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Ancient Greek

Phonology – Part 3: Syllables, Suprasegmentals and Prosodic Words



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Roadmap

- Suprasegmentals: Dissimilation, Epenthesis
- Syllable Structure
- Assimilation, Coda Deletion

Suprasegmentals

- **Dissimilation of aspirates: Grassmann's Law**
 - /t^hi.t^hɛː.mi/ > τίθημι 'I put' /T^h ... T^h/ > /T ... T^h/
 - /am.p^his.k^hɔː/ > ἀμπίσχω 'I surround' < *ἀμφ-ίσχω
 - /he.k^hɔː/ > ἔχω 'I have' /h ... T^h/ > /∅ ... T^h/
 - Can be undone by analogical restoration: ἐχύθη 'it was poured' (χέω)
- **Dissimilation of liquids** (frequent but irregular), e.g.:
 - /l ... l/ > /l ... r/ γλαφυρός 'hollow' < *γλαφυλός (cf. ἀγκ-ύλος)
 - /l ... l/ > /r ... l/ ἀργαλέος 'difficult' < *ἀλγαλέος (cf. ἄλγ-ος)

Suprasegmentals

- **Consonant epenthesis** between nasal and liquid:
 - /n.r/ > -νδρ- /an.ros/ > ἀνδρός ‘man’ (gen.sg. of ἀνήρ)
 - /m.r/ > -μβρ- /am.ro.tos/ > ἄμβροτος ‘immortal’
 - Cf. inscr. μροτος, μορτος (+ cpds.) in the archaic period
 - /m.l/ > -μβλ- /mem.lɔː.ke/ > μέμβλωκε ‘has come’
 - For /mlɔː-/ cf. aor. μολεῖν
- Word-initially, epenthesis **plus deletion** of nasal:
 - /mro.tos/ > /m^bro.tos/ > βροτός ‘mortal, man’
 - /mlɔːskei/ > /m^blɔːskei/ > βλώσκει ‘comes’

Syllable Structure

- **Possible onsets** (simple to more complex):
 - Any single consonant phoneme (no geminates)
 - /TR-/ (T = any plosive, R = /l, r, n/) (but not /bn/)
 - /mn-/ cf. μνήμα 'reminder'
 - /tm-/, /dm-/, /km-/ cf. δμητήρ 'subduer'
 - /T₁T₂-/ cf. πτερόν, βδελυρός, χθών
(T₁ = non-dental plosive, T₂ = dental plosive)
 - /sT-/ or /sm-/ cf. σπένδω, σβέννυμι, σμήχω
 - /sTL-/ with L = /l, r/ cf. σπλάγχνον, σφραγίς, στλεγγίς

Syllable Structure

- Possible **nuclei**: vowels (long and short), diphthongs

- Possible **codas**:
 - Any single consonant except /h/
 - Any sequence of liquid/nasal plus labial/velar plosive, e.g.
 - θέλκτρον = /t^helk.tron/
 - πέμπτος = /peNp.tos/

Assimilations

- Assimilation of voice and aspiration
- Assimilation of coda nasals (place of articulation) to onset C
 - βροντή [brontɛ:] ‘thunder’ from βρέμω ‘to roar’
 - μελάμπους [melampru:s] cpd. with μελαν- ‘black’
 - πέφαγκα [pepʰaŋka] perf. of φαν- ‘show, appear’
- <γ> as a velar nasal [ŋ]: ‘angma’

Assimilations

- **Substitution of coda plosive** before onset /m/
 - only in derivations with recognizable morpheme boundary:
 - root /grap^h-/: γράμμα ‘letter’
 - root /plat^h-/: πλάσμα ‘dough’
 - root /drak^h-/: δράγμα ‘sheaf’ [draɣma]

- Different treatment without a synchronic morpheme boundary:
 - ἀκμή ‘summit’, δραχμή ‘drachm’
 - πότης ‘fate’, αὐτμήν ‘breath’

Word end

- Possible **word ends**
 - Vowels and diphthongs
 - Vowel (or diphthong) plus [n, r, s], e.g. ἄρρην ‘male’, ὄναρ ‘dream’
 - Velar / labial plosive plus [s], e.g. φύλαξ ‘guard’, γύψ ‘bird of prey’
 - [ls] in ἄλς ‘sea’ (nom.sg.)
- The following word-ends are **disallowed**:
 - [ns], [rs] and [ts], cf. μάκαρ ‘blessed’
 - Any plosive : cf. ἄνα ‘Lord!’ < /anakɛ/, vocative of ἄναξ < /anakɛs/

Deletion of Coronals

- Deletion of /s/ | C₁_ C₂ : regular in perf. endings -σθε, -σθαι
 - **te-tag-st^he* > τέταχθε 'you have been ordered' (τάττω)
- Deletion of /n/ in coda before /sC/:
 - **p^he-p^han-st^hai* > πεφάσθαι 'to have been shown' (φαίνω)
- Deletion of /t d t^h/ in coda before /s/ :
 - **e-peit^h-s-a* > ἔπεισα 'I persuaded', aor. of πείθω
- Deletion of /t d t^h/ in coda before velar plosive:
 - **pe-peit^h-ka* > πέπεικα 'I have convinced', perf. of πείθω

Phonological repair

- /T.T/ > /s.T/
 - /e.peit^h.t^hε:/ > ἐπίσθη, aor. pass. of πείθω 'persuade'
 - Repair strategy /T^s.T/ already in PIE

Clitics

- **Clitics:** words that do not occur independently, but only when attached to a host within a phrase
 - proclitics, e.g. *ἀλλά, καί, ...*
 - enclitics, *δέ, τε, μιν, γάρ, μοι, ...*
- Narrower use of ‘clitic’ in AGr. grammar: words that (normally) have no accent mark in manuscripts and editions (e.g. *τε, μιν*)
 - Terms ‘pre-positive’ and ‘post-positive’ are used instead of ‘clitic’
- **Prosodic word** = host plus clitics