

Phonology in Generative Grammar

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6.2 Ancient Greek (Steriade 1982)

A. Both Attic (4th century BC) Greek and Sanskrit are Indo-European languages. A natural question to ask is whether the richer stock of core syllables found in Sanskrit or the more restricted Attic inventory reflects the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) system. The following data from Mycenaean (2d millennium BC) Greek, excerpted from Steriade 1982, shed light on this question. Mycenaean Greek had a syllabic writing system (Linear B), where each graph marks a particular vowel or consonant + vowel combination. In an alphabetic writing system the number of graphs typically equals the sum of the consonants and vowels. But in a syllabic system the number of graphs is much larger, approaching the arithmetic product of the vowels and consonants. In a string of alternating consonants and vowels CVCVCV . . . , each segment finds a representation. But some supplemental decision is required to represent consonant clusters in a syllabic system. Some examples of Mycenaean spelling are cited in (1). The words in the first column are reconstructions of the pronunciation of selected Mycenaean words. The second column indicates the spelling these words received in the Mycenaean syllabic system. First, determine what decision the system makes to deal with the problem posed by consonant clusters. Second, does this result shed any light on the syllabic structure operative in this dialect of Greek? Third, assuming that the Attic dialect discussed in section 6.5 is a later descendent of Mycenaean, can you say anything about whether Sanskrit or Attic syllabification more closely reflects the system that must have operated in PIE?

(1)	Aleksandra	personal name	a-re-ka-sa-da-ra
	Knossos	place name	ko-no-so
	dosmiya	'gifts'	do-si-mi-ja
	deksiwos	'right'	de-ki-si-wo
	ksenwos	'foreigner'	ke-se-nu-wo
	p ^h asgana	'swords'	pa-ka-na
	p ^h ulakp ^h i	'to the guardians'	pu-ra-pi
	aiksmā	'sword'	a-ka-sa-ma

B. In the development of Greek from Indo-European, PIE *[s] turned to [h] in certain contexts but not in others. On the basis of the following data, formulate a simple rule that predicts exactly where the sound change takes place. Also, can you say anything about what relative point (early, middle, or late) in the development of Ancient Greek this sound change must have occurred? (The forms in parentheses are later Attic developments.)

(2)	PIE *[s] → [h]			
	# ___ V	*sekwomai	hepomai	'I follow'
	# ___ sonor	*swekuros	hekuros	'father-in-law'
	V ___ V	*nesomai	nehomai (neomai)	'I return'
	sonor ___ V	*ansiā	anhiā (hāniā)	'rein'
	sonor ___ sonor	*arsma	arhma (harma)	'wheel, chariot'
	V ___ sonor	*naswos	nahwos (nāos)	'temple'

(3) PIE *[s] is retained

#___obstruent	spērō	'I sow'
obstruent___V	ak ^h sios	'worth'
V___obstruent	astēr	'star'
___#	nomos	'law'

6.3 *Italian Onsets*

A. The possible word-initial consonants and consonantal clusters for Italian are listed in (1) and (2). Both divide into two remarkably consistent groups with respect to a number of phonological rules and constraints outlined in questions B–E. Try to explain the basis for the groupings.

(1) group A

[p]	ponte	'bridge'
[t]	topo	'mouse'
[k]	corpo	'body'
[b]	bagno	'bath'
[d]	dente	'tooth'
[g]	gatto	'cat'
[č]	cielo	'sky'
[j]	giorno	'day'
[f]	forno	'oven'
[v]	volo	'flight'
[s]	segno	'mark'
[m]	mondo	'world'
[n]	nome	'name'
[l]	ladro	'thief'
[r]	regalo	'gift'

group B

[š]	sciopero	'strike'
[tʰ]	zio	'uncle'
[dʒ]	zaino	'knapsack'
[ŋ]	gnocco	'dumpling'

(2) group A

[pr]	proposito	'purpose'
[pl]	plastico	'plastic'
[tr]	treno	'train'
[dr]	drappo	'cloth'
[kr]	croce	'cross'
[fr]	fratello	'brother'
[fl]	flagello	'whip'
[py]	piatto	'dish'
[fy]	fiore	'flower'
[ky]	chiaro	'bright'

group B

[sp]	specchio	'mirror'
[st]	studio	'office'
[sk]	scudo	'shield'
[zb]	sbaglio	'mistake'
[sf]	sfogo	'outlet'
[ps]	psicologo	'psychologist'
[spr]	sprone	'spur'
[zbr]	sbrano	'tear'

B. Many prenominal modifiers (specifiers) lose their final [o] when the following word begins with a vowel or with a single consonant or a consonant cluster belonging to group A. Single consonants or consonant clusters from group B never permit the preceding -o to be dropped. How can this difference be accounted for?