

[lo kaze aj-aj-aj]¹: Haplology in Modern Hebrew plural marking

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In Modern Hebrew, nouns appear in two “states”: the Free State, which is the citation form, and the Construct State, which is the form of the noun when it is the head of a nominal compound $N_{\text{head}}+N_{\text{modifier}}$. As can be seen in (1), in both States the masculine singular does not carry any overt marking. Feminine singular nouns appear with one of several overt markers; this talk will only be concerned with the most common of these markers, namely *-a*. In the Construct State, this feminine singular marker appears with an additional [t]: *sus-at*. Masculine plural is exponed by a suffix *-im* in the Free State and by a suffix *-ej* in the Construct State. In contrast, feminine plural nouns carry a plural suffix *-ot* in both States. Note further that the feminine plural marker *-ot* is added directly to the stem, rather than to the singular form with the suffix *-at*.

(1)	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
	<i>Free State</i>	<i>Construct State</i>	<i>Free State</i>	<i>Construct State</i>
<i>masculine</i>	sus	sus ets	sus-im	sus-ej ets
<i>feminine</i>	sus-a	sus-at ets	sus-ot	sus-ot ets

The goal of this talk is to account for two cases of asymmetry between masculine and feminine exponence. The first appears in (2) and concerns possessive suffixes: when a suffix *-ey-*, marking the plurality of the possessed, is added to a masculine noun, it is concatenated to the singular form. But when it is added to a feminine noun, it is concatenated to the plural base. The same plurality is thus marked twice on possessed feminine nouns (marking plural number only once is ungrammatical: **sus-ot-xem* or **sus-at-ey-xem*):

(2)	<i>possessed is singular</i>		<i>possessed is plural</i>	
<i>masculine</i>	sus-xem	‘your _[mpl] horse’	sus-ey-xem	‘your _[mpl] horses’
<i>feminine</i>	sus-at-xem	‘your _[mpl] mare’	sus-ot-ey-xem	‘your _[mpl] mares’

The second case of double plural marking exhibits the same asymmetry. It is found in the formation of *new* dual nouns (Schwarzwald 2002). As shown in (3), the dual suffix *-áj-im* attaches to the masculine singular base, but to the feminine *plural* base.

(3)	<i>singular</i>	<i>dual</i>
<i>masculine</i>	sus	sus-áj-im
<i>feminine</i>	sus-a	sus-ot-áj-im

The talk presents an analysis of these cases based on haplology, i.e. the omission of one of two adjacent, similar exponents (for ample evidence for haplology, see Nevins (2012)). It is claimed that in both (2) and (3), a masculine plural marker is also expected to be present, but its realization is blocked because it is too similar to the following adjacent marker. Thus, [sus-ej-xem] and [sus-áj-im] are actually /sus-ej-ej-xem/ and /sus-ej-aj-im/ respectively. The first /ej/ is deleted because of haplology. In the feminine cases, haplology does not apply because the exponents are different /sus-ot-ej-xem/ and /sus-ot-aj-im/.

The analysis, conducted within Distributed Morphology (e.g. Embick (2010)), proceeds in two steps. First, a set of Vocabulary Items is proposed, formalizing the generalizations regarding number exponence in (1). The two important VIs are presented in (4a,b). Masculine is assumed to be the absence of a gender feature. Accordingly, (4a) assumes that /im/ and /ej/ are two allomorphic realizations of a plural feature only, /im/ realizing this

¹ NEG so [ajajaj], ‘not so good’

To summarize, by formalizing the basic VIs of inflection and setting the syntactic structures of the two constructions, the analysis manages to motivate the two asymmetries under discussion through the use of the concept of haplology. The talk concludes with a call for morphologists to look for good reasons for absent exponents, rather than resort to unconstrained mechanisms like impoverishment.

References

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