

Lenition of Latin branching Onsets in Gallo-Romance (French, Occitan, Franco-Provençal)

In its development represented by the Coda Mirror (Ségéral & Scheer 2001), the phonological theory that we are working in (so-called CVCV, Scheer 2004) makes predictions regarding the lenition consonants in all positions, except for branching onsets (i.e. obstruent-liquid clusters, henceforth TR). Also, the representation of TR clusters is non-local in the sense known from syntax (Relativized Minimality Rizzi 1990).

There is thus good reason to modify the treatment of TR clusters, and this is done according to the principles of locality: two objects of the same kind (onsets and nuclei in our case) may not contract a relation over another object of the same kind. We show that this move makes a precise prediction regarding TR clusters:

1. positional conditions being equal, all consonants involved in TR clusters behave exactly like if they occurred without an adjacent consonant.

In other words: for any consonant of a TR cluster, the other consonant behaves as if it were not there. This appears to be true for the evolution of obstruents from Latin to French: 1) V__V **capra** (> chèvre) = **ripa** (> rive), **petra** (> pierre) = **vita** (> vie), pour la dentale; 2) strong position {#,C}__ **pruna** = **porta**, **tres** = **tela**, **comprend(e)re** = **talpa**, **capistru** = **cantare**. We show that this equivalence also holds true for a number of other cases where the behaviour of TR clusters in regard of lenition is documented (Celtic, Gorgia Toscana). Finally use the dialects of the ALF (Atlas Linguistique de la France) as a testing ground for our hypothesis. Given dialectal variation, the prediction is that whatever the treatment of TR clusters and consonants in isolation in a particular system, all dialects will produce the same result for the same consonant involved in an TR cluster and occurring in isolation. We show that this is by and large true.

References

- Rizzi, Luigi 1990. Relativized Minimality. Linguistic Inquiry Monograph 16. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Scheer, Tobias 2004. A Lateral Theory of Phonology. Vol.1: What is CVCV, and why should it be? Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ségéral, Philippe & Tobias Scheer 2001. La Coda-Miroir. Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris **96**, 107-152.