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Consonant clusters and the word-initial position in Farsi

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In a nutshell

As part of the first thorough representational approach to Persian syllable structure, I show that word-initial syllabic restrictions in Farsi follow from Strict CV representations, given a language-specific parametric configuration.

1. Data

Syllables in Farsi (colloquial Iranian Persian)

CV: /bu/ ‘smell (n.)’

CVC: /pir/ ‘old’

CVCC: /dozd/ ‘thief’

A CVCCV sequence is invariably parsed as CVC.CV

/parti/: par.ti ‘party’ vs /patrik/: pat.rik ‘Patrick’.

Consonant clusters

In a written corpus composed of >32K lexical entries.

Medial CCs

474 out of 529 (23*23) logically possible combinations are attested.

Most gaps (38 out of 56) include /ʒ/ and /ɣ/, of limited distribution elsewhere in the language, as well.

Final CCs

252 out of 529 logically possible combinations are attested.

Gaps are due to etymological reasons, but also to OCP violations. In final CC clusters, dissimilarity between segments is privileged. There can be no combination of:

-Two Identical consonants (no final geminates)

-Two consonants differing only by voice (*td#, *gk#, etc.)

-Two sibilants (*sz#, *zs#, etc.)

-Two liquids (*lr#, *rl#)

-Two back consonants (velar, uvular & laryngeal, *kx#, *xg# etc.)

(Samareh 1999)

Medial CCCs including morpheme boundary

Diverse morphological structures:

N-V-Suf: kaff-duz-ak ‘shoe-sew-dim. =beetle’

Adj-V: garm-kon ‘warm-make = sweatshirt’

N-N-V: harf-guʃ-kon ‘speech-ear-make = one who listens to advice’

CC-C = CC.C in the bolded clusters.

Initial CCs

Initial clusters of any kind (TR, RT, TT, ST, SR) are banned.

Initial CCs, e.g. in loans, are repaired by epenthesis:

‘train’ (French) > teran

‘free’ > firi

‘stop’ > ?estop

Conclusion on syllabification in Farsi

Sonority is not at play in syllabification: slopes violating Syllable Contact Law (SCL) and Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP) are abundant.

2. Theoretical framework: CVCV

Universal syllable structure is reduced to a strict alternation of non-branching Onsets and non-branching Nuclei. (Lowenstamm 1996, Scheer 2004)

The distribution of empty Nuclei is regulated by ECP and a set of language-specific parameters.

Empty Category Principle (ECP) (KLV 1990)

An empty Nucleus may remain phonetically unexpressed if it is (properly) governed, i.e. if the following Nucleus is phonetically expressed.

Parameters

Final Empty Nuclei (FEN) are licensed. (KLV 1990)

FEN can govern Nuclei bare of any melodic content. (Scheer 2004)

Infrasegmental Government (IG) (Scheer 1996: 317): In a C1C2 sequence, C2 can govern C1 if it is more complex. (TR, but *RT). The enclosed empty Nucleus escapes lateral forces.

Initial CV (Lowenstamm 1999): the beginning of the word is marked by an empty CV unit which needs licensing (=absorbs the governing force of the initial Nucleus).

3. Parameter settings in Farsi

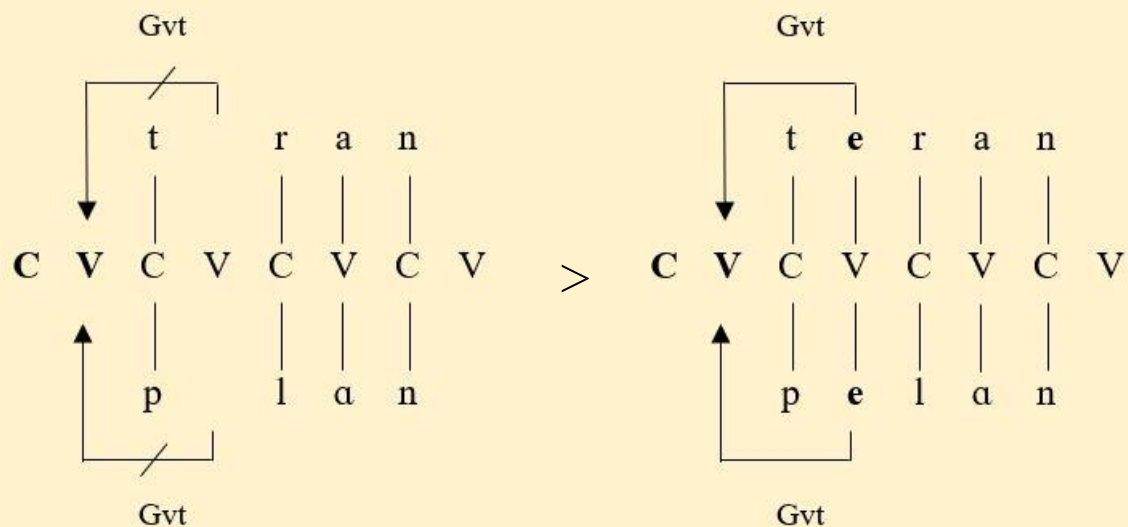
Parameter	Status	Result
FEN licensed	ON	CVC licit
FEN can govern	ON	CVCC licit
IG	OFF	No branching Onsets
Initial CV	ON	*#CC, *#V

Furthermore, morpheme-final word-internal Nuclei act as word-final Nuclei, i.e. they can govern → medial CCCs including morpheme boundary are licit.

4. Representations and analysis

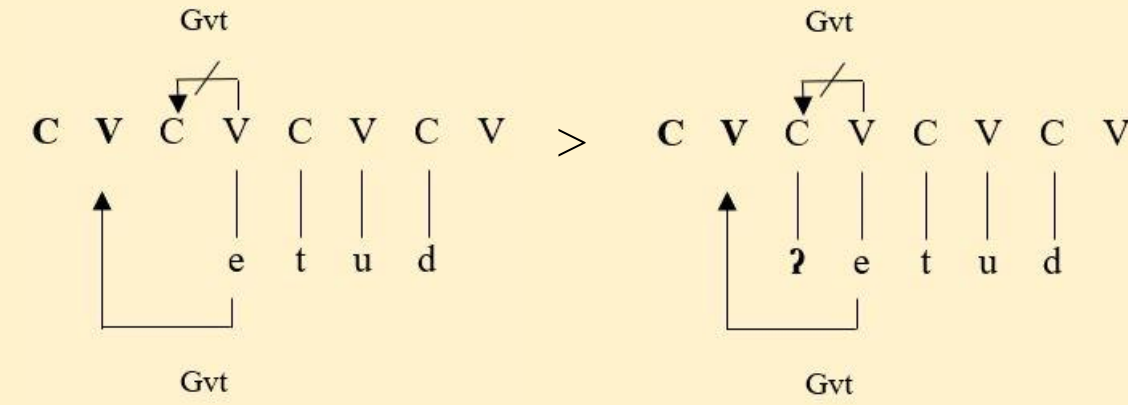
In Farsi, the Initial CV is always licensed/present (See Lahrouchi 2003 vs Scheer 2012 for debate on the parametrization of the initial site.) It thus absorbs the governing force of the word-initial Nucleus.

The IG parameter being off, no Nucleus can skip Government. Initial TR clusters are thus repaired by vowel epenthesis, e.g. in loan adaptation.



<French ‘train’, ‘plan’

Furthermore, as in Italian (cf. Faust et al. 2018), Onsets need to be governed in order to be empty. Government is nonetheless spent on the Initial CV. Vowel-initial forms are repaired by glottal stop epenthesis.

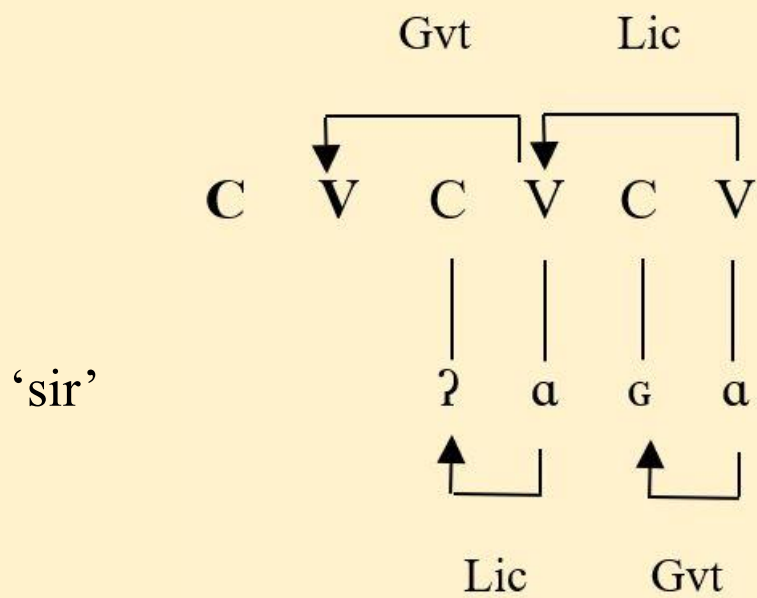


<French ‘étude’ (=study)

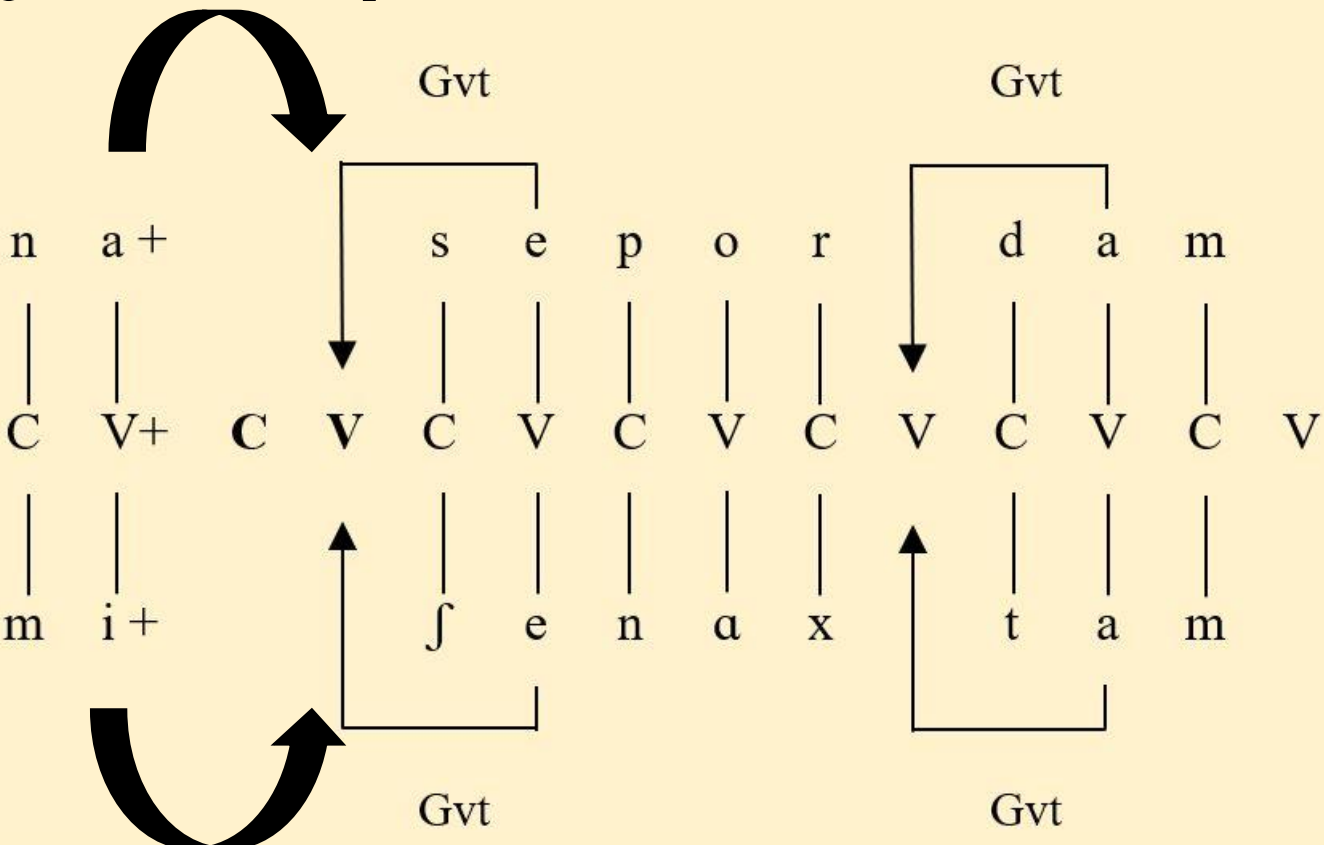
5. Further evidence for the Initial CV

Vowel-zero alternations in non-initial Nuclei only (Cf. Scheer 2012) Alternation occurs in verb paradigms containing diachronic initial clusters: ʃenaxtam ‘I got to know (=I knew)’ vs miʃenaxtam ~ miʃənaxtam ‘I used to know’, but never *ʃənaxtam.

Initial strength Initial consonants never undergo lenition, while intervocalic consonants do. In CVCV terms, initial consonants following an Initial CV are not governed, whereas intervocalic consonants are always governed. (Cf. Scheer 2012)



CV-shaped verb prefixes Verb prefixes are fit for cliticization into the initial site: na- ‘negative’, mi- ‘progressive’, be- ‘subjunctive’ (cf. the case of French in Lowenstamm 1999 and that of Tiberian Hebrew (ibid) and Berber (Lahrouchi 2018)). The Initial CV can host grammatical morphemes.



nasepordam ‘I did not cede’, miʃenaxtam ‘I used to know’

Conclusion

While CVCV dispenses with branching constituents, e.g. Codas, present in Standard Government Phonology (KLV 1985, 1990), it cannot (yet) dispense with parameter settings. (Open to discussion!)

References

Faust, N. et al. 2018 Articles of Italian Unite! KLV (Kaye, J., Lowenstamm, J. & Vergnaud J.-R. 1985. A Theory of Charm & Government. 1990. Constituent Structure and Government in Phonology. Lahrouchi, M. 2003 Manifestations gabaritiques dans la morphologie verbale du berbère. 2018. The left-edge of the word in Berber derivational morphology. Lowenstamm, J. 1996 CV as the only syllable type. 1999 The beginning of the word. Samareh, Y. 1999. Avāshenāsiye zabāne fārsi (Persian Phonetics). Scheer, T. 1996. Une théorie de l’interaction directe entre consonnes. 2004. What is CVCV and why should it be. 2012. Direct interface and one-channel translation.