

**Itelmen Plural Diminutives:
A belated reply to Perlmutter 1988***

Jonathan David Bobaljik
McGill University

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Perlmutter (1988) notes that Yiddish plural diminutives present *prima facie* counter-evidence to a version of the *Split Morphology Hypothesis* (SMH, cf. Anderson (1982), which predicts that inflectional morphology (including plural marking) should always be peripheral to derivational morphology (including diminutives) within a word. Some classes of Yiddish nouns display an order predicted to be impossible, specifically, root-plural-diminutive. Perlmutter notes that this morpheme order arises only with non-productive plural forms, and suggests treating these as instances of suppletion. He then defends a version of the SMH in which the prediction about morpheme order is restricted to productive inflectional morphology, calling for a view of morphology which treats regular and irregular affixes quite differently. In this squib, I demonstrate that even the weaker version of the SMH advanced by Perlmutter is untenable. Itelmen displays exactly the same problematic morpheme order as the Yiddish nouns, but in Itelmen, this order arises with fully productive regular morphology.

The cases of interest in Yiddish are examples in which plural marking is internal to (closer to the root than) the diminutive. Two such cases are illustrated in (1), from Perlmutter (1988), p.80.

(1)		Singular	Plural	Plural Diminutive
	‘child’	kind	kinder	kinderlex
	‘body’	guf	gufim	gufimlex

Basic segmentation suggests the structure of the plural diminutive forms is, for example, *guf-im-lex* ‘body-PL-DIM’. As Perlmutter observes, this is problematic for the claim that derivational morphology (which he takes diminutive formation to instantiate) is necessarily peripheral to inflectional morphology (which he takes the plural to instantiate). This claim about ordering in turn he derives as a central prediction of the SMH. Both the claim that diminutives are unambiguously derivational and the SMH itself have been challenged (see Scalise (1984) and the papers in Booij and van Marle (1996)), but as my aim here is to address the specific argument from Yiddish, we may accept these premises for the sake of argument.

Perlmutter argues that the force of the apparent counter-examples disappears, once it is recognized that the *-er* plurals and the *-im* plurals form restricted (though not negligible) classes (the latter being Hebrew/Aramaic loans). For both types, Perlmutter argues that the plural forms are listed in the lexicon (p.84, 91) and do not involve productive inflectional affixes. In particular, Perlmutter denies the synchronic segmentation of the

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-im plurals: claiming “[t]here is no reason to posit a suffix *-im*” (p.91). (Perlmutter also discusses ablauting plurals, which require a slightly more complex treatment, but one that does not affect the points made in Perlmutter’s article or here.)

In sum, Perlmutter’s conclusion is that the SMH can be retained, and with it the prediction that a diminutive suffix cannot follow a plural suffix, so long as this prediction is restricted to productive inflectional morphology, leaving a large amount of redundancy within suppletive rules.

The facts of Diminutive formation in Itelmen (Chukotka-Kamchatkan), illustrated in (2), refute that prediction.¹

(2)	Singular	Plural	Sg. Dim	Pl. Dim
‘morsel’	ansx	ansx-aṅ	ansx-čax	ansx-aṅ-č
‘house’	kist	kist-eṅ	kist-čax	kist-eṅ-č
‘pond’	kəɬɸ	kəɬɸ-eṅ	kəɬɸ-čax	kəɬɸ-aṅ-č
‘hut’	mem	mem-eṅ	meme-čx	meme-ṅ-č
‘woman’	mimsx	mimsx-eṅ	mimsx-čax	mimsx-aṅ-č
‘girl’	ɸaŋe	ɸaŋe-ṅ	ɸaŋe-čx	ɸaŋe-aṅ-č

Like Yiddish, the diminutive suffix in Itelmen has (partially) distinct singular and plural forms.² In addition, the Itelmen singular diminutive shows allomorphy for consonant-final and vowel-final stems. Unlike Yiddish, however, the diminutive and, more importantly, the plural morpheme in (2) are both productive. The only nouns that do not form a plural with glottalized *n* are native nouns ending in *-l* in the singular, which form their plural with glottalization of the *-l*. All other nouns, including borrowings, form their plural with the suffix in (2). Even in the extreme (and possibly nonce) formation in (3), involving a Russian lexical diminutive suffix *-uška* on a root of Koryak origin, the productive Itelmen morphology surfaces in the order in (2).

(3)	ekoɸ ¹ -uske-ṅ-č	[TN. 45 / SC963B.2413]
	girl-DIM-PL-DIM	
	‘girls’	

Since Itelmen plural formation is entirely productive, there is no way to argue for an account in terms of suppletion and lexically listing. And since listedness is not at issue, the prediction of the SMH, even weakened to apply only to non-listed forms, is falsified.

¹ The facts are originally presented in Volodin (1976) pp. 130-133. Examples are supplemented with data from Volodin and Khaloimova (1989) and from my own field notes (1993-2001). The plural morpheme is a glottalized *-n*, with an epenthetic vowel of variable and often indistinct quality after consonant-final stems.

² The Yiddish forms are singular: *-l*, *-ele*, plural *-lex*, *-elex* (p. 91)

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address: (to summer 2003)
McGill University
Department of Linguistics
1085 Dr. Penfield
Montréal, QC H3A 1A7
CANADA
tel: (514) 398-4224, fax: (514) 398-7088
jonathan.bobaljik@mcgill.ca

(from fall 2003)
Department of Linguistics, U-1145
University of Connecticut
337 Mansfield Road
Storrs, CT 06269-1145
tel: (860) 486-4229, fax: (860) 486-0197
bobaljik@alum.mit.edu