

PREPALATALS IN ARANDIC

Full Presentation
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This paper considers a phonological category - the prepalatals - proposed uniquely for some Arandic varieties (Breen 1977:382). Phonetically, this category is [i + Alveolar Consonant]. It is always preceded by a vowel, giving a [Vowel + i + Alveolar] sequence. All phonological analyses of the phonetic [i] encounter problems. I evaluate the alternatives, showing that one is the least problematic and therefore preferred.

The preferred analysis is that [i] realizes a /y/ phoneme in a /y + alveolar/ cluster. This cluster is phonotactically aberrant. Arandic does not otherwise permit heterorganic clusters with approximant first members, nor alveolar second members (Breen & Pensalfini 1999:21). This conforms to general Australian patterns (Dixon 2002:63-65, 547-658). However, the phonotactic aberrance is in fact an advantage as it is the only motivation for a recurrent historical change in Arandic: *Vynp > Vymp, phonetically *[Vinp] > [Vimp]. This change converts a cluster with an aberrant place profile /palatal+alveolar+labial/ into a cluster with a standard place profile /palatal+labial/ (Dixon *ibid*).

This motivation holds only if [i] is analyzed as the realization of a distinct consonant phoneme. The markedness of the /palatal+alveolar/ profile holds only in clusters. The sequence of the vowel phoneme /i/ + /alveolar/ is not marked. The sequence /Vnp/ is common in Arandic and not subject to change (Breen 2002:60), because there are no place constraints between /V/ and /n/, and /np/ has a standard /alveolar + labial/ profile (Breen & Pensalfini *ibid*, Dixon *ibid*, Hamilton *ibid*).

A second analysis is that [i] realizes an /i/ vowel. However, this analysis cannot account for the sound change, as the [i] is not a consonant. Further, as prepalatals are always preceded by a vowel, this analysis requires long vowels/diphthongs, which are not otherwise posited for the Arandic varieties (Breen 2002:49, Henderson 1998:59).

A third analysis is that the [i + alveolar] sequence realizes a complex segment – with a primary alveolar articulation and a secondary palatal on-glide (Henderson 1998:148, Koch 2004:137). The [i + Alveolar] phonetic sequence is phonologically a /C/. However, phonological processes involving this kind of complex segment should show ‘edge effects’ (Lombardi 1990). This prediction fails for the prepalatals (Breen 2002:60). Further, this analysis cannot account for the sound change, as the [i] is not an independent consonant.

A fourth analysis is that [i] realizes a palatal autosegment (Breen 2002:60). I demonstrate that [i] shows none of the patterns normally required for an autosegmental analysis: predictable association, spreading, interaction with prototypical suprasegmentals. The analysis is therefore unsupported. This analysis cannot account for the sound change. It predicts that *np > mp should apply everywhere (Breen *ibid*).

Given the problems with the other analyses, the cluster analysis is preferred, though imperfect.

References

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