

A split-margin approach to minimally-rising clusters in early French diachronic phonology

Despite the highly marked consonant clusters attested in present-day French (Dell 1995), French's early history exhibited an identifiable evolutionary trend towards syllable-geometric simplification as regards the sonority contour of licensed syllable- and word-internal consonant clusters. The longitudinal examination of diachronic changes in cluster licensing from Late Latin through Old French (11th-13th centuries) brings to light that these phenomena, traditionally viewed as independent from one another (e.g. Pope 1952), in fact represent a unified development in the phonological system (Montaño 2017). The Gallo-Romance period (5th-10th c.) in particular offers rich data regarding consonant cluster licensing and the repair of illicit phonotactic sequences, by virtue of the wide array of consonants brought into contact by Late Latin syncope (Dumas 1993; Hartkemeyer 2000).

My diachronic analysis elucidates important phenomenological connections among several early French cluster repairs, providing strong evidence for defining these changes as interrelated, interdependent manifestations of a single broader diachronic development. Drawing on evidence from several Gallo-Romance (GR) and Old French (OF) cluster repairs, including word-initial /s/ prothesis (*sponsa* > *espuse* 'spouse.FEM'), GR coda obstruent deletion (*rupta* > *rute* 'route'), and OF coda sibilant and sonorant deletion (re-characterizing Gess' [1998, 1999] analyses), my study zeroes in on the intersection of two distinct repairs on rising-sonority medial clusters resulting from Late Latin syncope: sonorant rhotacization in minimally-rising obstruent-nasal (*ordine* > *ordre* 'order') and /t/ (*epistula* > *epistre* 'epistle') medial clusters, and stop epenthesis in rising-sonority sonorant-sonorant syllable-contact clusters (SCCs) (*cisera* > *cisdre* 'cider', *cumulum* > *combe* 'peak', *camera* > *chambre* 'room', *molere* > *moldre* 'grind.INFINITIVE'). I present a unified analysis of these two particular diachronic phenomena, with a special focus on capturing how Gallo-Romance phonology resolves conflicting markedness priorities when rhotacization and epenthesis contexts overlap in sibilant-lateral SCCs.

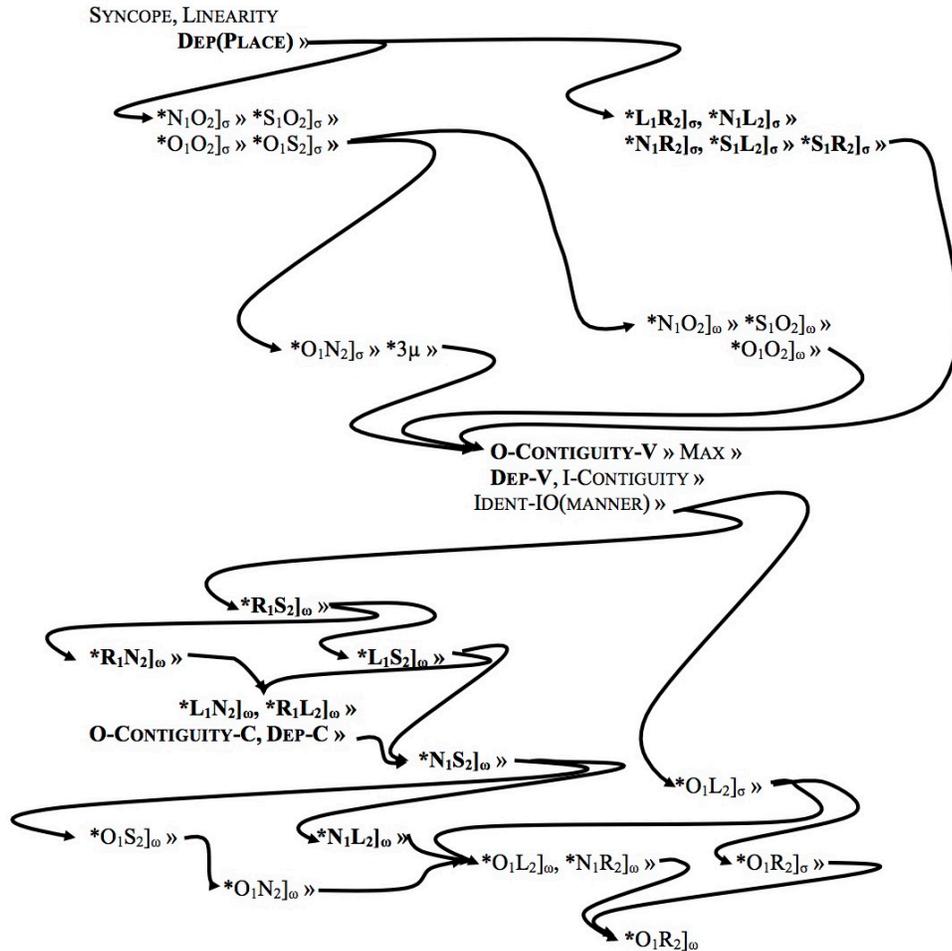
In order to formalize the interrelated nature and the predictable diachronic ordering of these changes in SCC licensing, my optimality-theoretic analysis hinges on the rich network of implicational structural relationships between constraints on margin segments in the syllable and phonological word as captured by the Split Margin Approach to the Syllable (Baertsch 2002; Baertsch & Davis 2003; and later work). In my application of this approach, the interaction of split-margin constraints with competing faithfulness constraints reveals how and why different cluster repairs surface to resolve illicit consonant phonotactics in a single, unified phonology.

Of particular relevance to the Gallo-Romance phenomena cited above, /s/ SCCs are ranked intermediately on the split-margin markedness hierarchy, between other rising-sonority clusters that do exhibit stop epenthesis, e.g. /sr/ and /ml/ clusters ($*R_1S_2]_{\omega} \gg *L_1S_2]_{\omega} \gg *L_1N_2]_{\omega}$). Given this, it is unexpected that /s/ clusters transmit faithfully without repair into Old French (cf. *isle* [iz.lə]), eventually feeding the well-known Old French coda /s/ deletion phenomenon ([i:lə], cf. contemporary French *île*) (Gess 1998 and later work). This apparent exception to GR stop epenthesis is captured in my analysis by the crucial interaction of competing markedness constraints, active in the contemporaneous GR rhotacization phenomenon, resulting in the failure of both phonological repairs and the preservation of /s/ SCCs at the word level:

Tableau. Lack of stop-epenthesis in Gallo-Romance /s/ syllable-contact clusters resulting from Late Latin syncope. /isola/ → [iz.lɛ]

/isola/	SYN	DEP (PL)	*S ₁ L ₂] _σ	O- CONT-V	MAX	DEP -V	*[TL]/ [DL]	ID- (MAN)	I-CONT	*L ₁ S ₂] _ω	O-CONT- C	DEP- C	*O ₁ S ₂] _ω
a. i.zo.lɛ	*!												
b. i.zlɛ			*!		*				*				
c. iz.blɛ		*!			*				*		*	*	*
☛ d. iz.lɛ					*				*	*			
e. iz.drɛ					*		*!		*		*	*	*
f. iz.dlɛ					*		*!		*		*	*	*

My analysis captures the overlap of the two phonological repairs thanks to the rich network of constraint interactions achieved by examining a diverse range of word-medial SCCs in GR. The granularity of the split-margin family of constraints and their relevance to both syllable and phonological word yield an informative schematization of early French consonant cluster licensing and its evolution over time in GR phonology. The final result is a unified representation of the GR phonological system as pertains to syllable- and word-level consonant phonotactics:



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