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Law of Limitation

The 'Law of Limitation' refers to a phonological process that limits how far from the end of a word an accent may be located: if the word-final syllable is light, the accent may be located as far from the end of the word as the antepenult, e.g. εὐρήματα [heuré:mata] 'discoveries (nom./acc. neuter plural)', ἐβούλευε [ebó:leuue] '(s)he was deliberating (impf. 3 sg.)'; if the word-final syllable is heavy, the accent may be located as far from word-end as the penult, e.g. εὐρημάτων [heuré:mátɔ:n] 'discoveries (gen. n. pl.)', βουλεύω [bo:léuɔ:] 'I am deliberating (pres. 1 sg.)' (Göttling 1835:21–28; Steriade 1988:273–275). For the Law of Limitation, a single word-final consonant does not affect weight. Final syllables ending in a short vowel (-V#) and those ending in a short vowel followed by a single consonant (-VC#) both count as light, e.g. βασίλεια [basíleĭja] 'queen (nom. sg.)', βασίλειαν [basíleĭjan] 'queen (acc.)'. All other syllable rhymes count as heavy, e.g. -VCC# in ἀστυτριψ [astútrips] 'always living in the city'. Word-final diphthongs pose a slight complication. As for the Sotera Rule, word-final -οι [-oĭ] and -αι [-aĭ] are treated as light rhymes in -VC#, e.g. φιλόσοφοι [p^hilósophoĭ] 'philosophers' like φιλόσοφος [p^hilósophos] 'philosopher', βασίλειαι [basíleĭjaĭ] 'queens (nom. pl.)' like βασίλειαν [basíleĭjan], with the exception of 3 sg. opt. act. -οι [-oĭ] and -αι [-aĭ], which are treated together with all other word-final long vowels and diphthongs as heavy -VV# rhymes, e.g. παιδεύοι [paídeuoi], παιδεύσαι [paídeusaĭ] like παιδεύω [paídeuɔ:] 'I am educating'. Note that the -οι [-oĭ] of locative adverbs such as οἴκοι [óikoĭ] 'at home' are also treated as -VV# rhymes, but the evidence comes from the non-application of the Sotera Rule, not the Law of Limitation.

A small class of exceptions to the Law of Limitation arose in Attic and Ionic when speakers retained the proparoxytone accentuation of words in which quantitative metathesis produced a heavy final syllable. These include genitives of i- and u-stems, e.g. πόληος [póle:os] (Homer) > πόλεως [póleɔ:s] '(of the) city', *ἄσθηος *[áste:os] > ἄστεως [ásteɔ:s] '(of the) town', some

nouns and adjectives belonging to the ‘Attic Declension’, e.g. *ἦλος *[híle:os] > ἦεως [híleɔ:s] ‘propitious’, and Ionic first declension gen. sg. forms of the type *Ἄτρείδης *[atréide:ɔ] > Ἄτρείδεω [atréideɔ:] ‘son of Atreus’; taken at face value, πόλιος [póle:os] shows that the Law of Limitation was already active before the last compositional phase of the Homeric epics (Wackernagel 1893:31–33).

The Law of Limitation essentially determines the domain of the word within which an accent is phonologically licit. Where the accent is located within that domain depends primarily on morphological and lexical factors. Words whose accent always falls at the left edge of that domain, such as those cited above, are referred to as exhibiting ‘recessive’ accent. These include entire classes of words, e.g. virtually all finite verbs, athematic neuter nouns, feminine verbal nouns in -σις [-sis] (e.g. μίμησις [mímɛ:sis] ‘imitation’), left-headed verbal/prepositional governing compounds (e.g. φιλοκόλαξ [p^hilokólaks] ‘fond of flatterers’), etc.

While it is possible that the accentable domain is independent of other rhythmic phonological structure (Devine & Stephens 1994:154), it is more likely (aligned with) a phonological constituent reflected elsewhere in the grammar. A number of suggestions have been made (cf. Probert 2010 with refs.), including equating the span between the accent (´) and word-end (#), which consists of two light syllables (LL, e.g. εὐρήματα [heuré:mata]), a heavy syllable (H, e.g. εὐρημάτων [heuré:mátɔ:n]), or a heavy-light sequence (HL#, e.g. εὔρημα [héure:ma]) — in other words, ´LL# or ´H(L)# — with a quantity-insensitive trochaic foot (Sauzet 1989) or a quantity-sensitive one (Golston 1990). This prosodic-phonological constituent may also be reflected in word formation (Gunkel 2011) and meter (Golston & Riad 2000; 2005; Gunkel 2010:43–75).

The Law of Limitation either arose in Proto-Greek or spread across all of the dialects for which we have accentual evidence (Probert 2006:72–74). Until that point, the phonologically accentable domain consisted of the entire word, as in Vedic. The Law of Limitation is thus a distinctive feature of Greek. From a phonological point of view, the change took place when speakers regularized the post-accentual fall in pitch by aligning it with word-end (Garrett

2006:141), or with a constituent such as a foot that was itself aligned with word end. The regular falling pitch at word-end may have facilitated the merger of word-final *[m] and *[n] > [n] and the loss of word-final stops, e.g. acc. sg. *[-om] > *[-on], 3pl. *[-ont] > [-on] (Garrett 2006:141). It has recently been argued that the change was itself facilitated by the fact that the location of the accent in a high proportion of early Greek words (by type and token) already obeyed the Law of Limitation before it arose (Probert 2012).

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