

Introduction to Prakrit

॥ पाउअप्पवेसिआ ॥

Lesson 8: Lenition between Vowels

अट्टमज्झाओ – सरंतरदुब्बलीकरणं

andrew ollett



अल्लडाअरियो

LENITION

- ☛ “Weakening”: the loss of certain articulatory features.
 - ☛ **Sonorization**: a sound is changed to a sound higher on the sonority hierarchy.

The sonority hierarchy is what determines which consonants are “weaker” or “stronger” than others when they come into contact.

- ☛ **Voicing**: a voiceless consonant becomes voiced.

t → **d**

- ☛ **Approximation**: a stop consonant becomes an approximant (semivowel).

p → **v**

LENITION

☛ “Weakening”: the loss of certain articulatory features.

☛ **Opening**: a sound is pronounced with a more open articulation.

☛ **Debuccalization**: an aspirated consonant loses all articulatory features except its aspiration.

kh → **h**

☛ **Elision**: a consonant is dropped entirely.

k → ∅

INTERVOCALIC

- ✿ The environment in which lenition generally takes place in Prakrit is **between vowels**.
- ✿ In order to be lenited, the consonant must stand **on its own**. It cannot be part of a conjunct consonant, nor can it be preceded by a nasal.

bhaṭah → **bhaḍō**

bhaṭṭah → **bhaṭṭō**

RETROFLEX STOPS

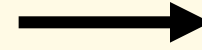
- ✿ In single intervocalic position, voiceless retroflex stops are voiced:

bhaṭaḥ



bhaḍō

pīṭham



pīḍham

ASPIRATED STOPS

- ✿ In single intervocalic position, (non-retroflex) aspirated consonants are debuccalized:

makhaḥ → **ma**hō

agham → **a**ham̐

Aspirated palatal stops do not occur on their own between vowels.

ASPIRATED STOPS

- ✿ In single intervocalic position, (non-retroflex) aspirated consonants are debuccalized:

tathā	→	tahā
budhaḥ	→	buhō
śēphālikā	→	sēhālikā
ubhayam	→	uhaam

UNASPIRATED STOPS

- ✿ Unaspirated stops, voiced and voiceless, are usually dropped entirely, and a **hiatus remains between the vowels**:

makarah → maarō

nāgaḥ → nāō

kacaḥ → kaō

vyājaḥ → vāō

UNASPIRATED STOPS

- ✿ Unaspirated stops, voiced and voiceless, are usually dropped entirely, and a **hiatus remains between the vowels**:

tatam → taam̐

vādaḥ → vāō

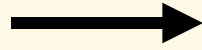
- ✿ This also happens to y:

bhayam → bhaam̐

UNASPIRATED LABIAL STOPS

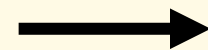
- ✿ The situation is slightly different with *p* and *b*. Both become the labial semivowel *v*:

vāpī



vāvī

kubēraḥ



kuvērō

THE SEMIVOWELS

- ✿ We've already covered *y*, which disappears intervocalically.
- ✿ Nothing happens to either *r* or *l*.
- ✿ With *v*, however, there is a general tendency to drop it entirely, especially before *ō*. But it can be retained as well:

bhāvah → **bhāō**

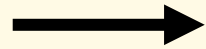
bhāvāntaram → **bhavantaram**

YA-ŚRUTIḤ

- ✿ This **could have been** the end of the lesson, but some Prakrit grammarians, and some scribal traditions, insert the letter *y* between vowels when a consonant has been dropped.
- ✿ **Note that this letter does not** (in most cases) **represent an original *y***. The sound *y* does not exist in Prakrit.
 - ✿ It is sometimes written as *ỵ* to distinguish it from *y*.
- ✿ Instead, it represents a “weakly articulated *y*-sound” that only serves as a glide between vowels in the hiatus left by elision.
- ✿ You are much more likely to encounter it between *a*-vowels (i.e., *a* and *ā*) than in other positions.

YA-ŚRUTIḤ

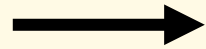
ma**k**araḥ



maarō

maḃarō

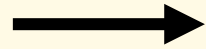
ma**t**am



maam̄

maḃam̄

ma**d**anaḥ



maanō

maḃanō

mā**y**ā

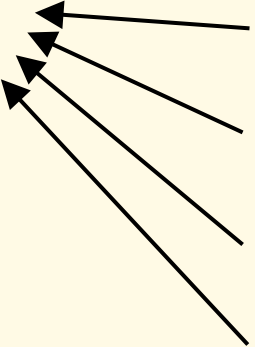


māā

māḃā

MASSIVE AMBIGUITY

- ✿ You might have noticed that the loss of intervocalic consonants creates a lot more ambiguity than there is in Sanskrit.

maam̐  **mṛgam**
mṛtam
matam
madam

- ✿ Deal with it.

Happy studying!
॥ सहलो होउ सज्ज्ञाओ ॥