Unaccusative Structures and Verbal Suppletion in Me'phaa from Iliatenco

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1. Whither Suppletion?

Bobaljik & Harley (2017) propose "stringent locality constraints" governing what arguments can and cannot trigger suppletion, based on the definition of locality seen in (1).

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

The consequences for this proposal can be summarized as follows. First, we expect to see an asymmetry between internal and external arguments, in that only internal arguments may serve as triggers for suppletion. Moreover, not all internal arguments are viable competitors for triggering suppletion. Instead, internal arguments must be sister to the verb root to be local enough; therefore, there can be no XP that intervenes between the suppletive trigger and the target of suppletion. Thus, in a configuration like that shown in (2) (from Harley & Bobaljik 2017: 151), only SP is "sufficiently local" to trigger suppletion on Y^0, and, absent head lowering, SP cannot trigger suppletion on X^0 because YP intervenes.

(2)
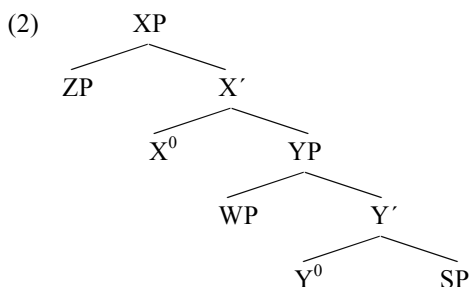
In this paper I present data from verb suppletion in Me'phaa (ISO 639-3: tcf) that challenges the definition of Locality as construed in (1). This is because deeply embedded arguments actually do serve as suppletive triggers in the language. In Me'phaa, while it is true for intransitives that only unaccusative subjects trigger verb suppletion, not all unaccusative subjects do. Like other languages (Levin 1993, Alexiadou & Schäfer 2011, Irwin 2018, a.o.), Me'phaa unaccusatives are a heterogeneous class, and the distinct architectures that underlie each lead to differing degrees of locality with respect to verb roots and internal arguments (Duncan 2017). Unaccusatives where the argument is sister to the verb root *never* trigger suppletion. On the other hand, unaccusative subjects located in a small clause corresponding to directed motion on a path are suppletion-triggering. This asymmetry extends to transitives, as well where certain verbs also supplete based on properties of their objects.

2. Verbal Person Marking Provides Initial Insights into Structure

Me'phaa[1] has a rich system of verbal person marking, with agreement surfacing preverbally, postverbally, or via suppletion depending on verb type (Suárez 1983, Wichmann 1996, 2006, Carrasco Zúñiga 2006, Navarro Solano 2012, Cline 2013, Duncan 2017, Tiburcio Cano 2017). Transitive (3a) and unergative (3b) subjects are encoded prefixally.

(3) a. Ni-**ta**-xkhax-úún.   b. Na-**ta**-ndxa'wa.
     PFV-2SG-wake-1SG   IPFV-2SG-shout
     'You woke me up.'   'You're shouting.'

Transitive objects (4a), on the other hand, are marked suffixally, and pattern with a subset of unaccusative subjects, such as statives (4b) and change-of-state inchoatives (4c).

(4) a. Nda-yara'-**áan**.   b. Max-**áan**.   c. Ni-th-**áan**.
     IPFV.3SG-hug-2SG   be.green-2SG   PFV-cut-2SG
     'S/he's hugging you.'   'You're green.'   'You got cut.'

An important initial observation with consequences for structure can be made by comparing the forms of verbal person marking in (3) with those in (4). From the perspective of a compositional approach to argument structure (Pylkkänen 2008, Marantz 2013), Me'phaa agreement exponents can be seen as being sensitive to both the syntax of argument structure *and* the base-generated position of the argument (Duncan 2017). Accordingly, transitive and unergative subjects are expressed the same because they are *external arguments* and *they are base-generated in Spec,VoiceP*. Transitive object marking patterns with stative and change-of-state inchoative subject marking by virtue of being *internal arguments that are sister to the verb root*. This notion that patterns of agreement emerge from differences in underlying geometries receives further support from object marking when there is a lower degree of affectedness.

(5) a. Ni-ta-tsi-kh-**úún**.   b. Ni-ta-mbáy-**ú'**.
     PFV-2SG-CAUS-burn-1SG   PFV-2SG-help-1SG
     'You burned me.'   'You helped me.'

The object suffix in (5b), *-ú'*, is the same one that surfaces in marking internal arguments of ditransitives as well as psych verbs (Wichmann 2010). I take it that, following Pylkkänen (2008), Cuervo (2003), and Schäfer (2008), among others, that the dative-marked argument in (5b) is introduced by an applicative head.

Suppletion is yet another means of encoding person and number marking on verbs in Me'phaa. The set of verbs that supplete in the language encodes inherently directed motion along a path (henceforth "path-verbs"), such as 'go, 'come', 'arrive', 'carry', 'put up,' and 'measure'. Examples with 'arrive' (6a-b) and 'carry' (6c-d) are shown below.

(6) a. Ni-**g**anu'.   b. Ni-**dx**anu'.   c. Ja-**ya**'.   d. Ja-**go**'.
     PFV-3SG.arrive   PFV-2SG.arrive   STAT.1SG-carry   STAT.1SG-carry.PL.INAN
     'S/he arrived.'   'You arrived.'   'I'm carrying it.'   'I'm carrying them.'

The logic of the preceding discussion vis-à-vis verbal person marking and argument structure proposes that different paradigms of agreement are a reflex of differences in underlying geometries and the location of an argument within a given configuration (e.g.. Spec,VoiceP, sister to the verb root, Spec,ApplP). Since verb suppletion constitutes a distinct agreement paradigm, this suggests that their

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[1] The term 'Me'phaa' refers to a group of about ten distinct varieties spoken primarily in *La Montaña* region in eastern Guerrero, Mexico, as well as some individual varieties within the group. Data in this paper comes from work with speakers originally from Iliatenco, Guerrero, who currently live in the United States.

structure is different than that of other verb types. If this is the case, then Me'phaa unaccusatives are not uniform: one class includes change-of-state inchoatives and statives and encodes agreement suffixally, and the other comprises path-verbs where agreement is marked directly in/on the verb root. In the following section, I show evidence from unaccusativity diagnostics that support this distinction, and in Section 4 I offer a preliminary syntactic analysis of Me'phaa unaccusative structures to argue that suppletive triggers are more deeply embedded.

3. Me'phaa Unaccusativities: Two Types, Only One Allows Suppletion
3.1. The postverbal enclitic =ne

Language-internal evidence for unaccusatives as a class in Me'phaa comes from the distribution of the verbal enclitic =ne. In Me'phaa, =ne behaves like a differential object marker in that it surfaces when transitive objects are inanimate, but cannot index an animate argument. The examples in (7) demonstrate this pattern.

(7) a. N<u>i</u>-dá'=<u>lo</u>=**ne**.   b. Ni-t-ro-thón=**ne**.
     PFV.1SG-throw=1SG.EMPH=*ne*   PFV-2SG-CAUS-cut=*ne*
     'I threw it (INAN)/*it (AN)/*him/*her.'   'You cut it (INAN)/*it (AN)/*him/*her.'

However, =ne is not limited to objects; instead, =ne can be used for some intransitive subjects.

(8) a. Ni-thón=**ne**.   b. Ni-ganu=**ne**.   c. *Ni-sia=**ne**.   d. *Ni-ro-th-úún=**ne**.
     PFV-cut=*ne*   PFV-arrive=*ne*   PFV-dance=*ne*   PFV-CAUS-cut-1SG=*ne*
     'It got cut.'   'It arrived.'   (Int.: 'It danced.')   (Int.: 'It cut me.')

Thus, =ne can stand in as the subject of the intransitive verb 'cut' (8a), which in Me'phaa is unaccusative and participates in a causative-inchoative alternation (cf. (7b)), as well as 'arrive' (8b), which is a path-verb. However, =ne is illicit when attempting to serve as a transitive or unergative subject (8c-d). This pattern suggests the distribution of =ne is sensitive to internal argumenthood, making it a viable diagnostic for unaccusativity. However, since =ne can occur on both change-of-state incoatives and path-verbs, this test only identifies the broad class of unaccusatives, but does not distinguish among members within the class.

3.2. The "Iterative" Suffix

Me'phaa also possesses what has been termed an "iterative" (Suárez 1983, Wichmann 1992, Navarro Solano 2012) or "repetitive" (Carrasco Zúñiga & Weathers 1988, Carrasco Zúñiga 2006) suffix, which serves as both a diagnostic for unaccusativity and a means of discriminating between unaccusative types based on: (a) (in)compatibility with the expression of verbal person marking, and (b) restricted interpretations with path-verbs.
An example of this vowel lengthening suffix can be seen in (9).

(9) A-tá-tsi-kha-<u>a</u>.
     IMP-2SG-CAUS-burn-ITER
     'Light it again.' (e.g., you light it and you lit it before)   (Repetitive reading)
     'Light it again.' (e.g., you light it but you did not light it before)   (Restitutive reading)

Though the semantics of this suffix are yet to be fully explored, its behavior and meaning are reminiscent of English *again*, *re*-, and (as seen below) *back*. As the translations in (9) show, the Me'phaa iterative patterns like *again* in that, at least in certain cases, it can trigger a well-known ambiguity between a reading where either the event happened (repetitive) or the state held (restitutive) at some point previously (Dowty 1979, von Stechow 1996, Alexiadou & Schäfer 2011, a.o.).
Two key differences emerge between change-of-state inchoatives and intransitive path-verbs with respect to the iterative. The first has to do with the behavior of agreement.

(10) a. Ni-kh-**áá**(*-**a**)**n**.
PFV-burn-2SG(*-ITER)
'You got burned (*again).'

b. Ni-**dx**a'nu-**u**.
PFV-2SG.arrive-ITER
'You came back.' (Lit., 'You arrived again.')

The example in (10a) shows that the unaccusative (change-of-state inchoative) verb 'burn' cannot take the iterative suffix when the internal argument is overtly expressed. This contrasts with (9), where causativized 'burn' does take the iterative suffix, though there is no suffixal agreement marker present. On the other hand, with path-verb unaccusatives like 'arrive' overt expression of the internal argument via suppletion is perfectly compatible with the presence of the iterative.

Second, path-verbs with iterative suffixes do not trigger the repetitive-restitutive ambiguity. The following illustrates this.

(11) a. *Context: A person who is from and lives in Iliatenco leaves the city and later comes back.*

b. N<u>i</u>-ganu-<u>u</u>   náá   Mixtru'w<u>i</u>ín.
PFV-1SG.arrive-ITER PREP   Iliatenco
'I arrived back at Iliatenco.'   (Restitutive reading)

(12) a. *Context: A person who is from and lives in Kansas visits Iliatenco for the second time.*

b. *N<u>i</u>-ganu-<u>u</u> náá Mixtru'wiín.
   (Intended: 'I arrived at Iliatenco again.')   (*Repetitive reading)

The crucial observation here is the unavailability of the repetitive reading in (12). When the iterative appears on a path-verb the only interpretation is that the motion along a path toward an endpoint has reversed (i.e., a kind of return trip) to reproduce the original result state.

4. Me'phaa Unaccusative Structures and Verbal Suppletion

The above discussion shows that Me'phaa unaccusatives bifurcate into two subclasses based on differences in agreement paradigms, semantics, and interactions with the iterative suffix. Assuming a decomposition framework, I take the following to be the structure for the unaccusative subclass that includes statives and change-of-state inchoatives.

(13)
```
            vP
          /    \
         v      √P
              /    \
             √      DP
```
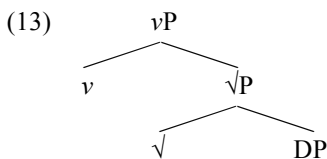
A transitive verbal structure can be built onto this by, say, merging a Voice head that introduces an external argument. If, as claimed above, agreement paradigms in Me'phaa map onto distinct architectures, then together these account for why stative and change-of-state inchoative marking pattern with canonical objects, as seen previously in the examples in (4). Moreover, an unergative structure would essentially resemble that of a transitive one, with the exception that the sole argument would sit in Spec,VoiceP. As noted above, given the tight connection between agreement exponents and syntactic structure, this explains the affinity between transitive and unergative subject marking.

Importantly, then, we can leverage rather uncontroversial syntactic architectures to begin understanding why Me'phaa exhibits such rich verbal agreement, and this has two key consequences for understanding verb suppletion in the language. First, the configuration in (13) is precisely the one where we expect suppletion to occur under Bobaljik & Harley's (2017) account, summarized in (1). However, this is exactly where suppletion in Me'phaa fails to obtain: arguments that are sister to the verb root (i.e., state and change-of-state inchoative subjects, canonical transitive objects) are uniformly

coindexed on the verb via suffixation, not suppletion. Second, the fact that agreement paradigms correlate with particular structures suggests that path-verbs do not have the structure in (13), and appealing to structural differences provides a basis for understanding the different behaviors among unaccusatives with respect to iterative suffixation. However, structural differences alter the distance between the target and trigger for suppletion, thus rendering Bobaljik & Harley's stringent locality constraints inapplicable for Me'phaa.

I propose that the reason path-verb type unaccusatives display the differences that they do in Me'phaa is because the sister of the verb root is not an argument, as in (13), but rather a small clause containing both the unaccusative subject and functional material corresponding to the semantics of inherently directed motion along a path. Here, I adopt Irwin's (2018) recent analysis of "existential unaccusatives," as follows:

(14)

```
           vP
          /  \
         v    √P
             /  \
            √   PredP
               /      \
           PathP       Pred′
           /  \        /    \
        Path  PlaceP  Pred_exist  DP
```
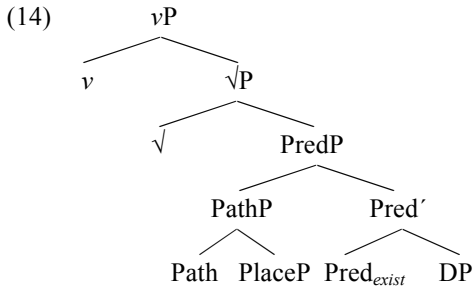
In this structure, the argument is introduced by Pred, which takes a dynamic event involving motion along a path to a "contextually-determined location" (PathP) in its specifier. Although for Me'phaa any simple small clause complement would effectively embed the argument and produce a non-stringently local relation between the target and trigger of suppleiton, (14) successfully captures the denotation of suppletive unaccusatives in Me'phaa as outlined above. Moreover, the additional structure may serve as a basis for explaining why the agreement-iterative interactions in (10) and the interpretive effects of iterative suffixation on path-verbs in (11)-(12) manifest, especially if the iterative suffix attaches below the verb root, as might be expected given the unavailability of the repetitive reading in such cases. For path-verbs, agreement transpires differently than those with structures like that of (13) because of the location of the argument, leading to the unavailability of suffixation. Since agreement in a structure like (14) yields suppletion, person marking and the iterative are completely compatible. Additionally, if the iterative suffix attaches below the verb root in (14), this could produce the particular flavor of the restitutive reading discussed above because the iterative will scope over the dynamic event in Pred's specifier. Finally, if we assume that Voice can merge with the structure in (14) to introduce an external argument, then we produce an additional transitive structure, and can account for the fact that objects of transitive path-verbs likewise lead to verbal suppletion.

5. Conclusion

Me'phaa verbs of suppletion offer rich insight into the structural configurations that relate the trigger and the target in a suppletion context. Although Bobaljik & Harley (2017) argue that suppletion must involve a sisterhood relation, Me'phaa provides further support that suppletion is not always stringently local in this way (Oseki 2016, Toosarvandani 2016, Thornton 2018). While it is true for Me'phaa that only internal arguments may serve as triggers of suppletion, the puzzle Me'phaa presents is that deeply embedded arguments within a small clause complement can induce suppletion, as well.

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