



Vocabulary insertion and locality: Verb suppletion in Northern Paiute

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1 The issue

In Distributed Morphology, the insertion of vocabulary items is sensitive to features of the surrounding context. To derive crosslinguistic patterns of suppletion in comparatives, Bobaljik (2012) imposes a strict locality constraint.

- (1) *Strictly local constraint on vocabulary insertion* (Bobaljik 2012:13)
- a. $\beta \dots [_{XP} \dots \alpha$
 b. $*\beta \dots [_{XP} \dots \alpha$ where β conditions the insertion of α

Verb suppletion in Northern Paiute is an ideal testing ground for this constraint. The form of the verb varies with the number of the subject for intransitives (2–3), and the object for transitives (4).

- (2) a. Su=nana **yadu'a**.
 NOM=man **talk.SG.IPFV**
 'The man is talking.'
 b. lwa-'yu naana **abbika**.
 many-NOM men **talk.PL.IPFV**
 'Many men are talking.'
- (3) a. Su=nana **wi'i-hu**.
 NOM=man **fall.SG-PFV**
 'The man fell.'
 b. lwa-'yu naana **wiide-hu**.
 many-NOM men **fall.PL-PFV**
 'Many men fell.'
- (4) a. Niï ka=tihidda **patsa-hu**.
 I ACC=deer **kill.SG-PFV**
 'I killed the deer.'
 b. Niï iwa-ggu tihidda **koi-hu**.
 I many-ACC deer **kill.PL-PFV**
 'I killed many deer.'

This verb suppletion does not pattern like agreement in several respects, and it is generally independent of a language's agreement system (Durie 1986, Hale et al. 1991).

2 Suppletion is not conditioned strictly locally

Under the strictly local constraint, objects can trigger suppletion (4a–b), because they are contained within VP; unaccusative subjects can also trigger suppletion (3a–b), since they originate inside VP. But, if external arguments originate in Spec-vP (Kratzer 1996), they should *not* be able to condition suppletion of unergative verbs.

For Hiaki, Bobaljik & Harley (2013) argue that the strictly local constraint is satisfied. All intransitive suppletive verbs are unaccusative, since they cannot take the applicative (assumed to be incompatible with unaccusatives).

In Northern Paiute, however, there are unergative verbs that undergo suppletion: e.g. *yadua* ~ *abbiga* 'talk' (2a–b). The passive distinguishes unergatives (5a) from unaccusatives (5b).

- (5) a. **Na**-bida-hu.
PASS-build.fire-PFV
 'There was fire building.'
 b. $*\mathbf{Na}$ -na'i.
PASS-burn.IPFV
 Intended: 'There is burning.'
- (6) a. **Na**-yadu'a.
PASS-talk.SG.IPFV
 'There is talking.'
 b. $*\mathbf{Na}$ -wi'i-hu.
PASS-fall.SG-PFV
 Intended: 'There was falling.'

Some intransitive suppletive verbs are grammatical in the passive, including *yadua* ~ *abbiga* 'talk' (6a), while others are not (6b). Thus, there are at least some suppletive verbs that are unergatives.

3 A phase-based locality constraint

I adopt a version of Embick's (2010) phase-based constraint: an item can be conditioned by elements in the same spell-out domain or the next highest spell-out domain (7a), if the lower domain does not contain a phase (7b).

- (7) *Phase-based constraint on vocabulary insertion* (cf. Embick 2010:53)
- a. $\delta [\dots \beta \dots \alpha$ or $\beta \dots \delta [\dots \alpha$
 b. $*\beta \dots \delta [\dots \alpha \dots \delta$ where β conditions the insertion of α and where δ is a phase head (v, C, or D)

This follows plausibly from cyclic spell-out if merging a phase head triggers spell-out of its complement only when it contains another phase head. When it does, a vocabulary item in the lower spell-out domain is inserted before any elements in the higher spell-out domain are merged, and thus cannot be conditioned by them.

As a result, for transitive verbs, just the internal argument conditions suppletion: (4b) vs. (8). The VP contains a phase head (D), and so the suppletive verb is already inserted by the time the external argument is merged.

- (8) $*\mathbf{lwa}$ -'yu naana simi-ggu tihidda **koi**-hu.
 many-NOM men one-ACC deer **kill.PL-PFV**
 Intended: 'Many men killed one deer.'

But, the phase-based constraint still allows unergative subjects to condition suppletion (2a–b). Since there is no phase head inside VP, the verb has not yet been inserted when the external argument is merged.

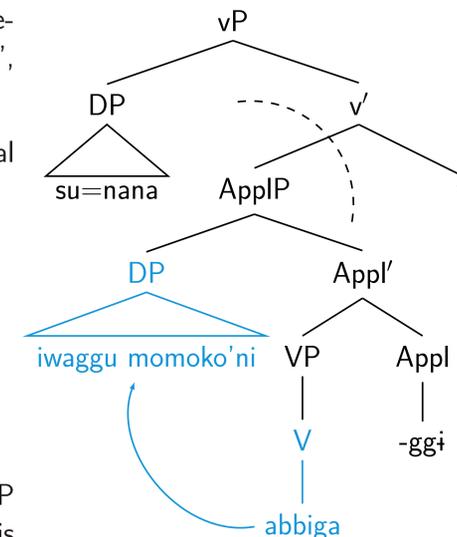
4 A prediction about applicatives

The applicative suffix in Northern Paiute has a benefactive interpretation with some verbs (though a causative interpretation with others). This is a high applicative, since it is compatible: i) with unergatives, as well as transitives and unaccusatives, and ii) with static verbs not describing a transfer of possession (Pylkkänen 2008:18).

There are at least three unergative suppletive verbs that have a benefactive interpretation with the applicative suffix: *yadua* ~ *abbiga* 'talk', *ti'atia* ~ *tibimua* 'play', and *issaye* ~ *issagoi* 'tell a lie'.

Assuming the applied object is introduced in Spec-AppIP, the strictly local constraint predicts—incorrectly—that it cannot condition suppletion.

- (9) Su=nana **iwa-ggu** **momoko'ni** **abbiga**-ggi-ti.
 NOM=man **many-ACC** women **talk.PL-APPL-TNS**
 'The man is talking for many women.'
 (10) $*\mathbf{lwa}$ -'yu **nanaana** ka=mogo'ni **abbiga**-ggi-ti.
many-NOM men ACC=woman **talk.PL-APPL-TNS**
 Intended: 'Many men are talking for the woman.'



By contrast, the phase-based constraint correctly predicts that the DP in Spec-AppIP can condition suppletion of the verb (9), because it is contained within the same spell-out domain as the verb. It also correctly predicts that the external argument *cannot* condition suppletion (10), since the lower spell-out domain contains a phase head.

Vocabulary insertion is not subject to a strictly local constraint: it can be conditioned by elements located in a higher projection.