

The nature of adjectives in the light of Spanish (categorizing?) prefixes

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Some Spanish prefixes, when added to nominal bases, give rise to forms that act as noun modifiers. Accordingly, the adjectival nature of these derived forms, as well as the possible categorizing power of the prefixes involved, has been discussed in the literature (see, e.g., RAE & ASALE 2009: §10.3i). The prefixes that generate these formations are so-called opposition (*anti-*) and favourable attitude (*pro-*) prefixes (cf. *chaleco antibalas* ‘bulletproof vest’ vs. **chaleco balas* ‘bullets vest’), temporal prefixes (*pre-*, *post-*; cf. *ropa premamá* ‘maternity clothes’ vs. **ropa mamá* ‘mum clothes’), the reciprocal prefix *inter-* (cf. *liga intermunicipios* ‘inter-municipal league’ vs. **liga municipios* ‘municipalities league’), prefixes expressing quantification (*mono-*, *bi-*, *multi-*, etc.; cf. *collar multicolor* ‘multicoloured necklace’ vs. **collar color* ‘colour necklace’), and the privative prefix *a(n)-* (cf. *flor apétala* ‘apetalous flower’ vs. **flor pétala*); see Serrano-Dolader (2002), Martín García (2005), or Fábregas et al. (2010), among others.

The categorizing capacity of these prefixes is only observed in the above-mentioned cases —i.e., when they are combined with a noun— and, crucially, the output is always an adjective (such as *octosílabo* ‘octosyllabic’, which agrees in gender and number with the modified noun; cf. *versos octosílabos* ‘octosyllabic verses’ and *palabras octosílabas* ‘octosyllabic words’) or a formation closely related to the adjectival category (e.g., *antiaborto* ‘anti-abortion’, whose adjectival category is less obvious because it does not agree with the noun it modifies; cf. *movimientos antiaborto* ‘anti-abortion movements’). This observation raises the following two research questions:

- (1) What do these forms tell us about the nature of adjectives?
- (2) What are the grammatical features of these prefixes and how do they relate to the adjective category?

Regarding the nature of adjectives, it has been pointed out that they are a derived category (Hale & Keyser 2002; Acedo-Matellán 2022), which would explain the difficulty in identifying a set of properties that define them as a natural class (Baker 2003; Fábregas 2020). The idea that adjectives are not a primitive category is developed in Mateu’s (2002) seminal proposal, according to which adjectives can be split into two more primitive lexical-syntactic components: a relational element (i.e., a preposition) and a non-relational element (i.e., a noun) acting as its complement. According to this approach, assumed in many subsequent studies and also in the present work, adjectives correspond to prepositional phrases (PPs), with which they share important similarities (among others, the possibility of functioning as noun modifiers) (see Acedo-Matellán 2022 for a more detailed survey).

As for the grammatical features of the prefixes involved in the formations here addressed, I argue that they are prepositional elements. In particular, and following a nanosyntactic approach to the syntax-lexicon interface (cf. Baunaz et al. 2018), I propose that such prefixes incorporate a prepositional layer in their structure that can be more or less complex (see Svenonius 2010 for the internal structure of prepositions, and Fábregas

2020 for an implementation of Svenonius' decomposition to Spanish adjectival forms). The prepositional nature of opposition and favourable attitude prefixes (*anti-* and *pro-*), temporal prefixes (*pre-*, *post-*), and the prefix *inter-* has already been considered (cf. Serrano-Dolader 2002). I will show, furthermore, that quantifier prefixes (*mono-*, *bi-*, *tri-*, *multi-*, etc.) and the privative prefix *a(n)-* also incorporate a prepositional layer, since they are relational elements that imply a possessive value (note, for example, that *un avión bimotor* 'a twin-engine plane' is 'a plane that has two engines', i.e., 'a plane with two engines').

Considering that adjectives can be decomposed into a prepositional element and a nominal one, the unexpected categorizing power of the prefixes analysed—which systematically produce adjectives from nouns—receives a straightforward account. Given that the prefixes at issue are relational elements of prepositional nature, when they are combined with a nominal base the result is a structure parallel to that lexicalized by adjectives, which explains the adjectival behaviour of the outputs generated by these prefixes. The study here presented, therefore, offers new arguments to support the analysis of adjectives as derived categories that incorporate a PP.

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