Agreeing in Number: Suppletive Verbal Plurals
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Problem: It has been argued that verbal suppletion for participant number is conditioned by a word-external trigger: the plural argument (Bobaljik & Harley to appear; Toosarvandini 2016). However, cross-linguistically, there is substantial overlap in the distribution of reduplication as well as suppletion in marking participant number. I argue (i) if both reduplication and suppletion mark participant number, then plural arguments must be specified at a verb-internal node; and (ii) word-external triggers are instances of an agree relationship between the argument and the #-head.

Background: Bobaljik & Harley (to appear) show that in Hiaki, suppletion for plural participant number occurs with subjects of intransitives (unaccusatives) and objects of transitives. They argue that the plural internal argument triggers VI of the plural root (1):

(1) √p
   3
   DP +PL  √KILL  < _- *me’a (*kill.sg.obj)
   : ume toto’im sua
      the.pl chickens kill.pl.obj

When VI occurs, sua ‘kill.pl’ will be inserted at the root (instead of me’a (kill.sg)), because it is a sister to ume toto’im ‘the.pl chickens’ and no phrasal projection intervenes.

In Niuean, though, both suppletion and reduplication mark the plural internal argument. Reduplication marks iterativity and makes the plural argument interpretation available depending on the lexical semantics of the verb (Haji-Abdolhosseini, Massam, & Oda 2002). Suppletion (2b) and reduplication (3b, 4b) mark plurality of the internal argument on the verb.

(2)a. To fano a au
   FUT go ABS I
   “I will go...”

b. To ō a tautolu
   FUT go.PL ABS we(incl)
   “We will go...”

(3)a. Ne hoko mai a Sione
   PAST arrive there ABS Sione
   “Sione arrived/came there.”

b. Ne hohoko mai a laua
   PAST arrive.PL there ABS they
   “They arrived/came there.”

(4)a. Kua hala e ia e lā akau
   PERF cut ERG he ABS branch tree
   “He cut the branch.”

b. Kua hahala e ia e tau lā akau
   PERF cut.PL ERG he ABS PL branch tree
   “He cut the branches.”

Like suppletion in Hiaki, Niuean reduplication and suppletion mark the plural subject of intransitives and plural object of transitives. Since reduplication marks the internal argument as an affix, VI must occur at a head that I will argue marks participant number.
Analysis: Evidence for a number node comes from the distribution of reduplication, which I will argue is an overt realization of the # head. Niuean gives evidence for a vP-internal #-node that is able to (i) mark plural arguments and events and (ii) phonologically affects the root. Harley & Leyva (2009) also note that Hiaki reduplication marks plural arguments and events. The examples in (5) show that the plural subject can only occur with the reduplicated verb.

(5) a. Aapo/*Vempo koche b. Vempo ko-koche
   3SG/*3PL   sleep    3PL   RED-sleep
   ‘He is sleeping’/ ‘They’re sleeping’  ‘They’re sleeping’ (H&L 2009: 254)

The #-node is specified with a [PL] feature before Spell Out (VI) as shown in the structure given in (6) When the domain head triggers VI of its sister, a [PL] feature on # will be realized as either a [RED] affix, or will trigger allomorphy of the plural root (7a).

(6) \[v^0\] (7) a. √ROOT ---> sua / ________#[PL]
                  v^0
                  # 3
                  √ROOT

b. √ROOT ---> me’a /
                  v^0
                  # 3
                  √ROOT
                  [PL]

Morphophonological processes -- such as suppletion and reduplication --provide evidence for the locality of this node. High affixes that can phonologically affect the root (i.e. suppletion) are limited (Embick 2010). Since suppletion is able to affect VI of the root’s exponent, I argue that the head which realizes plural arguments and events must be a low affix, internal to the vP. Koasati and Samoan also support a #-node by marking plural arguments and events by suppletion or reduplication. Reduplication in these languages is infixing depending on the phonological form of the verb (8, RED in bold).

(8)a. Koasati: cofok.có::nan to be angled (pl) b. Samoan: ālolofoa love (pl)

Implications: Northern Paiute also challenges Bobaljik & Harley since plural applicative and external arguments trigger verbal suppletion (Toosarvandini 2016). This is unexpected if the category-defining head v blocks higher heads from phonologically interacting with the root (Embick 2010). I hypothesize that participant number suppletion is always triggered by the local # head contained in the X^0; however, the arguments which are able to agree with the # head are different in Northern Paiute and Hiaki.

Conclusion: Cross-linguistic parallels between reduplication and suppletion provide morphophonological evidence that analyses for verbal plural suppletion are incomplete. I argue for a #-head internal to the verbal word that agrees with the features of higher heads and is realized as reduplication or suppletion of the root. Hence, the category-defining head plays a privileged role internal to the X^0 which allows for this interaction.