

When vowel harmony has a say in morpho-syntax: A case from Suspended Affixation

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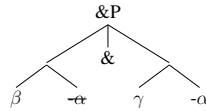
Suspended affixation (SA henceforth) is a phenomenon in which some affix(es) α is affixed to periphery of the coordination but interpreted for all coordinates. (1) shows a canonical example of SA in Turkish. Recent research proposed two analyses for this phenomenon: morphological ellipsis and phrasal affixation, shown in (2) and (3) respectively [1, 4, 5, a.o.].

(1) *John ve Mary-ye sor.*

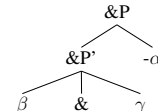
John and Mary-DAT ask

‘Ask it to John and Mary.’

(2)



(3)



Weisser [9] proposes that these analyses are distinguished in two respects. The first one is phonological. The structure in (3) is excluded when there is some phonological interaction between the suffix and the stem that is constrained by locality (e.g. wordhood or sisterhood). According to Weisser [9], since Turkish case endings show vowel harmony with the stem, the structure (2) must be adopted. The main observation in this paper is that in Turkish, this conclusion contradicts another criterion used by Weisser [9]. Specifically, the analysis in (2) leads to the consequence that special stem allomorphs should be preserved under SA. As an example, Weisser [9] mentions the Mari phrase *memna den nune-m* ‘us and them-ACC.’ This is an SA construction where the first conjunct (*memna*) does not exist as an independent word, and only occurs as a host for case markers (e.g., *memna-m* ‘us-ACC’). (Cf. [3] for similar proposal for Ossetic.)

With the morphological criterion in place, let us go back to Turkish. Turkish is for the most part a purely agglutinative language with no stem allomorphy. An exception is the 1SG and 2SG pronouns. For example, the 1SG pronoun *ben* ‘I’ has a phonologically unexpected dative shape *ban-a* ‘I-DAT’ (instead of the expected **ben-e*), see (4).

(4) *Ban-a ve John’a mektup gel-miş.*

1SG-DAT and John-DAT letter come-PST.

‘A letter came for me and John.’

(5) *Ben ve John’a mektup gel-miş.*

1SG and John-DAT letter come-PST.

‘A letter came for me and John.’

Now if Turkish had the structure in (2), we would expect the deletion of *-a* in (4) to yield *ban* in the first conjunct under suspended affixation. But this is contrary to the fact, since the only acceptable form under suspended affixation is *ben*, see (5). This contradicts the conclusion based on vowel harmony.

In order to resolve the paradox, I explore an analysis which is a modified version of the morphological ellipsis structure in (2). What this paper introduces a small modification: namely that phonology may re-rank morphologically suitable candidates in a given context [2, 8]. This analysis is grounded in a framework with a post-syntactic lexicon and a spellout algorithm based on cyclic movements [7]. This machinery matches syntactic trees with the spell out candidates that reside in the lexicon. The idea is that in the dative, both *ben* and *ban* can be inserted. Competition arises, and both morphology and phonology have their say in the selection of candidates. Under normal circumstances, *ban* would be chosen, because it is morphologically more specific. The insertion of *ban* is then followed by the insertion of the dative marker, which is an underspecified vowel with a floating consonant that harmonizes with the stem *ban*, and it is realized as the ending *-a*.

Now consider a structure where the deletion process applies: [*Bana ve John’a*]. In this context, *ban* is followed by a non-harmonic vowel *e* within *ve*. In this context, I propose, the morphological ranking of the candidates based on specificity (*ban* > *ben*) is reversed by a phonological preference for selecting an allomorph that harmonizes with the following vowel in *ve* ‘and.’ As a result, *ben*

appears in 5. I note here that even though the regressive inter-word vowel harmony is not the canonical vowel harmony in Turkish, it is contested as shown in 6 [6]. Additionally, the alveolar nasal [n] in *ben* is also assimilated to labiodental nasal [m] when followed by the verb *ve*.

(6) [nɛ aru-joI-sun] → [na aru-joI-sun]
what search-PROG-2SG → what search-PROG-2SG
'What are you looking for?'

Crucially, the solution in this paper both resolves the paradox, and it is compatible with the fact that regular nouns will not harmonize with *ve*. This is because nouns have only a

single root allomorph in the lexicon, and so no re-ranking of morphologically suitable candidates takes place. Similarly, the dative ending will not harmonize with *ve*, because it also does not have multiple allomorphs due to an underspecified vowel. One counterpoint may be the marginal acceptance of phrase *Ben ya da John'a* 'I or John-DAT'. However, this phrase is less acceptable compared to *Ben ve John'a* 'I and John-DAT'. For now, I am not able to provide descriptive statistics of acceptability judgments for this difference due to small number of participants and really wide standard errors, and for now the intuition is based on the personal judgments. In the future work, I will provide the results of an ongoing experiment.

References

[1] G. A. Broadwell. 2008. [2] P. Bye and P. Svenonius. 2012. [3] D. Erschler. *Glossa*. 2018. [4] E. Guseva and P. Weisser. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*. 2018. [5] J. Kornfilt. 2012. [6] B. Rona. 1986. [7] M. Starke. *Nordlyd*. 2009. [8] M. Starke. *Class notes*. 2020. [9] P. Weisser. *Syntax*. 2019.