

Palatalisation in the morphology of siSwati
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Palatalisation in Southern Bantu languages presents a number of challenges to phonological theory. Unlike ‘canonical’ palatalisation, the process generally affects labial consonants rather than coronals or dorsals. It applies in the absence of an obvious palatalising trigger; and it can apply non-locally, affecting labials that are some distance from a palatalising suffix.

The process has been variously treated as morphologically triggered (e.g. Herbert 1990) or phonologically triggered (e.g. Cole 1992). I take a phonological approach and assume that the palatalising trigger takes the form of a lexically floating palatal feature [cor] (Mester and Itor 1989; Zoll 1996; Yip 1992).

REAL-AFF (the morpheme must be realised in the output) and ALIGN-R (the morpheme must be on the right edge of the stem) result in the morpheme being realised as a suffix (e.g. $k^h i p^h a \rightarrow k^h i j^w a$ ‘remove pass.’).

The ranking REAL-AFF >> ALIGN-R allows the [cor] feature to be realised on root-medial labials (e.g. $sebenta \rightarrow setj^w ent^w a$ ‘work pass.’). Root-initial consonants resist phonological change in most languages (Downing 1998; Beckman 1997), hence root-initial labials are not palatalised. Ranking IDENT-PL, [σ_1] above REAL-AFF forces the root-initial labial to remain intact. The undominated constraints *Sec. Cor (A coronal must not be the secondary articulation), NO-CODA (syllables are open) and *COMPLEX ONSET (Onsets are simple) limit the way in which the [cor] could be realised in the output (e.g. $giga \rightarrow gig^w a$ ‘tie pass.’ * $gig^y a$, * $gigdʒ^w a$).

In C and VC roots the [cor] appears as /i/ (e.g. $\text{ʒa} \rightarrow \text{ʒiwa}$ ‘eat pass.’) to achieve the bisyllabic minimum. Evidence for this minimum comes from imperatives, nicknames and pronouns. Ranking MIN (a word must be minimally a foot) above DEP_μ (output moras have input correspondents) result in augmentation.

Onsetless syllables are disfavoured in most languages (Davis 1988; Downing 1994) hence VC roots need to be augmented as well (eḃa → eḃiwa ‘steal pass.’).

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