

# Stress-induced Vowel Lengthening and Harmonization in Kumzari

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## Abstract

This paper presents the morphophonological effects of four suffixes on noun stem vowels in Kumzari: the simple plural suffix *-an*, the existential plural clitic *-in*, the definite suffix *-ō*, and the indefinite suffix *-ē*. Two of the suffixes (*-an* and *-ō*) have an effect on the stress placement of their host stem. This results in an array of alternations which may be generalized as lengthening of the stem's final vowel and, in the case of *-ō*, harmonization of the stem's final vowel to that of the suffix. The remaining two suffixes (the clitic *-in* and the suffix *-ē*) are included in this study to emphasize the role of stress placement in vowel alternations in Kumzari: although *-in* and *-ē* are segmentally and semantically analogous to the first two suffixes – and, in the case of *-ē*, morphosyntactically equivalent – they have no effect on stress placement and consequently do not precipitate vowel lengthening or harmonization.

*Keywords:* Kumzari, languages of Arabia, morphophonological processes, vowel harmony, stress-length interaction

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Kumzari is an endangered language spoken by about 5000 people in Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. Speakers of the main dialect are found on the Musandam Peninsula of Oman and in small groups in cities along the Gulf coast of the United Arab Emirates. Laraki, a closely related dialect of the language, is spoken across the Strait of Hormuz by a single community on Larak Island in Iran (Anonby & Yousefian 2011, Lewis 2011).

The Kumzari language (endonym: *kumzārī*<sup>2</sup>) was identified by Jayakar (1902), and a brief grammar sketch and lexicon appeared in Thomas (1930). Although it is often referred to as a mixed language, its core vocabulary and verbal morphology support Skjærvø's (1989) classification of Kumzari within the Southwestern group

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تاتم شکره قادر کمظاریه تکم، ایشنه آر قبیلی بورن وجوانن بمناء، املو مه چدن جوان. حس چدم ان ائده خانغونیم. شکره شه تکم خیکی. سادو مه چدن و وقفه بورن و ا ما و شجه مه چدن. و حبه تکم شکره قادر آدمی تکم، خاصت ریشدن و آدمی آر تیسکن دچینه، حافظو جسین بتقالید خو اولین. و حبه تکم شکره ایشنه آر سادو مه چدن ائده بحث مه بنا، خاصتن نوفل پس حمد و مانله پس سلیمین و ایل حس ایلکو. قصر و جسی نه! بارک الله فیکم!

of Iranian languages. A large proportion of the overall vocabulary, however, as well as many linguistic structures, may be traced to influence from Arabic, including the neighbouring Shihhi dialect of Arabic (cf. Bayshak 2002, Anonby 2011). Still, Kumzari is highly differentiated from its Southwestern relatives and neighbouring Arabic varieties. In particular, Kumzari morphophonology is distinctive and complex.

One process characteristic of Kumzari is pervasive vowel alternation within stems, which is motivated by certain suffixes. This process, referred to as “umlaut” by Skjærvø (1989: 365), is observable from the data in Thomas (1930). However, it is not documented there in a systematic way, and for this reason the regularity and extent of this phenomenon, as well as its motivation, are difficult to determine.

In the present paper, I re-examine this phenomenon by introducing the morphophonological effects of four suffixes on root vowels in Kumzari:

1. the simple plural suffix *-an*
2. the existential plural clitic *-in*
3. the definite suffix *-ō*
4. the indefinite suffix *-ē*

Two of these suffixes (*-an* and *-ō*) have an effect on the stress placement of their host stem. This results in an array of alternations which may be generalized as: a) lengthening of the stem’s final vowel and, in some cases, b) harmonization of the stem’s final vowel to that of the suffix.

The remaining two suffixes (the clitic *-in* and the suffix *-ē*) are included in this description to emphasize the role of stress placement in vowel alternations in Kumzari. Although *-in* and *-ē* are segmentally and semantically analogous to the first two suffixes – and, in the case of *-ē*, morphosyntactically equivalent – they have no effect on stress placement and consequently do not precipitate vowel lengthening or harmonization.

The description given here is based on an analysis of 4500 lexical items as well as a number of longer texts collected from various Kumzari speakers (al-Kumzari (ms.), Anonby & van der Wal Anonby, in preparation). Because of the complexity of the alternations, this paper introduces the behaviour of these affixes with a common but very specific subset of noun shapes, namely two-syllable nouns with a CVC.CVC shape (e.g., *gambil* ‘hole’, etc.). While a historical and comparative analysis of affixation and stress patterns in related and neighbouring languages is important in its own right, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In the phonological orthography used in this article, the following symbols require explanation:

- a macron over a vowel indicates vowel length (e.g. *ā*, *ē*, *ī*, *ō*, *ū*);
- a dot below a consonant indicates emphasis (velaro-pharyngealization) (e.g. *ṣ*, *ṣ̣*);
- *q* represents a voiceless uvular stop;
- *ḡ* represents a voiced uvular fricative;
- *ʔ* represents the glottal stop, which is contrastive in Kumzari; and
- an apostrophe ( ‘ ) placed before the relevant syllable marks stress.

## 2. Patterns of stress-induced lengthening and harmonization in four suffixes

### 2.1. *The simple plural suffix -an*

The suffix *-an* (Modern Standard Persian = MSP reflex: *-ān*) is the basic plural marker with nouns in Kumzari.

sg.	pl.	
<i>dēw</i>	<i>dēwan</i>	‘demon(s)’
<i>gōz</i>	<i>gōzan</i>	‘walnut(s)’
<i>sūr</i>	<i>sūran</i>	‘wedding(s)’

In the data above, it is evident that pluralization can be achieved through the simple suffixation of *-an* to the noun stem. This is true of one-syllable nouns with a long vowel. However, the vast majority of nouns in the language have more than one syllable and contain a short vowel in their final syllable; for these nouns, the morphophonology is more complex. Consider pluralization of the following two-syllable nouns with a CVC.CVC shape, where the last vowel of the stem is lengthened:

sg.	pl.	
<i>birmī</i>	<i>birmītan</i>	‘hard candy(ies)’
<i>gambīl</i>	<i>gambīlan</i>	‘hole(s)’
<i>rištaḡ</i>	<i>rištāḡan</i>	‘thread(s)’
<i>ʔaqrab</i>	<i>ʔaqrāban</i>	‘scorpions(s)’
<i>barnuṣ</i>	<i>barnūṣan</i>	‘blanket(s)’
<i>xarkuk</i>	<i>xarkūkan</i>	‘parrotfish (sg./pl.)’

### 2.2. *The existential plural clitic -in*

The existential plural clitic *-in* (MSP reflex: *-and*) is segmentally and semantically analogous to the noun plural suffix *-an*. In fact, the two are confounded in Thomas (1930: 788–790). However, their syntactic distribution as well as their phonetic realization are contrastive, as is their phonological behaviour: in particular, *-in* does not cause the final vowel of the stem to be lengthened.

sg.	pl.	
<i>birmī</i>	<i>birmītin</i>	‘hard candy / they are hard candies’
<i>gambīl</i>	<i>gambīlin</i>	‘hole / they are holes’
<i>rištaḡ</i>	<i>rištaḡin</i>	‘thread / they are threads’
<i>ʔaqrab</i>	<i>ʔaqrābin</i>	‘scorpion / they are scorpions’
<i>barnuṣ</i>	<i>barnuṣin</i>	‘blanket / they are blankets’
<i>xarkuk</i>	<i>xarkukin</i>	‘parrotfish / they are parrotfish’

The key to differences in the changes caused by these two suffixes is in their effect on the stress of the stem to which they are attached.

Recall that in MSP, stress is typically on the last syllable of a word, especially for nominals (Windfuhr and Perry 2009: 429–430). When suffixes are added in MSP, they may be classified as stressed (= tonic) or unstressed, depending on whether or not they carry word stress (among others, see Lambton 1953: 96). In Kumzari, how-

ever (similar to a common pattern in Arabic), stress is by default placed on a word's penultimate syllable: *'birmit* 'hard candy', *'gambil* 'hole'.

Word-final monosyllabic suffixes, then, are never stressed in Kumzari. However, in some cases they cause word stress to shift toward the end of a word: while the simple plural suffix *-an*, introduced above, causes stress to shift to the second-last syllable of the resulting word, the existential plural clitic *-in* does not. (The data is repeated from above, with stress also being represented.)

	sg.	simple pl.	existential pl.
'hard candy'	<i>'birmit</i>	<i>bir'mītan</i>	<i>'birmitin</i>
'hole'	<i>'gambil</i>	<i>gam'bīlan</i>	<i>'gambilin</i>
'thread'	<i>'rištaḡ</i>	<i>riš'tāḡan</i>	<i>'rištaḡin</i>
'scorpion'	<i>'ʔaqrab</i>	<i>ʔaq'rāban</i>	<i>'aqrabin</i>
'blanket'	<i>'barnuṣ</i>	<i>bar'nūšan</i>	<i>'barnuṣin</i>
'parrotfish'	<i>'xarkuk</i>	<i>xar'kūkan</i>	<i>'xarkukin</i>

Since *-an* is a typical noun suffix and *-in* is a clitic, the question remains as to whether the difference in behaviour is morphosyntactically driven. However, a comparison between the definiteness-related noun suffixes *-e* and *-o* below shows that this is not the case.

### 2.3. The definite suffix *-ō*

The definite suffix *-ō* (no clear MSP reflex; possibly related to the definite direct object marker  $-(r)\bar{a} / -(r)o^3$ ), like the plural suffix *-an*, causes the last vowel of the stem to be lengthened. In addition, as can be seen from the second set of words below, the low vowel *a* harmonizes with the suffix, becoming *ō*.

unmarked	definite	
<i>birmit</i>	<i>birmitō</i>	'hard candy / the hard candy'
<i>gambil</i>	<i>gambilō</i>	'hole / the hole'
<i>rištaḡ</i>	<i>rištōḡō</i>	'thread / the thread'
<i>ʔaqrab</i>	<i>ʔaqrōbō</i>	'scorpion / the scorpion'
<i>barnuṣ</i>	<i>barnūṣō</i>	'blanket / the blanket'
<i>xarkuk</i>	<i>xarkūkō</i>	'parrotfish / the parrotfish'

### 2.4. The indefinite suffix *-ē*

The indefinite suffix *-ē* (MSP reflex: *-i*) is segmentally, functionally and morpho-syntactically analogous to the definite suffix *-ō*. However, it does not cause the final vowel of the stem to be lengthened.

unmarked	indefinite	
<i>birmit</i>	<i>birmitē</i>	'hard candy / a hard candy'
<i>gambil</i>	<i>gambilē</i>	'hole / a hole'
<i>rištaḡ</i>	<i>rištaḡē</i>	'thread / a thread'
<i>ʔaqrab</i>	<i>ʔaqrabē</i>	'scorpion / a scorpion'
<i>barnuṣ</i>	<i>barnuṣē</i>	'blanket / a blanket'
<i>xarkuk</i>	<i>xarkukē</i>	'parrotfish / a parrotfish'

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Beers (pers. comm.) has pointed out this possibility.

As has been shown for the first pair of suffixes, a suffix which causes stress shift also induces lengthening. The correspondence between stress shift and lengthening is similarly evident in the data on *-ō* and *-ē*, which is presented again here and marked for stress:

	unmarked	definite	indefinite
‘hard candy’	<i>'birmī</i>	<i>bir'mītō</i>	<i>'birmītē</i>
‘hole’	<i>'gambī</i>	<i>gam'bīlō</i>	<i>'gambīlē</i>
‘thread’	<i>'rištaḡ</i>	<i>riš'tōḡō</i>	<i>'rištaḡē</i>
‘scorpion’	<i>'ʔaqrab</i>	<i>ʔaq'rōbō</i>	<i>'ʔaqrabē</i>
‘blanket’	<i>'barnuṣ</i>	<i>bar'nūṣō</i>	<i>'barnuṣē</i>
‘newborn’	<i>'xarkuk</i>	<i>xar'kūkō</i>	<i>'xarkukē</i>

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, these data show that stress shift motivates the lengthening and, in some cases, harmonization of stem vowels in Kumzari. The fact that some suffixes (*-an*, *-ō*) cause stress shift suggests that they are phonologically more intimately associated with the stem than suffixes which do not (*-in*, *-ē*), regardless of similarities in the semantic and morphosyntactic connection to their hosts.

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