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Branching onsets in the light of diachronic lenition in French and Sardinian metathesis

The purpose of this talk is to adduce evidence for the existence of an empty nucleus between the two members of *muta cum liquida* clusters. Three sets of data are examined: 1) the lenition of Latin branching Onsets in Gallo-Romance (French, Occitan, Franco-Provençal), 2) a particular case thereof, i.e. the compensatory lengthening of *r* in *lat. tr,dr > rr* in French (*petra > pierre*, *quadratu > carré*) and 3) the metathesis found in Tertenia Sardinian (point 211 Contini 1987).

1. lenition of Latin branching Onsets in Gallo-Romance (French, Occitan, Franco-Provençal) (joint work with Guylaine Brun-Trigaud)

Coda Mirror theory (Ségéral & Scheer 2001, 2005, 2008) makes predictions regarding the lenition consonants in all positions, except for branching onsets (i.e. obstruent-liquid clusters, henceforth TR). In the same theory, the representation of TR clusters is also non-local in the syntactic sense (Relativized Minimality Rizzi 1990).

There is thus reason to modify the treatment of TR clusters in this particular theory, and this is done in the presentation according to the principles of locality: two objects of the same kind (onsets and nuclei in our case) may not contract a relationship over another object of the same kind. We show that this move makes a precise prediction regarding TR clusters: 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) intervocalic position *V__V* *capra* (> *chèvre*) = *ripa* (> *rive*), *petra* (> *pierre*) = *vita* (> *vie*); 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, we 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 when involved in a TR cluster and when occurring in isolation. That is, isoglosses of, say, *p* in *ripa* and *p* in *capra* coincide. This turns out to be by and large true.

2. Compensatory lengthening *tr,dr > rr*

In intervocalic position, (primary and secondary) *tr,dr* produces either simplex *r* or geminated *rr* in (Old) French: compare *petra > ofr. pierre*, *quadratu > ofr. carré* with *matre > ofr. mere*, *crēd(e)re > ofr. creire (>croire)*. Based on an observation by Fouché (1966-73:719ff), the following conditioning is identified: singleton *r* occurs if the preceding vowel was stressed in gallo-romance (irrespective of its length in Latin), while geminate *rr* is observed in case the preceding vowel was unstressed. Good illustration comes from the variation that is observed in ofr. for a given root in different verbal forms.

tonic V <u> </u> > r		non-tonicV <u> </u> > rr	
*riid(e)re	afr. rire	fut.3sg *riid(e)rát	afr. rirra
3sg it(e)rat	afr. eire	it(e)raare	afr. errer
creed(e)re	afr. creire	fut.3sg *creed(e)rát	afr. cerra
occiid(e)re	afr. ocire	fut.3sg *occiid(e)rát	afr. ocirra
buut(y)ru	afr. bure	*buut(y)raare	afr. berrer
		*buut(y)rariu	afr. burrier

Since stress has been transformed into length in Gallo-Romance, the generalization is that gemination is prohibited after a long vowel: *VVCx.CxV. In other words, super-heavy rhymes are illegal. This ties in with the contrast that is generally observed for the evolution of stressed vowels in open and closed syllables: length is prohibited in the latter. The argument for the existence of an empty nucleus in the midst of tr,dr comes from the fact that the gemination, in case it occurs, is a compensatory lengthening on the position that was vacated by the lenition of the t,d: while having been the first member of a branching onset originally, this position has become a coda after the *muta cum liquida* was destroyed. It is shown that this change of status (first member of a branching onset > coda) is automatic if the *muta cum liquida* hosts an empty nucleus in the first place. It is difficult to represent with traditional representations where the *muta cum liquida* is literally a branching onset.

3. Metathesis in Tertenia Sardinian (work by Rosangela Lai)

Tertenia Sardinian features a metathesis of word-internal r that is involved in a cluster. This process is triggered when the preceding word is consonant-final.

/soi dɔrmendu/	[soi ɔr'mendu]	I am sleeping
/ses dɔrmendu/	['sezi ɔr'mendu]	you are sleeping
	['ser ɔrɔm'mendu]	

The two forms of the 2nd person sg. are in free variation: either the final empty nucleus of the /ses/ is vocalized by way of epenthesis (the following /d/ is then in intervocalic position and deletes), or metathesis occurs and creates a branching onset with the /d/, which is in strong post-consonantal position and survives. The analysis presented argues that the illegal situation that triggers either solution (epenthesis or metathesis) is the existence of a sequence of two empty nuclei: /sesø₁ dɔ₂ɔrmendu/. In case ø₁ is filled, there is no trouble anymore. In case it is not, the r moves to the left and creates a *muta cum liquida* cluster that circumscribes ø₂. The situation is more intricate than what can be shown here (lexically, and also regarding the conditions on starting and landing sites of metathesized r): it is presented during the talk.

References

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