

Latin Iambic and Cretic Shortening Revisited

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Latin Iambic Shortening, by which an iambic L(ight)H(eavy) word becomes LL (/a.mo:/ *amo* ‘I love’ → [‘a.mo]) and Cretic Shortening, by which a cretic HLH word becomes HLL (/de:sino/ *desino* ‘I cease’ → [‘de:si.no]), have received a great deal of attention both from a traditional linguistic perspective (among many others: Lindsay 1894, Allen 1973 and Drexler 1969) and from a more theoretical, metrical phonology, perspective (again, among many others: Mester 1994, Prince and Smolensky 2004 and, more recently McCarthy, Pater and Pruitt 2016).

The latter two analyses, the parallel OT analysis of Prince and Smolensky 2004 and the serial OT analysis of McCarthy, Pater and Pruitt 2016 differ in details, one of which is whether or not a foot (‘LH) is allowed. It is allowed in the parallel analysis for Classical Latin, but not for Pre-Classical Latin, it is allowed as a foot in an intermediate step in the serial analysis, but not as surface foot. Both analyses follow Mester 1994 in considering that the basic motivation of the two shortening phenomena is an improvement in foot structure.

An aspect that has received far less, and arguably too little, attention is the resulting segmental structure of the shortening processes. For a final long vowel in a cretic word like /de:sino/ *desino* surfacing as [‘de:si.no] or an iambic word, like /a.mo:/ *amo* surfacing as (‘a.mo) in Pre-Classical Latin and counting as light in Plautinian poetry, the answer seems obvious: a short vowel. But what about shortening when the syllable that is shortened ends in a consonant, as in the second syllable of words like *canis* ‘dog’, *ministerium* ‘ministry’, *voluptatem* ‘pleasure’, *adoptatus* ‘adopted’ or *gubernabant* ‘they did govern’ or when that syllable is closed by a geminate, as in the second syllable of words like *supellectilis* ‘furniture’, *compellabo* ‘I will address’ or *vicissatim* ‘in turn, alternatively’? These are all instances of shortening in the poetry of Plautus, but their representation is less obvious. For the former cases, a single coda consonant, one might assume that the final consonant of the second syllable loses its mora, or violates the OT constraint WBP (Weight-by-Position: a coda consonant should have a mora), but that would incorrectly predict degemination for the latter, first part of a geminate. This has been mentioned in footnotes both by Mester (1994: 18, footnote 22) who suggests that the proper representation requires “perhaps a formal distinction between gemination and ambisyllabicity” and by Prince and Smolensky (2004: 78, footnote 43) who refer to Yupik and suggest that it is represented as an unassociated mora. As such it would require a two-layered moraic model (cf. Hayes 1995 for the comparable Yupik and Cayuga cases, where coda consonants are not moraic for stress, but are so for segmental phonology).

In this talk, we will first point out why iambic words were so problematic for Plautus who wrote quantitative verse, but with an agreement between ictus and word stress. As such, an ‘LH word like ‘*amo* or ‘*canis* could not fit in his Iambic or Trochaic lines given the foot types that were used, that is, Iambus, Spondee, Tribrach, Anapest, Dactyl or Proceleusmatic. Next, we will briefly compare the parallel and the serial OT analysis mentioned above and point out that they both predict shortening to take place in cases where it did not take place and predict secondary stress on prefinal unstressed vowels. After that, we turn to a two-layered moraic representation. We will argue that for typological reasons, it is an unnecessary complication of the model and that a better alternative (disentangling moras from coda consonants, but limiting them to segmental quantity) is to be preferred. Finally, we will show that it is not required for Latin and we will argue that the generalization behind the closed syllables that were allowed to count as light in

Plautinian poetry is the fact that they all constitute instances of closed syllables that were unstressed in the spoken language.

References

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