
Since the discovery of Sanskrit by the West and its subsequent link to other Indo-European (IE) languages, the phonology of Sanskrit has always been viewed as remarkably archaic. For this reason, the production of works devoted to the historical phonology of Sanskrit has been steady and fruitful. With such a seemingly straightforward derivational history from the proto-language and the abundance of scholarship on the topic to date, it may seem that yet another treatment of the historical phonology of Sanskrit would be unproductive, if not completely redundant. However, Masato Kobayashi’s *Historical Phonology of Old Indo-Aryan Consonants*, a revised version of his University of Pennsylvania dissertation, proves that such a statement could not be further from the truth.

Kobayashi’s goals for this book are ambitious. He intends to “reexamine the whole of Indo-Aryan historical phonology from subsegmental and microscopic viewpoints” (p. 3). Although at times this vantage point affords only a reaffirmation of the communis opinio, it frequently provides fresh insight into standing problems and addresses situations previously unknown to scholars. Ultimately, the success of this book is rooted in the author’s ability to integrate three separate (and often mutually unintelligible) realms of scholarship—Indology, Indo-European linguistics and generative phonology. He treats each problem judiciously and frequently refers to the writings of Sanskrit grammarians for insight into the true phonetic nature of the data.

What sets Kobayashi’s book apart from previous works, however, is his use of modern phonological theories such as suprasegmental phonology and the most widely used constraint-based theory within phonology, Optimality Theory (OT). Kobayashi demonstrates that these theories can give much insight into the Sanskrit data where rule-based phonology cannot, especially in situations where rules “conspire” together to satisfy a single constraint. He also makes use of typology, finding many comparanda in both IE and non-IE languages to bolster his analysis of Sanskrit. Of course, because his
work is at heart devoted to the historical phonology of the Indo-Aryan languages, he frequently discusses the position of Sanskrit vis-à-vis Proto-Indo-European and the other IE dialects, when relevant.

The book is organized into eight chapters plus an appendix. The book begins with a concise overview of Kobayashi’s methodology and updates the reader on the current state of phonological studies on the Sanskrit language. He then proceeds with an examination of syllable structure in IE and in Sanskrit; most noteworthy is his discussion of a very controversial topic, Brugmann’s Law, which states that an original PIE *o becomes Skt. ā in open syllables but short a in closed syllables. Kobayashi reinterprets this law as *o > Skt. ā, whose lengthening is blocked in closed syllables, a development that he connects to the general tendency within Indo-European to avoid over-long syllables. His explanation makes good phonological sense, and there are numerous parallels reconstructable for both PIE (e.g., Sievers’ Law [cf. Neri 2003: 32]) and the individual daughter languages (e.g., Osthoff’s Law [Mayrhofer 1986: 175]).

A large part of the book is devoted to the status of the sibilant in Sanskrit. Kobayashi convincingly argues that in Sanskrit a sibilant is realized as ‘extrasyllabic’ (i.e., a syllabic appendage) if it precedes a voiceless plosive (pp. 41-42) but can occur as the syllable onset if a sonorant (vowel or resonant) follows. In other words, if /s/ is positioned in accordance with the sonority hierarchy, then it is part of the syllable; otherwise it is extrasyllabic. This idea might seem slightly strange at first, but it allows the author (p. 38) to explain many seemingly unrelated phenomena in Sanskrit, such as the peculiar distribution of /s/ (e.g., /s/ cannot occur word-finally) and the deletion of /s/ in between two stops. Many Indo-Europeanists will delight in K’s ingenious explanation of the bizarre reduplication to SP- roots (where P = plosive), which reduplicate with P-not S- (e.g. st̂ā ‘stand’: 3 sg pfct ta-st̂āu), while SR- roots regularly reduplicate with S- (e.g. snā ‘bathe’: 3 pl pfct sa-sn-ur). Viewing S as extrasyllabic in SP- roots permits us to make many of our reconstructions for Proto-Indo-European more sensible. For example, we may now change our reconstruction of the reduplicated present to ‘stand’ from *sti-st(e)h2- (posited solely on the basis of Skt. tiṣṭāti) to *si-st(e)h2-, whose initial reduplication is seen everywhere else in Indo-European; cf. Lat. sistō, Gk. hístēmi, Av. hiṣṭanti, etc. Skt. tiṣṭāti is simply an innovation.
In Chapter IV (Sibilants, Affricates and their Features, 49-81), K proposes a new restriction called the AFFRICATE FILTER, which arose sometime between Proto-Indo-Iranian (PIIr.) and the earliest attested Sanskrit. This restriction accounts for more than just the simplification of PIIr. affricates, whose origin lies in the original PIE palatal stops. It is closely linked to the simplification of clusters of more than two obstruents in Indo-Aryan, such as in the forms nád-bʰyah ‘grandsons (Dpl)’ < *nápt-bʰyas and dípsati ‘deceives (desiderative)’ from *dʰi-dʰbʰ-s-ati. This process of cluster simplification also allows a straightforward development of PIE *sʰk to Sanskrit /(c)cʰ/, as PIIr. *sʰc was at one point in time a sequence of three obstruents, *[stɾ] vel sim. K shows that this sequence does not simplify to *[sɛ] as one might expect; rather, it reduces to [tɾ] or [ttɾ], which finds an exact parallel in the sandhi development of /-t ħ-/ to /ccʰ/.

Not all of his analyses come out so neatly, however. For example, as is well known, the change of PIIr. *jʰ and *jʰ to [h] is a regular process within the prehistory of Sanskrit (cf. hu- ‘pour’ < *jʰu-, han- ‘kill’ < *jʰan-). However, we also find the deocclusion of the voiced aspirates *dʰ and *bʰ, whose exact conditions, Kobayashi’s admirable efforts notwithstanding, look hopelessly sporadic and merely an idiosyncratic property of the morpheme itself (p. 85). Kobayashi also deals with unexpected differences between the nasals /m/ and /n/ and the glides /w/ and /y/. While I find it quite attractive to assume that /m/ was less marked than /n/, I remain unconvinced by K’s suggestion that in Pre-Vedic Indo-Aryan *w was not a glide. The form prthiwh₂, presented by K as evidence, should in no way be compared to the form (ava-)dyáti < *dh₂-ye-. The loss of laryngeal in this latter form should rather be traced back to Proto-Indo-European according to Pinault’s Law, whereby post-consonantal laryngeal was lost before *y in a medial syllable (see Pinault 1982, as well as Jasanoff 2003a: 132).

There are a few other issues worth mentioning:

1) It is incorrect to say that the sequence *-wṛ- only metathesizes in Greek (25). This, in fact, seems to be a rule of PIE origin; cf. Lat. quadr-, Gk. tru-, Gaul. petru-, Avest. čahr-, all from *kw₁,twr- (Mayrhofer 1986:162).

2) The ‘epenthetic’ -i- found in certain future forms (pp. 55-56, 136) may not always be the result of analogy and may derive from an original *-h₁- of the future suffix (see Jasanoff 2003b: 77, fn. 37 as well as 134, fn. 16). According to this view,
*-h₁-* was lost between an obstruent and s (cf. vatsya- ‘will dawn’ < *h₂wes-h₁s-ye/o-) but was retained elsewhere. This would explain the “quasi-sef” future form in -iṣya- to many roots ending in a resonant (e.g., kar-iṣya- ‘will make’) as well as forms in other languages, such as Gk. tenéō ‘I will hold’ < *ten-h₁s-e/o-.

3) On p. 64, replace “*wǝks+p” with “*wǝks+só” (Ringe 1996:10).

4) On p. 116, the dat.sg. of ‘father’ should be reconstructed as *ph₂trey, not *ph₂troy.

Despite a handful of minor issues, overall this is an excellent book and will be of great use to anyone interested in Indo-European linguistics, generative phonology or the Sanskrit language. In the preface, K writes (3): “This study is…intended as the first, modest installment of my plan to reexamine the whole of Indo-Aryan historical phonology from subsegmental and microscopic viewpoints.” This is exciting news, and I am eager to see what lies next in his “plan.” Moreover, I sincerely hope that this book, a work set apart by rigorous methodology and a clear mastery of phonological theory, will inspire other scholars to undertake historical phonologies of the other Indo-European languages with the tools of modern generative phonology at hand.

ANDREW MILES BYRD

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
References


