Intensifying Prefixes in the Etymologies

by Thorsten Renk

General Considerations

The Etymologies (as found in The Lost Road and in the “Addenda and Corrigenda to the Etymologies” published in Vinyar Tengwar 45 and 46) include several examples of forms that are denoted as “intensified” by Tolkien, among them those that are formed by a prefix. The entry A- (VT45:5) is perhaps the best starting point for a classification of these intensified forms.

We learn there of an intensive prefix, “distinct in origin, though similar in function to the prefixed basic vowel …. The prefix a- was usually combined with dynamic lengthening of the original initial consonant … and it could be applied to fully formed words.” From this, we may infer the following:

- There are two prefixes, “similar in function” (i.e. intensification).
- One of them is a- followed by dynamic lengthening of the first consonant, the other one is the prefixed basic (i.e. root) vowel (called in Quenya the sundóma).
- The prefix a- could be applied to fully formed words (it stands to reason that this is said by way of contrast with the prefixed sundóma, implying that this mechanism applied only to roots, not to fully-formed words).

In the following, we explore what is known about these two distinct prefixes in greater detail.

The Prefixed Sundóma

In most instances, we observe the prefixed sundóma as something applied to a CE root to form an intensified CE root. Thus, there is no difference in the application to Noldorin or Qenya forms. Nevertheless, there is some amount of variation to this concept found within the Etymologies. In particular, we can observe the following variations:

- Prefixed sundóma without modification of the following root-initial consonant, cf. NAR₁- (V:348) and ANÁR- (V:374).
- Prefixed sundóma with “fortification” of the following root-initial consonant, cf. NIS- (V:378) and INDIS- (V:361) (instead of **INIS-).

We find direct evidence for this mechanism in V:361, second entry I- — the gloss is “intensive prefix where i is base vowel” and from the examples ITHIL- ’Moon’ (THIL-, SIL-) and INDIS- = ndis- ‘bride’ we learn that indeed this prefix doesn’t seem to be applied to fully formed words but to the roots THIL- (SIL-) or NDIS-. VT45:17 adds the additional information (confirming what has been said above) that the prefix is used “with or without fortified following consonant”.

What is meant by that remark is readily apparent from NDIS- (V:375) where we learn that this is a “strengthening of NIS ‘woman’”. So while it is permissible to use both the prefixed sundóma and the strengthening of the first consonant for an intensified form, it is not necessary. This is somewhat contradicted by the entry E- (VT45:11), likewise glossed “intensive prefix … when base vowel is e” but with the additional remark “followed by
The Intensifying Prefixes A- and N-

In contrast to the prefixed sundóma, there is a second class of intensifying prefixes found in the Etymologies which is seen being applied to individual words (instead of roots). Thus, this class of prefixes acts in a different way on Noldorin and Qenya forms. Tolkien's ideas involve not only prefixion of a vowel (in fact, a single vowel as prefix is never seen within this class) but also addition of a consonant or dynamic lengthening of the initial consonant of the intensified word. There is evidence that Tolkien changed the underlying concept during his work on the Etymologies (and we will try to establish a tentative chronology later).

For Noldorin, the following variations of this type of prefix can be found:

- Prefixion of a with dynamic lengthening of the following consonant, e.g. angol (aňňol-) (VT45:5) from unintensified ţol- (V:378).
- Prefixion of the sundóma with dynamic lengthening of the following consonant, e.g. ongol (oňňol-) (VT46:6) from unintensified ţol- (V:378).

In Qenya, the expression of this prefix is quite different. We can observe the following variations:

- Prefix an, am, aň, dependent on the initial consonant of the following word, e.g. ankale (VT45:5) from an unintensified *kale; cf. kala (V:362).
- A prefix with vowel and nasal determined by the initial consonant of the following word, e.g. inkale (VT45:36).

Let us now examine the evidence in more detail. Most information about this intensification mechanism is listed in VT45:5 entry A- and VT45:36 entry N-. The two entries apparently refer to the same final prefix, and in fact the entry N- includes a reference to the a- prefix, but no reference to N- is given under A-. While this would suggest that the A- entry reflects Tolkien's earlier ideas, the tentative chronology of the entries outlined by Christopher Tolkien in V:344 would suggest that A- reflects in fact Tolkien's later ideas on the subject (and we will provide supporting evidence for this interpretation from post-Etymologies sources later).
Under N-, Tolkien describes for Quenya an intensive prefix as a “blend of a- prefix + dynamic lengthening and a base-vowel + nasal initials and of the syllabic forms of nasal initials as mbbar”. The resulting prefix takes the shape “an- before vowels (rare); um before p, q, v (umb); an before t, l (−d, and), r (arr), l (all), s (ass), w (y) (anw); iə before k, g and hence = before vowel (ink, ingle)”.

The entry l (−d) presumably indicates that when a Quena word-initial l is derived from a root with D- that this consonant reappears when the prefix is added. In addition, the entry provides the examples umpa ‘build’, ikale ‘radiance’, ‘Sun’, antara ‘very lofty’, Antaro a name and unquale ‘agony’. Considering e.g. umpa and the root PAN- ‘place, set, fix in place’ (V:380) we see that this is indeed distinct from the simple prefixion of the sundóma, which would yield *APAN-. Thus, the quality of the vowel of this intensive prefix depends on the quality of the initial consonant of the root.

In Noldorin this prefix “appears as a with dynamic lengthening afarch, angol (aññol- “), referring to the unintensified park, ñol. The first of these Noldorin examples can be found under the entry PÁRAK- (V:380) meaning ‘dry’, the second under ñOL- ‘smell’ meaning ‘stench’ (V:378). We will come back to the meaning of the dynamic lengthening shortly. Note that angol again shows development different from simple prefixion of the base vowel — the sundóma is ñ and yet a is used as the prefix.

We find a (possible) change in this scheme in VT46:6 where we learn that angol, aññol- appear to have had their initial vowel altered, “possibly to ongol and oññol- respectively.” Thus, Tolkien here seems to have blurred the distinction even more and introduced a system in Noldorin in which the sundóma was prefixed, combined with a dynamic lengthening of the initial consonant of the root. However, if we look at entry A- (which according to Christopher Tolkien’s chronology would be the latest), aññol- reappears, so this was probably a transient idea. In this later entry we learn that the prefix is indeed a- (in Noldorin; for Quenya see below) and we learn how the dynamic lengthening proceeds, e.g. parkā ‘dry’, ON parkha, N parch, but apparkā ‘arid, very dry’; ON apparkha, N afarch. Thus, dynamic lengthening seems to imply that the consonant is doubled in the CE stage and the subsequent phonetic developments are carried through to Noldorin. We may thus e.g. expect c- > ach-, t- > ath-, p- > aph- > af-, s- > ass-, n- > amn- , m- > amm- and possibly g- > ang-, b- > amb-, d- > and-. This is confirmed by “N angos ‘horror’, a + dynamic ñgoss- where ñg is dynamic length[ening] = gg” (VT45:15). Owing to the relation with N-, the prefix would conceivably become an- before vowels. Note that there is likely a similarity to the effects of nasal mutation for a prefix *an-.

The Quenya evolution likewise undergoes a revision — the prefix is now said to be an, am, aiñ, a generalized form. We see this in action in amparka ‘very dry’ (where the historical form *apparka is rejected), antara ‘very high’ and ankale ‘radiance’. The last example is especially interesting, as it apparently replaces ikale, confirming that Tolkien abandoned the concept of having a different vowel dependent on the initial consonant. There are still some traces of this phenomenon left, though — we learn that un, um appear before q, p, b, “but owing to the influence of û- … used only in an evil sense, as unquale ‘agony’”, a strengthened form to the root KWAL- ‘die in pain’ (V:366).

### Intensification in Post-Etymologies Sources

Tolkien seems to have stuck with prefixing the sundóma to the CE root vs. an intensive prefix a(n, m, n). The clearest example is Quenya ancalima (LR:704, L:278–79) ‘exceedingly bright’ rather than **inalima or **akcalima, and thus following the formation seen in Etym. ankale rather than inkale, and supporting the idea that A- represents Tolkien’s later decision.

In XI:415 Tolkien makes an interesting distinction between an inflectional prefix seen in ekwē, which is said to be a primitive past tense “marked by the “augment” or reduplicated base vowel and the long sundóma”; cf. akāra ‘made, did’ (ibid.) and the extension or intensification seen in akwā (from kwā). Like the intensifying prefix a-, this past tense prefix appears to be applied to fully-formed words, not to CE roots.

Sindarin and Quenya estel ‘hope’ are said to be derived by prefixion of the sundóma to the root stel (whence e.g. S thel ‘intend, mean, purpose, resolve, will’; XI:318).

In XII:358 we find Aran Elinor, translated ‘the Elder King’. This can conceivably be derived from OS *anjarā with subsequent i-affection of the prefix vowel a > ai (which in certain
environments as here further > ei, cf. the plural pattern alph > eilph, UT:265) and would hence involve a prefix an. The same prefix may be seen in Cuio i Pheriain anaann! (LR:932) 'may the Halflings live long!' (L:308) — that is, if anaann is not to be interpreted as dative an + and 'for [a] long [time]' but instead as an intensified form anaann 'exceedingly long'. Neither interpretation is supported over the other by the actual translation.

XI:311, 315 has the forms thent/estent, possibly meaning 'short'/? 'very short'. If the latter is indeed an intensified form, it clearly is interesting. Should we assume that this reflects a prefix e with the consequent re-emergence (actually, preservation) of the original initial root consonants st- in internal position? This would not be a straightforward development, since the root is apparently STINTĀ- and so the sundōma would be i and the historically correct form would seem to be *istinta > istent (as a-affection doesn't occur throughout the whole word, cf. silimā > silef not **self, V:385). But the prefixed vowel could then well be subject to analogical leveling, patterned after forms like thel/estel, XI:318 or thanc/nestegi, V:388 which show that the re-emergence of the original root consonants in the presence of a prefix is not uncommon. Tolkien also considered the fully analogical form #ethen 'shorter' in V:192 in which the original cluster did not re-emerge. On the other hand, an original a- prefix might be i-affected by the sundōma i before itself being changed by a-affection, i.e. *astinta > *estinta > estent; but this is not a likely explanation as it would require that i-affection and a-affection did not act in the usual order. Thus, the most likely conclusion is that we observe an intensification of the CE root here. The pair thâr 'stiff grass' and gwastar 'hummock', V:388, with the re-emergence of the original consonant cluster in the presence of the prefix gwa- which is used only "in old cmps.", V:399, seems to support the idea that the re-emergence of root consonants is typical for old formations and that estent would therefore not be recent.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Carl F. Hostetter and Florian “Lothenon” Dombach for interesting discussions and valuable comments leading to this article.

Bibliography


See also the general Tengwestië Bibliography.

Change Log

* 2008-11-08 14:27:27: Formatting changes only: converted text to Gentium/Basic, deprecated all Gentium tags, converted combining diacritics to modifiers where possible.

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