

“Unmotivated” consonant gemination in the Hungarian foreign accent

Bálint Huszthy
PPCU - Italianistics
HAS - RIL

In the phonology of Hungarian morpheme-internal geminates (i.e. long underlying consonants) are found, unlike in many languages spoken in Europe. However, the functional load of the length-opposition between consonants is rather low, only a few monosyllables represent it in the native vocabulary; otherwise, geminates occur mostly in onomatopoeic words and loanwords (cf. Siptár 1994: 189).

The tendency for consonant gemination in loanwords was first described by Nádasy (1989), as a phenomenon called “borrowed consonant lengthening”, whose claims were reported by other phonologists as well (e.g. Siptár 1994; Siptár & Törkenczy 2000; Kertész 2006; Magyar 2016; etc.). In Nádasy’s opinion, gemination happens through a diachronic language contact with the South-Eastern spoken varieties of German, which include morpheme-internal geminates, and have been influencing the Hungarian pronunciation of loanwords for several centuries.

This talk, on the other hand, offers a synchronic explanation for Hungarian consonant gemination in [+foreign] words: the phenomenon is examined through the typical foreign accent of Hungarian speakers. According to our hypothesis, gemination is a general characteristic of the Hungarian foreign accent, which influences the pronunciation of loanwords as well.

During an experiment at language courses, new data were collected for consonant gemination in two high schools and two universities, via four target languages, namely English, German, Italian and French. Eventually, it has been observed that Hungarian learners of foreign languages tend to lengthen certain intervocalic singleton consonants in L2. At the same time, inconsistencies were also discovered in the treatment of different foreign languages: indeed, gemination seems to be rather regular in Italian and German, but appears to be sporadic in English and French.

Data are analysed in classical OT; in this respect, gemination is seen as the result of the interaction between various constraints which are relevant for the Hungarian foreign accent. We suppose that constraint rankings may differ depending on the foreign language and also on the level of L2 acquisition (but sporadic geminations were found even at the uppermost level).

Among the supposed constraints two markedness constraints are of special interest. SWP requires syllables to be heavy when stressed. Italian and South-Eastern German accents are characterised by this requirement, and Hungarian language learners may adopt it in their foreign accent (cf. also Nádasy 1989: 199). A usual way to make syllables heavy is gemination. A constraint called HEAVY-CLOSED prefers heavy closed syllables rather than heavy open ones, that is, coda consonants are preferred over long vowels (which is the reason for the gemination in some loanwords as well, e.g. It. *mafia* > Hun. *maffia*, Eng. *doping* > Hun. *dopping*, Eng. *weekend* > Hun. *vikkend*, etc.). In addition, metrical constraints are also assumed, belonging to

a constraint family called Metrical Adjustment, which are responsible for the correction of certain word-rhythms. For instance, in [Italian] words the TROCHEE is a preferred word-rhythm for Hungarians (also used as a constraint), e.g. It. *Topolino* ‘Mickey Mouse’ > Hun. acc. *To[pp]olino*, It. *litorale* ‘coast’ > Hun. acc. *li[tt]orale*; in loanwords as well, e.g. It. *fusilli* > Hun. *fusszili*, It. *lapilli* > Hun. *lappili*, etc.

References:

Kertész, Zsuzsa (2006). Approaches to the phonological analysis of loanword adaptation. The Even Yearbook 7, Department of English Linguistics, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. <http://seas3.elte.hu/even/2006/06ke.pdf>

Magyar, Lilla (2016). Are Universal Markedness Hierarchies Learnable from the Lexicon? The Case of Gemination in Hungarian. In: Proceedings of the 33rd West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics. <http://web.mit.edu/lilla/www/lillamagyar.pdf>

Nádasdy, Ádám (1989). Consonant length in recent borrowings into Hungarian. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 39: 195–213.

Siptár, Péter (1994). A mássalhangzók. In: Kiefer Ferenc (ed.), *Strukturális magyar nyelvtan: Fonológia*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 183–272.

Siptár, Péter & Törkenczy Miklós (2000). *The Phonology of Hungarian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.