

There is no such thing as a verbal derivational affix

One of the main contributions of the approaches to morphophonology and morphosyntax couched in the fruitful interaction between Distributed Morphology and Minimalism is the treatment of derivational affixes as (containing) categorial heads. Based on their structural position, such affixes can have more or less influence on the spellout of what is traditionally considered the derivational base. As argued in a host of literature (e.g. Marantz 2013), this influence is highly dependent on the overt realisation of categorisers either at the PF or at the LF interface in the sense that overt categorisers tend to be interveners/blockers in contexts where mute/empty categorisers are not.

We focus on Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS), a language with default phonologically mute categorisers in the nominal and adjectival domain, but phonologically overt categorisers in the verbal domain, where the *v* head is realised as the so-called theme vowel (TV) (e.g. Milosavljević & Arsenijević 2022; Kovačević et al. 2024). It then comes as no surprise that, as observed already in some descriptive sources (Marković 2018), verbal derivational suffixes end in TVs that are independently attested in simplex verbs, e.g. *-a-* in simplex verbs like *čit-a-ti* ‘read’, but also in suffixes like *av-a* that serves as the secondary imperfectivising suffix, or *ir-a*, which integrates loan verbs. Examples from theme-vowel classes *a/a* and *a/je* are provided in Table 1. Note that BCMS TV classes are identified using two forms: INF and PRS. Similar patterns have been observed for other Slavic languages too, e.g. Gribanova (2015); Matushansky (2024) for Russian, Simonović & Mišmaš (2023) for Slovenian.

| gloss | root | derivational affix | theme vowel | INFL |
|----------------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|------|
| ‘read.INF’ | čit | | a | ti |
| ‘read.PRS.1PL’ | čit | | a | mo |
| ‘interpret.INF’ | interpret | ir | a | ti |
| ‘interpret.PRS.1PL’ | interpret | ir | a | mo |
| ‘write.INF’ | pis | | a | ti |
| ‘write.PRS.1PL’ | pis | | je | mo |
| ‘photograph.INF’ | fotograf | is | a | ti |
| ‘photograph.PRS.1PL’ | fotograf | is | je | mo |

Table 1: Same theme vowels following roots and derivational affixes

This has some interesting and previously undiscussed consequences for the system of derivational morphemes. For instance, while BCMS adjectival and nominal derivational suffixes fall into categories of prosody-affecting and prosody-neutral, all verbal suffixes affect the prosody of the base. There is, however, some variation in this respect, going from totally prosody imposing secondary imperfectivisers (e.g., *-av+a-* and *-iv+a-*) to verbalisers employed in current contact with English (*-ov+a-* in the east, *-a-* in the west), which allow for some level of prosody preservation.

Based on the quantitative data from the WeSoSlav database (Arsenijević et al. 2022), we map out the different classes of verbal affixes in BCMS and show how their semantics and prosody follow from the structural configuration in which they find themselves but also from their internal structure. We argue that not only do all derivational affixes in BCMS (and possibly beyond) end in a TV, but also that the segments preceding these TVs are not derivational affixes either; rather, they can be decomposed into independently attested primitives. Specifically, in secondary imperfectives, the position preceding the final TV is occupied by another TV: the only productive such suffixes, *iva* and *ava*, contain two vowels (*i* and *a*) that match the

two most productive TVs in BCMS, *i*, and *a* (see Simonović et al. 2023 for detailed morpho-phonological arguments in favor of such decomposition). For the semelfactive suffix *-nu-*, the pre-theme-vowel position is arguably occupied by a diminutive morpheme, as detailed in Štarkl et al. (2024) for BCMS and Slovenian. For the denominal suffix *-ov-a-*, we argue that the element *-ov-* realises a nominal (or non-verbal) head (cf. Kovačević et al. 2024). Finally, in the case of the complex loanword integration affixes *-is-a-* and *-ir-a-*, we propose an analysis in terms of transitive semantically empty/bleached roots (Lowenstamm 2014). A similar analysis has been proposed in Fábregas (2017) for Latin. He decomposes segments *ifca* and *iza* in verbs like *classificar* ‘classify’ and *autorizar* ‘authorise’ into a TV (*a*) and the light roots *ifc* and *iz* preceding the TV, which modify (i.e. augment) the basic roots.

The key theoretical benefit of our account is that it dispenses with the very existence of the traditional notion of derivational verbal suffixes and with purely morphological nature of TVs. TVs are verbalisers, the exponents of the *v* head (as in Fábregas 2017 for Latin), whereas verbal derivational affixes are always decomposable into verbalisers and multifunctional elements readily found in other categories as well, e.g. bleached roots (cf. Lowenstamm 2014, Simonović & Mišmaš 2020) or diminutive affixes (Manova et al. 2024, Štarkl et al. 2024).

In the talk, we will also address aspects of variation with other Slavic languages, but also variation between standard varieties of BCMS, whereby the element *-ov-* is almost exclusively denominal in Croatian, whereas it behaves as a loanword integration suffix in most of its uses in Bosnian, Montenegrin and Serbian.

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