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Diachronic Underspecification of final consonants: Alternatives to derivations?

We focus on lexical representations for which some features have been diachronically surplanted by others in the surrounding context. The morpheme-final stops of Latin that historically were lexically specified for Place and Voice came to have features that are predictable from the environment. In epigraphic Latin there was 'de-specification' of the morpheme-final stop consonants: Lat. SUB *sub* becomes /su∅–/ (shown beneath).

(1)   SUB DIE   →   *su die*   Omission of /b/
                              →   *sud die*   Gemination of /d/

The final segments of these forms do not carry a lexical specification, their output is context-sensitive. The features are predictable in a syntagmatic segment-internal context. This manifests itself in Italo-Romance as the alternation: SUB DICTU → It. *suddetto* vs. SUB AQVEV(M) → It. s*ubaqueo* (Type I Geminates). The same occurs with lexically-internal stop-stop sequences: Latin FACTU(M) It. *fatto* (Type II Geminates).

One response to the facts is to declare **both these final-stops as 'unspecified' and set up a derivation.** This could take many forms and raise a number of related questions. In all cases, the geminates result from the assimilation between a despecified position /∅/, which is derivationally associated to another position, which is itself associated lexically to a matrix. Stated in x-bar theory: predictability is induced from positional neutralization and a licensing statement: αF must be licensed in x (x-bar). Or, in structural linearity terms, one could analyse these despecified Latin geminates as a chain $(trace_i)(segment_i)$, where ∅ is a primitive but also an empty maximal projection: $∅_C$, a trace (t), and a non-specified constituent co-indexed with an onset: $∅_C – C$:

(2)   *sud die*   = $∅_d – d$

Another response is to observe that, from a synchronic perspective, Type II geminates never show alternations and therefore, from a learner's perspective, they are unpredictable/lexically specified. Type I geminates, conversely, show alternations and therefore their final-stop has a chance to be lexically underspecified and filled by a context-sensitive rule – that is to say – an empty position filled by phonological objects in its environment: CV.

Note, however, that even if the pattern is predictable, a derivation is not a *de force* requirement; the forms could be lexicalised regardless. Taking 'derived' and 'non-derived' to correspond to [[A][B]] vs. [AB] (Kaye 1995), the GP claim is that **geminates in Italian SUB-words are fully specified within [AB] domains.** In fact, Italian seems to differ from English in this regard. In English vowel quality and secondary stress shows there are derived and non-derived SUB-words: [['sʌb][ˌtaip]] 'subtype' vs. [sə'pi:nə] 'subpoeina' and [['sʌ][məˌraiz]] 'summarise' vs. [sə'rendə] 'surrender' (Harris p.c.). The difference between English and Italian is deeper. English allows [[A][B]] domains, while Italian does not (therefore, unlike Italian, English allows multiple feet per word, root-compounds and pseudo-compounds ['anɪkˌdəut] 'anecdote' (in Italian it is [a'nɛd:oto] *aneddoto*). Therefore, the only structure that SUB-words can take in Italian is [AB] and sychronically the geminates are lexically specified. English allows derived SUB-words, but in these cases, either the 'b' is fully specified or there is no corresponding position (though historically there may have been a geminate in this [AB] structure).