

The Interplay of Morphotactics and Underspecification: Overabundance in Athpare

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Among the factors conditioning overabundance, flexible morphotactics have been identified as a potential source, alongside alternations in exponence proper. While it is now well-established that morphotactic constraints being too lax may lead to alternate morph orders in the same cell, as in Chintang (Bickel et al., 2007) or Mari (Luutonen, 1997), we shall investigate the opposite situation where overly strict morphotactics leads to competition for overt expression of two distinct morphosyntactic properties.

Athpare (Ebert, 1997) verbs show agreement with both A(gent) and P(atient) roles, typically expressed by discrete person and number markers. As witnessed by the 2>1 subparadigm in Table 1a, we find two discrete markers for person, prefixal *a-* for second person and suffixal *-ŋa* for first person exclusive. Within the 2>1 paradigm, however, expression of number is special in that at most one exponent for number may occur. This contrasts with other parts of the Athpare verbal paradigm, where overt exponents of Agent and Patient number do cooccur, e.g. in the 2>3 subparadigm (Table 1a). Number marking in the 2>1 corner displays two characteristic properties: first, there is a morphotactic restriction to only have a single overt exponent of number in these cells. Second, the shapes of dual or plural markers in the 2>1 subparadigm distinguish neither role nor person, meaning that number marking is syncretic for A and P roles. The morphotactic restriction therefore confronts speakers with a forced choice as to which number specification to express overtly, giving rise to overabundance whenever two distinct non-singular values are involved.

Given morphotactic competition and the way it is resolved, overt expression of dual/plural number for any single role must be considered optional in the 2>1 cells. While optionality is a known source of overabundance, the case at hand is peculiar: competition not only limits the number of non-singular exponents but also requires there to be at least one. The intricate combination of underspecification, optionality and competition thus gives rise to a novel pattern of overabundance, where optionality is morphotactically conditioned.

The aims of this paper are threefold: first, we want to add to the typology of non-determinism in morphology (Thornton, 2019). Second, we shall compare the Athpare pattern to those found in related Kiranti languages, showing how Athpare 2>1 sits halfway between number neutralisation for these cells in Limbu (van Driem, 1987) and almost full combination in Thulung (Lahaussais, 2020). Finally, we shall present a formal analysis within Information-based Morphology (Crysmann & Bonami, 2016) that combines underspecification with positional competition.

↓ A \ P →	1SG	1DU	1PL	...	3SG	3NSG
2SG	a- -ŋa	a- -ci -ŋa	a- -i -ŋa		a- -u	a- -u-ci
2DU	a- -ci -ŋa	a- -ci -ŋa	a- -i -ŋa, a- -ci -ŋa		a- -c-u	a- -c-u-ci, a- -c-u
2PL	a- -i -ŋa	a- -ci -ŋa, a- -i -ŋa	a- -i -ŋa		a- -u-m	a- -u-m-ci-m

(a) Athpare

↓ A \ P →	1SG	1DU	1PL	↓ A \ P →	1SG	1DU	1PL
2SG	ke- -aŋ	a-ke-	a-ke-	2SG	-ŋri	-t-tsi-ki	-ti-ki
2DU	a-ke-	a-ke-	a-ke-	2DU	-ŋri-tsi	-t-tsi-ki	-ti-ki-tsi
2PL	a-ke-	a-ke-	a-ke-	2PL	-ŋri-ni	-t-tsi-ki-ni	-ti-ki-ni

(b) Limbu

(c) Thulung

Table 1: Number marking in 2>1 cells

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