

Pluractionality in Edo: A Distributed Morphology Account

Abstract

The –lv1 suffix in Edo which marks pluractionality is 'sensitive' to the Aktionsart (lexical aspect) of the verbs to which it is attached. When suffixed to accomplishments (e.g., build) it yields a plural reading but an iterative reading with achievements. States and activities which are [-telic] do not license the suffix. Based on empirical data on the interaction between the suffix and the syncretic verb *gbe* ('beat', 'kill' and 'dance'), I argue that (i) a computational system which adopts late insertion accounts for the data in ways in which a system that advocates for the insertion of lexemes early in the derivation does not. (ii) That features need not be erased in the derivation once they have been 'used up' in spell-out (contrary to Bobaljik 2000).

The goal of this paper is to (i) argue for a late insertion/partial specification model of Vocabulary Items (VIs) and (ii) argue against the feature re-writing assumption of Bobaljik (2000) based on data from the cooccurrence patterns between the pluractional suffix and verbs in Edo.

The -lv suffix is one of two inflectional verbal suffixes in Edo and it encodes pluractionality. Examples 1 (a)-(c) below present an illustration of this phenomenon as described in Omoruyi (1986b:70).

1. (a) *dè* 'buy' - *dè-lé* 'buy repeatedly'
- (b) *vù* 'uproot' – *vù-ló* 'uproot repeatedly'
- (c) *bùún* 'break' - *bùn-no* 'break repeatedly'

There are three competing analyses as to the nature of roots; (i) fully phonologically specified – where vocabulary items enter the computational system with phonetic (Embick 2000; Embick and Halle 2005; Embick and Noyer 2006; Borer 2014. (ii) partially specified – roots are devoid of phonetic/semantic information but bear an arbitrary index (Pfau 2000; Acquaviva 2008; Siddiqi, 2009; Harley 2014. (iii) under-specified – under this assumption all list A items (roots and features) receive phonological content only at the PF interface of the grammar.

I present evidence in favor of the partial specification of roots from the polysemous verb *gbe* which is ambiguous between three readings; ‘hit’, ‘kill’ (as in slaughter) and ‘dance’ as shown in examples 2 – 4 below.

(2a) *Ẹtinósà gbé úzò*
Ẹtinosa PST¹.kill antelope
 ‘Ẹtinosa killed an antelope’

(2b) *Ẹtinósà gbè-lé úzò*
Ẹtinosa PST.kill-PLR antelope
 ‘Ẹtinosa killed several antelopes’

(3a) *Ẹtinósà gbé Ozo*
Ẹtinosa PST.hit Ozo
 ‘Ẹtinosa hit Ozo’

(3b) *Ẹtinósà gbè-lé Ozo*
Ẹtinosa PST.hit-PLR Ozo
 ‘Ẹtinosa hit Ozo repeatedly’

(4a) *Ẹfosa gbé nóde*
Ẹfosa PST.dance yesterday
 ‘Ẹfosa danced yesterday’

(4b) **Ẹfosa gbé-le nóde*
 Intended: ‘Efosa danced repeatedly yesterday’

The three readings of this verb have different aktionsart – ‘hit’ is an achievement, ‘kill’ is an accomplishment and ‘dance’ is an activity. Due to the sensitivity of the pluractional suffix to the aktionsart of verbs, it will be problematic for a framework which adopts a full-specification approach as the grammar will be unable to distinguish between the different readings the suffix will have with different Aktionsart classes and which verbs would license the suffix as there would be three roots \sqrt{ghe} competing for insertion and no distinct means of distinguishing between verbs with different aktionsart and this will have implications when the *-lv* suffix is added to the structure. The root index system (Pfau 2002;2009) is adequate in this respect. For example, ‘cat’ could be represented as $\sqrt{3}$ while ‘eat’ is $\sqrt{220}$. In the case of *gbe*, there will be three roots realized by the vocabulary item ‘gbe’; $\sqrt{100}$ = ‘hit’, $\sqrt{200}$ = ‘kill’ and $\sqrt{300}$ = ‘dance’. These roots then

¹ Tense/aspect is marked prosodically (with tones) in Edo.

merge with a functional v head so $\sqrt{100} + v = \text{gbe}$ ‘hit’, $\sqrt{200} + v = \text{gbe}$ ‘kill’ and $\sqrt{300} + v = \text{gbe}$ ‘dance’.

Bobaljik’s (2000) account of contextual allomorphy argues that spell-out begins from roots and then moves outward to affixes. He further argues that after spell-out, the features ‘housed’ on that node are used up and are no longer available to be referenced within the computational system. Based on the sensitivity of the pluractional suffix to the aktionsart of Edo verbs, I argue that the aktionsart features ([telic] and [punctual]) need to be present in the v head which merges with roots. After the spell-out of the root + v, the aktionsart features in the v head still need to be present in the derivation in order to block [-telic] verbs as well as assign the appropriate reading (iterative or plural) to verbs based on their features at LF. If these features are unavailable after the spell-out of the root + v structure, there will be no way for the computational system to block the suffix from co-occurring with an atelic verb root such as the ‘dance’ reading of *gbe*.

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