

Can Low Tone trigger Velarization?

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In many dialects of the Ripuarian area historically coronal consonants are velarized in the coda. In most dialects this has no effect on the tone, in the sense that the original tone is preserved. Cologne, for instance, is a representative case. In this dialect the form [wiŋ²] ‘wine’ has preserved its original accent 2 (\cong level high tone on the two moras of the rhyme). The fact that accent 2 is the original tone in this form is shown by the many dialects that still have this accent.

There is a small group of dialects where velarization only applies if the rhyme has accent 1. These dialects have alternations of the following type:

(1) bru:n² ‘brown’, uninflected bruŋ¹ ‘brown, fem. sg.’

Dialectologists usually claim that the dialects where velarization only applies under accent 1 represent the original situation (Wiesinger 1970, Schirmunsky 1962). This seems to indicate that accent 1 originally functioned as a trigger for velarization. Since accent 1 consists of a sequence of H+L, this again suggests that Low Tone somehow implies Velarity.

If this were true, it would be highly interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, it seems to create a paradox when it is related to two other well known correlations. On the one hand, we know that velars tend not to be voiced. Dutch, for instance, does not allow a voiced velar stop. This seems to indicate that Voice excludes Velarity. On the other hand, we know that Voice seems to imply Low Tone. The latter relation is so strong that some linguists even have proposed the same representation for these features. Obviously, if all three relations were true, there would be a paradox.

(2) A paradox
Low Tone implies Velarity (Ripuarian Velarization)
Low Tone = Voice (many tone languages)
Voice excludes Velarity (Dutch *g)

The second reason why Ripuarian Velarization is important has to do with the definition of the class of segments that sympathize with accent 1, in the sense that they somehow trigger it. Historically, these are the mid and low vowels. If we add the velar nasal as a trigger on the grounds of Ripuarian Velarization, then how can we represent mid vowels, low vowels plus velars as a natural class?

In our talk we ask ourselves the following question. Is it really true that accent 1 has played a crucial role as a trigger of velarization, or is there an alternative interpretation? If the low tone did play a triggering role, then how can we solve the paradox, and how can we define the total set of triggering segments as a natural class? If the low tone did not play a triggering role, then what is the alternative interpretation of velarization?