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Rosangela Lai

Positional Factors in the Evolution of Sardinian *Muta cum Liquida*: A Case Study*

1. *Introduction*

The aim of this paper is to identify the syllable structure that underlies structural changes involving liquids in a *muta cum liquida* (obstruent-liquid cluster), such as metathesis or liquid deletion. Although recent literature has accounted for the positional effects on obstruents in a *muta cum liquida* (e.g., lenition)[1], this paper focuses on the other component of a *muta cum liquida* cluster, the liquid, and the structural conditions required for such changes to apply.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework adopted here, known as Strict CV or CVCV (Lowenstamm 1996, Scheer 2004). Section 3 provides new relevant data illustrating the diachronic behavior of liquids in *muta cum liquida* clusters in Tertenia, a dialect of Sardinian. Section 4 proposes an analysis according to which liquid deletion and metathesis are both effects of the positional factors influencing liquids in *muta cum liquida* clusters (henceforth TR clusters[2]), just like lenition results from positional factors affecting obstruents. The same section offers independent evidence for the proposed analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. *CVCV and the Coda Mirror*

The framework adopted here is the so-called Strict CV or CVCV framework (Lowenstamm 1996, Scheer 2004), a lateral approach to syllable structure. This theory revises some aspects of standard Government Phonology: in CVCV there are no branching constituents, and hence syllabic constituents are strict sequences of non-branching onsets and nuclei. The model

* The material presented here is from Lai (2013a). For further details, I refer the reader to that work. Many thanks are due to Tobias Scheer and two anonymous reviewers for very helpful comments as well as to the organizers and participants of the *Italian Dialect Meeting* (24-26 May 2012, University of Leiden).

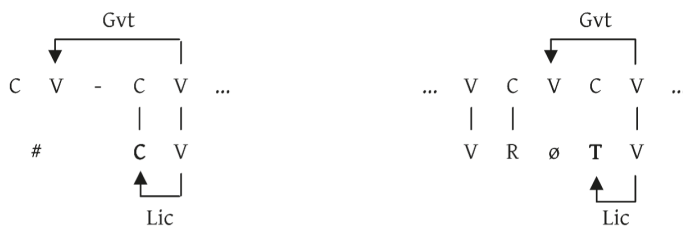
[1] Marotta (2008), Brun-Trigaud & Scheer (2010).

[2] T is shorthand for voiceless obstruents, R for sonorants, and D for voiced obstruents.

implements empty vowel units (empty-nuclei): a coda-onset cluster (henceforth RT), a branching onset (henceforth TR), or a geminate (TT and RR) always enclose an empty nucleus. Government is a lateral relation that regulates the distribution of empty-nuclei. Empty vowel units must be governed by the filled nucleus that immediately follows. The counterpart of Government is Licensing. Government has a damaging effect while Licensing has a positive effect on its target. In CVCV they always apply from right to left (Scheer 2004:249ff).

Ségéral and Scheer (2001) and further developments[3] present a theory of lenition and fortition in terms of CVCV phonology: Coda Mirror Theory. By adopting Lowenstamm's (1999) proposal of an empty CV unit at the left edge of words[4], the Coda Mirror unifies the different syllabic environments in which lenition does not apply cross-linguistically: the initial and the post-consonantal position. Both word-initial consonants and post-coda consonants are in strong position and occur after an empty nucleus. In terms of lateral relations, they are both licensed but ungoverned. Figure (1) presents post-coda and word-initial consonants in a CVCV approach:

(1) a. word-initial consonant #_ b. post-coda consonant C_



The weak positions in internal and final codas are unified by the fact that both are followed by an empty nucleus. Therefore, coda consonants are neither governed nor licensed.

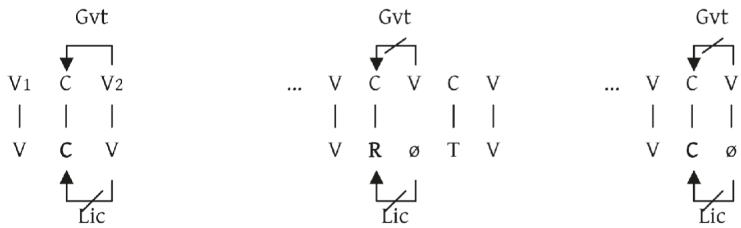
Intervocalic consonants are preceded and followed by filled nuclei. Since the preceding nucleus – notated as V1 in Table (2a)) – is full, it does not need to be governed and thus V2 has no governing duties. Therefore, the

[3] Ségéral & Scheer (2008), Scheer & Ziková (2010).

[4] The initial CV site realizes morpho-syntactic information; see, e.g., Scheer (2012). Scheer (2012:190ff) argues for parametric variation among languages: those with an initial CV site and those without one. In languages with a CV site the word-initial position appears to be strong, being protected from weakening (or changes of any sort) by this empty structure.

government of V2 applies to its own onset. Table (2) shows intervocalic and coda consonants in a CVCV representation[5]:

(2) a. intervocalic consonant V_V b. internal Coda_C c. final Coda_#



3. *Diachronic changes in TRs: lenition, liquid deletion, and metathesis*

3.1. *Data*

Tertenia Sardinian is commonly included in the Ogliastra Campidanese subgroup of the Central-Eastern area[6]. Tertenia Sardinian was subject to diachronic lenition that affected voiceless and voiced obstruents in intervocalic position: voiceless obstruents turned into voiced fricatives (e.g., LOCU> 'loɣu), while voiced obstruents deleted (e.g., NIGELLU> ni'eɖɖu)[7]. Liquids in TR clusters deleted or underwent a variety of different metatheses[8].

TRs may be divided into three main groups[9]. Group one includes cases in which a liquid targeted an obstruent in word-initial position to recreate another TR cluster. This is what I call *Long Distance Metathesis* group (LDM group). In this group, one can find secondary voiceless TRs

[5] The representation of intervocalic consonants follows Scheer & Ziková (2010).

[6] Examples and analysis refer to Tertenia Sardinian, point n° 211 in Contini (1987).

[7] This paper deals only with diachronic lenition (and metathesis). Modern Sardinian dialects (except for the Nuorese area) have intervocalic synchronic lenition, but only in external sandhi (e.g., / su kani/ [su ɣani]). See Wagner (1941), Virdis (1978), and Contini (1987). Note that upper case forms are Latin.

[8] On Sardinian metathesis, see Bolognesi (1998), Molinu (1999), and Alber (2001).

[9] The original database I worked on included 92 items which had a TR in their etymological form. For reasons of space, the following tables, (i.e., (3), (4) and (6)) report only a relevant selection of items for each group, with the exception of the NM group in (5), whose record exhausts the items present in the database. One can find in capital letters the etymological form followed by the form in the modern dialect. Etymological forms are from DES.

(e.g., FENUC(Ŭ)LU> fre'nuɣu), primary voiced TRs (e.g., FEBRUARIU> fri'ardʒu) as well as primary and secondary post-consonantal TRs (e.g., CASTRU> 'krastu). In each case the output of *Long Distance Metathesis* (LDM) is a word-initial TR cluster, as shown in (3):

(3) *Long Distance Metathesis* group

VD**R**V[10]→#T_	CT**R**V→#T_
primary voiced TRs	*primary and secondary post-consonantal TRs*
FEBRUARIU> fri'ardʒu	
PIGRITIA> pre'issa	
VT(V)**R**V→#T_	CASTRU> 'krastu
secondary voiceless TRs	CASTRARE> kras'tai
CONUC(U)LA> kran'nuɣa	COOPERC(U)LU> kro'βekku
COP(U)LARE> kro'βai	TEMPLA> 'trɛmpa
FENUC(U)LU> fre'nuɣu	
PEDUC(U)LU> pre'uɣu	

In other TRs the liquid moved to a coda position. I refer to this as *Local Metathesis* group (LM group). Inputs for LM were as follows: primary voiceless TRs (e.g., PETRA> 'pɛrða) and some "new" TRs due to syncope[11] (e.g., SUBULONE> sir'βɔni, CENAPURA> ʧe'narβa). The result was a coda-onset cluster, as one can see in (4):

(4) *Long Metathesis* group

VTRV→VDRV→VRDV

primary voiceless TRs plus some TRs of recent formation

APRILE> *a'βrili> ar'βili[12]	VITRICU> *'biðriu> 'birðiu
MATRICE> *'maðri> 'marði	SUBULONE> *si'βrɔni> sir'βɔni
SOCRU> *'soɣru> 'soɣru	CENAPURA> *ʧe'naβura> *ʧe'naβra> ʧe'narβa

[10] VT(V)RV is shorthand for secondary voiceless TRs, VDRV for voiced TRs, and CTRV for post-consonantal TRs.

[11] These were obstruent-vowel-liquid sequences in which the vowel deleted. Not every Sardinian dialect was affected by this syncope, which is much more recent with respect to the syncope that involved Latin CVL and TVL sequences (items in (3) "secondary voiceless TRs"). Ancient Sardinian texts still display the fuller form: in *Statuti Sassaresi* (13th century), *kenapura* occurs twice at I, 160 and II, 38 (Guarnerio 1892, DES 239). Note also that in Sardinian, unlike in other Romance languages, DVR sequences usually did not become DR sequences: lenition applied before syncope, causing the loss of the obstruent, e.g., FABULA> 'faula, STABULU> s'taulu, and TABULA> 'taula.

[12] Asterisks indicate that the form is not (directly) attested for in the dialect in question but has been reconstructed. These forms are reconstructed from the forms attested in the Medieval Sardinian texts (especially those from the south and transitional areas) and modern forms in neighboring dialects. In the interest of space I will not deal with these topics any further.

Only a few liquids did not undergo metathesis. I refer to this as *No Metathesis* group (NM group). These items had a primary voiced TR and hence should have undergone LDM:

(5) *No Metathesis* group
VDRV→VDRV
primary voiced TRs

CALABRICU> ka'lavriɣu	COLOBRA> ko'lɔvra
CIRIBRU> ʧi'livru	LABRA> 'lavraza

In this dialect there are also some TRs whose liquid was deleted. If one looks at (6) one can see that the input structure for these TRs was exactly the same as that found in the LDM group, namely secondary voiceless TRs and post-consonantal TRs:

(6) *Liquid Deletion*
VTRV→VTV

ORIC(U)LA> o'riɣa	MANUC(U)LU> man'nuɣu
OC(U)LU> 'oɣu	MASC(U)LU> 'masku

These TRs were affected by LDM, as expected. The only difference with the LDM group in (3) is the absence of an appropriate landing site: the words in (6) are either vowel- or sonorant-initial and hence do not allow for the constitution of an initial TR group. Therefore, I consider the items in (6) to be regular members of the LDM group, the only difference being lexical in kind: in absence of a word-initial T to dock on, the moving R is lost.

4. *Analysis*

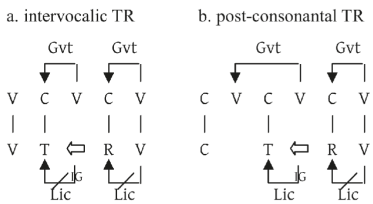
4.1. *Different syllabic representations for TR clusters*

Mutae cum liquida surface as a phonetic sequence of obstruent plus liquid but, as scholars have argued, they can have different syllabic representations[13]. TRs are usually interpreted as branching onsets (henceforth homosyllabic TRs), but there is also evidence for a heterosyllabic status (i.e.,

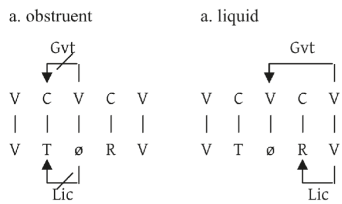
[13] TRs in a CVCV framework are discussed in Lowenstamm (2003), Scheer (2004), Ségéral & Scheer (2005), Marotta (2008), and Brun-Trigaud & Scheer (2010).

coda-onset clusters)[14]. In CVCV, both homo- and heterosyllabic TRs are bi-positional (i.e., they occupy two skeletal slots), but they are distinct by the lateral relations that hold among them. As shown in (7), in cases when a homosyllabic TR is in intervocalic position, the obstruent is governed, but when faced with a post-consonantal (and homosyllabic) TR the obstruent is in strong position (i.e., ungoverned and licensed)[15]. In both cases R is governed. As one can see in (8), in a heterosyllabic TR the obstruent can only be a coda consonant, which is neither governed nor licensed, while the liquid is in strong position:

(7) T and R in a homosyllabic TR



(8) T and R in a heterosyllabic TR



4.2. *Nature of the input*

In a homosyllabic TR, T behaves just like a simplex obstruent (Brun-Trigaud & Scheer 2010). In a language where lenition applies, assuming the Coda Mirror theory and the representations in (7), the response to lenition can provide a diagnostic to establish the syllabic status of TRs. Lenition should affect any governed obstruent, regardless of the obstruent being a simplex intervocalic obstruent or in a homosyllabic TR cluster configuration. On the other hand, if in a language with active lenition processes some TRs are not affected, T cannot be governed as its simplex counterpart is, and then the TRs in question must not be branching onsets but heterosyllabic clusters, with T sitting in coda (i.e., neither governed nor licensed)[16].

[14] Evidence for heterosyllabic TRs in some Italo-Romance dialects can be found in Loporcaro (2005).

[15] In Figure (7) 'IG' stands for 'Infrasegmental Government'. IG is a lateral relation responsible for the cohesion within the two members of a homosyllabic TR. For further details, see Scheer (2004:36ff, 64) and Brun-Trigaud & Scheer (2010:17).

[16] Nowadays, the effects of this syllabic configuration are still visible in the NM group (see below). Lenition in Old Sardinian was a systematic process. Every simplex T and T in an intervocalic TR were affected. Clearly, if a language has no lenition processes, other diagnostics must be used: for examples, see Loporcaro (2005) and Ségéral & Scheer (2005).

Following the Coda Mirror, ungoverned consonants are protected from changes, while governed consonants are more sensitive to changes of any sort. The main idea below is to apply the same line of reasoning to the counterpart of the obstruent in a TR cluster, i.e., the liquid, to see whether the facts above can be insightfully interpreted as a consequence of R being governed. We expect that metathesis can apply when R is governed, and thus in a homosyllabic TR, while it is barred when R is ungoverned[17]. This holds of heterosyllabic TRs, in which the liquid sits in strong position and should therefore be preserved from metathesis, just as obstruents in strong position are preserved from lenition. Thus, metathesis should not apply. In sum, the hypothesis is that homosyllabic TRs provide a good input structure for metathesis, whereas heterosyllabic TRs do not.

In this analysis, liquid migration is seen as the reaction of a liquid which is governed but unlicensed (see (7a,b)). Tertenia metathesis presupposes a homosyllabic status of all TRs at the time when they were affected by the process. Concretely, this means that both types of metathesis, LDM and LM, occurred when their respective TRs were homosyllabic[18]. The difference between the LDM and the LM group is thus diachronic in nature: In a first step, based on the Old Sardinian state of affairs in which all TRs were heterosyllabic, only DR, T(v)R, and CTR became homosyllabic. LDM then applied to all homosyllabic TRs. In a second step, the remaining heterosyllabic TRs became homosyllabic, and again metathesis (of a different type) affected all homosyllabic TRs present in the language[19]. Following this line of reasoning the NM group, in which R did not migrate, must have kept a heterosyllabic status all the way through. Evidence for this comes from the evolution of the voiced obstruent in this group. Recall from Section 3.1 that voiced obstruents in intervocalic position are systematically de-

[17] This paper is about liquids in *muta cum liquida*. I will not deal with another diachronic metathesis that affected R in the other weak position, i.e., the coda. For details, see Lai (2013b).

[18] The syllable structures postulated are not to be ascribed to Proto-Romance but to Old Sardinian. The identity of TRs was already ambiguous in Latin. See Timpanaro (1965) and Loporcaro (2005) for changes affecting TRs in Latin and Proto-Romance.

[19] LDM is attested even in the earliest medieval Sardinian texts, with some differences among dialects. LM started later and affected only a small central-southern area from the western to the eastern coast (Contini 1987:412, maps n° 5, 15, 27). Only a few instances of LM can be found in two ancient documents. One is a collection of legal acts edited by Solmi (1905), whose dating is controversial (Paulis 1997). The other one is the *Carta de Logu*, the most recent medieval text. A new edition of this legal code, based on the manuscript BUC 211, dates the *Carta de Logu* to the second half of the 15th century (Lupinu 2010:3, 27). In this code one can find the beginning of LM with a few items affected sporadically by this metathesis (e.g., PETRU> *petru*> *pedru*> *perdu*).

leted (FABULA> 'faula), but the NM group has a voiced fricative (LABRU> 'lavraza). A heterosyllabic status for the NM group precisely accounts for the anomalous evolution of the obstruent as well as for the absence of metathesis. The lenition observed (e.g., LABRU> 'lavraza) is a coda position effect. If the obstruent had been in an intervocalic position, the result would have been deletion (e.g., FEBRUARIU> fri'ardʒu). Analogously, R did not move because it was in strong position and therefore protected against changes.

The existence of the NM group offers evidence for the following claims. The absence of intervocalic lenition suggests a heterosyllabic status for these TRs and indirectly confirms the idea that metathesis does not apply when the liquid is in strong position (i.e., ungoverned). Finally, the existence of the NM group confirms that in the same language TRs with different syllabic status can co-occur[20].

4.3. *Proper landing sites for liquids*

The difference between LM and LDM is still to be explained. In Section 3.1 it was noted that the output of LDM was a word-initial TR, while the output of LM was a coda-onset cluster, with R sitting in coda position. Note that LDM is the older metathesis, while LM is more recent[21]. A crucial question to address is why one and the same input (i.e., a homosyllabic TR) produced different outputs at different points in time. A way to account for this contrasting behavior is to assume a change in the status of the word-initial landing site. Recall from Section 2 that the phonological identity of the beginning of the word is an empty CV unit whose presence or absence across languages represents parametric variation (Scheer 2012). In a language with an initial CV, the word-initial position is a strong position: word-initial consonants are ungoverned (like post-coda consonants) and not subjected to weakening. On the contrary, in languages that do not have the initial CV, the initial position is weak and word-initial consonants are governed (see Table (1a)). I argue that for all metatheses, the landing site of R is the strongest position available. In the early LDM period, the initial CV was present and hence the word-initial position was the strongest position available. The result of LDM, then, was a monopositional TR that stood in strong position (i.e., after the empty CV site; see (1a))[22]. Later in the LM period the

[20] See Timpanaro (1965:1093, 1096) and Ségéral & Scheer (2005).

[21] See note 19.

[22] For monopositional TRs I refer to TR sequences that occupy one single slot. In the CVCV

initial position ceased to be strong. During the LDM period the language possessed an initial CV which was lost by the LM period. As a consequence, the word-initial position ceased to be a good landing site for R. When the LM group shifted to a homosyllabic status, and thus began to be affected by lenition, e.g., 'pɛtra> 'pɛðra, metathesis occurred, but this time liquids went to the coda position (e.g., 'pɛðra> 'pɛrða). This is because at that time the coda position was the strongest position available for liquid migration. In terms of Coda Mirror[23] the intervocalic position is weaker than the coda: an intervocalic consonant suffers from the damaging effect of Government, while a coda consonant does not (being neither governed nor licensed).

4.4. *Evidence for a change in word-initial position*

A structural change in word-initial position might seem *ad hoc*, but there is further evidence in support of such a change. In a language with an initial CV the word-initial position is strong, and word-initial weakening is not to be expected. In Tertenia Sardinian one can note items with consonantal weakening (and complete deletion) word-initially, even in TR clusters[24]. Word-initial weakening is compatible only with a word-initial position without the initial CV site.

(8) *Weakening in word-initial TRs*

a) CLAMARE> la'mai
b) GLANDE> 'landi
c) GRANU> 'ranu
d) COMPLERE> 'lɔmpiri
e) COP(U)LA> 'lɔβa
f) COP(U)LU> 'loβu

In (8), items (d), (e), and (f) are especially relevant: they help one to date the loss of the initial CV. COMPLERE, COP(U)LA, and COP(U)LU underwent LDM and then the obstruent deleted, thus leaving the lateral as the word-initial consonant. In the 15th century, laterals in *muta cum liquida* clusters became rhotics, e.g., kl> kr (Contini 1987, Paulis 1997). By looking at items like COMPLERE> *clompere*> 'lɔmpiri, one can see that the fall of the obstruent occurred before the rhotacization of laterals (i.e., before the 15th century),

framework monopositional TRs have been discussed in Lowenstamm (2003) and Ségéral & Scheer (2005). On complex segments, see Steriade (1994), among others.

[23] Coda Mirror version 2 (Scheer & Ziková 2010).

[24] On word-initial weakening in Sardinian, see Wagner (1941:§374ff) and Virdis (1978:§35-36), among others.

otherwise a form with a rhotic (e.g., **ˈrɔmpiri or **orˈrɔmpiri) is expected[25]. The change in the status of the beginning of the word, which is a condition for the elimination of the obstruent, has thus to be dated after LDM but before the 15th century. That is, the initial position has become weak approximately at the time when LM started[26].

The loss of the initial CV made the word-initial position unavailable to act as a landing site for metathesized liquids, which thus became codas. It can therefore be claimed that the target for liquid migration was always the strongest position available at any given point in time.

5. *Conclusion*

In a TR cluster changes involving liquids, such as metathesis or liquid deletion, apply under the same structural conditions as changes involving obstruents (i.e., lenition). Both metathesis and lenition in TRs affected governed consonants, whereas they are excluded when the same consonants are ungoverned and licensed (i.e., in strong position). Lenition is the observable consequence of a governed stop, while metathesis is the reaction of a liquid to the same structural conditions. Metathesis can thus be interpreted as a form of lenition that applies to liquids.

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[25] Double asterisks indicate forms that would be expected, but are not actually found. For epenthetic vowels before /r/ in Ogliastra dialects, see Wagner (1941) and Virdis (1978).

[26] See note 19.

DES = Wagner, M., L., 2008 [1960-64]: *Dizionario Etimologico Sardo*. Nuoro, Ilisso.

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