CHAPTER 5

On the Syllabifications VOO.RV, VR.OOV

5.0 Introduction

Our development of the formal analysis of Vedic syllabification in Chapter 3 exemplified the characteristic give-and-take involved in applying theory to data: we pushed the theory as far as it could go, and where the Vedic data proved recalcitrant, we saw fit to revise it. In the end the Optimality-Theoretic analysis we arrived at required the introduction of established constraints, which, when arrayed in the language-specific ranking we identified, provided a straightforward and elegant model of the interactions between the various priorities competing in the system. The main occasion where data crucially informed theory was in the revision we proposed for the conception of locality in Pater’s (2006, 2009) constraint indexation framework; and in proposing our adjustment to the approach, we have taken pains to at least preliminarily consider the cross-linguistic implications it holds.¹

In this chapter we explore another topic concerning the syllabification of medial consonants, in this case within the domain of Proto-Indo-European itself: namely, the proposed treatments VR.OOV and VOO.RV. Specifically, our goal is to assess the ease with which Optimality Theory, as a current approach in phonological theory, can be utilized to generate these syllabifications in a coherent model. In engaging in this exercise, we intend to exemplify a situation distinct from that we mention above, in which the reconstructed data force us to consider drastic and ad hoc alterations to the theory, which in the end make it difficult to accept. In other words, whereas the Vedic data were able to inform our conception of phonological theory, we hope in this case to amply demonstrate how phonological theory should inform our conception of Proto-Indo-European.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. We begin in 5.1 with a review of the evidence that has traditionally been put forth in favor of the syllabifications VOO.RV and VR.OOV. In 5.2 we attempt to generate these treatments solely on the basis of what we term syllable-structural preferences, involving a sampling of constraints concerned with the locating of syllable boundaries. We consider an alternative type of account in 5.3, which incorporates reference to syllable weight. In 5.4 we evaluate these two analyses as a means of

¹ Again, see the elaborated discussion in Cooper 2012 and Cooper 2013b.
predicting the syllabification of VCCV and V̄CCV sequences, two further shapes whose treatment in this regard has been addressed in the literature. Finally, having undertaken this exercise, we conclude in 5.5.

5.1 VOO.RV and VR.OOV: Preliminaries

The syllabifications VOO.RV and VR.OOV have been reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European, VOO.RV emerging out of consideration of phenomena such as the μέτρον rule (1) (Saussure 1922: 424, Mayrhofer 1986: 111), VR.OOV posited based on the phenomenon of ‘bear’ metathesis (2) (Schindler 1977a: 33).

(1) a. */med-tro-/ ‘measure’ → *mett.ro- > *met.ro-
   (tautosyllabic *-tt- blocks dental-dental s-epenthesis)
   b. */u̯id-to-/ ‘known’ → *u̯it.to- > *u̯it.sto-
   (heterosyllabic *-tt- allows dental-dental s-epenthesis)

(2) a. */h₂ertk̑o-/ ‘bear’ → *h₂ar.k̑þo-
   (tautosyllabic *-tk̑- becomes *-k̑þ-)
   b. */h₂rtk̑o-/ ‘bear’ → *h₂r̥t.k̑o-
   (heterosyllabic *-tk̑- remains *-tk̑-)

There is also Schindler’s (1977b) conception of Sievers’ Law (and Lindemann’s Law, if one considers the two related). In the same work which will underly much of the discussion in the second part of this volume (as it contains his proposed rule of sonorant vocalization), Schindler proposes his account of Sievers’ Law, tying the occurrence of the high vowel to syllable structure, in particular VR.OGV (> VR.OV.GV), V̄.CGV (> V.ĆV.GV), but crucially not VOO.GV. Examples are given in (3).

(3) a. VR.OGV:   Ved. /dāś-vaś-/ ‘revere’ > dā.śu.vaś-
   a. V.ĆGV:   Plhd. /sūrja-/ > sū.rja-
   a. VOO.GV: Pre-Ved. */u̯īra-pśu̯a-/ > vi.rap.śá
   ‘having men and animals’

On the face of it these syllabifications are unusual, on two levels. In and of themselves they suggest a rather lax conception of the sonority sequencing principle: in the sequence VOORV an -OO. coda is preferred over an .OR- onset,