Prior engagements and the floating /n/ in [kətəlá]

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In Catalan, stem-final /n/ alternates with zero when it is word-final (1a). Crucially, this happens only when the /n/ is immediately preceded by a stressed vowel; when it isn't (1b), or when the stressed vowel is separated from the /n/ by /r/ (1d), the /n/ persists even though it is word-final. Finally, while one does find final [n]'s immediately preceded by a stressed vowel, it is curiously only as the result of the simplification of word-final clusters (1c; final [ŋ] can only arise through such a scenario). The process is productive - it is extended to loanwords e.g. [taliβá] 'Taliban' - though it does tolerate a few exceptions.

(1)	a.	plá	'plan'	pla**n**-s	'pl.'	b.	uríʒə**n**	'origin'
		kuzí	'cousin'	kuzí**n**-ɛt	'dim.'		kɔ́lu**n**	'column'
		ʃilɛ́	'Chilean'	ʃilə**n**-ízmə	'Chileanism'		plátə**n**	'banana'
	c.	kəlé**n**	'hot'	kəlé**n**t-ə	'fm.'	d.	kár**n**	'meat'
		blá**ŋ**	'white'	blá**ŋ**k-ə	'fm.		kuntór**n**	'contour'

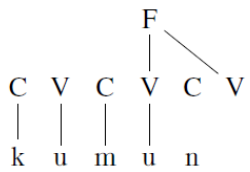
Previous accounts, when they did not resort to allomorphy, have gone as far as calling the phenomenon a "crazy" rule (e.f. Bonet et al. 2004). Indeed, [n] is a very good coda cross-linguistically, so it is unclear why it of all codas should be subject to deletion, and why this should occur only word-finally and only immediately after the stressed vowel. In this talk, we present an account which shows that there is nothing crazy about this. Combining 1) a Strict CV skeleton (Lowenstamm 1996); 2) the notion of Licensing (Scheer 2004); 3) skeleton-based foot construction (Ulfsbjorninn 2014); and 4) Optimality Theoretic constraints, we show that the problematic realization of /n/ is dispensed with when its underlying presence can be detected indirectly through metrical structure.

We begin with the stress facts. Regular stress in Catalan is penultimate in vowel-final words [kuzínə] 'female cousin' and final in consonant-final ones [kuzinét] 'cousin (dim.)' (words such as (1b) are crucially regarded by all specialists as carrying unpredictable, lexical stress). This common system is easily explained with a bimoraic right-aligned trochee, assuming that final C's project a mora [ku{zí$_{\mu}$nə$_{\mu}$}], [kuzi{né$_{\mu}$t$_{\mu}$}]. The loss of final /n/ as in [kuzí] presents a challenge to this account, because it produces a multitude of vowel-final words with stress on the final vowel. To explain this fact, a moraic account has to say that the underlying /n/ projects a mora, but subsequently remains unrealized; but this is a contradiction, since realization is what enables a sound to project weight.

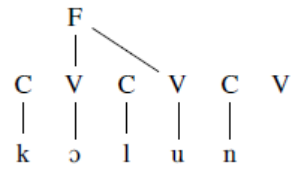
We propose an alternative account in which the right-aligned trochee is built not on moras but on nuclei, empty or full. According to Strict CV, every skeleton ends in a V-slot. Thus, an account of regular stress without moras can simply raise the status of the final empty V-slot to that of a full nucleus for purposes of stress: [ku{zínə}], [kuzi{nét$_{V}$}]. Such an account already provides the beginning of an explanation for words like [kuzí]: if feet are built of V-slots, and can independently be claimed to engage empty ones as in [kuzi{nét$_{V}$}], then the fact that the *consonant* /n/ is not realized is irrelevant for foot construction.

We propose the representation in (2a) for such words: the /n/ floats above a CV unit, and the stress algorithm identifies that unit as the weak branch of a right-aligned trochee. This representation is revealing with respect to the retention of /n/ when not preceded by stress, as in (2b): one may now say that the /n/ may remain afloat iff its CV unit is unengaged by metrical structure.

(2) a.



b.



Having shown the logic of the argument, we move to its formalization in terms of constraints. We first assume an algorithm which, all other things being equal, assigns to the representation as many CV units as there are consonants. We then assume with Scheer (2004) that /n/ requires licensing in order to associate to a skeletal position, and can get such licensing either through place-sharing or from a following realized nucleus. A word-final [n] is therefore unlicensed, a fact we express in a constraint *UNLICENSED-[n]. A second constraint is *UNENGAGEDCV, militating against any CV unit that is left completely unassociated (expressing the general principle of template satisfaction). (3a) below shows the effect of *UNLICENSED-/N/, in that if the final V is engaged by the metrical structure, associating the /n/ will be more costly than deleting it. *UNLICENSED-/N/ must be ranked below *UNENGAGEDCV, because if stress is lexically-assigned and the foot is not right-aligned, as in (3b), then the final CV slot must be engaged by the /n/ in order to satisfy *UNENGAGEDCV.

(3a) /kumun/	*UNENG CV	*UNLIC-[n]
☞ F | C V C V C V | k u m u n		
F | C V C V C V | k u m u n		*!

(3b) /kɔ́lun/	*UNENG CV	*UNLIC-[n]
F | C V C V C V | k ɔ l u n	*!	
☞ F | C V C V C V | k ɔ l u n		*

The account has the merit of being based on independently-motivated phonological principles (the constraints above), as well as illustrating how Strict CV representations and metrics can be combined with a violable conceptualization of phonological pressures. On the empirical side, the combination also makes a correct prediction with respect to the words in (1d): since final /rn/ cluster in Strict CV involve an intervening V-slot, the CV of the /n/ is not engaged by the metrical structure [{kar$_V$}n$_V$]; consequently, just as in (3b), the /n/ is correctly predicted to resist deletion as a result of *UNENGAGEDCV.

The talk then proceeds to explain the remaining issue in (1c) above. We formalize cluster simplification as a constraint against final nasal-stop clusters. However, assuming Containment, even unassociated segments remain in the representation. Thus, the nasal in [kəlén] is shown to be licensed by the underlying /t/ that surfaces in [kəlén**t**ə]. Being licensed, it does not violate the constraint and may associate to its C-slot.

The talk ends with a word about the factorial typology predicted by the proposed grammar. It concludes with the assertion that there is nothing crazy about Catalan /n/-deletion, if one understands the special status of /n/ and accepts (CVC)V-based foot construction.

Selected references

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