

THE ANTICIPATORY PHENOMENON, SOURCE OF NUMEROUS VOCALIC AND CONSONANTAL MODIFICATIONS IN THE PHONOLOGY OF OLD FRENCH

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This paper is oriented towards the teachers and students of Romance Philology, particularly those of Old French. My main objective is to demonstrate that most phonological modifications occurring during the shift from Vulgar Latin to Low Romance and Old French (also Old Provençal/Old Spanish) are very natural and simple physiological modifications, utilizing what I have designated the "anticipatory phenomenon". From my teaching experiences in Old French/Old Provençal/Old Spanish, I can confirm that describing phonological modifications in this manner facilitates student comprehension and stimulates greater interest in Romance Philology. It makes our highly specialized discipline more relevant and meaningful to them. It also shows the great assistance that Linguistics renders to Romance Philology and helps bridge the gap between these two intimately related disciplines.

The terms metaphony (umlaut) and assimilation/dissimilation are familiar to most students of Romance Philology. Most tyros can usually define these terms and, in addition, "seem" to comprehend both the umlauting phenomenon as well as the assimilative and dissimilative tendencies in Old French phonology. For example, few would have much difficulty in identifying the influence exerted by a final long \bar{i} (\bar{u}) on the tonic close e (\acute{e}). CL ille > VL *ēllī > OF il, VL *sēsī > OF sīs, likewise, the raising of the a to o by primary wāu (\bar{u}) in both Old French and Old Spanish. CL causa > OF chose/OS cosa. In addition, few would not be able to explain the consonantal assimilation ("totale") which takes place in the development of such words as CL nāvis > VL nāpes > OF nes, *grēvis > OF gries, etc. But do our students "really" understand these phonological modifications? If so, why do even our more advanced students have difficulty in explaining, for example, some of the more

sophisticated consonantal assimilations in such words as CL compūtārē > VL comp'tārē > OF conter, OP and OS contar, or even CL témpūs > OF tens, and CL cómes > OF cuens? Too many of our students seem to be merely memorizing various phonological rules without "really" understanding the anticipatory phenomenon taking place which explains the above modifications. There is no reason, in my opinion, why even a tyro can not explain the umlauting of the accented close e by a following long i (vénī > OF/OP vin, OS vine) as the natural and physiological modification caused by the anticipated elevation of the tongue to take, in advance, the position of the i (or y) as it prepares to make that sound. Cf. á plus i > e in OS lácēm > láite > OS leche. The raising of the tonic close e (by the final long i) one step up the vowel triangle (See Diagram I, next page) is therefore a very simple and logical modification. The change from m't to nt and from m's > ns is also a very natural phenomenon. The romance philologist should not merely tell his students that m't > nt, but should explain to them exactly why, namely that unlike labials and dentals which tend to assimilate completely with following consonants (*grévīs > gries), nasals tend to assimilate only partially, that is, they assume some of the characteristics of the following consonant. In compūtārē, the m, a labial nasal (See Diagram 2, next page) > n, a dental nasal, to become more similar to the dental t, m's > ns, for the same reason. (See Diagram 2, next page)

Once the anticipatory phenomenon has been sufficiently digested by the students, they are then ready to analyse some more difficult consonantal assimilations, such as "l'assimilation régressive"¹ (The preceding were examples of "l'assimilation progressive") Why a voiced consonant plus -icum > consonant plus g (médicūm > méd'co > OF miege), while an unvoiced consonant plus the same -icum suffix > consonant plus ch (pórticūm > OF porche), etc. Even more intricate secondary consonant groups can also be handled, such as a secondary consonant plus c (plus a) > consonant plus g [dž], but only if the preceding consonant is voiced (vendicārē > OF vengier, jūdicārē > OF jugier, etc), while if the preceding assimilated consonant is unvoiced, the ex-

Diagram I The following diagram illustrates the basic modifications of the Classical Latin accented vowel system which occurred in the shift to Vulgar Latin

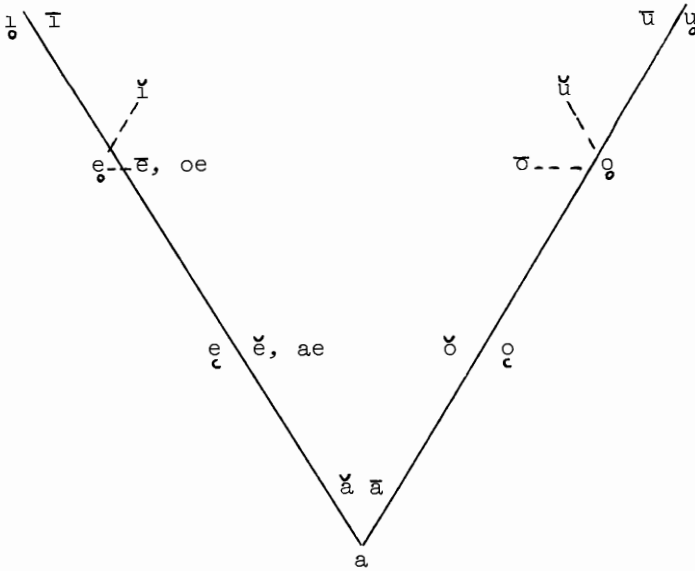


Diagram 2 The following diagram illustrates the consonantal phonemes of Vulgar Latin

non-nasal	labial	dental
voiceless stops	p	t
voiced stops	b	d
voiceless fricatives	f	s
voiced fricatives	v, u̥ (wau)	—
laterals and trills	—	r, l
nasal	m	n

Diagram-2 (continued).

non-nasal	palatal	velar
voiceless stops	[ts]	k
voiced stops	[dz]	g
voiceless fricatives	—	—
voiced fricatives	—	ʝ, ɟ (yod)
laterals and trills	λ	—
nasal	ɲ	—

pected g unvoices to ch [tʃ], as in masticárě > OF maschier.

With respect to palatals between two consonants, the general pattern is. consonant¹ plus palatal plus consonant² > yod plus consonant¹ plus consonant². CL plánc̄t̄um > VL plánc̄to > OF plaint, cr̄esc̄it > cr̄esc̄et > (cr̄esc̄'t) > OF creist. And while the student is too often told to just memorize what happens to palatals between two consonants if the general pattern does not materialize (e.g., palatals lost in scl, rcn, rgl, rgs, rgn, rgt, palatals remain in ngl, ngn, ncl, ncr, rcl), even special patterns such as rg'r > rdr and rc'r > rtr, as well as special patterns with glide consonant and yod development (ng'r > indr, nc'r > intr, sc'r > istr) can be easily mastered if he or she understands the assimilative process, both "régressive" and "progressive". In the case of rg'r > rdr, the voicedness of the palatal generates the voiced consonant d (súrḡěřě > sórḡ're > OF sourdre, spárḡěřě > espárḡ're > OF esparđrě), while in rc'r > rtr, the voicelessness of the palatal gives rise to the unvoiced glide consonant t (cárc̄ěřěm > cárc̄'re > OF chartre). With regard to ng'r > indr, the voiced palatal again consistently generates the voiced glide consonant d, while the unvoiced c in nc'r and sc'r produces the unvoiced glide consonant t (CL plánc̄gere > VL plánc̄'re > OF plaindre, fránc̄ěřě > OF fraindre, cínḡěřě > OF ceindre, buť vínc̄ěřě > věnc̄'re > OF veindre, and co(g)nos̄c̄ěřě > VL conósc̄'re > OF conois-tre, CL cr̄esc̄ěřě > VL cr̄esc̄'re > OF creistre). Note

that in ng'r > indr, nc'r > intr and sc'r > istr, the general pattern described above does occur

It is manifestly true that the anticipatory phenomenon can not explain the phonological evolution of a considerable number of OF words. There are so many other factors involved, such as dissimilation, analogy, ultra-correction, sporadic change, etc. It is nevertheless incontestable, in my opinion, that the anticipatory phenomenon accounts for most of the vocalic and consonantal modifications that have occurred during the historical development of the Old French language. And what is undoubtedly most important, the anticipatory phenomenon enables the romance philologist to explain his discipline to his students in a systematic, clear and meaningful manner, thus placing at his disposal a very practical pedagogical tool.

NOTES

¹ I realize that if the phoneme producing assimilation precedes the assimilated one the assimilation is usually said to be "progressive", if it follows the assimilated phoneme, it is said to be "régressive". However, for a purely pedagogical reason, if the assimilated consonant precedes the phoneme which produces assimilation, I prefer to call this type of consonantal assimilation "progressive", if the phoneme producing assimilation precedes the assimilated one, I refer to this type of assimilation as "régressive". I found that students comprehend consonantal assimilation better and easier if the assimilated consonant is made the point of reference, not the phoneme which produces assimilation.