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Phonotactics

Phonotactic constraints define permissible sequences of → consonants and → vowels (for a detailed description of licit consonantal combinations, see Lupaş 1972:133–41 and Steriade 1982:293–4; for vowels, see Lupaş 1972:141–51). We illustrate this here with consonant phonotactics in Ancient Greek.

Within a word, Attic Greek permits consonants to cluster with considerable freedom (for possible segmental sequences between words see → Sandhi). In this article we will look mainly at word-initial and word-final possibilities; similar restrictions apply to the onset, nucleus, and coda of → syllables. Tautomorphemic stops agree in → voicing and → aspiration (→ Assimilation), so we find word onsets like the following, where the first two consonants agree:

– *kteís* 'comb'
– *khthés* 'yesterday'
– *gdoupéō* 'I thud' (epic)

No words in Greek begin with [kth, kd], [kht, khd], or [gt, gth], where the initial consonants disagree in aspiration and voicing. Across morpheme and syllable boundaries stops need not agree in this way:

– *ék-thusis* 'atonement'
– *ék-dusis* 'way out'

Word-initially, [s] can be followed by any stop other than [d] and [g], i.e., by *p/t/k, b, ph/th/kh*; it can also be followed there by [m] but not by [n, l, r]. [s] is the only consonant allowed in CCC clusters word-initially: *spl-, spr-, sphl-, sphr-, stl-, str-, skl-, skr-*, etc. The only consonants that can precede [s] word-initially are [p, k, t], though the latter is only true if the letter ζ represents [ts].

Stops can be followed word-initially by nasals, but not all combinations are attested: (*pn, tm, thn, dm, dn, kn, khn, gn*) occur but *(*pm, phm, phn, bm, bn, tn, thm, km, khm, gm*) do not. Labial and dorsal stops can be followed by coronals word-initially (*pt-, phth-, bd-, kt-, khth-, gd-*), but never the reverse *(*tp-, thph-, db-, tk-, thkh-, dg-*). Any stop (*p, t, k, ph, th, kh, b, d, g*) can be followed by any liquid (*l, r*).

Word-initial [m] can only be followed by [n]; word-initial [n, l, r] cannot be followed by any consonant.

Word-internally, a wide range of segmental combinations is possible; some of these, however, are leveled out by assimilation over time (for changes in consonant clusters, see Sihler 1995:196–224).

Word-finally only three consonants are permissible in Greek: [r], [n], and [s]. The set of possible word-final consonant clusters is thus small in comparison to what one finds word-initially

and word-internally. The following are the possible word-final consonant clusters, all of which end in [s]: [ls, (m)ps, ŋks, rks]. For systematic gaps in consonant-cluster patterns, see Steriade (1982:215–6).

In general, phonotactic configurations are conditioned by the sonority hierarchy (in order of decreasing sonority: vowels > glides > liquids > nasals > fricatives > stops), according to which the syllable nucleus is the sonority peak and sonority decreases towards either edge of the syllable (see generally Blevins 1996; for Greek, Devine and Stephens 1994:22–6). To take a clear example, stops [p, t, k, ph, th, kh, b, d, g] are lower on the sonority scale than liquids [l], so stop + liquid is permitted in onsets while liquid + stop is completely excluded there. Within the syllable onset in Greek, sonority must rise (*pl, tm*) or plateau (*mn, pt*), but never fall *(*lp, mt*). The converse is true for syllable codas, where [ls, (m)ps, ŋks, rks] can occur but [sl, pr, tn, etc.] are impossible.

The distribution of [s] is exceptional with respect to this sonority sequencing in Greek and cross-linguistically (→ Movable s). Alongside expected [ps, ks] onsets with rising sonority, we also find in Greek [sk, skh, sp, sph] onsets with *falling* sonority. And while coda [sp, sk] are ruled out on general grounds (word-final *p, k* are prohibited), coda [ks] and [ps] should be impossible (*k* and *p* being *less* sonorous than *s*) but are well-attested. Word-internally, [s] is deleted between stops, e.g. *leleg-sthai* > *lelégthai* > *lelékhthai* (Steriade 1982:216; Devine and Stephens 1994:43). Since Fudge (1969), exceptional cases of [s] like this are treated with the offending [s] somewhere outside of the onset or coda proper, considered nowadays as licensed by the → prosodic word directly, rather than by any part of the syllable. Greek would then allow exceptional [s] only at the edges of words, not within them. See Côté (2011) for a recent overview of final consonants and Goad (2011) for s+consonant clusters.

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Phytonyms (Names of Trees)

Ancient Greek attests a number of tree-names (dendronyms and phytonyms) whose origins are diverse: some were inherited from PIE (→ Indo-European Historical Background), others constructed within Greek itself (→ Greek Lexicon, Structure and Origin of), taken from the substrate language(s) (→ Pre-Greek Substrate), or borrowed from neighboring languages (→ Greek and Anatolian Languages; → Greek and Semitic Languages (Early Contacts)); the origins of some remain obscure. These dendronyms may be classified according to their origin into the following groups:

1. Tree-names with Indo-European Cognates

ágnos (*H. Hom.*) '/willow-like chaste-tree/*Vitex agnus-castus*': Slav. **agnędъ* 'black poplar'.

aigílōps (Theophr.) 'Turkey oak/*Quercus cerris*', lit. 'crack-barked': Lith. *áiža* 'crack', Gk. *lőps· khlamús* (Hsch.), Gmc. **aikō* 'oak' (Blažek 2002:23–24).

ákarna: dáphnē (Hsch.) 'sweet bay': Gmc. **ahurna-* 'maple' < **h₂eḱr-(n-)*, cf. *ákastos: sphéndamnos* (Hsch.) 'maple'.

aktéa (Emp.) 'elder-tree/*Sambucus nigra*' < **atkeu̯a*: Avest. *akšaēna-* 'dark-colored'.

apellón: aígeiros (Hsch.) 'black poplar' < **sm̥-pelno-*: Germ. *Vielbaum*, Lat. *pōpulus* (Blažek 2003:6). Cf. E. Caucasian **pʰīlV* 'poplar/asp/ash-tree' (Nikolaev & Starostin 1994:870).

ápion (Aristoph.) 'pear'/*ápios* (Aristot.) 'pear-tree/*Pyrus communis*': Lat. *pirum/pirus* < **(sm̥-)piso-* (Blažek 2003:6).

árkeuthos 'juniper/*Juniperus macrocarpa*' (Hippoc.) / 'Phoenician cedar/*Juniperus phoenicea*'