Construction Grammar and the syntax-morphology interface: Are prepositions, prefixes and prefixoids objects of the same nature?
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Prepositions are objects with a syntactic status (1), prefixes are objects with a morphological status (2), but some items, such as those under (3) and (4), seem to have a double status, a syntactic one when used as a preposition (3) and a morphological one when used as a prefix (4).

(1) Il est sorti avec son fils
He went out with his son

(2) Il souffre d’hypertension
He is suffering from hypertension

(3) a. Le chat dort sur le fauteuil
The cat is sleeping on the sofa
b. Ils se sont garés avant la gare
They parked their car before going to the station
c. Il est parti sans (son) parapluie
He left without his umbrella

(4) a. Ce travail a été surévalué
This work is over-evaluated
b. Il est placé sur l’avant-scène
He is located on the forestage
c. Il travaille dans un foyer pour sans-abris
He works in a shelter for homeless people

As can be seen, while English uses two different forms (on / over, before / fore-, and even without / -less), French has only one form that carries out the two functions (but in English, over has also a double status, as sur in French).

In the frame of Construction Grammar, override coercion (among others Audring and Booij, 2016; Lauwers and Willems, 2011) seems an appropriate manner to give a full account of such phenomena: a form having a double status would be fundamentally a preposition, which could fulfil the slot of a prefix in a morphological construction; the construction would then give the appropriate meaning to the “derived” lexeme (Booij, 2010).

Yet this analysis, which would have the advantage of simplicity, does not allow us to give an account of all the bound uses of some prepositions (e.g. sur- ‘on/over’); it also fails to explain the use as a formative of other items (e.g. sans- ‘without’, or some usages of avant- ‘before’ or après- ‘after / behind’). Hence, we suggest to adopt a diachronic perspective to explain the emergence of morphological constructions through contextually grounded uses (among many others Fried, 2013; Traugott and Trousdale, 2013). In this perspective, the notion of prefixoid will turn out to be particularly relevant.

References