What the Schwartzes told me about allomorph priority

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The nominal plural in Yiddish, as in other Germanic varieties, can be expressed using several strategies. Putting aside all of the lexical plurals (umlaut, umlaut+ər, prestressing suffixes and suffix-specific plurals), a striking regularity emerges. There are two suffixal allomorphs /ən/ and /s/, whose complementary distribution is predictable on cross-linguistically well-founded phonological considerations. Having said that, a group of nouns resists this generalization. The plurals of proper names are all expressed with /s/, regardless of their form. This effectively creates minimal pairs, e.g. [maʁántsn̩] 'apples' [maʁántsəs] 'Marantzes' (the [ə] is epenthetic). I provide a phonological, morphological and morpho-syntactic account of this state of affairs. Most importantly, I argue that the structure of the plurals of proper names is equivalent to that of compounds. Thus, phonology first applies to base and suffix separately, and only then to their concatenation. The account illustrates a novel use of the somewhat controversial notion of lexicalized allomorph priority.