It has long been noted that complex onsets inherited from Proto-Indo-European into Classical Armenian were vastly restructured. Winter (1962) catalogs the following changes:

- *SC- > aSC-: (a)spaṙnan “threaten” : Lat. spernō “despise”
- *CR > eRC or aRC: elbayr “brother” : Lat. frāter; artawsr “tear” : Greek ὀφθαλμο

To this list could be added PIE tripartite initial clusters (Byrd 2010:164-5):

- *CSC > aSC: (a)stin-k’ “breast” : Avestan fštāna-, Sanskrit stāna-, OIc speni
- *HSC: > aSC: astl “star” : Greek ἄστερ, Lat. stella
- *STR: not attested in Classical Armenian.

While Winter (1962) and Kassian & Yakubovich (2002) discuss epenthesis and metathesis in #CR-clusters and Schwink (1994) and Pierce (2007) discuss schwa epenthesis before #ST, there has as yet been no systematic attempt to relate the two processes or account for the fact that #CR- and #HSC-clusters have [e]- or [a]- epenthesis while #ST- and #CST- clusters epenthesize a schwa.

I will argue that the mechanisms behind these epenthesis asymmetries are fueled by an interaction between phonotactic constraints and secondary stress. Early in the history of Proto-Armenian, constraints on the sequences of consonants allowed in onset position caused epenthesis and regular metathesis. Furthermore, reranking of constraints governing the realization of extraprosodic segments caused changes in prosodic structure and deletions in some PIE tripartite clusters. Based upon dialectal variation in the modern language (Fairbanks (1958), Vaux (1998), Dum-Tragut (2009)), it can be shown that Classical Armenian must have had secondary stress on the initial syllable of the word (a so-called “hammock
pattern” like that of Udihe and Canadian French (Gordon 2011:158-9)). The development of epenthetic schwa to [e] or [a] in original PIE #CR- and #HSC-clusters, I will argue, was triggered by this secondary stress placement. This secondary stress effect is not seen in original PIE #ST- and #CSC-clusters because the [s] in Proto-Armenian was extraprosodic.

Secondary stress applies to the first syllable of the prosodic word, and primary stress applies to the last. In words like <as>.pàr.nám, the extraprosodic <as> is attached to the prosodic phrase, and is therefore outside the stress domain (the prosodic word). Thus, the schwa has no reason to develop into [e] or [a]. In èlbayr, however, the original epenthetic schwa receives secondary stress and cannot remain unchanged.

References


