Philippe Ségéral, Université Paris 7
Tobias Scheer, Université de Nice

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A look at the Gallo-Romance trouble with *Muta cum liquidā* through the positional prism

Sequences made of an obstruent followed by a liquid (henceforth TR) are a notorious source of headache for phonologists of all times and all theoretical orientations. Sequences of the reverse sonority slope, however, enjoy a unique syllabic status: the two members of an RT cluster cannot possibly behave in a solidary fashion. Romance diachronics are an excellent witness of this situation.

The main purpose of our talk is to show that any uniform treatment of the surface sequence TR is necessarily doomed to failure. There is no universal or cross-linguistically stable syllabification for TR clusters. The question, then, is threefold: how do we detect the actual status of a TR cluster? How many different underlying identities can TR instantiate? And what are possible and impossible distributions of the different identities of TR within a given language?

We begin with the review of events that make TR clusters special in Gallo-Romance, and expose how they have been treated in the literature (among others, Steriade 1988, Lahiri, Riad & Jacobs 1999, Bullock 2001). Relevant issues include the following. 1) the stress shift in proparoxytons where the last syllable is TR-initial (colubra > colubra). 2) the loss of [t,d] in intervocalic [tr,dr] clusters and eventual ensuing gemination (based on graphic evidence, but which we show is far from being just chance) of the liquid: (patrem > père vs. latroone > larron). 3) the yodification of velars in TR clusters (sacramentu > ofr sairement). 4) the epenthesis of a stop in the middle of a syncope-created sonorant cluster (sim(u)laare > sembler). 5) the unexpected survival of final vowels other than [a] in case they are preceded by a TR cluster (patrem > père).

Unsurprisingly, all events that single out TR clusters as troublesome fellows are related to their syllabic status: they sometimes show solidary behaviour (branching Onset), but at other times (or at the same time actually) seem to pattern with interludes (Coda-Onset). In addition, the obstruent member may also behave like a true intervocalic consonant.

Hence, a tool is needed which detects the wavering syllabic status of TR clusters. We submit that looking at the facts through the prism of positional strength is a reliable guide through the TR-jungle. We show how a theory of positional strength such as the Coda Mirror (Ségéral & Scheer 2001a) makes a firm statement concerning the syllabic status of another kind of object which is typically uncertain, i.e. C+j sequences: rab.ja > rage, but Modern French rabiot is ra.bjo, not *rab.jo (Ségéral & Scheer 2001b).

The next question is how many different syllabic structures a TR cluster may represent. We argue for at least three possibilities which, using the familiar generative terminology, come down to 1) a branching Onset, 2) a Coda-Onset sequence or 3) a contour segment (i.e. an "affricate"). The fundamental split opposes the former two structures which involve two skeletal slots, and the mono-positional contour segment.

Conceiving TR clusters as contour structures is not an original proposal (e.g. Hirst 1985, Steriade 1994, Rennison 1998, Lowenstamm 2003). We argue that the epenthesis of stops in the middle of sonorant-liquid (or [s,z]-liquid) clusters that have been created by the loss of a post- or pre-tonic vowel (e.g. cam(e)ra > chambre) allows for no other interpretation than a resulting contour structure. This is because the original structure offers no free position where the additional stop could parachute, and syllable structure does not fall from heaven (we discuss this point in greater detail): the syllabic space must be constant throughout the entire process. We conceive the epenthetic activity as a strengthening process, rather than as the resolution of an "illicit" contact between a sonorant and a liquid ([s,z]-liquid): the second

member of the syncope-created cluster enjoys the privilege of the Strong Position, and therefore strengthens. The resulting "affricate" TR is the strengthened version of its ancestor R.

The benefits of this analysis are twofold. For one thing, the two major types of liquid metatheses that are found across Romance (kap**r**a > sard. k**r**aBa, do**r**mire > sard. d**r**ommire) make sense: they leave their original position, which is indeed weak (i.e. a form of lenition); their "landing site" is also selected according to positional criteria, i.e. the strong word-initial position. On this analysis, the original T (in kapra) undergoes a strengthening process, which results in a contoured TR (kr in kraBa): TR is the strong version of T. Also, cases of "intrusive r" may be analysed along these lines: perdiice > perd**r**ix, thesauru > t**r**ésor.

We also discuss the case of TR clusters that are necessarily bi-positional. Illustration comes from the evolution of intervocalic [tr, dr] in French: the dental stop is always lost, but in some cases there is an ensuing compensatory lengthening of the sonorant (latroone > la**rr**on), while at other times this does not happen (patre > pè**r**e). The scriptural evidence is highly wavering, but we show, following Fouché (1966-73:719-722), that the geminate result occurs in pre-tonic position, while the sonorant remains simplex in case the stress precedes.

The overall approach developed here is different from the classical generative picture in that it does not grant any phonological reality to typology or markedness: TRs are not "fundamentally" branching Onsets that may be transformed into an interlude by performing a special action (Maximal Onset Principle, Coda capture). Rather, nature allows for at least three interpretations, each of which is equal-righted in phonology. In short, the various syllabic identities of TR clusters are not created by any procedural tool, they ARE. The conclusion, then, is that phonological theory will be left with a zone of muddy TR-water unless the existence of a syllabic TR-typology is accepted. We try to flesh out the properties and the functioning of its internal variation.

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