**CONTEXTUAL ALLOMORPHY IN THE MEHRI DP**

**Introduction:** This project introduces novel data from Mehri (Modern South Arabian, Semitic) that exhibits contextual allomorphy, and develops a Distributed Morphology analysis of the allomorphies evidenced in pronominal possessive constructions. The Mehri data presents a puzzle in which certain plural features are apparently not exponed in the context of an agreement marker (an adjacent AGR node), despite the evidence that the agreement markers subsequently exhibit allomorphy triggered by this plural feature. Mehri, a language largely unfamiliar to modern linguistic theory, can thus inform current debate on the nature of contextual allomorphy, locality and Vocabulary Insertion. The analysis presented ultimately provides further support for the idea sketched in Adger, Béjar and Harbour (AB&H, 2003) that grammatically-conditioned inwardly-sensitive allomorphy can be licensed hierarchically. Additionally, the analysis demonstrates empirically that Linearization/Vocabulary Insertion (VI) of a complex head occurs cyclically node-by-node (contra Embick 2010). Finally, the analysis necessitates that idiosyncratic properties of the Root (List 1) are more highly specified than phonological or grammatical features with regards to the Subset Principle and VI.

**Data:** Watson (2012) and Rubin (2010) both describe pronominal possessive constructions in Mehri as nouns followed by suffixed pronouns. Using diagnostics to distinguish clitics from object agreement (Kramer 2014), I demonstrate that these suffixes are not pronouns (Ds) but instead possessor agreement markers from a pro-dropped possessor. For singular nouns, the agreement markers are straightforward suffixes that agree in φ-features with the possessor.

1. a. bayt
   house
   b. bayt-i
   house-POS.1S
   (Watson 2012)

   The plural data, however, is more complex. Mehri plurals can be formed via a plural suffix or, more commonly, via a change in the vocalic pattern (the “broken plural”, a hallmark of many Semitic languages). If a plural is formed via a suffix (as in (2b)), the suffix is absent in the presence of the agreement marker, which takes a special plural form. Note the different forms of the agreement marker in (1b) and (2c), despite the φ-features of the possessor remaining the same (also note that the feminine suffix is exponed only in the context of the plural feature in (2b) and (2c). I argue that this is contextual allomorphy of n, seen in select feminine plurals).

2. a. ḥayd
   hand
   b. hād-ūt-on
   hand-F-PL
   c. hād-it-ya
   hand- F-POS.1S
   my hands
   (Watson 2012)

   However, if a plural is formed via ablaut, the plural form of the noun remains unchanged and the plural form of the agreement marker is suffixed (the deletion of the schwa between [w] and [k] in (3c) is the result of a common phonological process in Mehri):

3. a. xalēk
   clothes
   b. xalōwak
   cloth.PL
   c. xalāw-k-aya
   cloth.PL-POS.1S
   my clothes
   (Rubin 2010)

   Given this set of facts, I propose a DM analysis that is constrained enough to prevent the plural feature from being exponed as a suffix in certain contexts ((2c) vs. (2b), but allows for the plural feature to be exponed via a vocalic pattern in all contexts ((3c) vs. (3b)). Additionally, I account for the special plural forms of the possessive agreement that appear regardless of whether the plural feature is exponed ((2c), (3c) vs (1b)).

**Analysis:** I show the following allomorphic relations in Mehri pronominal possessive constructions:

```
   Inwards Sensitivity
   \ /
   / * n * Num * AGR
   Outwards Sensitivity
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Such relations include the lexically-conditioned inwardly-sensitive allomorphy of Num to the Root (analogous to English plural allomorphy with /-z/ and /-en/, roughly corresponding to a plural suffix (2b)
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or a broken plural (3b)) and grammatically-conditioned outwardly-sensitive allomorphy of Num to AGR, meaning that Num’s adjacency to an AGR node will cause insertion of a further specified Vocabulary Item (accounting for the apparent lack of plural marking, demonstrated in the VI (4b) below).

Additionally, the above schema indicates grammatically-conditioned inwardly-sensitive allomorphy of AGR to Num, a problematic type of allomorphy for the DM assumption of “rewriting”: once Vocabulary Insertion has taken place, the grammatical features are discharged and no longer available in the derivation (Bobaljik 2000). The Mehri data highlights this issue with the different forms of the agreement marker dependent on the plurality of the head noun.

To address this problem, I sketch several proposed solutions (Carstairs-McCarthy 2001, Adger, Béjar and Harbour 2003, Embick 2010, and Harizanov and Gribanova 2013), and determine the solution from AB&H that allows inwardly-sensitive grammatically-conditioned allomorphy that makes reference to hierarchical relations best fits the data (contra Embick 2010, which states that linear concatenation is a prerequisite for contextual allomorphy). In the AB&H solution, the AGR depend upon its sisterhood to the non-terminal Num node (that retains the plural feature specification) to condition its allomorphy, seen below:

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[PL]  AGR
  /
[PL]...
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Such a proposal allows the retention of the DM assumption of rewriting, and additionally bears consequences with respect to the timing of Linearization and Vocabulary Insertion. While Embick (2010) assumes that Linearization occurs across a full Spell-Out cycle before Vocabulary Insertion begins (to create the requisite linear concatenation), the present proposal necessitates that Linearization/Vocabulary Insertion happen cyclically node-by-node.

Finally, the project requires a specificity hierarchy of grammatical, phonological, and lexical features with respect to Vocabulary Insertion and the Subset Principle. Supporting assumptions made by Harizanov and Gribanova (2013), I demonstrate that phonological features are more highly specified than grammatical features. Additionally, I propose that idiosyncratic properties of specific Roots are more highly specified than either phonological or grammatical features, using the Mehri “broken plural” data seen in (3). This proposed hierarchy is demonstrated in the ordered list of Vocabulary Items below:

(4) Selected Vocabulary Items for [Num]

a. [PL] ←→ ḍw / { √xlk, √xtm, √ftx...}

b. [PL] ←→ ∅ / _AGR

c. [PL] ←→ -ǝm

In (4) above, the most highly specified VI is that which makes reference to certain Roots (4a), followed by the VI that makes reference to a certain grammatical context (4b). Such a hierarchy ensure that the plural feature is always exponed in Roots that take a broken plural, while the plural suffix is not exponed in the context of an AGR node, thus generating the data in (2) and (3).

**Conclusion:** This project introduces data from an understudied language to the contextual allomorphy literature and utilizes it to distinguish amongst competing theories. The data presented bears directly on locality conditions of contextual allomorphy, as well as the timing and nature of Vocabulary Insertion.