Pomeranian *ain gaur fruug* and German *eine gute Frau* 'a good woman' – Null-morphemes in morphology, (historical) apocope in phonology, or a combination of both?

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Apocopic rules are as pervasive in diachronic phonology as are null morphemes in morphosyntax. The question is whether the material really drops, whether an empty morpheme emerges, or if there is an underlying latent morpheme. One can be a precursor for the other. In this talk we make a first step in showing that there is fundamental, but constrained, catalexis in natural language. Calatexis is the non-spelling out of morphophonological material at the edge of a prosodic domain. The cataletic material then remains prosodically unparsed. Catalectic material can show up upon further affixation when it is not at the edge of the prosodic domain (latent sounds). A well-known phonological example is French, *petit* ‘small-masc’ where the final /t/ is latent: [p å.t]. This /t/ becomes lexical upon further affixing of feminine [a], *petite* (‘small-fem’), while this feminine morpheme itself remains latent: [p å.te.t]. Simplicity of the theory, and diachronic evidence, blocks in the case the assumption that it is the affixed /t/ that instantiates the feminine morpheme in [p å.ti/p å.te.t], in view of the pair [gri/griz] ‘gray’, where /z/ seems to be the sign of the feminine. It is easier to hypothesize a catalectic feminine -e morpheme and latent final consonants. The spellout of the final /t/ only occurs in the presence of this zero suffix. • In this talk we will construe a compelling case where we must assume synchronic catalexis. The constructed case is drawn from Pomeranian, a costal West Germanic dialect, related to German (still spoken in Brazil). This language variant has massive erosion of inflectional material. It has replaced: 1. final -en by -e everywhere (in infinitives, plurals, participles, ...), 2. final -e was dropped everywhere. 3. root consonant -n after long vowels and diphthongs were dropped as well: *swiin>*swi ‘pig’, *stain>*stai ‘stone’, *klain>*klai ‘small’ etc. The three changes are in (3), applied to forms of the indefinite article.

(3) **Standard German** | **Pomeranian**
---|---
3-1. ein-en | → ain-e
3-2. ein-e | → ain
3-3. ein | → ai

If we inspect the possessive *mein*-paradigm, the definite determiner paradigm, and the adjectival paradigm in Pomeranian and compare these to German, its turns out that they are identical, modulo the changes under 3. We here give the paradigm for *mijn* 'my' under (4). The subtractive morphology rule 3 (mi:n→mi:) is indicated by ø, the null inflection produced by rule 2 by —, i.e (mijn——) is indicated by —.

(4) **Pomeranian** | **Standard German**
---|---
*mijn* masc fem neut pl | *mein* masc fem neut pl
NOM ø — ø — | NOM — e — e
DAT em er em X | DAT em er em en
ACC e — ø — | ACC en e — e

Similar charts hold for the indefinite article *ein/kein*, and some other functional morphemes. This means that Standard German and Pomeranian are similar modulo the changes under (3). We then present theoretical and dialect-geographical evidence that n-drop of change 3-3 is one and the same process as change 3-1. This creates a dilemma: we now cannot order the two rules 3-1/3 and rule 3-2 with respect to each other as they mutually feed each other, which would provide the wrong changes of either *einen*→*einen* or *eine*→*eine*. The only solution is to apply the various rules in tandem. As diachronic processes are ordered in time, interpreting the projection rules as *synchronic spellout rules* is the only option. We then apply the spellout rules to Pomeranian infinitives, gerunds, datives, and plurals. It turns out that many wild paradigms in Pomeranian become (almost) regular. Cases of subtractive morphology disappear etc.