

Structure of French a- Prefixed Deadjectival -ir Verbs

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I – Presentation

French exhibits two groups of **deadjectival (change of state) –IR verbs**, those who can appear with the prefix *a-* and those who can't. All their bases are gradable monoradical adjectives (i.e. overtly unconstructed).

Note 1 : French IR verbs

French has, traditionally, two groups of (phonological) IR verbs

- the 2nd group of French verbs (with the one at stake in this work):
 - grandir > (en) grandissant
finir > finissant
agir > agissant
 - to grow > growing
to finish > finishing
to act > acting
 - with [-is-]
- and the IR verbs that are in the 3rd group (which contains other endings) :
 - tenir > (en) tenant ~ *tenant
dormir > dormant ~ *dormissant
rire > riant ~ *rissant
(+ mordre > mordant ...)
 - to hold > holding
to sleep > sleeping
to laugh > laughing
to bite > biting ...

Note 2 : What adjectives for those bases

French adjectives :

« qualificatifs »		« relationnels »
gradable, indicate a property	constructed	constructed (always derived, from N)
simplex : unconstructed (monoradical)		
grand - big	parasseux - lazy	royal - royal
maigre - thin	menteur - liar	dentaire - dental
lourd - heavy	équitable - fair	diplomatique - diplomatic
souple - supple	sportif - sporty	hospitalier - hospital
sale - dirty	immoral - immoral	présidentiel - presidential
vieux - old	intéressant - interesting	universel - universal

scalar adj.

II – Data

1. That accept the prefix *a-*

X _i (adj)	X _i –ir (V)	a- X _i –ir (V)
grand	grandir	agrandir
big	to get big.er (to grow)	to make sth big.er
faible	faiblir	affaiblir
weak	to get weak.er	to make sb weak.er
maigre	maigrir	amaigrir
thin	to get thin.er	to make sb thin.er

b

X _i (adj)	*X _i –ir (V)	a- X _i –ir (V)
doux	*doucir	adoucir
soft, mild	(to get soft.er, mild.er)	to make sth soft.er, mild.er
lourd	*lourdir	alourdir
heavy	(to get heavy.iер)	to make sth heavy.iер
sage	*sagir	assagir
good, wise	(to get better, wise.er)	to make sb wise.er, quieten down
souple	*souplir	assouplir
supple	(to get supple.er)	to make sth supple.er

2. That don't accept the prefix *a-*

X _k (adj)	X _k –ir (V)	*a- X _k –ir (V)
blanc	blanchir	*ablanchir
white	to go/make white.er	(to make sth white.er)
blême	blémir	*ablémir
pale	to go pale	(to make sb pale)
raide	raidir	*araïdir
stiff, straight	to make stiff, straight	(to make sth stiff, straight)
sale	salir	*asalir
dirty	to make dirty	(to make sb/sth dirty)
vieux	vieillir	*avieillir
old	to get/make old.er	(to make sb old.er)

3. Examples for valency

- (01) a. Those which are attested in pairs
i. preferably intransitive without *a-* (unaccusative type)

- a. Lisa **grandit** beaucoup d'année en année.
Lisa grows up a lot year after year
- b. L'ennemi **faiblit** un peu plus chaque jour.
Each day the ennemy gets weaker and weaker
- c. Il **maigrit** à vue d'œil !
He visibly loses weight

ii. transitive when *a-* prefixed

- a. Il faut agrandir cette ouverture.
It is necessary to enlarge this opening
- b. Affaiblissez l'ennemi !
Weaken the ennemy !
- c. Le travail l'a beaucoup amaigri.
Work made him a lot thinner

inchoative/causative alternations

- (01) b. Those which only appear with *a-*

- i. *intransitive
a. Elliott **adoucit** le linge.
Elliott makes the linen soft.er
- b. *Le carton **alourdit** avec ces livres
The box gets heavier with these books

Pronominal SE construction needed to give *a-* verbs an intransitive reading !

- (02) Those which refuse *a-* can appear in different valencies

- i. intransitive (unaccusative type)
a. Le linge **blanchit** vite avec ce produit.
The linen whitens quickly with this product
- b. Le blanc **salit** facilement
White gets easily dirty
- c. On **vieillit** tous !
We all get older !
- d. Ariel **blémît** de peur.
Ariel gets pale by fear
- e. ? Ce bout de métal **radit**
This piece of metal gets stiff
- ii. transitive
a. Arno **blanchit** le linge.
Arno whitens the linen
- b. Il a sali son pantalon.
He dirtied/soiled his pants
- c. Cette coiffure **te vieillit**.
This haircut makes you older
- d. *La peur **blémît** Ariel
(Fear makes Ariel go pale)
- e. Le forgeron **radit** ce bout de métal
The smith stiffens this piece of metal

IV – Assumptions

A/ What is –IR ?

- Not a flexion, but a **derivational affix** (site for the verbal flexion)
- of the same kind as -ifi(er), is(er)... ex. simple (adj) > simplifier (v) (to simplify)
- national (adj) > nationaliser (v) (to nationalize)
- « -IR » = **citation form** of this element ! [iŋ]: from [-i]+[-i] the infinitive flexion
- its real forms being the allomorphs [-i]/[-is-]
- ex: [ʒə febli̪ø], [nø febi̪is+ɔ], [â febi̪is+ã] ...
- a verbalizing element
- sort of « light verb » that needs a complement in order to go to Tense
- bound morpheme, i.e. with a merge feature to satisfy: [u X]
- traditional view → X can be a root: ex. [Nag]-ir (to act)
- or a categorized element: ex. [faibl]-ir (to get weak.er)
- [fin_N]-ir (to dirty)
- semantic of « aller » / to go, creating those change of state verbs

B/ What is *a-* ?

- The directional preposition « à » (latin ad) / to
vers / toward.s
- prefix => preposition without its syntactic complement
(the base of the –ir verb being also the semantic complement of *a-*)

C/ Special relation between -IR and *a-* : « aller à » / (to) go to

- IR can use *a-* or not
- « aller »/to go always implies a direction, whether it uses (on surface) or not the preposition

VI – Proposal

: on *a-*'s contribution/part in this transitivity effect

- IR...à : belong together (go...to) ; sort of discontinuous morpheme → the root √IR has the structure implying √à as its complement [cf. ex (03)]
- This root of the prep « à » has a feature (I call here: [y]) representing the movement/direction it implies

Having this directional property, I claim that √à always comes as the comp of the functional directional head (I call Dir) √à selects a complement => the base of the -IR verb (x_i)

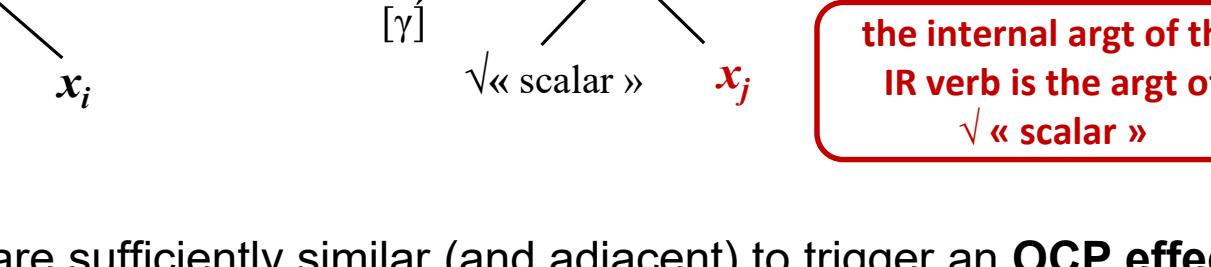
(03) Structure of IR.P



the internal arg of the IR verb is the arg of √scalar

x_i

(04) Structure of scalar elements' roots



the internal arg of the scalar is the arg of √scalar

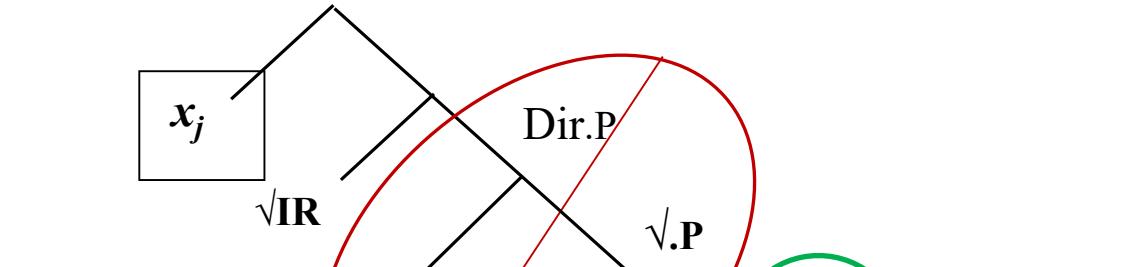
x_j

- √à's [y] and Deg's [y] are sufficiently similar (and adjacent) to trigger an OCP effect [cf. ex (05)]

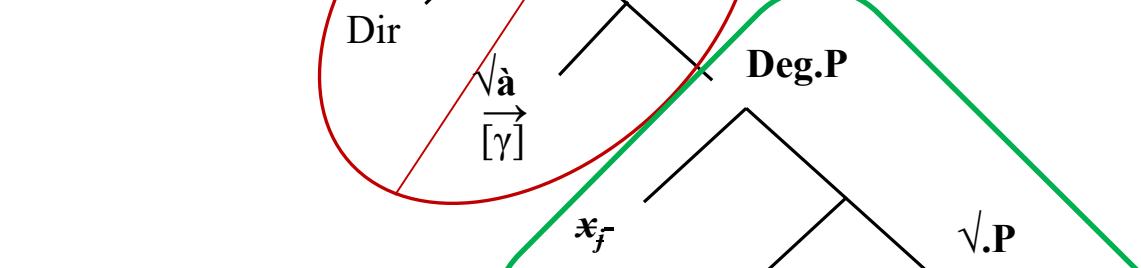
Either Deg stays : cf. ex. (06), either √à does : cf. ex. (07)

(06) Derivation of ir-verbs : √à is erased (its projection Dir.P too) → the Deg.P stays

a.



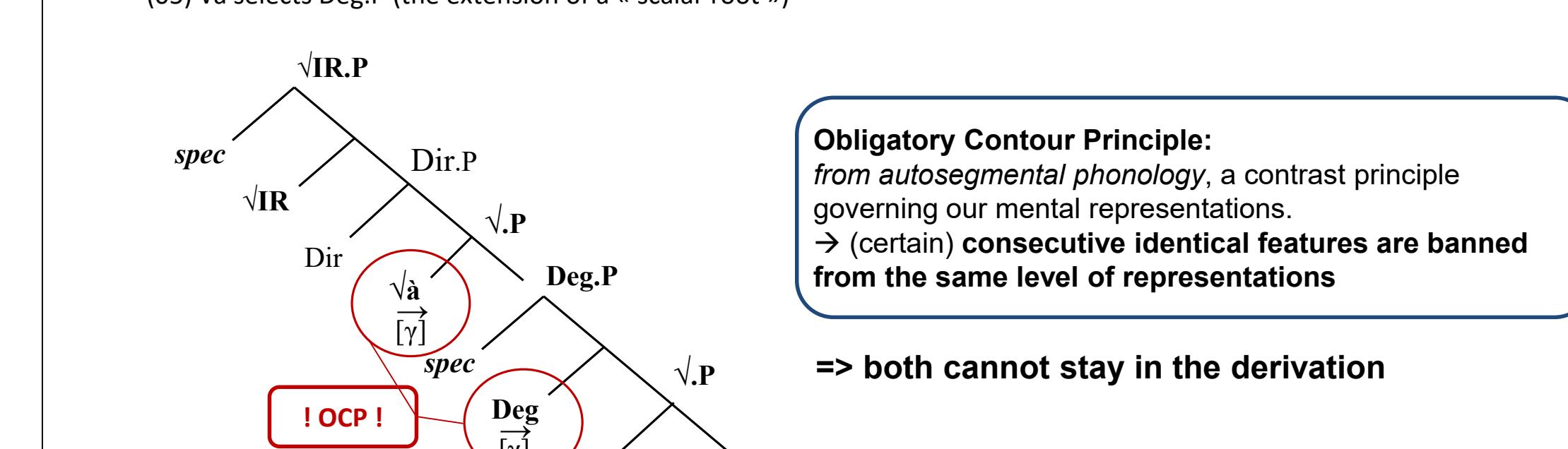
=> y



=> y

- Expanding from some literature [cf. Matushansky 2005] I propose the structure of **scalar elements** as having their roots being the comp of the functional degree head, called **Deg** [cf. ex (04)]
- I claim that this **Deg** head also has a [y] feature (representing the movement/direction degree implies)

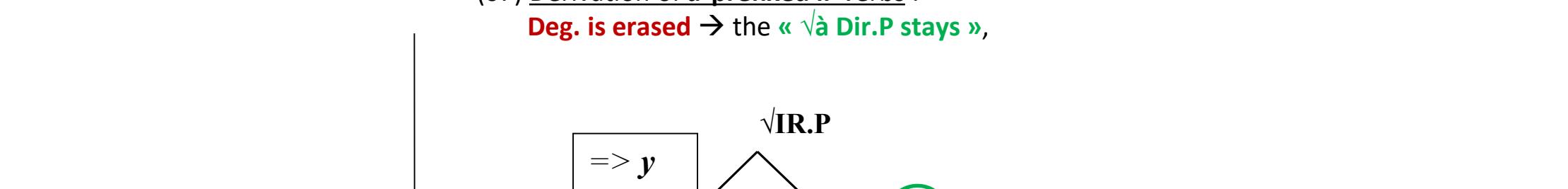
(05) √à selects Deg.P (the extension of a « scalar root »)



Obligatory Contour Principle:
from autosegmental phonology, a contrast principle governing our mental representations
→ (certain) consecutive identical features are banned from the same level of representations

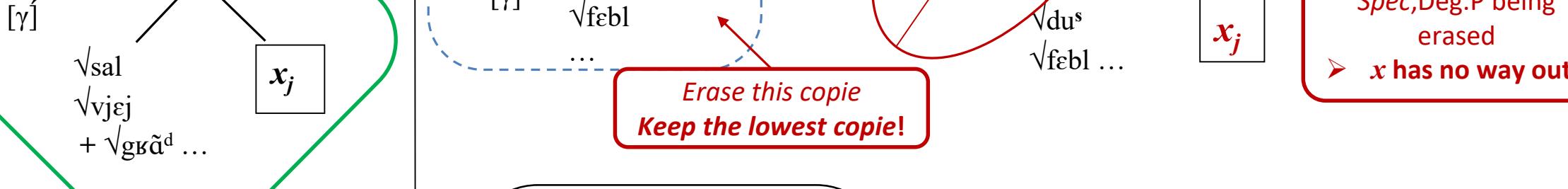
=> both cannot stay in the derivation

(07) Derivation of a-prefixed ir-verbs : Deg. is erased → the √à Dir.P stays,



the scalar roots cannot left adjoin the √à(y) head !

Spec.Deg.P being erased
x has no way out !



ex. Elliott(y) **adoucit** le linge(x)
L'armée(y) **affaiblit** l'ennemi(x)
La couturière(y) **agrandit** le pantalon(x)

Only one possible valency here:
Having no spec,Deg.P anymore > x cannot rise out

The presence of √à blocks the movement of the internal argument (x)
Preventing (x) from rising, an external argument (y) can enter the derivation (x) stays in the object position => the verb is always transitive

→ a- acts like a de-unaccusativifier

V – Theoretical Background

- Neoconstructivism: words constructed with the same tools (i.e. syntax) as sentences
- Minimalist syntax: derivation bottom up, features (phi, tense...), targets & probes
- Roots and categories [cf. Lowenstamm 2010]: are the objects in the Lexicon
 - « Categories » among functional empty heads, and « roots »: phonologically expressed elements
 - Roots have no categories but can be categorized by any categorial head (n, v, a) [cf. Marantz 1997]
- + Theoretical assumptions:
 - Roots can have argument structure → e.g. here, the roots involved have only an internal direct argument

Data (mainly) from

. http://www.cnrtl.fr/ : Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales

. http://bescherelle.com/le-conjugueur-bescherelle . http://dict.xatieri.com/conjugaison.php