Vahn

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1 Foreword

I despise the term "Oligosynthetic". It is a horrible, non descriptive word with little or no face value meaning. "Oligo" from the Greek "Oligos" meaning "few", and "synthetic" from the Greek "Suntithenai" meaning "place together". You could argue that is very descriptive, as an Oligosynthetic language is one in which a few things are placed together, however you must also remember that "synthetic" in modern language (in the context of linguistics) means "Characterized by the use of inflections rather than word order to express grammatical structure"; Inflection is the modification of a word to express further meaning. Lets have a look at a passage in Toki Pona.

> ma ali li jo e toki wan en sama. jan ali li kama tan nasin pi kama suno, li kama lon ma Sinale, li awen lon ni. jan li toki e ni: "kama! mi mute o pali e kiwen tomo, o seli e ona." jan mute li toki e ni: "o kama! mi mute o pali e ma tomo e tomo palisa suli. lawa pi tomo palisa li lon sewi kon. o nimi pi mi mute li kama suli! mi wile ala e ni: mi mute li kan ala. mi mute li lon ma ali." jan sewi Jawe li kama anpa, li lukin e ma tomo e tomo palisa pi jan lili mute. jan sewi Jawe li toki e ni: "jan ni li jo e ma wan, li jo e toki sama, li pali e tomo palisa. tenpo ni la ona mute li ken pali mute ike. mi wile tawa anpa, mi pakala e toki pi jan mute ni. o jan li sona ala e toki pi jan ante." jan sewi Jawe li pali e ni: jan ali li poki ala jan, li lon ma mute, li ken ala pali e ma tomo. nimi pi ma tomo ni li Pape tan ni: jan sewi Jawe li pakala e toki pi jan ali. tan ma tomo Pape la jan sewi Jawe li tawa e jan tawa ma mute.

I personally would not look at that and think "What an obviously synthetic language". In fact, I would think the opposite. It looks rather like an isolating language. Many short words, all providing context to each other rather than synthesising in a traditional sense. So it seems very odd to me that a language I feel could be better described as isolating falls under the label of "Oligosynthetic".

As such, I would propose (and will use as such through the course of this grammar), that a new term be defined. "Oligo" is a property of the morphemes of a language, not of any form of synthetic alignment, like Agglutinative or Fusional. The term I (as discussed with a group of my peers) would propose is "Oligomorphemic". As such, Vahn would typologically be described as a "Oligomorphemic, Agglutinative, Neutral Aligned, SOV" language. This provides a much better description than combining the first two into "Oligosynthetic". For the sake of brevity, as is often favoured, I would propose that the first two can still be combined, however into "Oligoagglutinative" in the case of a language like Vahn, and "Oligoisolating" in the case of a language like Toki Pona.

2 How to read

This book features a number of notational features, designed to increase legibility and ease of understanding when reading. However, in order to fully utilize these you must first learn them.

Firstly, whenever a word in Vahn appears in an English passage, it will have a faint grey highlight as it's background. As such, you can tell the difference between the English word "Vahn" and the Vahn word, " vahn ". Usually these words will not occur in quotation marks, as such when talking about things such as the jarehrdeelhaiy , you will not need to be confused about the origin of this strange, unquoted, undefined word.

Glossing will occur in verbatim sections, so as to allow for easier word spacing. Due to Vahn's oligomorphemic nature, there are 2 glossing forms that will be used. One is a full morphemic gloss, in which every base morpheme is marked in the gloss, they will be separated with a period "." in the gloss. The second if a natural gloss, in which morphemes will be grouped into their larger derived meanings, with a hyphen "-" being used to separate major semantic divisions, and a period "." being used to mark smaller, less significant morphemic splits. To demonstrate using the same phrase "All rivers go through the/a mountain"

```
Natural:
puhngmoo-ngah zor.wa     torw
mountain-METH river.all go

Morphemic:
p.uh.ng.moo.ngah          z.or.wa       tor.w
day.thing.place.stone.in water.path.all path.verb
```

It should be noted that some non standard glossing notations will be used. This is because a number of the grammatical features of Vahn are not easily defined by traditional or commonly accepted linguistics, as such glossing abbreviations have not been predefined. This can be seen in the above, where the "methodative" case has been used. This is not a standard grammatical case, however no studied or documented case (that has been seen in natural language) exists which covers the nuance of ngah , so a new case has been defined.

Another notation feature within this will be showing the morphemic construction of vocabulary. This is done in Vahn through morphemes merging and binding, the following is how it is notated.

Vahn	Merger	English
poo		day
suh	merge	thing
puh		sun
ng	append	place
puhng		sky
moo	join	stone
puhngmoo		mountain

There are 3 types of merger in Vahn. A join shows the combining of the initial and final of a morpheme; an append shows the adding of a bound morpheme after a single or merged double unbound morpheme; an infix shows the infixing of a morpheme between the initial and final of a single or merged double unbound morpheme; a join shows the concatenating of 2 unbound morpheme clusters; with the special case double syllable morphemes, when joining to a morpheme or morpheme cluster their final is taken, when being joined by a morpheme or morpheme cluster their initial is taken. The only final thing to note is that when you have multiple morpheme clusters, they are shown by embedding such as in the example that follows, where a secondary level occurs in which norngahrar is formed in order for it to attach to the torwn which is formed in the "top level".

Vahn	Merger	English
tor		path
w	append	verb
torw		go (v)
n	append	alike
torwn		going (n)
nor		tree
ngah	append	in
norngah		tree.in
rar	join	man
norngahrar	join	clothing
torwnnorngahrar		trousers

3   History

3.1   Real World

Although the exact point at which Vahn was conceived is lost, it's first public release came out on the 12th of December, 2013.

It has gone through a number of major changes and revisions over it's lifetime, the first of these was the removal of it's tone structures, this led to the ambiguity you see today in the words `kah` and `vah` , `rar` and `bar` , `tor` and `nor` , `poo` and `moo` .

The second was the introduction of a pronoun structure. Originally (in old Vahn) one would use "one" `rar` to refer to any person regardless of pronoun. However, this soon proved impractical, so I implemented a pronoun system.

The third was a massive increase in the structure of it's sentence structure. Originally sentences were SVO, with time and location positioned seemingly randomly. However, this was revised to be TLSOV. It was also at this time altered such that noun phrases could not exist without a binding word such as `chi` or `chin` . As such, identifying part of speech became a much simpler ordeal.

The fourth was a revamp of it's mathematical system. It gained a much more simple reverse polish style maths system. This led to a revision in ordinal and cardinality.

The final was the addition of temporal phrases, allowing an entire clause to be the time slot of the following clause, and also allowing for simpler constructions of temporally based questions.

3.2   Constructed World

To be Written at a Later Date

4 Phonology

4.1 Vowels

Vowels in Vahn primarily serve as the finals (nucleus) in unbound morphemes, however they do appear in a number of the bound morphemes. It's vowel topology may appear fairly scatter-shot, though it does have some degree of symmetry.

	front	near-front	mid	near-back	back
close	i				u
near-close		ɪ			
close-mid	e				ɤ
mid			ɚ		
open-mid	ɛ & ɛ˞				ʌ · ɔ & ɔ˞
near-open	æ				
open				ɑ & ɑ˞	

Table 1: Vowel Inventory

On top of just vowels, there are also 3 diphthongs in Vahn.

ɑɪ │ ɔɪ │ eɪ

Table 2: Diphthong Inventory

The orthography is as follows:

<	ah	ar	or	oo	uh	eu	ee	ih	ai	eh	ehr	oi	uhr
oor	a	w	o	ay	i	>							
/	æ	ɑ˞	ɔ˞	u	ʌ	ɤ	i	ɪ	ɑɪ	ɛ	ɛ˞	ɔɪ	ɚ
ɚ	ɑ	u	ɔ	eɪ	i	/							

Table 3: Vowel Orthography

4.2 Consonants

Consonants serve primarily as the initials (onsets) in unbound morphemes, and as the entirety or onset of bound morphemes.

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Eppiglotal	Glottal
Nasal	m̥ · m			n̥ · n			ŋ		
Stop	p · b			t · d			k · g		
Sibilant fricative				s · z	ʃ · ʒ				
Non-Sibilant fricative	ɸ · β	f · v	θ · ð				x · ɣ	ʜ	h
Approximant				ɹ̥ · ɹ		j			
Flap / Tap				ɾ					
Lateral Aproximant			l̥ · l						

Table 4: Consonant Inventory

Though the above form the consonant inventory of Vahn, a number of common clusters (affricates or otherwise), occur.

m̥m │ n̥n │ t͡ʃ │ d͡ʒ │ l̥l │ ɹ̥ɹ │ hf │ hv │ hj

Table 5: Consonant Clusters and Affricates

The orthography for consonants is less simple, due to the existence of Vahn's morpheme for "not", this modifies the sound of the initial, and is written in the Latin alphabet as a <h> after the consonant.
The Orthography is as follows:

<	k	kh	r	rh	t	th	p	ph	s	sh	d	dh	f	fh
	g	gh	h	hh	j	jh	l	lh	z	zh	v	vh	b	bh	n
	nh	m	mh	ng	ch	y	>								
/	k	x	ɹ	ɹ̥ɹ	t	θ	p	ɸ	s	ʃ	d	ð	f	hf
	g	ɣ	h	ʜ	d͡ʒ	hj	l	l̥l	z	ʒ	v	hv	b	β	n
	n̥n	m	m̥m	ŋ	t͡ʃ	j	/								

Table 6: Consonant Orthography

Additional to this, /ɾ/ occurs whenever in the orthography the cluster <rw> occurs: It is said as /ɾu/.

In clusters such as /hv/ and /hv/, a very short schwa is often said between the consonants to emphasise the distinction and improve clarity. This same short schwa also occurs when two consonants which cannot be fluidly moved between in the mouth occur next to each other.

When the same pattern occurs twice (such as <ngng>), the sound is germinated. In some dialects a schwa may be inserted between the two in place of germination.

4.3 Phonotactics

Phonotactically Vahn follows a fairly simple set of rules, imposed on it due to it's limited morphemic inventory and the phonemic structures associated with each of them. It's structure can be summarised as

$$(H)C(L)V(C)*$$

Where "H" is a voiceless nasal or /h(ə)/, "C" is any consonant or affricate, "L" is a /l/, "V" is a vowel, and "*" shows that the previous character can be repeated indefinitely.

For Example, with periods (".") showing repetitions of the above structure.

Word	Phonetics	Phonotactics
sarrarngah	sɑˑɹɑˑŋæ	CV.CV.CV
yavarngngor	jævɑˑŋːɔˑ	CV.CV.CV
klahw	klæw	CLVC
thorkn	θɔˑkən	CV.CVC
vahkmnngah	vækəmnŋæ	CV.CVCC.CV
vahchitorwn	væt͡ʃɪtɔˑɾun	CV.CV.CV.CVC

Table 7: Phonotactic Examples

4.4 Stress

Stress is morpheme dependant, in that primary stress falls on the last unbound morpheme (or double unbound morpheme cluster) in a word, secondary stress on the second to last, of these clusters, tertiary on the third and so on.

This is demonstrated in the following, the morphemic breakdown inserts hyphens to show bound morphemes, and the direction in which they bind. Asterisks show the binds of semibound morphemes.

Word	Morphemes	Phonetic Stress
sarrarngah	sar.rar.-ngah	ˌsɑˑˈɹɑˑŋæ
yavarngngor	ya-.var.-ngor	jæˈvɑˑŋːɔˑ
klahw	k.-l-.ah.-w	ˈklæw
thorkn	t.-h-.or.-k.-n	ˈθɔˑkən
vahkmnngah	vah.-k.-m.-n.-ngah	ˈvækəmnŋæ
vahchitorwn	vah.*chi*.tor.-w.-n	ˌvæt͡ʃɪˈtɔˑɾun

Table 8: Stress Examples

5 Morphology

5.1 Introduction

Morphology is arguably the most important element of any Oligomorphemic language, and for Vahn this is no different. It is auto-defining that all languages of this type contain a very small number of morphemes, with Vahn this number is 37. These morphemes are broken into 3 Categories: Bound Morphemes, Unbound Morphemes, and Semi-bound Morphemes.

5.2 Unbound Morphemes

Unbound morphemes are the area in which Vahn differs from many other Oligomorphemic Agluitinative languages, in that though they do not bind to other morphemes, they are capable of fusing with each other. This is to say that semantically, their meanings can be combined.

This happens through a portmanteau of the onset of one Unbound morpheme and the Nucleus (and coda) of another. The base morphemes are as follows:

Morpheme	Pronunciation	Meaning
kah	kæ	time
rar	rɑ˞	man/being
tor	tɔ˞	path
poo	pu	day
suh	sʌ	thing/good/yes
deu	dɤ	male/true
fee	fi	female/false
gih	gɪ	life
hai	hɑɪ	child
jeh	d͡ʒɛ	land
jarehr	d͡ʒɑ˞ːɛ˞	country/tribe/group
laiy	lɑɪj	hand
zoiy	zɔɪj	water
saruhr	sɑ˞ːɚ	room/container/vehicle
vah	væ	text
bar	bɑ˞	eye
nor	nɔ˞	tree
moo	mu	stone
paroor	pɑ˞ːɔ˞	name

Table 9: Unbound Morphemes

Of these, all but three behave in the same way. The three exceptions are jarehr , paroor , and saruhr .

Other than these, the same basic mergeing mechanic applies to all of them. The initial of the first, and nucleus of the second combine to create a new word. This can be seen in the following :

Vahn	Merger	English
zoiy		water
tor	merge	path
zor		river

Table 10: Morphemic Formation - zor | River

Vahn	Merger	English
kah		time
poo	merge	day
koo		today

Table 11: Morphemic Formation - koo | Today

Vahn	Merger	English
nor		tree
rar	merge	man
nar		sleep (n)

Table 12: Morphemic Formation - nar | Sleep

The derivation of the above should be relatively apparent, but to break it down further: Water that is a path is a river. Time that is a day is today. The final one on the list is one of the small number of words in Vahn that draw inspiration from chinese; it constists of the character for "tree" and "man" as the chinese character for "rest" does, and it means "sleep" in Vahn.

The order of the morphemes when fusing is important also, it can be described that the first part of the combination usually provides the main semantic meaning, and the second modifies it's properties.

Vahn	Merger	English
moo		stone
zoiy	merge	water
moiy		lava/magma

Table 13: Morphemic Formation - moiy | Lava/Magma

Vahn	Merger	English
zoiy		water
moo	merge	stone
zoo		ice

Table 14: Morphemic Formation - moo | Ice

Vahn	Merger	English
vah		writing
laiy	merge	hand
vaiy		handwriting

Table 15: Morphemic Formation - vaiy | Handwriting

Vahn	Merger	English
laiy		hand
vah	merge	text
lah		writing hand

Table 16: Morphemic Formation - lah | Writing Hand

There are also the three special case unbound morphemes which function differantly: jarehr , saruhr , and paroor , There three are special, as instead of splitting at the onset and grouping the nucleus with the coda to form the initial and final, the word is instead split at it's center vowel, such that jarehr splits into jar- and -ehr , saruhr splits into sar and uhr , and paroor splits into par and oor . They also do not merge like the others, instead they either append or prepend to other unbound morphemes (on their own, or in a merged cluster).

Of the three special case unbound morphemes, each half carries a slightly different meaning. par refers to the name of an animate thing, oor to the name of an inanimate thing. sar refers to a building or any object that contains people (such as a vehicle), uhr refers to general containers. jar refers to a specific group, whilst ehr can be either "group of" or "of the group".

Vahn	Merger	English
jarehr		country
rar	append	man
jarrar		citizen

Table 17: Morphemic Formation - jarrar | Citizen

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Vahn	Merger	English
rar		man
jarehr	append	country
rarehr		politician

Table 18: Morphemic Formation - rarehr | Politician

Vahn	Merger	English
saruhr		room
tor	append	path
sartor		door

Table 19: Morphemic Formation - sartor | Door

Vahn	Merger	English
tor		path
saruhr	corridor	room
toruhr		corridor

Table 20: Morphemic Formation - toruhr | Corridor

5.3   Bound and "Semibound" Morphemes

In addition to it's inventory of unbound morphemes, vahn also features 16 bound morphemes and 2 "semibound" morphemes.

Morpheme	Pronunciation	Meaning
-k	k	Broken
-h-		Not
-th	θ	Only
-wa	wɑ	All
-l-	l	Number
-m	m	Very
-n	n	Alike
-l	l	Question
-w	u / w	Verb
-ngah	ŋæ	Inside
-ngol	ŋɔl	Above
-ngor	ŋɔ˞	Beside
-ngay	ŋeɪ	Below
-ngi	ŋi	Begin
0 -t	t	End
chi	t͡ʃɪ	Equal
ya	jɑ* (jæ)	Result

Table 21: Bound and Semibound Morphemes

The above morphemes have a number of ways in which they can bind. This is notated above by the positioning of the hypen (-) character against the orthographic representation of the morpheme. Things can either bind by appending ("-*") such that kah and -k bind to create klahk . Another way of binding is by infixing ("-*-"), such that kah and -h- becomes khah (The bound morpheme is placed between the onset and the nucleus of the unbound morpheme, modifying the pronunciation as necessary). Finally, there are those that do not have hyphens, these can bind either by prepending, ya and var bind by prepending to create yavar ; appending, gih and ya bind by appending to create gihya ; or can exist without binding, chi can stand on it's own as a word (with a meaning similar to the English "of").

The reason the "semibound" morphemes are classified seperately to the Bound morphemes is that they have a tendancy to bind, and cannot fuse.

5.4   Derivation

In any Oligomorphemic Aglutinative Language, the way in which morphemes combine to derive meaning and words is one of the most important elements. For Vahn, this is done in a number of ways, but the most common is through patterns. Patterns, are constructs which Vahn considers to be of some meaning that will apply to other morphemes attatched to it. A good example of this is the pattern -norngahrar , which refers to the clothing of a specific body part or function (combining it with hand is a glove, with foot is a shoe, with legs is a skirt with "going" it means trousers). These commonly repeated patterns that

provide context and meaning are all over Vahn, and there is normally logic (con-historical or otherwise) that dictates these definitions.

In this section of the grammar, many of Vahns combinational patterns will be discussed in detail, as well as the logical or historical reasons behind them.

5.4.1 A Broken or Divided form of __, -k

-k Refers to something a broken, queer or divided form. It is often very direct in it's meaning. It is one of the primitive bound morphemes, and so has no logical derivation further than it's meaning.

Root	Root Meaning	With "-k"	Broken Meaning
rar	Man	rark	Disabled Man
tor	Path	tork	Impass
suh	Thing	suhk	Broken-Thing
gih	Life	gihk	Sickness
jeh	Land	jehk	Unstable Land
moo	Stone	mook	Sand / Dust
zoo	Ice	zook	Snow
nor	Tree	nork	Wood

Table 22: Example Applications of "-k"

5.4.2 An Amplification to the Quantity or Degree of __, -m

-m Refers to something that is in a heightened or amplifide state. It can be used to apply enlargements, or increase frequency, or degree. It is one of the primitive bound morphemes, and so has no logical derivation further than it's meaning.

Root	Root Meaning	With "-m"	Anplified Meaning
kah	Time	kahm	Often
rar	Man	rarm	Many Men
suh	Good	suhm	Very Good
jeh	Land	jehm	Continent
zoiy	Water	zoiym	Lake
nor	Tree	norm	Forrest
vah	Text	vahm	Book
moochivar	Computer	moochivarm	Super-Computer

Table 23: Example Applications of "-m"

5.4.3 Properties Pertaining to __, -n

-n refers to the properties of something. It can be used to form adjectives based upon features and properties of a given noun, or to form nouns out of verbs.

It is one of the primitive bound morphemes, and so has no logical derivation further than it's meaning.

Root	Root Meaning	With "-n"	Property Meaning
zhoiy	Fire	zhoiyn	Hot
zoo	Ice	zoon	Cold
moo	Stone	moon	Strong / Hard
torw	Go	torwn	Going
vah	Text	vahn	Speech (iregular)
mih	Money	mihn	Valuable

Table 24: Example Applications of "-n"