When nothing is good enough: Dialectal variation in Norwegian imperatives

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This paper presents an analysis of imperative formation in Norwegian. The analysis occasions discussion of variation as reranking in OT, as well as providing a novel example of a grammar in which 'null' is the optimal candidate.

The Norwegian imperative is in most cases identical to the verb stem (cf. Faarlund, Lie & Vannebo 1997:477). For verbs having the familiar disyllabic structure with a final schwa in the infinitive, such as *å spise*, 'to eat', *å telle*, 'to count', and *å kaste*, 'to throw', we find the corresponding imperatives *spis*, *tell*, and *kast*. For the smaller class of monosyllabic verbs, such as *å gå*, 'to walk', *å gi*, 'to give', and *å be*, 'to pray', the imperative is also identical to the stem, yielding *gå*, *gi*, and *be*.

The focus of this paper is a class of verbs for which the stem ends in a cluster with rising sonority, presenting the speaker with syllabification challenges. Examples include *å sykle*, 'to bike', *å åpne*, 'to open', or *å våkne*, 'to wake', which do not yield the (naïvely) anticipated imperatives *sykl*, *åpn*, or *våkn*. The dialectal variation analyzed in this paper focuses specifically on the different strategies found for producing imperatives for this type of verb.

There are at least five dialects (D1-D5) which are documented, including two different dialects in which the null parse is optimal, albeit under varying conditions. Furthermore, anticipating an optimality theoretic analysis, there are plausible but unattested dialects (D6-D7). The range of options is as in the following table, for the verb *å sykle*, 'to bike'.

	citation	___/#C	___/#V
D1: sonorant devoicing	sykl̥	sykl̥	sykl̥
D2: intercluster epenthesis	syk.kəl	syk.kəl	syk.kəl
D3: avoidance	Ø	Ø	Ø
D4: avoidance + liaison	Ø	Ø	syk.l#VC.
D5: Postcluster epenthesis	syk.lə	syk.lə	syk.lə
*D6: deletion	syk	syk	syk
*D7: metathesis	sylk	sylk	sylk

The analysis of each system and the variation among them illustrate the OT prediction that typological variation in grammars reveals variation in constraint ranking. For example, the form with the devoiced sonorant in D1 performs better than the absolutely ungrammatical form with the voiced sonorant against the constraints prohibiting rising sonority in the coda (a constraint conjunction effect), at the cost of violating MAX(VOI), since the voicing specification in the input sonorant is not present on the output sonorant. The option of epenthesis, for example in D2 and D5, satisfy MAX(VOI) at the cost of violating DEP, since the schwa in the output is not present in the input. Reranking these constraints yields the results of the different dialects.

The difference between D2 and D5, with epenthesis respectively into the cluster and after it, is a result of a tension between the ranking of a phonological constraint from

the ANCHORIO family, requiring a peripheral element in the input to be peripheral in the output, and an OO correspondence constraint. The anchoring constraint is satisfied in D2, where the [l] of the output is in the same position as the /l/ in the input. It is violated in D5, such that high ranking of ANCHOR IO will favor D2. When D5 is optimal, this is due to a highly ranked output-output correspondence constraint requiring identity between the bare infinitive and the imperative. An additional argument that this is a morphological effect comes from a dialect in which the infinitive ends in an *-a*. Speakers of this dialect use schwa as their epenthetic vowel in a number of situations, such as dealing with ungrammatical clusters in loan words. However, the imperatives in question surface with a final *-a*, e.g. *sykla* 'bike!'. These speakers are also avoiding *sykl*, but the presence of the final *-a* here invites an analysis based on the form of the infinitive. Hence, I conclude that the difference between D2 and D5 is not simply a difference about syllable structure preferences; rather it is a difference based on the relative importance of achieving identity with the infinitive.

Dialects D3 and D4 avoid making imperative structures for these words (except prevocalically in D4, where we see a 'liaison' type effect). These dialects are argued to have grammars in which the null parse, or null output, is optimal (Prince & Smolensky 1993, McCarthy 2001). Speakers of these dialects use a modal + infinitive construction in the situations calling for an imperative, rather parallel to the use of periphrastic comparative constructions in English non-minimal words (monopods), where the phonology bars suffixation (*more burgundy* versus *redder*).

Given the (increasingly) familiar assumption of the richness of the base, these dialects cannot be analyzed as lacking inputs of the type /sykl/. Even in these dialects, tableau associated with such an input must have one best candidate, and since the speakers produce nothing, that must be an unutterable candidate. Prince & Smolensky envisage candidates lacking prosodic structure (e.g. unsyllabified [sykl]), which therefore vacuously satisfy markedness constraints but are nonetheless "unusable as an element in a Phonological Phrase" (P&S1993:49). McCarthy 2001 deploys the symbol ⊙ to avoid taking a position on the relationship of such a candidate to faithfulness constraints. Rather, he conjectures that ⊙ "always and only violates" M-PARSE, which requires that a candidate participate in a morphological category (p. 281). For the analysis at hand, a grammar in which ⊙ is optimal follows from ranking M-PARSE lower than the constraints eliminating the other candidates (presumably the outputs in the other dialects).

To summarize, the task of imperative formation in Norwegian, when faced with a coda of rising sonority, compels consideration of alternative optimal candidates. Seven possible solutions are presented as following from rerankings of a small set of familiar and well-motivated constraints. The paper provides an empirical contribution by presenting data not yet present in the literature. The analysis underscores the OT strategy of dealing with (micro)variation through reranking, and expands the literature on the possibility of the null output, thereby contributing to the discussion of absolute ungrammaticality.

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McCarthy, John 2001 *A thematic guide to optimality theory*. Cambridge: CUP. (Page nrs. from ms.)
Prince, Alan & Paul Smolensky 1993 *Optimality theory: constraint interaction in generative grammar*. Report no. RuCCS-TR-2. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Center for Cognitive Science.