

## Prefixhood is a PF Requirement: Evidence from Svan

David Erschler, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

In Nanosyntax, arguments have been raised in favor of a non-phonological nature of prefixation (Starke 2018; Vanden Wyngaerd et al. 2022, a.o.). I address nominalizing morphology in Svan, an endangered South Caucasian language of Georgia, to argue that it involves phonologically conditioned prefixation.

**1. INTRODUCTION.** The thrust of the nanosyntactic enterprise has been to dispense with post-syntactic diacritics and post-syntactic morphological operations, e.g., Caha et al. (2019) for diacritics that regulate allomorph selection in comparatives, Caha (2021) for declension features, or Starke (2018) for a purely syntactic approach to prefixhood. It is an empirical question to determine whether such an approach is feasible, see, e.g., Kukhto (2024) in favor of a DM-style approach to contextual allomorphy.

**2. DATA.** Descriptively, Svan nominalizing morphology is consistently circumfixal. For my present purposes, I assume that the prefixal parts of a nominalizer *A- ... -B* realizes a single syntactic head. The prefixal part of a nominalizer, *A-*, however, consistently docks on the final phonological word of the nominalized XP: [<sub>XP</sub> ω ω **A-ω**]-*B*.

**2.1** As an illustration, consider VERB NOMINALIZATIONS (Topuria 1967: 238) (1). The choice of the nominalizer does not depend on a specific verb.

(1) **li-wʒ-e** ‘sleeping’ **la-wʒ-a** ‘(in order) to sleep’

The argument(s) of a nominalized root precede the prefix-marked nominalized verb.

- (2) a. Baseline: finite clause  
 nodar-d læir adtʃʷoda:ne  
 Nodar-ERG book read.AOR  
 ‘Nodar read a book.’
- b. Nominalized clause: “Masdar” (name of action) nominalization  
 ia-d ænbine [læir-i gezl-æʃd **li-tʃʷdæ:n-i**]  
 Ia-ERG begin.AOR book-GEN kid-BEN NMZ-read-NMZ  
 ‘Ia started reading a book to (her) kid.’
- c. Nominalized clause: Purpose nominalization  
 Wano lirhæ:lte anə:gæ:n [tʃʷem-i la:ræ-xæn  
 Vano early got.up hay-GEN alpine.meadow-ABL  
**la-madʒ-a**]-te  
 NMZ-bring-NMZ-ALL  
 ‘Vano got up early to bring the hay from the alpine meadows.’

**2.2** The same point can be illustrated with the behavior of the circumfix *lə- ... -j*/[+FRONT] ‘with X, having the property of X.’

- (3) a. tsxa ‘nail, claw’ **lə-tsxæ-j** ‘having claws’  
 b. paqʷ ‘cap’ **lə-pæqʷ** ‘wearing a hat’

The circumfix *lə- -B* can combine with nominal phrases, the prefixal part docks then on the (final) noun.

- (4) a. [tsʰərni **lə-pæqʷ**]  
 red COM-hat.COM  
 ‘red-hatted’
- b. [χofa **lə-tsxæ-j**]  
 big COM-claw-COM  
 ‘big-clawed’

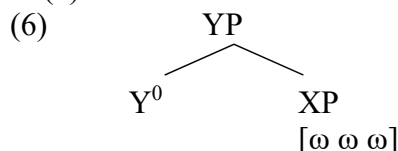
**2.3** ORDINAL NUMERALS are formed out of cardinals by the circumfix *me- ... -e*, the prefixal part again docks on the final word of a complex numeral, even if the numeral involves coordination.

- (5) Cardinals
- a. iʃgwid ‘7’  
 b. woxwiʃd-æ:ʃd =i iʃgwid ‘57’  
 5-10 =& 7

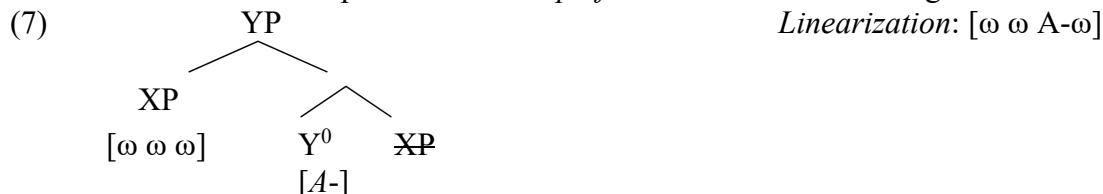
	Ordinals	
c.	me-fgw(i)d-e	‘7 <sup>th</sup> ’
d.	woxwɨfɖ-æ:fɖ =i	me-fgwɨd-e ‘57 <sup>th</sup> ’
	50 =&	ORD-7-ORD

To recapitulate, although a prefix, the prefixal part of a nominalizer always aligns with the right edge of the constituent it takes scope over.

**ANALYSIS.** Syntactically, the examples in (2), (4), and (5) all have the structure shown in (6). Y is the head (or, possibly a treelet) corresponding to the prefix *A-* of (**Error! Reference source not found.**) – a verb nominalizer in (2), the comitative/possessive *la-* in (4), or the ordinal *me-* in (5).

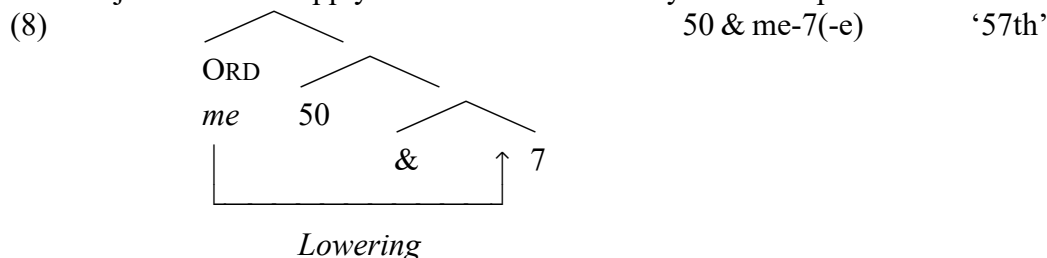


Analytic possibilities within Nanosyntax include, first, the standard movement of XP into Spec, YP with the consecutive spellout of Y as a *prefix A-* that docks on the rightmost word of XP.



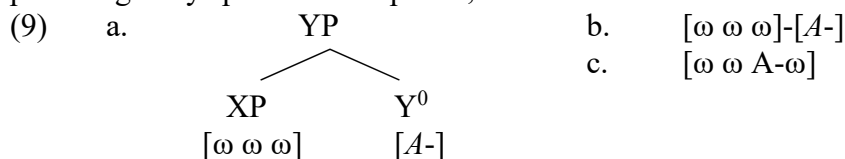
Without specifying [A] as a prefix, the correct linear order cannot be achieved this way.

Otherwise, in the spirit of Starke (2018), the structure corresponding to *A-* can be derived as a separate left branch. However, to preserve constituency, it must merge with XP as a whole. To achieve the correct linearization, it has to be lowered to the rightmost word of XP. Given that XPs under discussion may involve coordinations (5), this lowering operation must be non-local (8) – contrary to what is normally expected of movement, syntactic or post-syntactic. The same objection would apply to a subextraction analysis in the spirit of Caha & Žiková (2022).



**DERIVATION IN DM.** DM countenances left branching structures and lexical specification of VIs as a suffix or a prefix. Modulo the behavior of nominalizing prefixes, Svan clause structure up to AspP is consistently left-branching. Given that the prefixal nominalizer aligns with the right edge of the respective constituent, it is natural to conclude that it realizes a final head.

Assuming that Vocabulary Insertion and linearization proceed from the bottom of a tree, the structure that needs to be linearized is shown in (9a). The VI [A-] is inserted in Y<sup>0</sup> (9b). Being phonologically specified as a prefix, it docks at the nearest suitable position (9c).



**CONCLUSION.** While the data analyzed here do not allow us to adjudicate between Nanosyntax and DM analyses in general, they strongly suggest that being a prefix can be a phonological property of a given lexical entry/vocabulary item. Prefixation can’t be fully relegated to syntax.