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## Seri Vowels and the Obligatory Contour Principle

Stephen A. Marlett and Mary B. Moser

A serious question in the past, under the assumptions of certain phonological theories, was whether phonetically long vowels in Seri should be analyzed as vowel clusters or as long vowels. The data presented here, based on regular and well-attested conjugation patterns of Seri verbs, present clear evidence as to how this question should be answered. It is clear that underlying long vowels are not vowel clusters; the conjugation pattern of verbs with single *a* are totally different from the conjugation pattern of verbs with double *aa*, for example. However, there are two ways in which true vowel clusters arise. One is the result of affixation: the proximal realis prefix {*mi-*} plus the root {-*ai*} *say to*, gives the vowel cluster *ii*. The second is the result of a word formation process, such as in the derivation of plural and repetitive forms: the *i* of the verb {-*aitom*} *talk* changes to *aa* in the repetitive; nevertheless, the repetitive form conjugates like verbs beginning with short *a*, not like verbs beginning with a long *a*. These facts provide confirmation of the predictive value of the Obligatory Contour Principle (see McCarthy 1986, Yip 1988, and the works cited in them).

Seri is spoken by about 700 people who live in the state of Sonora in northwestern Mexico. The data presented here were collected primarily by Edward and Mary Moser between 1951 and the present. The results of further study and analysis appear in Marlett 1981 and in Marlett and Stemberger 1983.

The transcription of data presented here follows IPA conventions. Some phonetic detail is omitted.

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**Seri Vowels and the Obligatory Contour Principle**  
(Mexico)

	<i>Distal</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>Proximal</i>	<i>Realis</i>	<i>Subj. Nom.</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Obj. Nom.</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Imperative</i>	
1.	jóoφp	míiφp	táφp	íiφp			<i>arrive</i>
2.	jóo ]kam	míi ]kam	tá ]kam	íi ]kam			<i>arrive (pl.)</i>
3.	jóotæxa	míitæxa	tátæxa	íitæxa		kátæxa	<i>stagger</i>
4.	ijóomæn	imíimæn	itémæn	ímæn	óomæn	kámæn	<i>winnow (it)</i>
5.	ijóo ]t	imíi ]t	itá ]t	íi ]t	óo ]t	ká ]t	<i>tattoo (him/her)</i>
6.	ijóom	imíim	itám	ím	óom	kám	<i>swallow (it)</i>
7.	jáa	máa	táa	jáa			<i>flat</i>
8.	jáakox	máakox	táakox	jáakox			<i>big</i>
9.	jáaφ ]X	máaφ ]X	táaφ ]X	jáaφ ]X		?áaφ ]X	<i>sneeze</i>
10.	ijéætoɪ	iméætoɪ	itéætoɪ	i?éætoɪ	jéætoɪ	?éætoɪ	<i>push (it)</i>
11.	ijáa ]i	imáa ]i	itáa ]i	i?áa ]i	jáa ]i	?áa ]i	<i>carry</i>
12.	ijáaka	imáaka	itáaka	i?áaka	jáaka	?áaka	<i>send (it)</i>
13.	ijáaφk	imáaφk	itáaφk	i?áaφk	jáaφk	?áaφk	<i>pound (it)</i>
14.	jóitom	míitom	táitom	íitom		káitom	<i>talk</i>
15.	jóaatim	méaatim	táaatim	éaatim		káaatim	<i>talk (rep.)</i>
16.	ijói	imíi	itái	íi		kái	<i>say to (him/her)</i>
17.	ijóoam	iméoam	itáoam	éoam			<i>say (pl.) to (him/her)</i>
18.	ijóoiiX	imíiiiX	itáiiX	íiiX	óiiX	káiiX	<i>leave (place)</i>
19.	ijóoaxim	iméoaxim	itáoaxim	éoaxim	óoaxim		<i>leave (place, rep.)</i>
20.	jáaiɪ	máaiɪ	táaiɪ	jáaiɪ			<i>spacious</i>
21.	jáaax	máaax	táaax	jáaax			<i>spacious (pl.)</i>
22.	ijáaisX	imáaisX	itáaisX	i?áaisX	jáaisX	?áaisX	<i>clean (it)</i>
23.	ijáaasXim	imáaasXim	itáaasXim	i?áaasXim	jáaasXim	?áaasXim	<i>clean (it, rep.)</i>
<i>Two irregular verbs</i>							
24.	ijóa	imíja	itáa	íja	okóaa	káa	<i>know (it)</i>
25.	ijóæ	imíjæ	itéæ	íjóæ		káæ	<i>give (it) to (him/her)</i>

<sup>1</sup> Finite verb forms are cited with third person subject (zero) and (when transitive) third person object.

<sup>2</sup> The Actor Nominalization and Object Nominalization forms are inflected for third person possessor.