Deepthi Gopal || Uppsala University

Georgian pre-sonorant syncope is no longer phonological

In Georgian, vowel-initial affixes (other than the nominative /–i/ and vocative /-o/ in nouns[1]) often trigger the deletion of the last *non-high* vowel in a sonorant-final (/n/ /m/ /l/ /r/ /v/) stem (*reduction* in Hewitt 1995, 25–27, 34–37, Butskhrikidze and van de Weijer 2001; *deletion* in Butskhrikidze 2002, 90–93; *quantitative ablaut* in Boeder 2005, 10; see Gamkrelidze and Mac'avariani 1965; Gamkrelidze 1966 for the historical situation)[2]. The typical pattern, which generalises to some recent borrowings, is shown in (1); most obstruent-final stems and stems in which a final sonorant is preceded by a high vowel do not participate, inverting the more usual typology of targets for syncope (Gouskova 2003, 211). /o/ alternates with [ʷ][3] rather than deleting outright: /p'ɑmidɔr-is/ [p'ɑmidʷris] 'tomato-GEN'.

(1) Pre-sonorant syncope in Georgian (Butskhrikidze 2002, 90–93, Hewitt 1995, 34–37).

-NOM	-PL /-ebi/	-GEN /–is/	-PL-GEN	*Gloss*
bɑli	blebi	blis	blebis	'cherry'
mʁvdeli	mʁvdlebi	mʁvdlis	mʁvdlebis	'priest'
rest'ɔrɑni	rest'ɔrnebi	rest'ɔrnis	rest'ɔrnebis	'restaurant'
k'ɑmɑtʰi	k'ɑmɑtʰebi	k'ɑmɑtʰis	k'ɑmɑtʰebis	'debate'
p'ɑnduri	p'ɑndurebi	p'ɑnduris	p'ɑndurebis	'(string instrument)'

Several further complications arise, illustrated in (2). First, there exist obstruent-final stems which do undergo syncope; second, there exist sonorant-final stems that do not. The failure of sonorant-final stems to syncopate is not predictable from phonological information, and this can result in homophonous pairs distinguished solely by the failure of one item to undergo syncope, as shown. (Hewitt (1995, 35) does, however, observe that monosyllabic stems are much more likely to escape syncope than polysyllabic stems.) Compounds involving exceptionally non-syncopating members often regularise (although not always): /dɑr–/ 'climate' is non-syncopating, but /ɑv+dɑr-is/ [ɑvdris] 'bad climate-GEN' (Vogt 1971, 21–22). Finally, inter-speaker variation in both directions can be found in natural corpora.

(2) Exceptional obstruent-final undergoers and sonorant-final non-undergoers.

-NOM	-PL /-ebi/	-GEN /–is/	-PL-GEN	*Gloss*
ɑrɑq'i	ɑrq'ebi	ɑrq'is	ɑrq'ebis	'vodka'
k'ɑk'ɑbi	k'ɑk'bebi	k'ɑk'bis	k'ɑk'bebis	'partridge'
t͡seli	t͡slebi	t͡slis	t͡slebis	'year'
t͡seli	t͡selebi	t͡selis	t͡selebis	'waist'

One possible analysis of the facts in (1) is as typical metrical syncope targeting weak positions (with pre-obstruent vowels protected by phonotactic constraints), as proposed by Butskhrikidze (2002, 152–153); even in the absence of the data in (2), however, questions arise. First, it is not clear why nominative /-i/ and vocative /-o/ (and further verbal affixes) are excluded. Second, if word-level stress in Georgian is initial (see Borise 2023 for an overview), then syncope in monosyllabic roots like /bɑl/ and /t͡sel$_1$/ targets surface-strong syllables, and elsewhere is further insensitive to a phrasal accent that applies leftward from the right edge (see Kaplan 2022 for some implications). I argue here that both the lexical specificity of the alternation and the non-participation of certain affixes instead motivate a stratal account (Bermúdez-Otero 2013) of pre-sonorant syncope as stem allomorphy, and as such, that this is a *lexicalised* pattern that is no longer under the control of the phonological computation (but once was); this reasoning also allows an account of the non-participation of the synchronic high vowels, which in fact postdate (Gamkrelidze and Mac'avariani 1965; Gamkrelidze 1966) the prior state of the language in which this pattern must first have entered the phonology.

[1] The situation of the verbs is similar, including the presence of non-participating affixes and stems.

[2] Or both the final and penultimate vowels in a vowel-final stem in which a sonorant precedes the final vowel.

[3] Butskhrikidze (2002, 95) gives /v/ but on p. 88 gives [ʷ] as narrowly-transcribed post-consonantal /v/.