# Rule exceptionality II

Exceptionality (EGG 2025, Zagreb)

## 1 Introduction

Today, we'll expand the empirical and theoretical world of exceptionality a bit.

## 2 Piro syncope

- Kisseberth (1970), henceforth K, extends the *SPE* theory of exceptionality using data evidence from Piro.[1]
- According to K, Piro has a productive rule of syncope.[2]

(1) Syncope: V → ∅ / VC ___ +CV

(2)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | /kama/ | [kama] | 'to make, form' |
| | /kam**a**-lu/ | [kamlu] | 'handicraft' |
| b. | /xipalu/ | [xipalu] | 'sweet potato' |
| | /n-xipal**u**-ne/ | [nxipalne] | 'my sweet potato' |

- K does not discuss cyclicity, derived environment effects, or rule directionality, but (1) appears only to a morpheme-final vowel.
- (1) has some apparent negative exceptions.[3]

(3)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | /meyi-ta/ | [mey**i**ta] | 'to please' |
| b. | /hi-nama-ya/ | [hin**a**m**a**ya] | 3sg.Pssr.-mouth.of-Obl |

- This type of negative exception can be generated in *SPE*'s exceptionality theory simply by marking /meyi-, nama-/ as −Syncope.
- But other underapplications of (1) are not so easily handled.

[1] I too will refer to this language as such following K and his primary source, Matteson 1965. It should not be confused with an unrelated language known as Piro Pueblo. Some subsequent work on syncope in this language refers to the language as Yine, though other sources say Yine is simply the most common variety of Piro. I have been unable to figure out what the preferred endonym is.

[2] His term is Vowel Drop.

[3] Here I am drawing additional data from an unpublished paper by Héctor González, henceforth G, ultimately taken from a Yine audio-book of the Gospels. G's transcriptions are somewhat different (though not in any important way) and his glosses are morphemic.

(4)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | /n-nika-nan**i**-m-ta/ | [hnik**a**nan**i**mta] | 1SG-eat-EXTNS-NONDUR-VCL |
| b. | /nik**a**-ya-pi/ | [nikyapi] | eat-APPL-INSTR.NOM |

- The root /nika/ 'eat' behaves as if it's −SYNCOPE in (4a) but +SYNCOPE in (4b).
- What's going on? It seems that the following /-nan**i**/ (as well as several other suffixes, including the verbal theme suffixes /-ta, -wa/) fails to *trigger* SYNCOPE.
- A Piro morpheme's status as a *target* or *trigger* of SYNCOPE are partially independent.

(5) SYNCOPE targets and triggers:

  - **Mutable, catalytic**: the nominalizing suffix /-lu/ is mutable (undergoes syncope) as in (2b), and catalytic (triggers syncope) as in (2a).
  - **Inalterable, catalytic**: No Piro examples given.[4]
  - **Mutable, quiescent**: the intransitive suffix /-wa/ is mutable as in /meyi-w**a**-lu/ [meyiwlu] 'celebration' and appears to be quiescent as in /poko-wa-ta/ [pok**o**wata] 'to establish a town'.[5]
  - **Inalterable, quiescent**: the imperfective suffix /-wa/ (not to be confused with the homophonous intransitive suffix) is inalterable (does not undergo syncope) as in /yimaka-le-ta-ni-wa-yi/ [yimakletniw**a**yi] 'teach-SUBD-VCL-AFFCT-IMPFV-2SG' and quiescent as in /r-hina-wa/ [r**i**n**a**wa] '3-come-IMPFV'.

- K proposes that each morpheme bears two features for each rule *R*: one indicating whether the morpheme is an *R* TARGET and another whether it is an *R* TRIGGER.

(6) Kisseberth conventions:

Rule *R* applies just in the case where all of following obtain:

  - *R*'s structural description is met (cf. yesterday's RULE PRINCIPLE).
  - The target morpheme is +*R* TARGET.
  - The trigger morpheme is +*R* TRIGGER.

(7) The Kisseberth exceptionality taxonomy:

| | |
|---|---|
| +*R* TARGET, +*R* TRIGGER: | mutable, catalytic |
| −*R* TARGET, +*R* TRIGGER: | inalterable, catalytic |
| +*R* TARGET, −*R* TRIGGER: | mutable, quiescent |
| −*R* TARGET, −*R* TRIGGER: | inalterable, quiescent |

- G claims there are some additional complexities w.r.t. the elative suffix /-pa/ and its triggering of syncope; it is unclear what to make of this.

[4] Kenstowicz and Kisseberth (1977:118f.) give a hastily-described example in Slovak.

[5] However, from this limited evidence we can't rule out the other possibility, namely that /poko/ 'town' is inalterable.

(8) Syncope triggering with elative /-pa/:

- /-pa/ triggers deletion of the penultimate—rather than the preceding—vowel as shown in /r-hit**a**ka-pa-n**ɨ**-lo/ [r**ɨ**tkapanro] '3-put-Elv-Antic-3sg.F'.
- /-pa/ loses its catalytic property (unlike, e.g., /-lu/) when it undergoes syncope as shown in /cinan**ɨ**-p**a**-yi/ [cin**a**n**ɨ**pyi] 'full-Elv-2sg'.

# 3 Blackfoot breaking

- In Blackfoot (Frantz 2017), *k* "breaks"—i.e., is realized as the affricate *ks*—when followed by *i*, as in *kitáa**ks**ipii* 'you will enter'.
- But not all *k*'s undergo breaking; e.g., the second person prefix *k-* is "always impervious to breaking".
- And not all *i*'s trigger breaking; e.g., the initial vowel of ***i**tsiniki* 'tell a story' never does.
- Frantz proposes, à la Kisseberth (1970), that morphemes must be specified for:
  - they undergo breaking and
  - whether they trigger breaking.

# 4 English velar softening

- There is an obvious parallel to the Blackfoot pattern: English velar softening. Focusing on the least-controversial branch of the sketchy analysis developed in *SPE* (*passim*):
  - Stem-final *k* alternates with *s* when followed by a front non-low vowel, as in *electri*[k]/*electri*[k]*al*/*electri*[s]*ity*, *criti*[k]/*criti*[k]*al*/*criti*[s]*ize*/*criti*[s]*ism*.
  - But many *k*'s fail to soften in this context, as in *anar*[k]*ism* or *Tur*[k]*ic*.
  - Similarly, certain suffixes start with a surface front non-low vowel but fail to trigger softening, as in *medi*[k]*ate* (but cf. *medi*[s]*ine*).
- *SPE* proposes:
  - Target morpheme must be +Latinate; stems like /tʒ́k/ are −Latinate (§8.7).
  - Surface front non-low vowels which fail to trigger softening are underlyingly low (e.g., /-ǣt/ for *-ate*; §1.8) so they don't meet the structural description for Velar Softening at the time the rule is applied.
- Two lingering questions:
  - Is Velar Softening really productive in English? (cf. Shortening)
  - If it is, can we improve on the *SPE* analysis at all?

# 5 Further reading

- Read ch. 3 of Zonneveld 1978 for a detailed review and critique of Kisseberth's approach.

# References


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