Dissimilatory constraints discriminate between variants in analogical change

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This talk presents a case study of interaction between analogical changes in Occitan (Gallo-Romance) varieties of Haute-Garonne and Ariège, focusing on the behaviour of the preterite (reflex of Latin perfect) as observed in historical texts and linguistic atlas data (Ravier 1978–1993). Within the study area, preterite forms are subject to two separate analogical changes both involving the extension of velar stops. The interaction observed between these changes, and the resulting lexical incidence of each, points to a specific role for dissimilatory constraints in analogical changes: namely, as selection criteria where multiple morphological variants are available as inputs to analogy (compare Maiden 1997, 2003).

The first development of interest is a highly localised innovation confined to Haute-Garonne and Ariège, which occurs during or before the fourteenth century (Anglade 1919, Esher 2021a). In a reanalysis which takes the third person singular preterite form as a root for all other preterite forms (Ronjat 1937, Bybee & Brewer 1980), a velar stop is generalised throughout preterite desinences of all lexemes, e.g. 1SG *cantègui*, 2SG *cantègues*, 3SG *cantèc*, 1PL *cantèguem*, 2PL *cantèguetz*, 3PL *cantèguen* for first-conjugation *cantar* 'sing'. By contrast, preterite desinences in most other Occitan varieties display rhotic and dental consonants, e.g. *cantèri*, *cantères*, *cantèt*, *cantèrem*, *cantèretz*, *cantèron* (Ronjat 1937).

The second development, widely attested throughout varieties of Occitan from the fifteenth century onwards (Esher 2021b,c), involves the lexically gradual spread of distinctive velar-final roots across preterite and imperfect subjunctive forms of 'irregular' verbs, e.g. [preŋg]- for earlier [prez]- (*prendre* 'take'), [aŋg]- for earlier [an]- (*anar* 'go'), [dig]- for earlier [dis]- (*dire* 'say'); in some cases this development also affects the present subjunctive (compare Wheeler 2011). The templates for this change are a subset of lexemes in which a velar-final root in all personal forms of the preterite and imperfect subjunctive was established by the early thirteenth century, e.g. *volguem* 'we wanted' (Skårup 1997).

The lexical incidence of the second development is noticeably lower within Haute-Garonne and Ariège than in varieties of Occitan with rhotic preterites. 'Irregular' verbs without a [g]-final root in the mediaeval language either retain a velarless root or assume an alternative form in [sk] as opposed to the expected [g] (e.g. *vesèguem* 'we saw', *fasquèguem* 'we did' for earlier *vim*, *fem*, compared to *veguèrem*, *faguèrem* elsewhere). 'Irregular' verbs with a [g]-final root in the mediaeval language may conserve this (e.g. *volguèguem* 'we wanted' for earlier *volguem*), or evict it in favour of a velarless or [sk]-final root (e.g. mediaeval *deguem* 'we had to', *poguem* 'we were able to' develop to *devèguem, posquèguem* within the study area vs. *deguèrem, poguèrem* elsewhere).

Thus, within the study area, the lexical spread of [g]-final roots is demonstrably restricted by the earlier generalisation of -[g]- through preterite desinences. While there is no absolute phonological prohibition on the sequence -[gɛg]-, it is nevertheless dispreferred and liable to elimination by analogical introduction of a non-[g]-final root where available: the role of dissimilation here is not that of a productive phonological process, but that of a constraint discriminating between available morphological variants. Additional trends revealed by the dialect data include lexical gang effects, and stepwise progression of innovative roots from the present subjunctive via the imperfect subjunctive into the preterite, visible in rare but highly consistent cases of formal divergence between preterite and imperfect subjunctive forms.

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