Locality Domains for Number-Based Suppletion: Evidence from Yawanawa

Overview: Number-based suppletion (NBS) has been used as evidence in the discussion of locality domains in Distributed Morphology (DM). Given that NBS follows an absolutive pattern crosslinguistically (c.f. Veselinova 2003), Harley (2001), and Bobaljik & Harley (2017) argue that the locality restriction conditioning it is that of sisterhood between a root and its complement: external arguments are outside the phase and expected not to play a role (Marantz 2001, 2008). NBS in Yawanawa (Panoan) suggests instead that conditioning features for suppletion may lie across phrase but not phase boundaries, as long as node adjacency obtains (c.f. Merchant 2015).

Data: Yawanawa roots meaning ‘come’ and ‘go’ undergo an unusual type of NBS, conditioned by the total number of arguments involved in the verbal event. One form is chosen if the verb has a single singular argument, as in (1-a). The other form is chosen if the event has multiple participants, i.e. if the single argument is plural, as in (1-b), or if the verb has more than one argument, as in (1-c). The ‘transitive’ versions of ‘come’ and ‘go’ mean ‘bring’ and ‘take’, respectively. The same pattern is attested in Shipibo (Panoan) (Valenzuela 2003:150,273-279).

(1) a. Kape u-i / ka-i. (*)ve-i / *hu-i
caiman come.SG-IPFV go.SG-IPFV come.PL-IPFV go.PL-IPFV
‘The caiman is coming/going.’
teenager-PL come.PL-IPFV go.PL-IPFV come.SG-PL-IPFV go.SG-PL-IPFV
‘The teenagers are coming/going.’
c. Tika=nẽ a-wẽ pani ve/hu-a. (*u-a / *ka-a)
Tika=ERG 3S-GEN hammock come/go.PL-PFV come.PL-PFV go.SG-PFV
‘Tika brought/took his hammock.’

One could object that only the intransitive roots are suppleting for number: the transitive verbs just happen to be homophonous with the plural forms. However, (2) shows that the same suppletion pattern obtains with a second pair of predicates, namely the functional forms of ‘come’ and ‘go’, which translate as ‘come/go while X-ing’. -keran is used if the verb’s single argument is singular, as in (2-a), otherwise -veran is used, as in (2-b) and (2-c). This suggests the pattern is no coincidence. (Only ‘V-come’ is given here due to space restrictions).

(2) a. Vea sai-keran-i. (*sai-veran-i) single SG argument
Vea sing-COME.SG-IPFV sing-COME.PL-IPFV
Vea is singing as he is coming this way.
b. Yura westima sai-veran-kan-i. (*sai-keran-kan-i) single PL argument
person many sing-COME.PL-PL-IPFV sing-COME.SG-PL-IPFV
‘Many people are singing as they are coming this way.’
c. È mi-a xinã-veran-i. (*xinã-keran-i) two SG arguments
1SG.ERG 2S-ACC think-COME.PL-PROG think-COME.SG-PROG
‘I was coming this way thinking about you.’

The plural forms can’t be an expression of object agreement on v, because singular objects cooccur with it, as in (1-c) and (2-c). Nor do they express subject agreement on T. In clauses with intransitive versions of the suppleting predicates, there are two expressions of plurality in the verbal word: the form of ‘come/go’ itself, and the plural agreement morpheme -kan as in (1-b) and (2-b). In contrast, the transitive predicates with singular subjects as (1-c) and (2-c) only express plurality on ‘come/go’, not on T. In addition, switch-reference clauses, where the head T doesn’t expone φ-features (Baker & Camargo Souza 2019) still have number suppletion on ‘come/go’, as in (3).

(3) [[Yume-hu cidade hu-shû] pro tšäivema-hu], Txini inîma. (*ka-shû)
teenager-PL city go.PL-SS.PFV.ERG pro call.OS-PL Txini be.happy.PFV
‘When the boys went to the city and called her, Txini was happy.’

Proposal: I argue that features on a Multiple-Agreeing v head condition suppletion in YW, as in (4). I assume that non-singular morphology is the exponence of a set of atomic IND(ividual) features, rather than a [PL] feature (c.f. Trommer 2006, Gluckman 2016). This set can be exponed on v itself, in the ‘come/go while X-ing’ constructions, or on the root if and only if it’s immediately adjacent to v. An intervening head, such as the applicative in (5) blocks the
exponent of non-singular morphology on the root. (Read [-SG] below as short for [IND IND]).

Vocabulary insertion rules for suppletive roots:

a. $\sqrt{\text{go}} \leftrightarrow \text{hu} / [[\text{VP}_{-}] \mid \text{v}^{0}_{-}]_{\text{vP}}$

b. $\sqrt{\text{go}} \leftrightarrow \text{ka} / \text{elsewhere}$

Applicative constructions also provide additional evidence that suppletion tracks the total sum of arguments in the extended verb phrase: in (6), -shū introduces an affected argument in the clause, which in turn, licenses the plural suppletive functional form veran (compare with (2-a)).

Implications: This typologically novel pattern of NBS contributes to the DM discussion on locality domains by showing that external and applied arguments may play a crucial role in the determination of NBS. Considering a parametric variation where v can probe for the subject at the edge of the phase in certain languages but not in others, it’s also possible to capture the absolute patterns of NBS found cross-linguistically. If v only probes its c-command domain, we get the absolutive pattern; if it probes its specifier as well, we get the Yawanawa (and Shipibo) pattern, assuming the non-singular suppletive form exposes a set containing multiple atomic features on the same Multiple-Agreeing v head. NBS therefore is a combination of Agree – limited by the PIC – and contextually-conditioned allomorphy – limited by node adjacency.