

Grassmann's Law in Ofo

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NOTES AND REVIEWS

GRASSMANN'S LAW IN OFO

TABLE 1

Ofo is an extinct American Indian language formerly spoken on the lower Mississippi. It was shown to be Siouan by Swanton (1909), who collected a short dictionary from the last speaker in 1908 and published it in Dorsey and Swanton (1912:319-31).

All my examples are taken from this dictionary, and as it is not known with certainty what the phonemes of Ofo were like,¹ I use Swanton's inconsistent transcription, with the following clarifications: *d* and *g* are almost certainly allophones of /t/ and /k/; *b*, however, is distinct from /p/; *c* is /s/; *tc* is /č/; *x*, *ɣ*, or *h* indicates aspiration of a stop, fricative, or affricate. These aspirated consonants appear to be separate phonemes.² It is not impossible, however, that some of Swanton's *sh* digraphs stand for /š/. The nasalization of a vowel is indicated by a superscript *n* or *m* or by a following *ñ*. *ě* and *ĩ* are shorter varieties of /e/ and /i/; *ǻ* is [ə] and an allophone of /a/. The phonemic status of vowels with a circumflex accent is uncertain: *â* is *aw* as in *law* (Dorsey and Swanton 1912:1); *ô* is *o* as in *stop* (1912:4), and *û* is *oo* as in *foot* (1912:2). The notation of accent is extremely inconsistent and has no relationship to the rule I will discuss.

I will now provide evidence for the following phonological rule: *A syllable of the shape ChV loses its aspiration when it comes to occur before another syllable of the shape ChV*. This kind of aspiration simplification is well known to Indo-Europeanists as part of Grassmann's

<i>p t č k</i>	<i>i ĩ u ũ</i>
<i>ph th čh kh</i>	<i>e o (q)</i>
(b)	<i>a ǻ</i>
<i>f s (š) h</i>	
<i>fh sh</i>	
<i>m n</i>	
<i>w l y</i>	

law. The rule can be formalized for Ofo as follows:

$$h \rightarrow \emptyset / C_1^2 - V + C_1^2 hV$$

+ indicates a morpheme boundary.

The following lists make up an exhaustive inventory of all the evidence available for a Grassmann's law in Ofo. No counterexamples to such a law are found.

Six examples of compounds can be given; for each of them, except the last one, both underlying words have been found as separate entries in Swanton's dictionary:

- (1) *oskǻpha* 'the white or American egret', from *o'skha*, *o'skxa* 'the crane' and *ǻpha*ⁿ 'white';
- (2) *pačhû'ti* 'redheaded', as in *ǻkhĩ'si pačhû'ti* 'redheaded turtle', from *ǻpha*, *pa* 'head' and *tchû'ti* 'red';
- (3) *ethe'ni naqsakthě* 'fresh meat'; *ethe'ni* is 'meat'; *naqsakthě* is *naqsha*, *na'kašǻ* 'young, fresh' and *ktxě*, *ktě* 'to kill';
- (4) *ape'shihi* 'smoke', from *aphe'ti*, *aphi'ti* 'fire' and a component probably related to *tashi'hi* 'to burn' or *našhi'hi* 'to breathe';
- (5) *patho'pka* 'redheaded woodpecker (?)', probably from *ǻpha*, *pa* 'head' and a component found in *ĩtatho'pka* 'pestle';
- (6) *oⁿtafhǻhi* 'watermelon', which is *ôⁿthâⁿ* 'pumpkin' and another unknown element.

It can be seen in these examples that some individual words, such as *ǻpha* 'head' or *ktxě* 'kill', are sometimes written without the aspiration, which fact could weaken my argument. However, the words with inconsistently spelled

¹ The inventory given in table 1 seems reasonable; the more suspicious phonemes are between parentheses.

² As Swanton (1912:319) puts it: "x, ɣ and h all usually stand for the aspirate which follows several Siouan consonants and is particularly prominent in the Ofo language."

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aspiration occur much more often with the aspiration than without it, and therefore I take the forms with aspirated consonants as the correct ones. Other examples of such words are: *akhu~ku* 'to give', *thiⁿto~tiⁿto* 'husband', *tcí'fhi~tcí'fí* 'foot', *atchu'ti~(a)tcu'ti* 'red', and *í'fihě'pi*, *í'fihě'pi*, *í'fihě'pi~í'fí'pi*, *í'fí'pi* 'black'.

Three examples of probably reduplicated verb stems with apparent application of the rule were found:

- (1) *tcíⁿtchí'nti* 'to crawl'; since the *n* probably indicates nasalization of the preceding *i*, I postulate the following analysis: /čh_i/ + /čh_i/ + a morpheme /ti/;
- (2) *tasi'shihi* 'to whine' can be analyzed as follows: /ta/, instrumental prefix 'by mouth', + /shi/ + /shi/, probably related to the stem in *nashi'hi* 'to breathe' or *tashi'hi* 'to burn', + the very frequent suffix of uncertain meaning /hi/;
- (3) *tu'fafha*, *dufafha*, *tufafhahi* 'to tear', which can be analyzed as: /tu/, instrumental prefix 'by hand', + /fha/ + /fha/ + (in the third form) the suffix /hi/.

Three examples show that the rule does not apply if there are one or more syllables between the two syllables of the shape *ChV*:

- (1) *oⁿtho'mofthu'* 'grape', the first part of which is *oⁿthāⁿ* 'pumpkin';
- (2) *atisho'skatha'la*, *atisho'ska-atha'la* 'sparrow hawk';
- (3) *ta'phe'sukithě'la* 'centipede', which is related to *taphe'su* 'rattlesnake'.

One example shows that the rule does not apply across word boundaries, but this does not mean much, because Swanton was probably inconsistent in writing word boundaries too: *tcí'fhi thu'ti* 'the ankle, "the foot bone"'.³

The discovery of a rule similar to Grassmann's law in an exotic language family may be important for the study of phonological universals, and it may also prove important for the study of Ofo phonology. Indeed, if the rule I have postulated is correct, it proves that the Ofo aspirated consonants are definitely phonemes distinct from the nonaspirated consonants, and not simply orthographic variants in Swanton's inconsistent spelling, as has been assumed so often,³ despite Swanton's clear

³ As in Wolff (1950:65) and Matthews (1958:13).

statement⁴ and Haas's warning (1969:289-90).

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

0. Introduction

1. Typos
2. Critical remarks
3. Report of the book's contents; appraisal
4. Conclusion

0. Under normal circumstances, it does not seem worth one's while to compose a rejoinder to a hostile review. By normal circumstances I mean a situation where the linguistically trained public, if faced with disagreements between an author and a reviewer, has sufficient access to the primary data to form an opinion of its own. If the public has no such firsthand knowledge of the language in question, it may turn to the relevant grammars or handbooks.

A markedly different situation is presented if the book, along with its review, deals with a language that is hitherto unexplored or has received only fragmentary treatment. Here, the reviewer, just as the author, carries a special responsibility. The linguistic public has no way of verifying his criticisms and his claims. If the reviewer distorts or misrepresents the author's data and/or statements, it is the author's duty to set the record straight.

⁴ See n. 2.