

*The contextual allomorphy and paradigmatic pressure
of the prepositions a, en and amb in Catalan*

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In most Catalan varieties, the prepositions *a* ‘to/in’, *en* ‘in’ and *amb* ‘with’ present similar allomorphs, a situation that may provoke some confusion. Here we show all the possible allomorphs of each preposition, without making distinctions between the dialectal varieties.

-*a* {/a/, /an/ or /am(b)/, /ana/ or /am(b)a/}

(/n/ and /m(b)/ vary according to the variety)

-*en* {/en/, /am(b)/, /am(b)a/}

-*amb* {/am(b)/, /am(b)a/, /en/}

In most cases, the allomorphy of the preposition *a* has a phonological basis. It is a phonologically conditioned allomorphy, since the allomorph /an/ or /am(b)/ avoids vocalic contact (ex. *Viu an/am(b) aquesta casa* ‘He/she lives in this house’). The preposition *amb* also presents a phonologically conditioned allomorphy in the Northern and the Alguerese dialects since /am(b)a/ avoids consonant codas (ex. *Viu am(b)a gent* ‘He/she lives with people’). In these cases, the markedness constraints *VV and *CODA are the most relevant in the analysis in Optimality Theory.

In contrast, the allomorphy of the prepositions *en* and *amb* has no phonological basis because their exchanged allomorphs do not improve the phonological structure (e.g., the allomorph /am(b)/ of the preposition *en*, *Penso am(b) això* ‘I think in that’: in Central, Balearic and Northern Catalan; e.g., the allomorph /en/ of the preposition *amb*, *Vindrà en ell* ‘He/she will come with him’: in Valencian and in two North-western subdialects), and they are the result of paradigmatic pressure under the consideration that the prepositions *a*, *en* and *amb* form a paradigm due to their phonetic, semantic and etymological similarities, in which certain allomorphs exert pressure on the others. In some varieties of Central and North-western Catalan, the allomorphs of the preposition *a* are also the result of paradigmatic pressure, and the consequence is that /an/ or /am(b)/ appears in front of a consonant. The paradigmatic pressure is represented by the faithfulness constraint OO-PARADIGM (Bonet & Lloret 2002), framed in the parallel Correspondence Theory.

For their part, the allomorphs /ana/ and /am(b)a/ are the result of diachronic processes of paradigmatic pressure. They appear exclusively before pronouns and the definite article, phonologically very short elements that achieve more phonological entity with these longer allomorphs. At the same time, they appear particularly frequently in front of interrogative pronouns, which are especially prominent pronouns as they occupy the first position in the sentence. The analysis of these cases is based on the lexical specifications of pronouns and the definite article for these allomorphs, specifications which are preserved by the faithfulness constraint RESPECT (Bonet & Lloret & Mascaró 2007).

Finally, the quantity of allomorphs and their distribution may vary depending on the syntactic context. This allomorphy is syntactically conditioned and is especially visible in the preposition *a*: the lesser the semantic motivation of the preposition (e.g., lexicalized expressions, verbal periphrasis, adverbial manner and prepositional direct object) and the higher the extent of the derivation from the main meaning of the preposition (e.g., a prepositional phrase complement and temporal adverbial), the lesser the allomorphy in terms of numbers of allomorphs or in contexts of appearance, compared with a more semantic motivation (e.g., locative adverbials and indirect object). However, in the prepositions *en* and *amb*, the effect is the opposite: the lesser the semantic motivation of the preposition, the greater the presence of allomorphs. This is because the origin of the allomorphy in the preposition *en* and *amb* is the result of paradigmatic pressure; if the preposition loses its semantic motivation it means that it is less similar to the original preposition, thus allowing the allomorphs to expand. Over the syntactic context, the specific contexts prevail. These contexts select the preposition *a* and, from among its allomorphs, the allomorph /a/. The analysis in optimality theory of the allomorphy conditioned by syntax and by specificity is based on the Subcategorization model (Paster 2005, 2006, 2009; Bye 2007, to appear).

To sum up, there is a hierarchy between the different types of contextual allomorphy of the prepositions *a*, *en* and *amb*: specificity >> syntax >> morphology / phonology.

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