

Impostor onsets in Omani Mehri as a bicyclic effect

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Main claims: A bicyclic effect in Mehri can be explained if a root node exposes cyclic boundaries. In the spirit of Scheer (2012) and Newell (2021), phonology does not require a diacritic #.

Bicyclicity in Government Phonology: English regular past tense forms like [si:pt] *seeped* involve VVCC sequences that are only found in morphologically complex words. Kaye (1995) proposes that domain-final nuclei can remain empty, and also allow for preceding long vowels [si:p_]. When, in a second cycle, /t/ is added, the final empty nucleus of the base does not lose its final status [[si:p_]t_]. One problem with Kaye's view is that the bracket that maintains the final status of the empty nucleus] is a diacritic, for brackets are not phonological objects. This is a problem both for modularity (Scheer 2012) and in terms of restrictiveness: what the symbol] (or #) can or cannot do is anybody's guess.

Alternatives outside GP: Optimality Theory uses Output-Output (OO) faithfulness in bicyclic constructions (Benua 1997). Since [si:pt] is built on [si:p], faithfulness to the latter allows for the VVCC marked structure in the former. A principled problem with OO faithfulness is that the part of the representation of the base that will be affected – e.g. specific features, stress position, etc. – is not predicted, and OO constraints explode factorial typology. Stratal Optimality Theory adds yet another complication, in that the grammars of the different strata can be different. Thus, [si:pt] can be accounted for by saying that VVCC sequences are accepted in non-initial strata, while being banned in the initial stratum. But then one may ask why it is not the other way around.

This talk provides an analysis of a cyclic effect without diacritics, OO constraints, or different grammars across cycles/strata. Instead, we propose a *representational* object that demarcates cycles and is a primitive of phonological representations. More specifically, we propose that the right edge of a morpho-phonological cycle is signaled by a rote node ▪. The presence of a root node makes the cycle-final V slot non-empty, thereby allowing its nucleus to govern, license, and resist empty VC reduction.

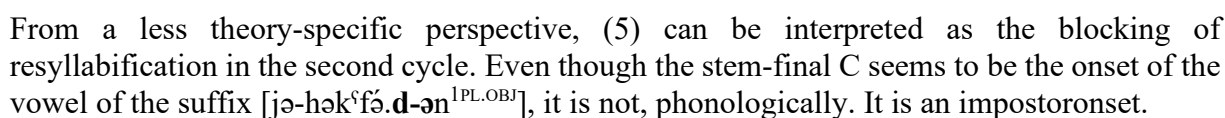
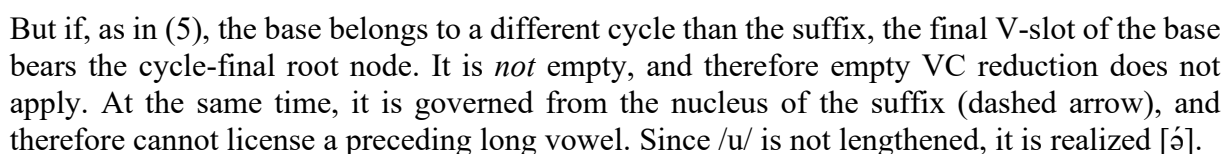
Data and previous treatments: The facts come from the interaction between syllable shape and vowel quality and length in Mehri.^{1,3,4} As can be seen in (1), the high vowels /i,u/ are lengthened and faithfully realized when stressed in open medial syllables or in final syllables closed with a singleton. In non-final closed syllables, even when stressed, they are reduced to [ə]. That said, there are principled cases in which /i/ and /u/ are reduced to a short [ə] even though they stand in a stressed open syllable. In (2), the stressed, long vowel [ú:] of the base (2a) corresponds in (2b) to a short, stressed [ə] when an [ə]-initial object suffix is added. Crucially, this does *not* occur before the homophonous *subject* suffix (2c).

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|--------|---------|----------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) a. | ktú:b | ‘he wrote’ | (2) a. | həkʰfú:d | ‘he lowered’ |
| b. | ktáb-k | ‘I wrote’ | b. | jə-həkʰfəd-ən ^{1PL.OBJ} | ‘he lowers us _{acc} ’ |
| c. | ní:ləz | ‘he drank tea’ | c. | həkʰfú:d-ən ^{1PL.SBJ} | ‘we lowered’ |
| d. | nólz-ək | ‘I drank tea’ | | | |

Rubin (2018) derives the contrast between (2b,c) from an underlying segmental contrast /n/ vs. /ən/ - a proposal we will show is unlikely. Watson & al-Mahri (2018) account for this pattern within Stratal OT. Both /ən/ suffixes are assumed to adjoin the heavy [fú:d] of the base. The SBJ /ən/ belongs to the same stratum as the base, but the OBJ /ən/ belongs to a subsequent stratum, the “word-level”. In this stratum, a constraint *HEAVYADJOIN, banning adjunction to heavy syllables, is high ranked. In order to satisfy this constraint, the vowel is shortened in (2b).

Non-diacritic Strict CV⁴ Analysis: Similarly to Stratal OT approaches, we propose that the different behavior of verb-final stressed vowels is due to subject suffixes attaching to the verb in the same cycle and object suffixes doing so in a later cycle. Differently from Stratal OT approaches, though, we maintain that the phonological grammar holding in these two cycles is

In the unsuffixed form (3), the root node (in light purple) marks the edge of a cycle, and can license the long vowel preceding it (licensing signaled by arrow). If the SBJ suffix /ən/ is added (with its two CVs) as in (4), there is no cycle boundary between it and the base, and the process of empty VC reduction (Gussmann & Kaye 1993) can apply. The vowel of the suffix licenses the long vowel of the base.



Summary We have used a phonological object, a root node, to expone a cyclic boundary in Mehri, and thereby account for the blocking of open syllable lengthening in some bicyclic constructions. We contend that this view of cyclic boundaries is more concrete and constrained than views using OO correspondence or stratum-specific grammars.

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