

Sonority Sequencing Violations and Prosodic Structure in Latin and other Indo-European Languages

Jessica DeLisi, UCLA Program in Indo-European Studies

A fair amount of attention has been paid of late to syllable structure in ancient Indo-European languages, e.g. Sanskrit (Kobayashi 2004), Latin (Marotta 1999), Greek (Steriade 1982, Devine & Stephens 1994, Zukoff 2012), and general Indo-European (Byrd 2010, Keydana 2012). There is little agreement in the field about some of the more difficult cases, most of which involve both word-initial and medial clusters that violate the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP),¹ particularly sibilant-stop clusters. Because sibilants are more sonorous than stops, $[stV-]_{\sigma}$ onsets like **steh₂-* require special consideration.

With no living native speakers to give syllabification judgments, our discussions of syllable structure are often hindered by ad hoc and circular syllabification procedures. I will argue that there are three types of evidence we can and should employ in attempting to diagnose syllable structure in ancient languages: metrical, phonological, and morphological. All three diagnostics may not be available in all languages,² and furthermore they are not all equally dependable; instead there is a hierarchy for reliability among the diagnostics. To demonstrate the variable reliability of these diagnostics, I will apply all three to Latin forms, showing that in very Old Latin, sibilant-stop clusters formed true onsets, as Byrd (2010) has argued for Proto-Indo-European, but that by the Classical period these SSP-violating clusters were no longer licensed. Classical Latin sequences of $[st-]$ allowed only $[t]$ in the onset, while the $[s]$ was in the coda in medial position and extraprosodic word-initially. The differential treatment of ST-sequences in Latin and other Indo-European languages, especially Sanskrit, Greek, Italian, and Spanish, will be modeled in an Optimality Theoretic factorial typology of constraints on phonotactics and extraprosodicity.

¹A phonotactic principle dictating that well-formed syllables should consist of a sonority peak at the syllable nucleus, with onset and coda segments reducing in sonority toward the margin. That is to say, CRVRC is wellformed according to the SSP, but RCVCR is not.

²For instance, Classical Armenian has no metrical texts.

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