THE SYLLABLE IN PERFORMANCE:
DIACHRONY
1 Introduction

There has been considerable debate in the phonological literature of the last few decades concerning the role played by the syllable in consonantal phonotactics. One party attributes the range of contrasts in each environment to positions within the syllable (the syllable-based approach; section 1.1); an opposing camp argues that linear segmental sequence, not syllable-internal position, determines phonotactics (the linear approach; section 1.2). Whereas the majority of previous studies have adopted a position in one or other camp with a solely synchronic focus,¹ this chapter evaluates the two approaches from a mainly diachronic perspective with reference to the development of Latin consonantal phonotactics, focusing upon assimilations. Our understanding of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) word-formation has long been sufficiently refined to furnish us with a rich array of securely reconstructed consonantal sequences in prehistoric Latin, whose outcome in the familiar classical language is much altered. As the two accounts make different predictions regarding the possible development of word-internal consonantal sequences, Latin presents a promising testing ground.

1.1 The Syllable-Based Approach

A syllable-based account of phonotactics can be found in early investigations into syllable-internal structure, which focused on the distribution of segments in different syllable constituents (Fudge 1969,

¹ Notable recent exceptions being the work of Blevins (2003, 2004).