

## Initial codas & weak word-initial position

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Based on Greek phenomenology, this talk establishes a relation between syllable structure, initial restrictions of consonantal distribution and the melodic evolution of obstruents.

When compared with other languages such as Romance or German, Greek bears two extraordinary features in word-initial position: for one thing, it displays “initial codas”, that is, it tolerates word-initial consonant clusters such as pt-, kt- etc., which is untypical for an IE language. Also, regarding lenition, a word-initial consonant before vowel is in “weak position” in Greek, while it stands in “strong position” cross-linguistically and in other IE languages<sup>1</sup>. The weakness of the initial position in Greek is illustrated below by comparing Greek with Germanic and Romance evolutions<sup>2</sup>:

	#_V (1)	C_ (2)	V_V (3)	_ {C,#} (4)
Greek (class. –asp)	<b>pater-pateras</b>	kleptēs-kleftis	epeide-epiði	kleptēs-kleftis
Greek (class. +asp)	<b>t<sup>h</sup>alasa-θalasa</b>	ok <sup>h</sup> t <sup>h</sup> os-οχτος	ot <sup>h</sup> oni-oθoni	<b>p<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ino-ftino</b>
English-German	<b>paθ-pfaad</b>	karp-karpfən	pɔp-pfaffə	ʃi:p-ʃaaf
Latin-French	<b>porta-pɔrtə</b>	talpa-topə	ripa-rivə	rupta-rutə

In the three languages, the post-consonantal<sup>3</sup> position (2) is strong: classical Greek aspirated stops, which is the series most exposed to lenition, maintained their occlusion after obstruents. In the three languages, the right margin of the syllable (coda) is weak: the most resistant series of Greek (classical voiceless non aspirated) lost its occlusion. This series induces to establish a graduation among the two weak positions: the coda (4) is weaker (spirantisation in modern Greek) than the intervocalic position (3) (occlusion)<sup>4</sup>.

The only position on which Greek does not conform to the general pattern is (1) #\_V: this context is strong and equivalent to the post-consonantal one in French and German. On the contrary, it is weak and equivalent to the intervocalic situation in Greek.

This talk provides a unified account of both extraordinary properties of the initial site that are found in Greek: I show how the existence of “initial codas” and the weakness of word-initial consonants in Greek may be viewed to be consequences of the same cause, elaborating on the theoretical status of the beginning of the word that has been developed within government phonology<sup>5</sup>: Lowenstamm 1999 proposed that the beginning of the word is a CV (a sequence of two segmental positions without any phonetic realization, which universally precedes the first audible consonant of words). On the other hand, Scheer 2000 assumes that this CV is not present in the lexicon: it is distributed by another instance, so it can be present in a language and absent in another one. My analysis of Greek tells in favor of the second assumption. Besides this conclusion, this study shows that the coda is weaker than intervocalic context. Both conclusions remain to be verified on other languages.

LOWENSTAMM, J 1999. The beginning of the word. *Phonologica* 1996, ed. by John Rennison & Klaus Kühnhammer, 153-166. La Hague: Holland Academic Graphics.

SCHEER, T 2000. De la localité, de la morphologie et de la phonologie en phonologie. Habilitation thesis, Université de Nice.

SCHEER & SEGERAL 2001. La Coda-Miroir. Bulletin de la société de linguistique de Paris. Tome 94. Peters Paris Louvain.

<sup>1</sup> See Scheer & Ségéral 2001.

<sup>2</sup> In the following panel, Greek stands for classical Greek - modern Greek. English witnesses the consonantal situation of Common Germanic.

<sup>3</sup> Post-obstruent in Greek. The contrast between post-obstruent vs post-sonorant is common in lenition-systems. This issue will be addressed in greater detail during the talk.

<sup>4</sup> This graduation is corroborated by the Romance data (intervocalic spirantisation, loss in codas).

<sup>5</sup> Lowenstamm 1999, Scheer 2000, Scheer & Ségéral 2001.