

Deriving Allomorphy and Suppletion as PF-Idioms

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Claim: I claim that instances of allomorphy and suppletion should be viewed and derived as PF-idioms: While the parts of regular (LF-)idioms receive a special semantic interpretation in a given syntacto-semantic context, allomorphs and suppletive roots receive a certain spell-out form given the right morphosyntactic context. As a result of this view, a number of cases which have recently been analyzed as locality effects on the trigger-target relation of allomorphy can receive a unified explanation with LF-idioms where similar effects have been argued to follow from a simple restriction on C-Selection. This view of allomorphy can be shown to be (a) empirically more adequate than other approaches to allomorphy/suppletion and (b) conceptually simpler as it uses the same mechanics that have independently been proposed for (LF-)idioms.

Background: A growing body of literature (see e.g. Bobaljik 2012, Moskal & Smith 2016, Smith et al 2017, Bobaljik & Harley 2017) has identified quite a number of cases where structural locality plays a role in determining which nodes in a tree can trigger suppletion on a head in a given configuration. Based on a pattern in the Uto-Aztecan language Hiaki, where only direct objects and single arguments of unaccusatives can trigger number-driven suppletion on the verbal root, Bobaljik & Harley (2017) arrive at the locality constraint in (1).

(1) β may condition α in (a), not (b): (a) $\alpha \dots]_{X^0} \dots \beta$ (b) $\alpha \dots]_{X^n} \dots \beta$, where $n > 0$

Only the first-merged sister of V can trigger suppletion on V. Since B&H want to make sure that head-movement does not extend the domain of allomorphy, specifiers are deliberately excluded from the set of possible suppletion triggers. In a configuration as in (2), where X undergoes head-movement to Y, only Y and CP can trigger allomorphy on X. AP and BP cannot.

(2) $[_{YP} AP [_{Y'} Y [_{XP} BP [_{X'} X CP]]]]$

I want to put forward an alternative view according to which syntactic selection is the decisive prerequisite for context-sensitive spell-out. Assuming the principle in (3), the data from Hiaki are derived since the verb selects only selects for direct objects and subjects of unaccusatives.

(3) α and β can trigger context-sensitive spell-out of each other if one selects the other.

Argumentation: I argue that the selection-based approach is favorable on both empirical as well as conceptual grounds: *Empirical Arguments:* The approaches make the same predictions for all nodes in (2) except for the lower specifier BP. Only in the approach at hand, BP can trigger allomorphy on X since it is selected by X. Specifiers of heads are allowed to trigger allomorphy as long as they are selected. Note however that head-movement still does not extend the domain of allomorphy. AP can still not trigger allomorphy of V. In order to argue for (3), I will present a number of cases where a specifier triggers allomorphy on a head: ① Movement reflexes: In a number of languages, moved elements trigger allomorphy on a variety of functional heads. In Breton, which is a V2 language in matrix clauses, we find that the head which is the target for head-movement of the verb alternates depending on the element in the prefield. If the first element of the clause is nominal, the head (glossed as R in (4)) is spelled out as *a*, otherwise as *e* (see Anderson 1981; Urien 1989,1999; Rezac 2004; Jouitteau 2008). In (4-a), a (nominal) DP has moved to the prefield, in (4-b), a (non-nominal) PP has moved. (ex. (4) from Rezac 2004).

(4) a. Eul levr a lenn Yannig bemdez b. D'ar merc'hed e kasas ar pakadse
 A book R reads Johnny every.day to.the girls R sent.3SG the package
 'Johnny reads a book every day.' 'He sent this package to the girls.'

The alternation between *a* and *e* cannot be plausibly analyzed as agreement since agreement in terms of syntactic category is virtually unattested. Allomorphy wrt. syntactic category however

is widespread. Also, as other Celtic languages, Breton shows agreement only if the agreed-with element is covert. This is crucially not the case here. Finally, the process never applies at a distance, it always depends on the element in the prefield (see Joutiteau 2008 for the same conclusion). And since the preceding element is moved (i.e. focussed or topicalized), we can be sure that we are dealing with a specifier. (5) illustrates the derivation of (4-a). The direct object moves to SpecRP and then triggers allomorphy on R.

$$(5) \quad [_{RP} \text{XP} [\text{R}+\text{v}+\text{V} [_{vP} \text{Subj } \text{v}+\text{V} [_{VP} \text{V } \text{Obj}]]]]$$

Bobaljik & Harley's (2017) approach rules out such configurations since specifiers are excluded as suppletion triggers in general. In the approach at hand, the specifier of RP is allowed to trigger allomorphy on R since it is selected by R - presumably by some sort of EPP-feature triggering movement to the preverbal position. SpecRP still is not allowed to trigger allomorphy on V even though V has undergone head-movement to R. ② Recipient-driven suppletion of verbs *give* and *say*: As Bobaljik & Harley (2017) already note, there are genuine cases where the verbal root supplettes depending on the person of the indirect object. An example comes from Malayalam where the verbal root for *give* has two forms: *koṭukkuka* describes situations where the recipient is 3rd person whereas the root *taruka* describes situations where the recipient is 1st or 2nd person (Asher & Kumar 1997, p.348). If we assume that verbs like *give* with an obligatory recipient role have some kind of Larsonian VP-shell structure, where the verb selects for both the direct and the indirect object, this suppletion pattern is predicted. Bobaljik & Harley (2017) note that these cases seem to be problematic, as they would be forced to assume that the recipient is obligatorily the first-merged object. ③ Conjunction-triggered allomorphy on pronouns: Weisser (2017) lists some cases where the presence of a conjunction triggers allomorphy on pronouns as the first or the second conjunct of coordination, the former of which crucially is standardly assumed to be a specifier.

Conceptual arguments: I want to argue that the present approach is to be preferred on conceptual grounds for several reasons: ① The present approach sheds light on the parallelism between LF and PF as it illustrates the similarities between context-sensitive spell-out and context-sensitive interpretation. If LF-idioms and PF-idioms can be shown to be dependent on the same syntactic concepts, then this provides a strong argument for the architecture of grammar where interpretation and PF-realization are fed by syntax in a parallel way. ② Unlike competing proposals that pose locality restrictions on context-sensitive spell-out, the approach at hand does not introduce novel concepts. It makes use of the independently motivated concept of c-selection and it states that selection is the decisive prerequisite for possible trigger-target relations of allomorphy. It has been argued for extensively by Bruening (2010) that selection constrains LF-idioms in the very same way. His arguments, which are based on various asymmetries with idioms regarding subjects and objects (cf. also Harley & Stone 2013) as well ditransitive constructions, are very similar to the empirical patterns of suppletion (see e.g. Hiaki and Malayalam above). Thus, (3) merely extends the relevance of the constraint to PF-idioms. Competing approaches all require at least a minimum of stipulation as they all introduce some sort of locality domain (as in (1) or the *Accessibility domain* in Moskal 2015 et seq.) that does not coincide with domains that are relevant for other processes.

Selected References: Bruening, B (2010): Ditransitive Asymmetries and a Theory of Idiom Formation. LI 41.4
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