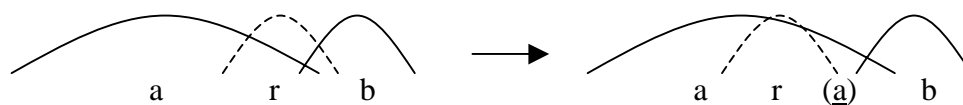


## Monosyllabic “CVCVC”: the intrusive vowel syndrome

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I describe a syndrome of ‘intrusive vowels’ that appear in certain types of consonant clusters, as in the Scots Gaelic name *barabəra* ‘Barbara’. The diagnostics of this syndrome are: 1) the intrusive vowel is a copy vowel; 2) the consonants are heterorganic, and one is a sonorant or guttural; 3) the vowel copied (the ‘base vowel’) is adjacent over the sonorant / guttural (*barabəra*, not \**barəbəra*). Oddly, intrusive vowels tend to break up rather *unmarked* clusters- Winnebago, for example, splits prevocalic *pr* and *kw* but leaves *xg*, *tcg*, *ks*, and *pc* intact.

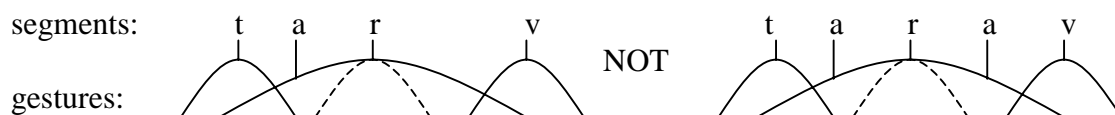
In an articulatory phonology framework (Browman & Goldstein 1990) Steriade 1990 argues that these vowels result from a gestural timing shift. A sonorant gesture moves away from an adjacent consonantal gesture to overlap a vowel gesture, causing the vowel gesture to be heard in two parts.



This analysis explains why the intrusive vowel is a copy vowel (it is actually part of the adjacent vowel gesture), and suggests why this happens only with gutturals and sonorants: they are plausibly more able to overlap with vowel gestures than obstruents are. Steriade assumes that overlap creates a new syllable, since “a vowel gesture is interpreted as a monosyllable only if all the superimposed consonantal gestures are peripheral.”

Based on a survey of 20 languages, I argue that intrusive vowels do not create new syllables, nor constitute segments. Crosslinguistically, the *CVCV* or *VCVC* sequences they create pattern with monosyllables. In Winnebago, reduplicants that are normally one syllable copy both an intrusive vowel and its base: *ʃara* ‘bald’, from /ʃra/, reduplicates to *ʃara-ʃara*, not \**ʃara-ra*. When a stem-final vowel undergoes *e* → *a* ablaut before a suffix, a preceding intrusive vowel must ablaut as well: *kere* (/kre/) + *hire* → *karaire*, not \**keraire*. The intrusive vowel behaves like part of the final vowel segment. Scots Gaelic speakers identify words like *tarav* (/tarv/) ‘bull’ as one syllable, sing them on one note, and have difficulty pausing within them, although they can easily pause between syllables. Other evidence for monosyllabicity and monosegmentality include patterns of Finnish allomorphy, Winnebago nasalization, Scots Gaelic syncope and positional licensing, and a Kekchi language game.

These facts suggest that phonological output representations must specify both a gestural score and a segmental representation, and that the relation between the two is regulated by the grammar. *tarav* has the segmental representation *t-a-r-v*, despite a gestural score that causes the *a* and *r* gestures to overlap heavily. Although the intrusive vowel in Scots Gaelic is phonetically as long as other vowels, it is not an independent segment.



Since syllables organize segments, not subparts of gestures, *tarav* is one syllable and behaves as such in the phonology and in speakers’ intuitions. Intrusive vowels thus have implications for our understanding of the phonetics / phonology interface as it relates to syllable structure.

refs.: Browman & Goldstein 1990. Articulatory phonology: an overview. *Phonetica* 49  
Steriade 1990. “Gestures and Autosegments” *Papers in Laboratory Phonology I*