

snippets

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Special Issue on Non-local Contextual Allomorphy

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Root allomorphy depends on head movement: Support from Breton pluralization

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The trigger of allomorphy should be sufficiently local to the morpheme subject to the allomorphy (Embick 2010). Bobaljik (2012:68) adopts as a working hypothesis that this locality should be defined as head incorporation: a head that conditions root allomorphy must be in the same complex head (i.e. the same morphological word) as the root. As such, he captures the fact that comparative suppletion is blocked in periphrastic comparatives. This snippet shows that Breton plurality provides further empirical support for the hypothesis that the appropriate locality condition for allomorphy is head incorporation.

Breton plurals may show a vowel modification in the stem, i.e. an ablaut. In other words, the stem may be subject to allomorphy. Note that the actual plural affix (in these cases *-ed*) is often optional for such plurals. Its presence or absence does not yield any semantic effect (see Trépos 1957, Anderson 1986, Stump 1989, Favereau 1997, Harris 2017). (Examples are taken from personal fieldwork and from Favereau 1997:43.)

(1) louarn fox 'fox'	(2) l(u)ern foX _{ALLOMORPH} 'foxes'	(3) l(u)ern-ed foX _{ALLOMORPH-PL} 'foxes'
(4) maout ram 'ram'	(5) meot ram _{ALLOMORPH} 'rams'	(6) meot-ed ram _{ALLOMORPH-PL} 'rams'

Cardinals and plural marking are in complementary distribution in Breton plural NPs. For the nouns under discussion, crucially, the presence of a cardinal does not only imply the absence of a plural affix, but also the absence of the marked root allomorph, which is otherwise selected in plural contexts. In the presence of a cardinal, the default root surfaces obligatorily:

(7) ugent louarn twenty fox 'twenty foxes'	(8) *ugent l(u)ern twenty foX _{ALLOMORPH}	(9) *ugent l(u)ern-ed twenty foX _{ALLOMORPH-PL}
(10) pemp maout five ram 'five rams'	(11) *pemp meot five ram _{ALLOMORPH}	(12) *pemp meot-ed five ram _{ALLOMORPH-PL}

Discussing Turkish and Hungarian data, Borer (2005:116-117) provides the following analysis for the complementary distribution of cardinals and plural marking: in the absence of a cardinal, the

Dividing (Div) feature is realized by the plural affix. When present, however, the cardinal realizes both the feature [Div] (i.e. plural number in this case) and the [#]-feature, i.e. the feature regularly expressed by quantifiers, which represents a counting function semantically. Consequently, in the presence of a cardinal, the noun (i.e. the root, the root incorporated into little n, or simply little n, depending on the analysis) does not head-incorporate into the plural morpheme, either syntactically (via head movement) or post-syntactically (via morphological merger). The data show that in the absence of such head movement, root allomorphy is blocked. As such, these data confirm Bobaljik's (2012:68) hypothesis that root allomorphy depends on head movement.

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