Morphological epenthesis in Romance: a case for Lexical Conservatism

Eduard Artés
CLT – Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

1) Goal. This talk aims to present empirical and theoretical evidence in favor of the idea of epenthesis as a morphological phenomenon. Data from Italian, Spanish, Catalan and Occitan elucidate the trade-off between morphology and phonology in some determined contexts such as gender agreement. Morphology provides phonology with an exponent already present in the paradigm, Lexical Conservatism (Steriade 1994) being the main reason for it. Moreover, the epenthetic processes present in Italian loanword phonology demonstrate that inflectional endings of the nominal system should be treated as class markers (Acquaviva 2009).

2) Spanish epenthesis. In Spanish, initial epenthesis is a very regular process and phonology alone can explain its behavior. Final epenthesis, however, is a more complicated phenomenon, as the right edge of the word is the placement for inflection. In the nominal system, for instance, there are some problems with the epenthesis account. Traditionally (see Saltarelli 1970 and Harris 1986), it has been argued that epenthesis applies in word-final position to satisfy syllabic requirements. The question we have to adress is whether final -e is still epenthetic (*carne* 'meat', **carn*) or it has been reinterpreted as a common class marker (Harris 1999, Bonet 2006), found in words like *hule* 'oilcloth' (**hul*, although well-formed phonotactically). This illustrates what has been called morphological epenthesis (Cardinaletti & Repetti 2008), *i.e.*, a direct relation between morphology and the phonological content of epenthesis.

3) Lexical Conservatism in Romance determiners. Morphological epenthesis is also related to the notion of Lexical Conservatism. Phonological problems can be repaired via morphology, thus preventing the creation of novel phonological material. Catalan, Italian and Occitan present a similar pattern of vowel epenthesis in the masculine determiner. According to Repetti (2012) 'i' is the initial and medial epenthetic vowel in Italian. Following her, I assume for Italian (as for Catalan and Occitan) an underlying masculine determiner /l/ (cf. Garrapa 2012):

-Italian:	/l#fratɛl:o/ > [ilfratél:o] (phon. epenthesis)
	/l#amiko/ > [lamí:ko]
	/l#skandalo/ > [loskándalo]
-Catalan:	Central Catalan /l#maɾ/ > [əlmár] (phon. epenthesis)
	NorthWestern Catalan /l#aɾbɾe/ > [larβɾe]
	NorthWestern Catalan /l#paɾe/ > [lopáɾe]
-Occitan	/l#gal/ > [lugál]
	/l#amig/ > [lamík]

In front of a C-initial noun, we see a regular pattern of epenthesis in Italian and Catalan ('i' and schwa as default epenthetic vowels). However, in certain cases the vowel –o, usually used as an exponent for masculine, seems to resolve the phonological problem.

In North Western Catalan, a sequence of two sibilants is avoided in plural formation (/felis+s/ 'happy.inv + pl > *[felíss]). This problem is solved with the same strategy, *i.e.*, the adjunction of the vowel –o instead of the default epenthetic vowel -e, which is also a feminine marker (in Old Catalan –e was the chosen vowel, but that created a fusion of masculine and feminine plurals):

-feliç/feliç[o]s (m) *'happy.m, happy.m.pl'*
-feliç/felic[e]s (f) *'happy.f, happy.f.pl'*

4) Loanwords as evidence for class markers. In addition, epenthetic processes in the loanword phonology of Italian seem to converge in the same direction:

Frankfurt > Francofort[e]
Stockholm > Stoccolm[a]
Zurich > Zurig[o]

This paragogic process uses different vowels to solve the phonotactic requirements of Italian. In regular epenthesis, we would expect final –i to appear, but we find three different vowels instead. These vowels, which can be related neither to sex nor to grammatical gender, are used to attach the word to a specific noun class. Again, as in the case of the determiners, phonotactic problems are repaired via morphology. A further comparison with Catalan supports the idea of class markers.

- *Tot Barcelona* 'The whole city of Barcelona' [masculine adjective, -a marker usually standing for feminine: 'no agreement' / cf. *La Barcelona dels 80* '80's Barcelona']

5) Conclusion. All in all, the data presented here give support to the idea that morphological epenthesis is a widespread phenomenon in Romance languages, as we can see instances of it in many varieties. In the case of the determiners, it is used for gender specification. In loanwords, it helps to give them the same inflectional character of native words. Furthermore, Lexical Conservatism 'recycles' what it is already present in the morphology to avoid new phonological variants.

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