Is Paragoge a Contact Effect?

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1   Introduction

The addition of a vowel after a word-final consonant, termed paragoge, has often been remarked to be an uncommon sound-change cross-linguistically (for instance by both Campbell (2013, pg. 32) and Millar & Trask (2015, pg. 61)). Furthermore, some authors have suggested that paragoge might be an indicator of a period of adult L2 acquisition, as opposed to a spontaneous sound change in itself (Ng, 2013). The purpose of this paper is to show how a closer examination of the instances of paragoge found in the languages of the world reveals that the actual picture is more nuanced and that there is a higher burden of proof needs to be satisfied before this metric can be described as reliable.

1.1   The Austronesian Exception

The Austronesian family in particular exhibits a large number of languages which have undergone paragoge as a sound change, spread over a wide geographical area. We will examine Malagasy of Madagascar, Saaroa of Taiwan and Talaud of Sulawesi, and examine both the form which paragoge takes in these languages and its relationship with their sociolinguistic context.

For example, in Malagasy originally consonant-final Austronesian roots such as *kulit ‘skin’, *anak ‘child’ and *inum ‘drink’ are reflected with the support of an additional -a [ə], giving hóditra, ánaka and ínona respectively (Blust & Trussel, 2020). This paragoge is both fed by changes to word-final consonants, such as a shift of final *-p to → -tra seen in *tuptup ‘cover’ → mi-tótotra ‘be covered over’, while also counterfeeding other changes, such as the spirantization of pre-vocalic *p- to f- seen in the suffixed undergoer form totóf-ana (Adelaar, 2012).

1.2   Contact as an Explanation

The examination of the Austronesian data shows that assuming that paragoge must reflect a period of non-native acquisition seems premature. In particular, while in some languages such as Malagasy contact does seem to have played a primary role (Adelaar, 2012), for others such as Talaud it is not clear that such a contact-based explanation is even plausible (Sneddon, 1993). Furthermore, even in those instances where contact languages were present, this by itself does not actually prove that the paragoge is contact-induced, as not all changes in languages in contact with each other are necessarily the result of said contact. This therefore should lead us to be wary of any assertion that the presence of paragoge must entail a period of contact to actuate the change.

References

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