

PLURAL SUPPLETION IN BARGUZIN BURYAT: CASE CONTAINMENT VERSUS *ABA

Keywords: morphology, suppletion, ABA, case, Mongolic

INTRODUCTION: Recent works in morphology observe the rareness of “ABA” suppletion patterns, and thus construct theories that don’t generate them. If such theories are right, any ABA pattern is a puzzle. In this project, I examine an ABA pattern in the Barguzin dialect of Buryat (Mongolic, Russia) using original fieldwork data. This language allows a suppletive plural in ACC and GEN contexts, but not in NOM or oblique ones. This is an ABA pattern, following works on containment relations in case features (Blake 1994, Caha 2009, Zompi 2017, Smith et al 2018) which posit that ACC/GEN features should be present in oblique forms, and thus be able to trigger this suppletion. I argue that case containment holds in Barguzin Buryat, but that independent properties of this suppletive plural conflict with obliques, yielding an accidental ABA pattern.

THE SUPPLETION FACTS: In Barguzin Buryat, the default plural $-(n)u:d$ (PL1) is possible in all case forms. There is also a colloquial plural $-(n)u:fa$ (PL2), which is only allowed in ACC/GEN contexts. Since there is no phonological process in the language that could derive $-(n)u:fa$ from $-(n)u:d$, nor a semantic difference between these forms, I regard $-(n)u:fa$ as a contextually triggered suppletive variant of $-(n)u:d$.

Example (1) shows that the suppletive plural $-(n)u:fa$ is banned in nominative contexts:

- | | | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------------------|----|---|-------------|
| (1) a. | bu:za-[nu:d]/[* nu:fa] | amtatai | b. | noxoi-[nu:d]/[* nu:fa] | jədə: |
| | Buuzā-PL1/*PL2 | delicious | | dog-PL1/*PL2 | came |
| | | ‘Buuzā are delicious’ | | | ‘Dogs came’ |

Examples (2) and (3) show that the suppletive plural is permitted in ACC and GEN contexts, respectively:

- | | | | | | |
|--------|--|-----------------------|----|--|--------------------------|
| (2) a. | bi bu:za-[nu:d-i:jə]/[nu:fa] | əɖjə:b | b. | bi gər-[nu:d-i:jə]/[nu:fa] | xaranab |
| | 1SG buuzā-PL1-ACC/PL2 | ate | | 1SG house-PL1-ACC/PL2 | see |
| | | ‘I ate buuzā’ | | | ‘I see houses’ |
| (3) a. | mi:sgəi-[nu:d-əi]/[nu:fa] | χɛ:l-n:əd uta | b. | ʃono-[nu:d-əi]/[nu:fa] | ʃudən xursa |
| | cat-PL1-GEN-/PL2 | tail-PL long | | wolf-PL1-GEN-/PL2 | tooth sharp |
| | | ‘Cats tails are long’ | | | ‘Wolf’s teeth are sharp’ |

Finally, the suppletive plural is banned in oblique contexts, as (4) shows for dative and ablative. The same holds for the other obliques, comitative and instrumental:

- | | | | | | |
|--------|--|---------------------------|----|--|-----------------------------|
| (4) a. | bi mi:sgəi-[nu:d]/[* nu:fa] | -tə mʲaxa ʊgə:b | b. | bi bagʃa-[nu:d]/[* nu:fa] | -χa: ainab |
| | 1SG cat-PL1/*PL2-DAT | meat gave | | 1SG teacher-PL1/*PL2-ABL | afraid |
| | | ‘I gave meat to the cats’ | | | ‘I’m afraid of the teacher’ |

Puzzle: If it is correct, as a number of works argue, that oblique cases contain features related to ACC (and likely also GEN), why is the suppletive plural $-(n)u:fa$ possible in ACC/GEN contexts, but not oblique ones?

Solution: Notice that in (2/3), when $-(n)u:fa$ occurs, typical ACC/GEN marking is absent. From this I’ll argue that $-(n)u:fa$ is really a portmanteau of number and case features, some of the latter of which oblique marking also depends on. Consequently, oblique morphology and the suppletive plural conflict.

BACKGROUND ON FEATURE HIERARCHIES AND *ABA: A growing body of work observes a (near) absence of ABA morphological paradigms (Bobaljik 2012, Moskal 2015, 2018, Smith et al 2018, a.o.). Many such works argue that ABA patterns are unattested due to the way that morphological realization interacts with featural/structural containment hierarchies. For instance, Bobaljik (2012) shows that ABA adjectival patterns like *good - better - goodest* are essentially absent cross-linguistically, and argues that this is so because the superlative contains comparative features. Thus any suppletion triggered by the comparative will also be triggered by the superlative, yielding the attested ABB patterns like *good - better - best*.

If case features also involve a containment hierarchy, we expect to find a lack of ABA patterns in case-driven suppletion as well. Smith et al (2018) argue that this expectation is born out. Smith et al and Zompi (2017) argue that the case hierarchy maps onto the case categories of Marantz’s (1991) *disjunctive case hierarchy* and much work following. The resulting hierarchy is shown in (5):

- (5) **Case containment hierarchy based on Marantz’s categories**

[[[Unmarked case ((NOM/ABS)] Dependent case ((ACC/ERG)] Oblique/lexical cases]

Marantz (1991) suggested that GEN is noun-internal unmarked case. In contrast, Blake (1994) and Caha (2009) posit hierarchies in which GEN inhabits a position near ACC, properly contained by oblique case features. From this, and following Baker's (2015) observations about the structural parallels between ergative and GEN assignment, I regard GEN as a dependent case, in a natural class with ACC.

If the hierarchy in (5) is correct, oblique cases contain dependent case features. Consequently, the fact that plural suppletion fails in oblique cases in Barguzin Buryat is an ABA pattern that requires explanation. **KEY POINT - THE SUPPLETIVE PLURAL EXPRESSES NUMBER AND CASE:** Explaining this ABA pattern, while also maintaining case containment, depends on the fact that the suppletive plural prevents typical ACC/GEN marking. We saw in (2/3) that while ACC (-i:jə) and GEN (-əi(n)) marking co-occur with the default plural, they disappear when the suppletive plural is used. Including them is ungrammatical, as in (6):

- (6) a. *bi mi:sgəi-[**nə:f-i:jə**] xaranab b. *mi:sgəi-[**nə:f-əin**] χu:l-nə:d uta
 1SG cat-PL2-ACC see cat-PL2-GEN tail-PL long
 'I see cats' 'Cats tails are long'

The final vowel of -(n)u:fA in (6) is omitted due to a regular hiatus-avoiding short vowel deletion process, which would apply in these circumstances. That these examples (as well as the uses of -(n)u:fA in (4) above) are ungrammatical can't be attributed to some general surface constraint against following -(n)u:fA with additional suffixes, because it can be followed by possessive agreement markers.

I argue that -(n)u:fA precludes typical ACC/GEN morphology because it expresses both plural number, and dependent case features. This could be accomplished by fusion (Halle & Marantz 1993), insertion of a morpheme that targets multiple adjacent nodes in the functional sequence (Svenonius 2016, Ostrove 2018), or insertion at a phrasal node dominating those features (Starke 2009, Caha 2009, Radkevich 2010). Either way, I argue that insertion of -(n)u:fA makes the features it expresses unavailable for further realization, following Bobaljik's (2000) claim that spelling-out a feature removes it from the PF derivation. From this basis, a solution to the ABA puzzle which maintains the case containment hypothesis is possible.

A CRASH FROM COMPETITION FOR FEATURES: In some languages, each part of the case hierarchy is spelled-out separately, as Smith et al (2018) claim for Khanty and Kalderaš Romani. In languages where cases are not internally complex on the surface, I assume that case morphology is essentially portmanteau-like, spelling-out all features of the case layer present in a given context. In such a system, which I adopt for Buryat, NOM is the spellout of the feature [Unmarked], ACC and GEN are (context sensitive, verbal vs. nominal) realizations of [Unmarked] plus [Dependent], and oblique cases spell-out the entire hierarchy.

Since the default plural only spells-out the number node, simultaneous realization of dependent or oblique case causes no conflict, as the abbreviated and flattened structures in (7) show:

- (7) a. **Default PL + ACC/GEN marking** b. **Default PL + oblique marking**
 [N # UNMARKED DEPENDENT]

The suppletive plural prevents typical ACC/GEN marking, since it is a portmanteau of number and dependent case features (which contain unmarked features). If the suppletive plural expresses this part of the case hierarchy (8a), but oblique morphology expresses the entire hierarchy (8b), the two compete for the [Unmarked] and [Dependent] features, and thus conflict. Since insertion of oblique case or the suppletive plural consumes features needed by the other, these morphemes cannot coexist in the same nominal form.

- (8) a. **Exponence of suppletive plural** b. **Exponence of oblique morphology**
 [N # UNMARKED DEPENDENT]

Whether the structure is spelled-out bottom-up (as often argued), top-down, or all at once, this conflict will always arise if the suppletive plural is used with obliques. Thus obliques only occur with the default plural.

CONSEQUENCES: This account of the ABA distribution of -(n)u:fA allows the case containment hypothesis to be maintained, since suppletion in oblique environments is blocked by an independent conflict. Importantly, this conflict provides evidence that case containment indeed holds in Barguzin Buryat, at least for dependent case features as a subset of oblique cases. This is because if oblique morphology in this language did not correspond (in part) to dependent case features, there would be no reason for this conflict to arise.