

A Phonetic Approach to the ‘Saussure Effect’

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The number of proposed instances of laryngeal loss possibly due to the Saussure Effect (SE) is large. Of the sequences *HRoC and *CoRHC often adduced in discussions, my paper focuses on the latter, returning to the more traditional view of SE. After showing that the vast majority of plausible SE cases actually involves the sequence *CoLHC (L= r/l), I examine the counter-examples not involving a liquid before the laryngeal. Almost all have been refuted in recent scholarship and are not treated as SE examples. I entertain the idea of a possible PIE sound law *oLHC > *oLC as a phonetic change involving two processes. The first is a function relating tongue root retraction and lip rounding; increased backness of a vowel is directly correlated to increased lip rounding. So, like a balloon being squeezed, as back vowels are raised, the oral cavity is lengthened by both retraction of the tongue root and lip rounding (cf. the increasingly back and rounded qualities in the vowels [ɑ], [ɔ], [o], and [u]). The second is further retraction of the tongue root caused by velarization or pharyngealization of liquids in this environment. The result is the approximation of the secondary velarization or pharyngealization gesture of the tongue to the vicinity of the point where laryngeals may have been articulated. The laryngeal, then, completely assimilates to the retracted liquid before subsequent laryngeal vocalization in IE languages, all while preserving the prosodic value of the sequence. In order to provide adequately convincing evidence, I detail similarities between the two liquids as a whole in IE. Using recent scholarship (such as Melchert’s *Anatolian Historical Phonology*, Nussbaum’s “The ‘Saussure Effect’ in Latin and Italic,” Lubotsky’s “The Indo-Iranian Reflexes of PIE *CRHUV,” etc.), I explore features distinguishing liquids from other resonants, and I expose their interaction with a [+back] feature of the laryngeals. To justify this, I show pertinent phonetic universals in environments similar to *CoLHC. Then, to support complete assimilation and degemination, i.e. *LHC > *LLC > LC, I compare other instances of assimilation in many IE languages, highlighting the cases not involving compensatory lengthening. Finally, if such a phenomenon relating rounding to back quality is highly prominent, then other similar effects would likely be seen in IE. Thus, I close by promoting consideration of a few other unexplained phenomena with this phonetic perspective.

Selected References:

- Lubotsky, A. (1997). "The Indo-Iranian Reflexes of PIE *CRHUV" In: Alexander Lubotsky (ed.): *Sound Law and Analogy: Papers in Honor of Robert S.P. Beekes on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 139-154.
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- Nussbaum, A. (1997). "The 'Saussure Effect' in Latin and Italic." In: Alexander Lubotsky (ed.): *Sound Law and Analogy: Papers in Honor of Robert S.P. Beekes on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 181-200.