomposita* "verbal governing compounds", and also the term "synthetic", introduced by Schroeder (1874: 206), refers to a "double synthesis", that is derivation and compounding, which involves a structure formed by a nominal first member, a verbal stem, and a nominal suffix[8].

[6] Harley's hypothesis that roots take arguments is based on Marantz (1997), while subsequent inquiry refused this idea: cf. Marantz (2013); Alexiadou (2014); Borer (2014); Acedo-Matellan – Mateu (2014).
[7] For an historical overview on this kind of compounds, cf. Lazzeroni (1962).
[8] Cf. Lindner (2011: 19-21) for further information on this terminology.

In DM's typical decomposition of verbs into roots and verbalizing heads, the semantics of "verb" is not associated to the root, but to the verbalizing head (e.g. Marantz 2013; Mateu 2014). In split-v proposals such as Ramchand (2008), the event structure syntax of the verb is split into subevental heads, such as initiation, process, and result, so that they can license the typical semantics of the initiator, the undergoer and the resultee. If we want to give a correct semantic interpretation to the root in a synthetic compound, we cannot avoid a reference to a kind of verbal semantics.

A hypothesis may be that the second member of a synthetic compound is formed by a morphological process that derives a noun or an adjective from a verbal basis[9]. As is well known, compounds like *agricola* or *pontifex* are nouns, but many other, as *magnificus* or *particeps*, are adjectives, and some of them, as *princeps*, can be adjectives or nouns depending on the context. Hence, an analysis of the compound may be as in (5):

(5)



This abstract structure tries to explain why the root √COL has typically verbal semantics. Firstly, the root √COL is introduced by the

[9] This analysis was proposed by Oniga (1988: 82) in a lexicalist framework.

projection of the head of a verbal Process, and the entity undergoing this process, the nominal root $[[\sqrt{\text{AGR}}]\text{n}]_{\text{nP}}$ is placed in its specifier position. Secondly, the argument structure contains not only a process component, but also an initiation component, that is responsible for introducing the agent. If the root $\sqrt{\text{COL}}$ projected a full verbal structure, we would find the agent NP in the specifier position of this Initiation head (Ramchand 2008: 73). But in this case we do not have a full verb phrase, because the verbal structure is embedded in the functional structure which derives a noun or an adjective. According to the analysis proposed by Fábregas (2018), I think that an abstract Predication element introduces a relation between the suffix and the verbal process, so that the suffix absorbs the agent semantics of the Initiator of the process[10].

4. Phrases, Derivatives and Compounds

We now try to better understand the processes which give origin to three different structures: full verb phrases, derivatives, and synthetic compounds. In the case of a full verb phrase, as in (6a), the root $\sqrt{\text{COL}}$ of the verb *colere* projects a Process subevent, responsible for introducing a full NP (*agrum*), to which accusative case is assigned, and

[10] There remains a possible problem. As has been rightly observed by McIntyre (2009), in examples such as *home made* and *oft derided*, the selection features of the verbal roots *make* and *deride* do not percolate to the nominal stems of the past participles *made* and *derided*. Perhaps, this happens because they are not synthetic compounds, but modifier compounds, so *home* is not the internal argument of the verb *to make*, but it is only an adverbial adjunct, meaning "at home", and the adverb *oft* is an adjunct to the verb *deride*. However, the distinction between synthetic compounds and modifier compounds is not always clear. In Latin, for example, a compound like *magniloquus* "boastful" (Ov. *met.* 8, 396) has syntactic counterparts in *magna loquor* (Hor. *serm.* 1, 3, 9; Tibull. 2, 6, 11; Ov. *met*. 1, 747), while *magnum/magne loquor* is not in use. On the other hand, *blandiloquus* "charming in speech" (Pl. *Bacch.* 1173) seems to be based on *blande loquor* (Pl. *Truc.* 224), not on *blanda loquor*.

an Initiation subevent, responsible for introducing the external argument, another full NP (*L. Quinctius*), to which nominative case is assigned. Similarly, in (6b) the nominal derivative *cultor* assigns objective genitive to the full NP *agri*, but the nominative is not assigned, because it is absorbed by the suffix *-tor*. In (6c), no case is assigned within the compound *agricola*, because the first member is not a full NP, but a stem without inflection, so it only receives a semantic role, not a case:

(6) a. *L. Quinctius*$_{\text{Nom}}$ […] *colebat agrum*$_{\text{Acc}}$ (Liv. 3, 26, 8).
b. *Fuit vir* […] *diligens agri*$_{\text{Gen}}$ *cultor* (Hist. Aug. *Pius* 2, 1).
c. *Ergo arbores seret diligens agricola* (Cic. *Tusc.* 1, 14, 31).

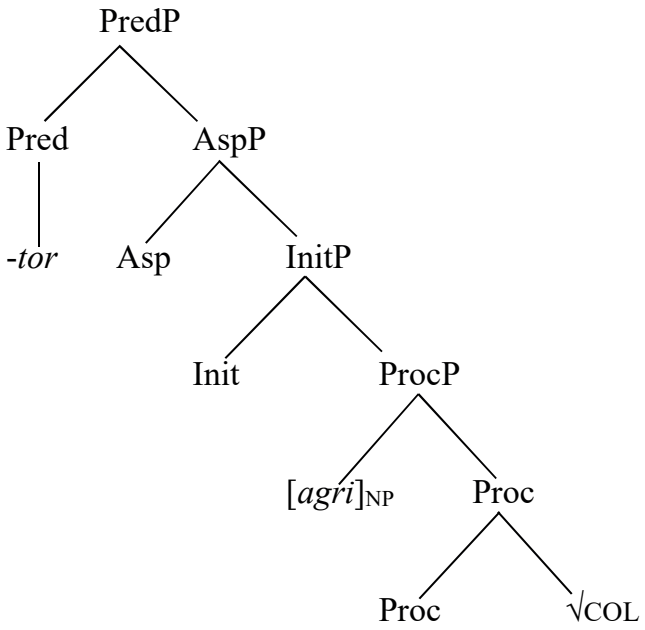
We find a similar picture in English. In (7a), the verb *to drive* assigns accusative case to the object DP, while in (7b) the nominal derivative *driver* assigns the case through *of*-insertion, as nouns without case-assigning capacities normally do (e.g. of *line of trucks*). In the case of a compound, as *truck driver* in (7c), if we admit that the first member of the compound is a stem without inflection, we may think that no case is assigned, as in Latin:

(7) a. John drives trucks.
b. John is a driver of trucks.
c. John is a truck driver.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that in (7a) and (7b) the full DP *trucks* not only receives a case, but also expresses number (in these examples, plural); it can also host a Determiner (e.g. *a truck*). Conversely, the first member of the compound in (7c) may not express number, nor host a Determiner.

If we now try to highlight the structure of the nominal derivative, we may think that it is similar to that of a compound. The phrase structure is indicated in (8):

(8)



The crucial difference between (8) and (5) is the presence in (8) of an aspectual projection, in order to explain that in this case the event is episodic, while in (5) a noun expressing professional occupation is non-episodic.

Notice also that in Latin, unlike English, there is no overt agentive suffix in the synthetic compound. While in English synthetic compounds such as *taxi driver* we find the typical agentive suffix *-er*, in their Latin counterparts we do not find the typical agentive suffix *-tor*. In Latin synthetic compounds, the nominal or adjectival head bears only a theme vowel, such as *-a-* in *agricola* [agri-col-a-] or *-o-* in *magnificus* [magni-fic-o-s], or also a zero morpheme, as in *artifex* [arti-fec-s][11]. Furthermore, the semantics of the compound is not always active, as in *agricola*, but it can also be passive, as in *alienigena* "generated in another country".

However, the presence of an aspectual projection, which is typical of derivatives, may also be found in compounds. This is true, in particular,

[11] On the structure of Latin radical compounds like *artifex* cf. Benedetti (1988); Bertocci – Pinzin (2020).

for the synthetic compounds with participial second member, as in *arquitenens*.[12] In some cases, we may remain in doubt, especially when the choice among possible alternatives for the same root, e.g. *-fer* and *-ferens* seems to be conditioned not by semantics, but by stylistic and metrical factors. For example, in a verse of *De rerum natura* by Lucretius, we find the two synthetic compounds *naviger* and *frugiferens* in (9):

(9) *quae mare* navigerum*, quae terras* frugiferentis (Lucr. 1, 3).

The Latin poet chooses to employ the participial compound *frugiferens* "fruitbearing", perhaps attested in the archaic *Carmina Marciana*[13], and not the synonymous and equally possible compound with an *-o* suffix *frugifer*, already attested in Ennius (*ann*. 510 Skutsch), and in an archaic tragic fragment (*trag. inc*. fr. 164 Ribbeck). The choice seems to be motivated by the will to introduce a stylistic variation with regard to the preceding compound *naviger*, and also by metrical opportunity.

5. Syntax and Morphology

We conclude with some considerations on the difference between phrase syntax and morphological compounding. In English, like in Latin, a compound like *truck driver* in (10a) or *agricola* in (10b) expresses in a morphological way the same sense that may be expressed

[12] Notice that, also in English, participles are typically analyzed as containing two cyclic heads, i.e. a verbal head embedded in a nominal head (Embick 2010: 16).

[13] As is well known, a *carmen* in hexametric form is attributed by Livius (25, 12, 5-6) to a *vates Marcius*, who would have predicted the battle of Canne (216 BC). The reading *frugiferente* is a correction by Lambinus for *frugifera*, accepted by Morel (p. 63: *carm. Marc*. fr. 1, 6), but refused by Blänsdorf (p. 14), who reduces the fragment to a non-literal testimony, as is clear from the Livian expression *haec fere verba erat*, and the fact that the hexameter was introduced in Roman poetry later.

in a syntactic way by a verb phrase like *drives trucks* in (11a) or *colit agros* in (11b):

(10) a. John is a truck driver.
b. Marius agricola est.

(11) a. John drives trucks.
b. Marius colit agros.

When an expression is newly created, involving non-conventional stuff, such as a free modification by an adjective, as in a sentence like (12), we may only use a verb phrase like *drives old trucks* or *veteres agros colit*, blocking the use of compounds like in (13):

(12) a. John drives old trucks
b. Marius veteres agros colit

(13) a. *John is an old-truck-driver
b. *Marius veteriagricola est

The compounds in (13) are grammatically well formed, but not attested in use. However, let's hypothesize that in the future new driving systems will be developed for trucks, so that drivers will no longer need to know how to drive old trucks. Then, if special drivers are needed, who are able to drive the last functioning exemplars of old trucks, an *old truck driver* may be formed as a new compound, in a similar way as a *race car driver* was formed, when professional drivers began to be needed for car races. Similarly, in Latin, we find exceptional nonce words as *turpilucricupidus* "greedy-for-dishonest-gain" (Plaut. *Trin.* 100), where the morphological process is allowed, because the author feels the necessity to create a new word, intrinsically endowed with a special comic semantics.

6. The Compound Parameter

A last question is to see what Latin can offer for the intriguing correlations put forward by what Snyder (2001; 2016) calls "The Compounding Parameter" (TCP). Crucially, TCP is claimed to link syntactic availability of verb-particle constructions and adjectival resultatives to the availability of creative endocentric compounding. Latin confirms that these predictions are borne out.

As is well known, Latin lacks verb-particle constructions of the Germanic type (e.g. *to cut **off***, *to force **out***, *to put **in***). In Latin these Germanic particles are usually replaced by prefixes (***ab**duco*, ***ex**pello*, ***in**mitto*). Similarly, Latin lacks (strong) adjectival resultatives of the Manner+Result type: e.g., the English expression "to hammer flat"[14]. Then, the TCP predicts that Latin should also lack productive endocentric compounding of two nouns, of the type Engl. *banana box*.

This prediction is true, as NN compounds are used in Latin much less than in the Germanic languages[15]. This typological difference between Latin and Germanic languages may perhaps explain the structural difference between at first sight similar compounds as *agricola* and *truck driver*, since only the latter consents to be also interpreted in a nominal way as NN compound, similar to the *banana box* type, while in Latin the verbal character of the second member of the compound is more prominent.

In conclusion, though many problems remain still open, a DM approach may be useful for a better understanding of the relationships between morphology and syntax in the structure of Latin nominal compounds.

[14] Cf. Mateu (2012) for a discussion of the connection between the TCP and Talmy's typology of motion events.

[15] Cf. Oniga (1988: 130). Only few examples are attested: archaic forms as *caprificus*, *iuglans*, or comic nonce words as *verbivelitatio*, *trisaeclisenex*.

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