

Lenisizing English

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monomorphemic obstruent clusters: traditional view

- ▶ at word edges
 - ▶ mostly fortis+fortis: *spot, stop, scot; apse, quartz, ax, depth; wasp, cost, soft, mosque; apt, act*
 - ▶ rarely lenis+lenis *adze, aux* [o:gz]
- ▶ within foot: only
 - ▶ fortis+fortis: *aspen, aster, rascal; chapter, actor; asphalt, esthete*
 - ▶ lenis+lenis: *husband, wisdom, Glasgow; observation, existential; abdomen, Ogden*
- ▶ across foot boundary: also
 - ▶ fortis+lenis: *Afghan, anecdote*
 - ▶ lenis+fortis: *Aztec, gazpacho*

type frequency of singleton obstruents in CUBE

		fortis	lenis	ratio
medial	plosive	41,488	28,601	1.45
	fricative	23,552	11,218	2.10
	all	65,040	39,819	1.63
initial	plosive	23,730	17,694	1.34
	fricative	14,546	2,154	6.75
	all	38,276	19,848	1.93
final	plosive	10,953	9,321	1.18
	fricative	6,885	16,617	0.41
	all	17,838	25,938	0.69

type frequency of obstruent clusters: traditional view

		fortis	lenis	ratio
medial	plos+plos	2,360	376	6.28
	plos+fric	2,787	479	5.82
	fric+plos	6,758	284	23.80
	fric+fric	424	38	11.16
	all	12,329	1,177	10.47
initial	plos+plos	0	0	—
	plos+fric	13	5	2.60
	fric+plos	4,143	0	—
	fric+fric	29	0	—
	all	4,185	5	837.00
final	plos+plos	954	301	3.17
	plos+fric	4,990	1,616	3.09
	fric+plos	2,606	596	4.37
	fric+fric	313	370	0.85
	all	8,863	2,883	3.07

fortis+lenis: 631; lenis+fortis: 886

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4. why is the number of fortis+lenis and lenis+fortis clusters so low, when there does not seem to be any assimilation rule

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fortis = excessive consonantalness

- ▶ a fortis obstruent may spread its Cness on adjacent sounds (Cness protrudes on the adjacent sonorant, making its voiced phase, Vness, shorter)
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lenis = absence of excessive consonantalness

a lenis obstruent may accommodate (some of) the Vness (spontaneous voicing) of adjacent sounds (sonorants)

where fortis+fortis was first reanalysed

a well-known pattern

batik	[bæthíjk]	Maltese	[molthíjz]
boutique	[buwthíjk]	antique	[anthíjk]
cartoon	[ka:thúwn]	mistique	[mist*híjk]

an explanation

mistique is not [mistíjk], but [misdíjk] (eg Twaddell 1935, Davidsen-Nielsen 1969, Kaye & Pöchtrager very soon)

plosives are not aspirated after a fortis fricative

because there **are no** fortis plosives after a fortis fricative (within a morpheme that is: cf *mistime* [misthájm])

accessible types of fricative+plosive clusters

fortis+lenis ✓

star [sda:], *spar* [sba:], *scar* [sga:], *stew* [sdʒuw], *Afghan* [afgan]

lenis+fortis ✓

Aztec [aztek], *lieutenant* [levtenənt], *gazpatcho* [gazpatʃəw] (or [gasbatʃəw])

lenis+lenis ✓

wisdom [wizdəm], *husband* [həzbənd], *Glasgow* [glazgəw]

fortis+fortis ✗

only across a word boundary: *mis#time*, *kiss#Pam*, *brief#case*

hypothesis

*fortis+fortis extends to **all** clusters

fortis+lenis vs lenis+fortis

obstruent+plosive+sonorant

- ▶ no aspiration: *anecdote* [anəkɹdəwt], *Macbeth* [mækbeθ]
- ▶ aspiration: *September* [sebteɹnbə], *October* [ogtəwbə],
electric [ilegtrik]

source of misanalysis

the assumption that any voiceless obstruent that does not contrast with a fortis is itself fortis

lenis obstruents

are voiceless except between two nonfortis segments: [g] is voiced in *dagger*, *alga*, *anger*, *singular*, *language*, *angry*, *English*, *Magda*, *Pisgah*, *exam*; but voiceless in *god*, *dog*, *actor* [agtə], *action* [agʃən], *Agfa*, *Afghan*

neutralization

apparently

word finally the fortis+lenis vs lenis+fortis contrast is neutralized:

tract [tragt] (cf *tractate* [tragtejt])

vs

tracked [trakd] (cf *track* [trak])

ie [tragt] and [trakd] are homonyms

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4. why is the number of fortis+lenis and lenis+fortis clusters so low, when there does not seem to be any assimilation rule
⇒ most obstruent clusters are either fortis+lenis or lenis+fortis

so why do we transcribe fortis+lenis as fortis+fortis?

speakers of voicing languages would notoriously misunderstand (and mispronounce) [sbo:t], [asbə:gəz], [kisd], [likz], etc

I am grateful to George Soros.