

On (the unfortunate consequences of) Parametrizing the Initial CV

Jean Lowenstamm

Lowenstamm (1999) proposed that templates associated to major categories – N, V, P – are always preceded by an initial CV site. This proposal was put forth as part of an attempt to derive the dichotomy pitting two types of languages against each other: Type I languages (German, Italian, French, etc.) exclusively tolerate initial cluster of rising sonority, #tr, #bl, etc., whereas Type II languages (Biblical Hebrew, Berber, etc.) tolerate clusters of rising sonority as well as their mirror images, #rt, #lb, etc. The argument proceeded in two steps:

- 1) The dichotomy was shown to follow from the differential licensing status of the initial site in Type I languages (always licensed) and in Type II languages (not always licensed). Moreover, the inexistence of a hypothetical class of languages exclusively tolerating initial clusters of decreasing sonority #rt, #lb, etc. was shown to follow from the proposal.
- 2) Independent consequences of the differential licensing status of the initial site in both types of languages were brought out, such as, for instance, the ability of Type I languages to host proclitics, and the corresponding inability of Type II languages to do the same. Further confirmation of the reality of the initial site was provided by Ségéral & Scheer (2001)'s "Coda Mirror" results.

Following Scheer (2000), Froli (2001) submits, in a detailed study of the diachrony of Greek, that the difference between Type I and Type II languages results, not from the differential licensing status in one kind of language and the other, but from its presence in Type I languages (French, German, etc.) and its outright absence in type II languages (Biblical Hebrew, Berber, and now Greek). Scheer (2000) and Froli (2001) argue for the parametrization of the presence of an initial CV site. They view major categories of a language such as French as equipped with an initial CV; on the other hand, they claim, major categories of a language such as Berber are deprived of an initial CV.

According to Lowenstamm (1999), by contrast, an initial CV site is always present in both Type I languages and Type II languages. Both stances will be compared and it will be argued that Scheer (2000)'s and Froli (2001)'s suggestion is undesirable. The demonstration will include two facets:

- parametrizing the initial CV site is incompatible with an account of Biblical Hebrew facts (Lowenstamm 1999), but more dramatically with an account of Berber facts (Guerssel 1992, Lahrouchi 2001).
- parametrizing the initial CV site only imperfectly accounts for the Greek facts, even though they were adduced as evidence for its absence, in the first place.

An alternative analysis of Greek will be proposed. It will be shown a) to provide a more explanatory account of the Greek facts themselves, b) to provide – beyond Greek this time – a means of integrating data explicitly left out both by Lowenstamm (1999) and by Scheer (2000) and Froli (2001), viz. the status and treatment of initial clusters such as #str, #spl, #spr, #st, #sp, #skr, #sk in languages such as French, German, Italian and Spanish.

References

- Froli, D. (2001) De la lénition des "codas" initiales en grec, Mémoire de DEA, Université de Nice.
- Lahrouchi, M. (2001) Aspects morphophonologiques de la dérivation verbale en berbère (parler chleuh d'Agadir), Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 7.
- Lowenstamm, J. (1999) The Beginning of the Word, Phonologica 1996, Holland Academic Graphics, The Hague.
- Scheer, T. (2000) De la localité, de la morphologie et de la phonologie en phonologie, Mémoire d'HDR, Université de Nice.