EPENTHESIS AND SYLLABLE WEIGHT*

A standard assumption in the moraic theory of syllable weight is that a syllable must contain at least one mora, which is usually associated with a vowel. This paper presents arguments and evidence against this assumption. The evidence is drawn primarily from the behavior of epenthetic syllables in Mohawk and Iraqi Arabic with brief reference to Selayarese and Yapese. It is demonstrated that weight-sensitive phenomena such as stress assignment, vowel lengthening, and the bimoraicity of the minimal word consistently treat certain epenthetic syllables in these languages as lacking weight. To explain the behavior of epenthetic syllables, the paper proposes a revision to the theory of epenthesis to permit 'stranded' or unlicensed consonants to project (or be mapped) to syllables that have no weight. Such syllables may remain without a vocalic nucleus throughout the phonology and as such are interpreted as weightless by various phonological processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of phonological weight, first elaborated by Hyman (1985) and further developed by Hayes (1989) and others, distinguishes syllables in terms of the number of weight units (moras) they contain. The standard distinctions are those in (1).

\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{The Weight Typology}\textsuperscript{1} \\
a. \text{The Monomoraic (light) Syllable (}\sigma_{\mu}\text{)} \\
(i) \sigma \\
\downarrow \mu \\
C V \\
(ii) \sigma \\
\downarrow \mu \\
C V C
\end{array} \]

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\textsuperscript{1} A third weight-type, the trimoraic syllable, has been proposed by Hayes (1989). The existence of this type is not strongly supported by cross-linguistic evidence and is not a factor in this paper.

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b. The Bimoraic (heavy) Syllable ($\sigma_{\mu\mu}$)

(i) $\sigma$

(ii) $\sigma$

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\mu \\
\mid \\
C V \\
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\mu \\
\mid \\
C V C \\
\end{array} \]

The above typology characterizes the CV syllable as invariably monomoraic and the CVV syllable as invariably bimoraic, but the classification of the CVC syllable is variable. The variability is attributed by Hayes (1989) to a language-particular choice. In some languages, a consonant to the right of a vowel (which is not in an 'onset') is syllabified as a 'coda' and assigned a mora by rule. Hayes refers to this rule as Weight-by-Position. An informal statement of this process is given in (2), where the use of the term 'coda' is just a convenient way of identifying the affected consonant.

(2) Weight-by-Position

A 'coda' consonant is assigned a mora in the course of syllabification (Parameter).

This statement of the Weight-by-Position rule differs from the version adopted by Archangeli (1991), who argues that weight is assigned to a coda consonant in Yawelmani only after it has been syllabified. Archangeli does not reject the possibility that Hayes' proposal still holds for some languages. Therefore, the statement in (2) remains viable, and the discussion in this paper will be conducted on the basis of the hypothesis that syllabification and weight assignment apply simultaneously.²

The assumption that the typology in (1) captures the only possible weight types leads to the conclusion that a well-formed syllable must contain at least one mora. I argue in this paper that such a conclusion is untenable. The evidence that supports my arguments is drawn primarily from two languages, Mohawk and Iraqi Arabic, with some supporting evidence from Selayarese and Yapese. I demonstrate that epenthetic syllables in these languages are treated as well formed but non-moraic by one or more processes which make crucial reference to weight. These processes include stress assignment, vowel lengthening, and word augmentation to satisfy a minimal word requirement.

The organization of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides an outline of the theoretical framework, including the sub-theory of epenthesis. In

² I can reanalyze the Yawelmani data in accordance with the statement in (2), but such a reanalysis is beyond the scope of this paper.