

## Morpheme specific phonological account of verbal nouns in Sylheti

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Morphemes of similar category sometimes behave in so differently that it cannot only be explained in terms of phonology. One morpheme triggers a process and the other one does not even though both of them end up yielding the similar result. Syncope in Sylheti provides an example of morpheme specific phonological phenomena. Syncope in Yine (Matteson 1965, Kisseberth 1970, Lin 1997) exemplifies the morpheme specific phonology. For example, in Yine, /heta+nu/ [hetanu] “going to see” and /heta+ lu/ [hetlu] the two morphemes “lu” and “nu” differ in deletion of preceding vowel of the root. Pater (2000) argues that the distinction between the exceptional triggering and blocking in Yine can be explained in OT if markedness and faithfulness constraints can be lexically indexed. Morphemes that trigger a process are indexed for the application of lexically specific markedness constraint and the morphemes blocking a process are indexed for the lexically specific faithfulness constraint.

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There are two more approaches in OT to deal with the exceptionality. They are:

1. Co-phonology approach: morphemes select the constraint ranking.
2. Only faithfulness constraints can be lexically indexed.

Morpheme specific constraints were first mentioned by Prince and Smolensky (1993, 2004) when they proposed Edgemost constraints that apply to specific morphemes to distinguish prefix, suffix and edge oriented infixes from one another. However, later the Edgemost constraints were reformulated as Generalised Alignment.

In this paper, I will use the idea of the lexicalisation of Alignment constraints to discuss the exceptionality in Sylheti Verb-Verbal Noun transformation. Sylheti is mainly spoken in Sylhet, a province in north eastern part of Bangladesh and southern part of Assam, India. Sylheti is an Indo-European language spoken in the Barak Valley region of northeast Bangladesh and southeast Assam (India). The feature of Sylheti that distinguishes it from other neighbouring languages such as Assamese or Bangla is its property of cluster simplification. Sylheti does not seem to allow any sort of consonant cluster in a syllable.

This paper aims to analyse two suffixal morphemes which when attached to a verb forms a verbal noun. The suffixes studied here are /ɔn/ and /ani/. The paper attempts to elaborate on how Optimality Theory helps in capturing the behaviours of morphemes in terms of lexically indexed markedness and faithfulness constraints.

These morphemes behave differently in whether they cause the preceding vowel to delete such as:

/nasa/ (to dance) + ɔn → /nasɔn/ (the act of dancing)

Or no vowel deletion as in:

/nasa/ (to dance) + ani → /nasani/ (the act of making someone dance)

Here, the vowel /a/ which is technically supposed to get elongated in /nasani/ does not as Sylheti does not have long vowels in the inventory. Hence, the /a/ of both the verb and the suffix is represented as a single /a/ in the final realisation of the word /anani/.

The suffix /ɔn/ causing syncope can be seen in the following examples:

/gɔɽa/ (to build) + -ɔn → /gɔɽɔn/ (building)

/k<sup>h</sup>aoa/ (to eat) + -ɔn → /k<sup>h</sup>aoɔn/ (eating)

/zaoa/ (to go) + -ɔn → /zaoɔn/ (going)

/bara/ (to grow) + -ɔn → /barɔn/ (growing)

/kɔoa/ (to speak) + -ɔn → /kɔoɔn/ (speaking)

The instances where vowel deletion does not occur are as following:

/χɔra/ (to do) + ani → /χɔrani/ (doing)

/χaoa/ (to eat) + ani → /χaoani/ (eating)

/sua/ (to touch) + ani → /suani/ (touching)

/fɔra/ (to wear) + ani → /fɔrani/ (wearing)

Extension of morphological indexation from Alignment to other constraints (Fukuzawa (1999), Ito & Mester (1999, 2001), Kraska- Szelenk (1997-1999), Pater 2000) shows that a single constraint whether markedness or faithfulness constraint, can be multiply instantiated in a constraint hierarchy and each instantiation may be indexed to apply to a particular set of lexical items.

For example, if a hypothetical language has coda deletion, which is blocked in certain cases, the coda deletion can be explained in terms of NO CODA >>> MAX. The exceptional items can be explained as morphologically indexed MAX. Hence, the grammar of the language follows the constraint hierarchy MAX<sub>(L)</sub>>>> NO CODA>> MAX. Here, NO CODA is a markedness constraint, which prevents the occurrence of coda at syllable end. MAX is a faithfulness constraint which ensures the input segments are reflected in output as well. If the hypothetical language does not allow consonant clusters in the onset position, the hierarchy is \*CC>> MAX<sub>(L)</sub>. Even if under richness of base, a lexicalised underlined form with consonant clusters occurs in occurs, the cluster is always simplified. Here, the \*CC is a markedness constraint that prevents occurrence of consonant clusters at onset position. Thus, morpheme specific phonology captures the distinction between exceptional and impossible form. In Cophonology approach constraints are instantiated only once but the ranking can be altered to cater to the needs of individual morphemes. Under this view, coda deletion in this hypothetical language will follow the follow NO CODA >> MAX. The exceptionality is shown as MAX>> NO CODA. But the problem with this approach is that Richness of base would allow any input to alter the constraint hierarchy. This approach is not able to distinguish an impossible form from an exceptional one. Here, I propose an Alignment constraint to explain the constraint driving syncope: \*ALIGN-SUF-V<sub>(front, close)</sub> ALIGN (Suffix, L, V<sub>(front, close)</sub> R) This says that the left edge of a suffix should not attach to the right edge of a front, close vowel. ALIGN refers to Alignment constraints that shows preference for certain linguistic features to be aligned with other linguistic features.

Syncope in Sylheti can be shown as:

Input	Candidates	*ALIGN-SUF-V <sub>(close, open)</sub>	Ident <sub>Suffix</sub> , Max IO
nasa+ ɔn (to dance (v) + suffix)	→nasɔn		*
	nasəɔn	*!	
	Nasan		*

Again, lexicalising the alignment constraint and observation of the other suffix /ani/ with the same verbal root shows the impact of lexicalisation of constraints in ranking. Here the constraint is indexed to a set of morphemes.

Input	Candidates	*ALIGN –Suffix (L) –V <sub>(close, open)</sub>	Ident <sub>Suffix</sub> , Max	ALIGN-SUF-V <sub>(close, open)</sub>
nasa+ani (to dance (v) + suffix)	→nasani			
	nasəni		*!	
nasa+ ɔn (to dance (v) + suffix)	→nasɔn		*	
	nasəɔn	*!		

Hence, the hierarchy for Syncope in Verb to Verbal noun transformation in Sylheti is

ALIGN –Suffix (L) –V<sub>(close, open)</sub> >>> Ident<sub>Suffix</sub>, Max >>> ALIGN-SUF-V<sub>(close, open)</sub>.

This analysis distinguishes morpheme specific triggering from blocking.

#### REFERENCE

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