

On the Structure of Syntax-Morphology Interface: Evidence from Suspended Affixation

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Suspended affixation, i.e., sharing of one suffix by several conjuncts, has been mostly studied on the material of Turkish (Kornfilt 1996, Kabak 2007, Broadwell 2008). In this paper, I use data from Ossetic and Eastern Armenian to argue that the suspended affixation is a result of phonological deletion that occurs *after* the insertion of the phonological exponents of morphemes in derivation. That serves as an independent piece of evidence for positing a morphological module between the narrow syntax and the PF.

Data. The phenomenon is amply manifested by Ossetic and, on a much smaller scale, by Armenian. For conjoined nouns, the suspended affixation is readily available in these languages:

- (1) a. *[Alan ema Soslan]-i fewwitton*
A and S-OBL I.saw
'I saw Alan and Soslan.'; Digor Ossetic (fieldwork)
- b. *šat haj-er aprum = en [Moskva jev Piter]-um*
many Armenian-PL live=PRS.3PL MOSCOW and Piter-LOC
'Many Armenians live in Moscow and Petersburg.' Eastern Armenian (fieldwork)

Somewhat unexpectedly, the straightforward generalization of this type of example for pronouns turns out to be ungrammatical¹:

- (2) a. **du ema medin-i fewwitton*
you.NOM and M.-OBL I.saw
'I saw you and Madina.' (intended); Digor Ossetic
- b. **du ema medin-e-bel isembaltten*
you.NOM and M-NOM-SUP I.met
'I met you and Madina.' (intended); Digor Ossetic
- c. **jes u k^hez-anic^h nver*
I.NOM and you.DAT-ABL gift
'a gift from you and me' (intended); Eastern Armenian
- d. **Usuc^h ič^h-ə hpartanum = e na jev dzez-anov*
teacher-DEF be.proud=PRS.3SG (s)he.NOM and I.DAT-INSTR
'The teacher is proud of her/him and me.'; Eastern Armenian

However, suspended affixation becomes fully grammatical in Ossetic and considerably improves in Armenian when the first conjunct is an oblique form of the pronoun:

- (3) a. *dew ema medine-bel isembaltten*
you.OBL and M-NOM-SUP I.met
'I met you and Madina.'; Digor Ossetic
- b. *indz u k^hez-anic^h nver*
I.DAT and you.DAT-ABL gift
'a gift from you and me'; Eastern Armenian
- c. *??Usuc^h ič^h-ə hpartanum = e nran jev dzez-anov*
teacher-DEF be.proud=PRS.3SG he.DAT and I.DAT-INSTR

¹ For some speakers of Iron Ossetic, certain examples somewhat improve when the nominative-marked conjunct is in the 1st person:

- (i) *?vž emv dola-t-y čyžg-en evn kerezi cer-en nal i*
I.NOM and Dola-PL-OBL girl-DAT without each.other live no.more exist.3SG
'The Dolaevs' daughter and I cannot live without each other any more.' Max Dug 2007 Iron Ossetic

However, this example was judged unacceptable or hardly acceptable by many speakers, despite its being extracted from a literary text.

‘The teacher is proud of her/him and me.’; Eastern Armenian

A (partial) explanation of this fact comes from the structure of pronominal paradigms in Ossetic and Armenian: what is allowed to stand as the first conjunct is actually the largest extant independent pronoun that serves as the stem for the corresponding form: *indɕ* I.DAT for *indɕ-anic^h*

I.ABL, *dew* you.OBL for *dewbel* you.SUP etc.

Table 1. Declension of personal pronouns in (Digor) Ossetic (fragment)

	1SG	2SG
Nominative	<i>ɛz</i>	<i>du</i>
Oblique	<i>mɛn</i>	<i>dew</i>
The rest of cases, illustrated by the superessive	<i>mɛn-bel</i>	<i>dew-bel</i>

Table 2. Declension of personal pronouns in Standard Eastern Armenian (fragment) (Dum-Tragut 2009)

	1SG	2SG	3SG
Nominative	<i>jɛs</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>na</i>
Dative	<i>indɕ</i>	<i>k^hɛz</i>	<i>nra-n</i>
Ablative	<i>indɕ-(a)nic^h</i>	<i>k^hɛz-(a)nic^h</i>	<i>nra-n-ic^h</i>
Instrumental	<i>indɕ-(a)nov</i>	<i>k^hɛz-(a)nov</i>	<i>nra-n-ov</i>

These data suggest that suspended affixation should be best analyzed as a manifestation of ellipsis on the post-morphological level.

Analysis. Assuming the late insertion of phonological exponents, we conclude that the deletion of the case suffix must occur after the allomorph of the first conjunct stem has been chosen – otherwise, it would have been impossible to choose between the allomorphs of the stem.

Potential alternative explanations of the phenomenon are: (a) to postulate case agreement between the conjuncts or (b) to assume that oblique-marked pronouns are default forms (see, a.o., Schütze (2001) for this kind of analysis of English accusative pronouns). Neither of these explanations seems to be tenable. Case agreement is unattested elsewhere in Ossetic and Armenian, and the explanation (a) would look entirely stipulative (and, moreover, would fail to explain why the agreement takes precisely this shape.) Nor does there exist any evidence that oblique-marked pronouns are default forms in Ossetic and Armenian: they only surface in environments where the oblique (resp. the dative) is assigned, or in suspended affixation constructions of the type (3a-c).

Although the idea to analyze the suspended affixation as an instance of ellipsis is very natural, the fact that the ellipsis occurs after the choice of phonological exponents has far-reaching consequences for the architecture of the grammar. Assuming that the ellipsis is triggered semantically, it means that certain interpretable features remain semantically visible after the insertion. Probably this stage of derivation, with phonological exponents already inserted but semantic features yet undeleted, precisely *is* the morphology.

If my proposal is on the right track, it could probably also explain the choice of allomorph in the suppletion effect in French, as observed by Schlenker (2010).

References

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ABL ablative; DAT dative; DEF definite; INSTR instrumental; LOC locative; NOM nominative; OBL oblique; PL plural; POSS possessive; PRS present; SUP superessive