

Mojeño Trinitario syncope and stress in Strict CV metrics

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The basic premise of the autosegmental theory of Strict CV (Lowenstamm 1996, Scheer 2004) is that the skeletal tier is composed of a single, repeated unit: the CV sequence. Accordingly, the theory does not recognize codas or rhymes as representational primitives. Instead, non-prevocalic consonant always precede an empty nucleus or V-slot, and effects such as closed-syllable shortening are explained using letteral relations (government, licensing). Due to these basic assumptions, for a long time it has not been clear how the theory can explain metrical phenomena which are traditionally analyzed using rhymes, moras and feet. A first step in this direction was taken by Scheer & Szigetvári (2005), who proposed that empty nuclei can be either counted or not in the assignment of stress, and that viewed in this manner, many weight-sensitive systems are in fact reinterpretable as weight insensitive. However, Ulfsbjorninn (2014) has shown that quite a few languages cannot be analyzed in these terms. To express the weight of CVC and CVV syllables, he proposed the tool of “incorporation”. Operating within a grid-based approach, he submitted that the projections of metrically-significant empty nuclei are added to the projections of adjacent contentful ones, making the latter metrically more salient than non-augmented, non-incorporating vowel: e.g., /ba¹r¹bi¹/ => /ba²r⁰bi¹/ (superscripts show projection levels – space considerations exclude fuller representations).

Faust & Ulfsbjorninn (2018) apply this theory to the weight-sensitive stress assignment of Palestinian Arabic, as does Ulfsbjorninn (2021) to word-minimality and metrically-conditioned gemination. The phenomenon of rhythmic syncope, however, has not yet been discussed in this approach. This talk aims to fill that gap, providing an analysis of rhythmic syncope in Mojeño Trinitario (Rose 2019).

Mojeño presents an interesting set of phenomena revolving around metrically-conditioned syncope. Syncope applies to every odd syllable starting from the left, except the final vowel (a,b – targets underlined in UR). In words with even-numbered syllables, main stress ends up

a.	/nu-huma/ => [nhúma]	‘1SG-illness’
b.	/ʃunusihi-re/ => [ʃnushire]	‘cushion-NPSD’
c.	/tiko-huma-numo/ => [tkohmánmo]	‘3-VZ-illness-SMOT’
d.	/kojure-çira/ => [kojréçra]	‘bird-DIM’
e.	/ʃineno-ko/ => [ʃnénoko]	‘daughter-in-law-NPSD’
f.	/oni-çira-rine/ => [on-çirarine]	‘DEM-DIM-RESTE’
g.	/su-poriropa/ => [spo:ropa]	‘3F-needle’
h.	/emotone-ko/ => [ʔmotnéko]	‘work-NPSD’

on the underlying penult (a,b); but in words with odd-numbered syllables it surfaces on the underlying antepenult (c). In a smaller set of forms, however, syncope applies to even, not odd-numbered syllables (d).

Furthermore, some vowels are immune to syncope. In (e), syncope targets odd syllables, but the penult [o] is not syncopeated. Again, stress surfaces on the underlying antepenult, which here is also the surface antepenult. In (f), syncope targets even syllables, but [a] is not syncopeated. Finally, syncope feeds other processes. When a preconsonantal /r/ would be created, that /r/ is not pronounced and the vowel lengthens in compensation (g). And when an initial onsetless syllable is syncopeated, the result is a [ʔC] cluster (h).

Rose (2019) proposes an iambic parse for all items except (d,f), with vowels in weak branches syncopeating. Main stress is on the last foot, which must not be aligned with the right edge. As a result, in e.g. (a), the final syllable is unfooted /(nu-hu)ma/. In (c), the footing is /(tiko)-(huma)-numo/, deriving the stress on the underlying penult. (d,f) are lexically marked as having a trochaic parse, e.g. (d) /(koju)(re-çi)ra/ with a final unparsed syllable. (g) is also given a moraic explanation: after syncope of /ri/, the mora is associated to the /r/, and then taken over by the preceding vowel.

There are several problems with this account. First, it has to assume two types of motivations for syncope: weak branch and unfootedness (last /u/ in (c)). Second, final Vs are exempted by assumption. Third, two parses must be assumed. Fourth, only iambic feet are subject to non-finality – trochaic feet can in fact be right-aligned: (f) is /(oni)-(çira)-(rine)/.

In an incorporation-based account, assuming all regular vowels project once, and incorporation is to the right, the iambic parse in e.g. (c) is derived: /ti¹ko¹-hu¹ma¹-nu¹mo¹/ =>

[t⁰ko²-hu⁰má²-nu⁰mo²]. Vowels with no projection syncope, and stress falls on the last vowel projecting to line 2, excluding the final vowel. The trochaic parse is assumed to begin with a free-standing projection (in red): for (d) /¹ko¹ju¹re¹-çi¹ra¹/ => [⁰ko²j⁰ré²-çi⁰ra²]. It is therefore not “trochaic”, but also “iambic”. Syncope-immune vowels are lexically marked as projecting twice, such that even when incorporation applies, they are pronounced (green): (e) /ɸ¹ne¹no²-ko¹/ => [ɸ¹ne²no¹-ko²]; (f) /¹o¹ni¹-çi¹ra²-ri¹ne¹/ => /⁰o²n¹-çi²ra¹-ri²ne¹/. This approach does not suffer from the shortcomings mentioned above: there is only one reason for syncope (V⁰); final vowels always project, and their retention is thus explained rather than assumed; there is only one parse; and there is no alignment difference between iambic/trochaic feet. In addition, moras, extrametricality or unparsedness are unnecessary.

I further show that the segmental effects in (g) and (h) receive a more elegant explanation in Strict CV than in Rose’s analysis. Assume /r/ needs to be licensed by a realized nucleus. In /nu⁰-wo²ro⁰-ʔo²/ it precedes an empty one. Since it cannot hold its position, “good old” template satisfaction (McCarthy 1979) applies and the preceding vowel spreads to occupy the following V-slot. This, of course, is only possible *because* /r/ does not interfere. Rose’s account, in turn, involves a violation of syllable integrity (syllables cannot straddle feet), as the long vowel resulting from /r/-elision straddles the foot-boundary: /su-por¹ropa/ => [(supo)(:ro)pa]. Finally, as for (h), in Strict CV there are no onsetless syllables. The initial 2 syllables in (f) and (h) are in fact /Coni/ and /Cemo/ respectively. In /Coni/, /o/ is not syncope, and may govern the C-slot, thus inhibiting its realization (Charette 2003). But in /Cemo/, syncope of /e/ leaves an ungoverned C-slot, which is realized as [ʔ]. Rose’s account assumes that once the glottal stop is inserted to express the mora that was lost by the elision of the vowel; in other words, it employs the controversial, marked configuration of moraic onsets.

To summarize, incorporation can be used to account for metrically-conditioned syncope. In the conclusion, I discuss several questions of principle, such as the limits on incorporation and its possible targets, and why incorporation is preferred to more traditional grid-based approaches of foot-building.

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