

Grassmann's Law before Consonant Shift in Messapic and 'Pelasgian'

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1. Martin Huld's (1995) shrewd analysis of a Messapic inscription, which led him to the hypothesis of a relationship with Georgiev's 'Pelasgian' (e.g. Georgiev 1981: 99ff.), has drawn my attention to what may appear to be a contradiction, should the consonant shifts involved be interpreted in terms of a theory valid for Germanic and Armenian to which I have previously subscribed in the pages of this Journal (Woodhouse 1996: 36ff. & fn. 11). An improved version of this theory is based on the discovery that aspiration of a series of plain voiceless stops and devoicing of a series of plain voiced stops are both typologically likely processes in a phonemic inventory containing voiced implosives (see Woodhouse in press a, § 2), such as I have posited on these and other grounds as the originals of the PIE 'asperae',¹ i.e. the traditionally reconstructed 'mediae aspiratae' (Woodhouse 1995).² Clearly if Grassmann's law was a matter of aspiration and the phase of aspirated asperae detectable in a number of IE languages postdates the period of the implosives that supposedly conditioned the consonant shifts, Grassmann's law should, if anything, follow, not precede, these shifts.

¹This term (sg. *aspera*) replaces, thanks to the welcome intervention of Michel Job (p. c.), the 'asper(es)' appearing in some of my earlier writings.

²Note that in my usage, the terms *tenuis*, *media*, *aspera* have the useful function of denoting, not particular constellations of phonetic/phonemic features (since for these a far more adequate terminology is now available), but the three well established series of stops in PIE together with the reflexes of these in the various daughter languages, some traces (at least) of the original distinctions being now detectable in virtually every major branch of IE — for Tocharian, e.g., see now Joseph/Wallace (1994: 245, fn. 6), for Anatolian see my suggestion (Woodhouse in press b, § 7.4) that failure to undergo palatalization before **u* may distinguish the PIE prevelar (i.e. traditional 'palatalovelar') media in Luvian from the corresponding tenuis and aspera.

2. There can be no question of sacrificing Georgiev's and Huld's hard won results for the sake of my theory of implosives. Equally, there is no basis for an ad hoc claim that in the case of these languages it was the implosive feature that triggered the dissimilation. In particular, the direction of the dissimilation argues in favour of aspiration being the crucial triggering factor since, when due allowance is made for some oddities in Greek and elsewhere arising from the differing morphologizations of an originally phonetic process,³ the direction of dissimilation is the same in all languages known to me where the dissimilation is demonstrably or arguably a question of phonemic aspiration, viz. Sanskrit, Greek, Tocharian (Winter 1962), Sindhi (Turner 1924: 311ff.), Northern Basque (Saltarelli 1988: 282) and Ofo (Salmons 1991: 47),⁴ and contrasts with the direction of dissimilation reported for other glottalic features by Salmons (1991).⁵

3. Fortunately, close attention to the likely phonetic relationships based on those actually attested elsewhere yields a tenable solution based on the following chronological stages:

- (1) The implosive asperae encourage the usual aspiration of tenues and devoicing of mediae in these ancient Balkan languages.
- (2) The asperae now shift to breathy voiced implosives, such as have been attested in the Bunji and Karanga dialects of Shona (Doke 1931: 95) and in a provincial form of Owerri

³ Cf. Schindler (1976: 626) for Vedic and Collinge (1985: 52) for Greek evidence that the dissimilation was originally purely phonetic.

⁴ The (dialectal) occurrence of aspiration on English consonants before stressed vowel (and elsewhere) (Salmons 1991: 48) is non-phonemic and thus has nothing to do with Grassmann's law. Joseph Wallace (1994) have convincingly revealed the hollowness of the thinly argued Gamkrelidze/Ivanov claim of aspirate dissimilation in Italic. On the similar Gamkrelidze-Ivanov claim for Germanic see Woodhouse in press a, § 5.2.3 and fn. 37.

⁵ This discovery makes it less crucial that Grassmann's law be located in Proto-Greek simply because it is (allegedly) pan-Greek (*pace* Palmer 1980: 231). The phenomenon labelled *Hauchversetzung* occurring in some dialects (Schwyzer 1939: 269) may in fact reflect the erstwhile presence not of aspiration but of some other feature in those dialects and the identification of this older feature may be facilitated by proper attention to the Semitic prototypes of the Greek letters θ and φ (only partly with Miller 1994: 41, 48f., 51f.).

Igbo (Ladefoged 1964: 59).⁶ Of the two Shona dialects it is noteworthy that Bunji, though not Karanga, appears to have suffered the same weakening in the voicing of the plain voiced stops as is general in other Shona dialects (see Doke 1931: 38, 41, 44).

- (3) The aspirated/breathy stops are dissimilated in the usual way. Remembering that the voicing of breathy voiced stops is already less than full or modal voicing, the immediate product of the dissimilation will be a series of non-aspirated, lightly voiced, slightly glottalized allophones. The mediae need not be completely voiceless at this point but if they are, then polarization against the voiceless aspirates may well have set in, and, as appears to have been the case in Armenian, Germanic and modern Hindi, and possibly even in Greek and Latin around the beginning of the present era (Woodhouse 1996: 36ff.), this may have taken the form of glottalization, i.e. glottal closure.
- (4) The lightly voiced, slightly glottalized, deaspirated allophones of the asperae merge with the mediae which are also unaspirated and may also be either lightly voiced or voiceless and slightly glottalized.
- (5) The mediae, their numbers swelled by the merger with the deaspirated allophones of the asperae, proceed to complete voicelessness, while the breathy voiced implosives suffer a reversal,⁷ losing their breathiness and thus returning to full voicing. A decision as to whether they also lost the implosive feature before supplying loans to Greek may depend on the chronology of similar matters in Proto-Greek.
- (6) In Messapic the aspirated tenues lose their aspiration.

4. Thus the possible contradiction foreshadowed in § 1 above turns out to be a chimaera. In the (temporary) development of aspiration in the asperae when the shifts of the tenues and mediae were already far advanced, these ancient Balkan languages reveal a further point of similarity not of course with Albanian, but with Armenian (Woodhouse 1996: 38).

⁶ This is of course not the frequently cited Mbaise Owerri dialect described in Ladefoged *et al.* 1976.

⁷ For more detail on reversals as dialectally differentiated parallel processes see Woodhouse in press a, fn. 36.

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