Loanword behavior as a window on consonant mutation

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Morphosyntactically conditioned stem initial consonant mutation poses a perennial challenge to theoretical linguistics because its occurrence in any given language exhibits systematic and regular sound patterns that seem to cry out for a principled phonological explanation even while they lack any apparent phonological conditioning. To explain Irish mutations like those in (1) as a lexical list, as Green (2006) does, is inherently unsatisfying to the phonologist because it relegates the phonological pattern to the status of epiphenomenon, and the relationship between forms is consequently of no more significance than if they were suppletive.

(1) Irish ‘shoe’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UR/Input</th>
<th>lenition</th>
<th>eclipsis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bróg</td>
<td>bhróg</td>
<td>mbróg</td>
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In addition to the recent robust lexical analyses of consonant mutation such as Green (2006) and Iosad (2008), there are equally robust analyses of the phonology of mutation such as Trommer’s (2009) mapping of Irish lenition and eclipsis to Gnanadesikan’s (1997) sonority and aperture scales respectively, so there is still no consensus as to which way mutation should be treated, and the question as to whether it is, in fact, “the job of the grammar to change bróg into bhróg” or simply “to determine which form is used where” (Green 2006:1948) has not yet been resolved.

I propose that one way out of this impasse is to consider the behavior of loanwords in languages that exhibit initial consonant mutation. Loanwords cannot be assumed to have an a priori representation in the lexicon, thus their allomorphs (if there are any) cannot constitute a lexical list from which the grammar chooses according to the morphosyntactic context. In a lexical analysis, then, the expectation would be that loanwords do not undergo mutation, unless they are so-called ‘integrated’ loanwords that have made their way into the L1 lexicon, while in an autosegmental analysis where mutation is assumed to be the result of affixation, loanwords would, all other things being equal, be expected to undergo mutation. In the Celtic languages, which have been in contact for a very long time with Romance and Germanic languages, evidence points to an imperfect integration of loanwords into the mutation system. While English loanwords in Welsh, for example, undergo consonant mutation, they do not do so as robustly as native words and there are many exceptions (Green 2006). Based on evidence from a much more recent case of language contact, I will argue that the behavior of loanwords in Pulaar provides substantial evidence against a lexical analysis and for an autosegmental approach to stem-initial consonant mutation. I will be concerned with how the grammar changes bróg into bhróg, or in the case of Pulaar, how it changes fàdò ‘shoe’ into pàdè ‘shoes.’ I will argue that the behavior of loanwords supports an analysis in which stem-initial consonant mutation involves the prefixation of a morpheme whose phonological exponence is an autosegment and that constraints on morphological realization ensure that it be parsed. This is not a new analysis, but what is
new is its extension to loanword behavior which provides important corpus-external evidence for mutation as affixation in Pulaar, and opens a small window on a new aspect of loanword phonology.

Iosad, Pavel. 2008. All that glistens is not gold: against autosegmental approaches to initial consonant mutations. GLOW 31.