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Open-class roots in closed-class contexts: a question for lexical insertion

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Recent work in Distributed Morphology which follow Marantz 1997, e.g. Harley and Noyer 1998 and Embick 2000, reject the notion of a lexical category. Instead, it is claimed that categorial distinctions depend on the syntactic context in which category-neutral ROOTS are inserted. A noun is a root inserted as complement to a Determiner, and a verb is a root inserted in a shell of functional heads including Tense.

On this theory, there is a clear separation between FUNCTIONAL MORPHEMES (f-morphemes), which fill f-nodes, and LEXICAL MORPHEMES (l-morphemes), which fill l-nodes. To fill an f-node F, a vocabulary item must be specified for a subset of F's features (Halle 1997). By contrast, to fill an l-node, a vocabulary item cannot have grammatical features (otherwise, it would block all other roots, cf. Marantz 1997). If this entails that the set of lexical bases and the set of functional morphemes have no member in common, facts like the following may be problematic.

The Turkish morphemes *çok* 'much/many/very' and *az* 'little/few' are closed-class quantifiers according to Kornfilt 1997: 432. Unlike adjectives, which syntactically precede the morpheme *bir* when it acts as an indefinite article, as in example (1a), *çok* and *az* appear between the article and noun, as in (b) and (c):

(1) a. buyuk bir kiz
big a girl
'a big girl'

b. bir çok seker (*çok bir seker)
much sugar
'a lot of sugar'

c. bir az seker (*az bir seker)
a little sugar
'a little sugar'

- *çok* and *az* participate in various additional phenomena indicative of closed-class status, including the formation of quantifier compounds, e.g., *en az* (‘least’), *en çok* (‘most’) (ibid.), the use of *az* as a comparative operator (Lewis, 1967: 54), and *çok* as a quantifier rather than a cardinality predicate when it hosts a possessive suffix: *çog-umuz* ('most of us') (Lewis 1967: 75).

However, in at least one instance, *çok* and *az* are input to the same derivational process as lexical bases. The passive suffix *-al* and the causative suffix *-t* derive intransitive unaccusative and transitive causative verbs from these two f-morphemes:

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(2)	a.	az-al-mak az-PASS-INF 'to decrease' (intr.)	b.	az-al-t-mak az-PASS-CAUS-INF 'to reduce' (tr.)
(3)	a.	çoğ-al-mak coğ-PASS-INF 'to increase' (intr.)	b.	çoğ-al-t-mak çoğ-PASS-CAUS-INF 'to increase' (tr.)

In all other cases, these suffixes regularly target lexical bases (roots), either noun or adjective; there is no independent reason to think that the base of these verbs is a grammatical formative.

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