ON THE VELARIZATION OF N IN GALICIAN

The fate of Latin n among the Romance languages has been a diverse one, and it is particularly in intervocalic position that the full panorama of development may be observed. Intervocalic n remained unchanged in most dialects of France, Spain, and Italy, as well as in many parts of Rumania and various Rhaeto-Romance dialects. The instances of modification of intervocalic n have been summarized in an interesting article by Meyer-Lübke,1 and include change to another nasal consonant (such as [ɲ] or [ɲ]), change to r, and total disappearance. The latter change, complete removal, represents the most drastic possible modification of -n-, and is shared by Portuguese, Galician, and Gascon. While there are no doubt interesting parallels to be drawn between the developments in these three languages, the scope of this paper will be confined to certain instances of the loss of intervocalic n along the western edge of the Iberian peninsula, in Portugal and particularly in Galicia.

At some point in the remote past, Portuguese and Galician were once united into a more nearly homogeneous dialect zone than may be found today, and part of this common heritage includes the loss of l and n in intervocalic position. As the languages diverged, however, the residue left by the fall of n was treated differently in each case: in Portuguese a nasal vowel or diphthong often resulted, while in Galician the nasal resonance implanted in the vowel eventually disappeared. This loss of intervocalic resonants is one of several factors which draw Portuguese and Galician together, and oppose them to Spanish.

As well as ultimately leading to a hiatus or diphthong, the fallen intervocalic n in Portuguese and Galician was sometimes replaced by another nasal consonant. The most common cases of substitution occurred when the first vowel was i, in which case the palatal nasal [ɲ] generally arose; e.g. Latin vínam > Ptg. viña, Gal. viña, etc. A number of scholars, including Meyer-Lübke, Barciesz, Laubsberg, Nunes, and Nobiling, have concluded that this development may be directly attributed to the palatal quality of i which, when nasalized by the loss of a following nasal consonant, would naturally evolve a palatal nasal. In another study,2 we have tried to show that the evolution of the palatal nasal in such forms was largely dependent upon a bi-phonemic interpretation of nasal vowels by the speakers of that period.

A much more interesting case history, however, may be obtained by following the development of Latin ūnam among the Portuguese and Galician dialects. Following the loss of -n-, a half-nasalized hiatus resulted, spelledān (found in the old texts), and this pronunciation is still preserved in some dialects of northern Portugal. In standard Portuguese, ān evolved an m to become uma, again largely as a result of the inherent quality of u, although the general phonotactic structure of the language probably also played an instrumental role in this process (see our above-mentioned study).

In Galician, a more 'exotic' course of evolution was followed, and ūn developed the velar nasal [ɲ] to become unha [uŋa]. This development, evidently of quite ancient origin, has tantalized investigators for a long time, and a number of interesting although incomplete suggestions have been advanced. Instead of attempting to supply the solution to this problem, which has been lacking up to this time, the present study has the more modest goal of bringing together in one place some of the various available theories, and of pointing out a few additional observations which have hitherto not been employed in this particular domain.

Nobiling1 has seen in the rise of Galician unha another case of a purely physiological development. After outlining the process by which ān could become uma, he remarks (p. 148): 'Wurde aber statt der labialen die lingual-velare enge zum verschluss, so musste [uŋa] entstehen, und auch diese entwicklung scheint in portugiesischen dialekten vorzukommen . . .'. While the development of ān to uma may be effected by a relatively simple process, as Nobiling himself realizes, the evolution of the velar nasal represents a rather unusual alternative, one which would not normally be expected under such circumstances; indeed, Nobiling gives no answer as to why Galician should have produced such a form, merely offering a possible phonetic route that its evolution might have taken. Another important question left unanswered by Nobiling is why forms with an identical phonotactic configuration, such as ūn (< ūnam), xesua (< jeǐnam), etc. did not similarly evolve a velar nasal instead of denasalizing the first

vowel. It is not sufficient to claim at this point, as many investigators have done, that the peculiar fate of Galician una (Ptg. uma) is due to analogical influence of the corresponding masculine form um (un), since under these circumstances one could equally well expect other types of analogical formation, such as sexna > *sexnuna (Ptg. *jefuna) based on 'analogy' with sexen (Ptg. jejun). Furthermore, in those Galician and Portuguese dialects which share (or shared) such alternations as cabrum : cabra, comum : comu, etc., there is again no discernible analogical pressure. These various discrepancies preclude finding a totally phonetic solution to the problem of Galician una, at least along the lines suggested by Nobling.

One fact which has struck most investigators studying the Galician dialects is the observation that word-final n is invariably pronounced as a velar [ŋ], thus: un [uŋ], pan [pãŋ], etc. These same scholars have also noted that, contrary to the normal rules of syllabification, the nasal consonant in una appears to belong to the first syllable rather than to the second. Speaking of this division, Otero (p. 21) states: 'Desde Sarmiento hasta D. Alonso... están de acuerdo los autores en que la k de unha representa una linde.' Dámaso Alonso (pp. 211—12 puts the matter even more explicitly: '... todos los que han hablado del asunto... han coincidido siempre en una observación: la de que la consonante n va unida a la vocal anterior, cerrando la sílaba, es decir, un-a, y no un-ja.' In attempting to evaluate such statements, one is immediately struck by the circularity of trying to sort out cause and effect. Is the n of una syllable-final because the phonotactics of Galician do not permit the velar nasal in syllable- (i.e. word-) initial position, but only word-finally or before a velar obstruent, or is this nasal consonant velarized because it is syllable-final? Actually, the former seems more plausible, since una is unique in exhibiting an intervocalic [ŋ], but the latter possibility is difficult to disprove, since word-internal syllable-final nasals assimilate homorganically to the following consonant, while word-finally only [ŋ] may occur. At any event, the above observations have been interpreted in roughly the following manner: since the masculine form un is pronounced [uŋ], and since the corresponding feminine form is ultimately arrived at by adding the morpheme a to the masculine form, speakers evidently performed a morphophonemic analysis and analyzed un as um + a, whence [uŋa], the current pronunciation. Looking backwards from the present situation, and noticing in particular the striking correspondence between the pronunciation of un and una, this is a reasonable assumption to arrive at, but it too misses several important points. In the first place, while un was probably already pronounced as [uŋ] in early Galician, the corresponding feminine form was ın [iŋ]. Thus, in order to insert the velar nasal after the ı, in imitatio of the masculine form, the speakers would have to have separated ın into two discretely pronounced mutually independent syllables: ı...a, the first carrying the semantic concept of the indefinite article, and the second carrying the semantic marker of 'feminine.' Such a division would, however, be completely without parallel in the language, where the gender markers are ordinarily attached smoothly, with no perceptible break. Another, more important, point is the fact that other similar paradigms exist, such as bon : boa, ladrón : ladrone, padrón : padron, etc., where, if the theory of morphemic division were correct, the feminine form should have evolved to *bonha, *ladronha, etc. The development of the velar nasal is confined, however, to una, together with its derivatives, such as algunha, nunha, nunha, dunha, etc. Thus, unless further clarification can be offered, the theory based on morphemic division leaves too many questions unanswered to be considered a complete solution.

As an interesting interlude at this point, one may observe a partially analogous situation in the Portuguese creole dialect of Macao, as described by Graciete Nogueira Batalha.1 In this dialect, posterior nasal vowels or glides are followed by [ŋ] in word-final position, thus: um [uŋ], apo [apŋ], etc. The creole dialect, rapidly disappearing under the influence of continental Portuguese, still exhibits remnants of peculiar old morphological constructions. In particular, este was replaced by estu [estŋ] and esta by estuna [estuŋa] or estuña [estuŋa]. These forms probably came from combinations like *este um and *esta ın, or something similar, and exhibit the same peculiar alternation found in the Galician pair un-unha. One may therefore speculate that an equivalent development occurred in Macao,

1 The form luna for luz occurs in some Portuguese dialects. A parallel development, however, is unattested in Galician.

and a solution to the Galician situation will probably also carry over to the creole forms.

In looking over the opposing theories on the origin of Galician unha, it seems unlikely that any single factor may be adduced as the overriding cause. Rather, it seems more plausible that a complex array of interacting factors will have to be considered as having led to this rather unusual development. To this end, a number of separate but interlocking phenomena may be discerned as possibly shedding light on the entire problem.

In the first place, it appears more than coincidental that it was only in forms where -n- fell after u that the development of the velar nasal ensued. It has already been pointed out by many investigators that the deletion of n after a high vowel provided the phonetic (and also phonological) basis for the appearance of a new nasal consonant. The vowel u in hiatus with a following vowel normally develops a following [w] as a sort of transition sound. The labial element of [w] seems to be predominant, thus leading to the more 'usual' development of m in Portuguese uma and dialectal luma, etc. However, the glide [w] also contains a velar element which, if additional circumstances permit, could conceivably influence the development of a following nasal consonant. However, the exclusive dominance of the velar element, as suggested for example by Nobiling, is contradicted by the lack of a parallel development in homologous forms, both in Galician and in Portuguese.

Another factor, which has been overrated by many investigators, but which nonetheless must be assigned a role in the overall process, is the existence of the masculine form un [un]. Analogical creation or leveling of nominal paradigms is quite common among the Romance languages, and may be clearly seen, for example, in the Italian treatment of the reflexes of Latin neuter forms.1 Coming closer to the matter, one may observe the analogical leveling of the plurals of Portuguese words in -do to the most common ending -dos. The analogical tendency for the Old Galician indefinite article sa to develop an internal consonant, particularly since the corresponding masculine form ended in a consonant, should therefore not be discounted as having contributed to the eventual creation of unha.

It should be noted that, combining the above two observations, that of a phonetic evolution, and that pertaining to the possible influence of


3 Dámaso Alonso, op. cit., p. 214.

4 For a typical description of this phenomenon, covering the dialect of Nicaragua, see Ruth L. Hyman, 'n̩' as an allomorph denoting open juncture in several Spanish-American dialects,' Hispania 39 (1956), 293–99.
words, together with the definite articles, demonstrative pronouns, and a
handful of other forms, differ from the other words of the language in being
able to join with a following word as a nexus; that is, as a unified phonetic
entity which behaves as though it were a single word. While the articles
may also appear individually, in expressions such as teño unha, they are
most frequently found welded phonetically to a following noun or adjective,
and it is this strong associative bond which has led to the formation of
words like gone, cited above.

Such a statement must be clarified a bit, however, since as rigorously
defined for example, by Pulgram, a nexus contains certain very specific
properties, among which is the fact that ‘beginnings and ends of lexemes
that lie nexus-medially behave as though they were in word internal
position’ (p. 25). Additional properties of a true nexus include reservation
of all the features associated with word-initial and word-final sounds for
the beginning and end of the nexus, together with a suprasegmental con
figuration which treats the nexus like a single word. That Galician forms
such as articles do indeed form a nexus with a following noun or adjective
may be demonstrated by observing that the final s of words like as, as,
unhas, etc. becomes voiced when followed by a word beginning with a
voiced obstruent or a vowel, thus conforming to the general phonotactic
patterns for word-internal occurrences of s. Furthermore, in those dialects
of Portugal (and in some contiguous areas of Galicia) where syllable-final
s is normally palatalized to [ʃ], this palatalization does not occur when
a clitic form such as as is followed by a word beginning with a vowel. In
addition, elision of word-initial voiced stops occurs regularly after articles
and pronouns ending in a vowel.

If the Galician articles do indeed form a nexus with following words,
as the general structure of the language strongly suggests, one is struck
by the fact that the word-final [γ] in un does not change to [n] when
immediately followed in the next word by a vowel, since [γ] is not a
normally-occurring intervocalic sound in Galician, but appears to be an
allophone of [n] word-finally and before velar obstruents. The answer to
this apparent dilemma seems to be that the word-final [γ] of Galician
is no longer felt to be a true combinatory variant of [n], but rather as an
independent realization which does not change with shifting context. One
may find, both in listening to connected Galician speech, and in con-
sulting the phonetic transcriptions cited above, abundant evidence that
word-final [γ] maintains its independence irregardless of the context in
which it occurs.

It is this relative independence of the word-final velar nasal, together
with the ability of the articles to form a nexus with a following word, which
may serve to shed additional light on the evolution of Galician unha. The
importance of the combinatory properties of the velar nasal may be clearly
seen by considering the phonetic results, in old Galician, of combining
un and iu with a word beginning with a vowel, particularly with a. Un
amigo would be pronounced roughly as [uramigɔ], while iu amigo would
be [uiamigɔ]. Consider further the results obtained by applying the inde
finite article to words whose endings give no clue as to gender; for example
un drbore [urdrbore] vs. iu ambición [uiambisijɔn]. Since the word-final velar
nasal maintains itself in a nexus relationship with a following vowel, it is
thus implicitly admitted as a permissible word-internal intervocalic con
sonant. Thus the above examples show the enormous potential for both
analogue leveling and confusion as the old indefinite articles un and iu
were applied to words beginning with a vowel, especially a, or a vowel
which could be assimilated to a. In words exhibiting alternations of
the type amigo-amiga, there would be an analogical tendency towards standardization of the first lexical element of the nexus (as for example, in Spanish,
Portuguese, Italian, etc.). On the other hand, in words such as drbore,
exhibiting no outward marker of gender, there could be confusion as to
the choice of article, as evidenced, for example, by the numerous gender
switches of such words among the Romance languages. These two factors
combined could very plausibly lead to the evolution of the velar nasal
in iu, and may also partially account for the fact that partially
similar paradigm and words did not undergo a similar process, since
these latter forms do not normally form a nexus with a following word.

In partial summary, we may note that the evolution of Galician unha
appears to be the largely fortuitous result of several interlocking factors,
which, when combined, yielded a velar nasal in this particular form, while
leaving superficially similar forms untouched. The relationship of the
various factors may be shown by a schematic representation:

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The realm of possible factors represented by Figure 1 has been additionally complicated in certain areas of Galicia, particularly along the border of Asturias, for in these regions other examples of apparently spontaneous development of intervocalic [n] may be found. Dámazo Alonso\(^1\) cites such examples as engalar [ęgalar] from en-xalar, apito from a noite, fungeiro from *funariu, milango or miango for milano, while Aníbal Otero\(^2\) cites forms like canal, pangeiro, etc. Further forms of this nature include engadir or engadar from in addere (cf. Spanish ahadir). In attempting to account for this series of additional developments, Alonso notes (p. 214): ‘La n, pues, se ha articulado como final, y como n final del Noroeste, es decir, velar; se ha articulado, pues, en-adir, en-adar, en-adar.’ However, on the same page, Alonso also remarks: ‘La preposición IN en estas composiciones verbales ha tenido un reforzamiento de la n, que manifiesta también el español ahadir.’ These two remarks seem partially contradictory, since the ‘reinforcement’ of the n would have taken place in initial position, much as initial l and n have been reinforced to ll and n in some dialects of Leonese. However, at the same time, the n would have had to maintain itself as final in order to carry over its velar articulation when it combined with a following word.

It is possible that the rise of such words as engalar may also be accounted for in terms of the general phonotactic structure of Galician. Forms like engalar, engadir, etc. were all formed by the addition of the preposition en to a verbal infinitive. En as a preposition freely occurs in the language, but invariably as a nexus with the following word. Thus, it is most likely to assume that the compound forms such as engalar were formed after the process of dropping intervocalic n had been spent; in this fashion, the velar articulation of the n in en could easily be preserved when combined with a verb commencing with a vowel. It is possible that early anoite, being compared with words like en-xalar, un ome, etc., was mistakenly identified as anoite, in which case a velar nasal would appear, giving the cited pronunciation [əˈnoiθe].

Forms such as fungeiro, pangeiro, etc. are not readily explainable, but it is possible that their velar nasal arises from the addition of productive suffixes like -eiro, -eira, and so forth, which are found in many derivational paradigms throughout the language. In particular, since a word like pan is realized as [paŋ], it is not difficult to imagine how adding a suffix after the final velarized pronunciation had been established could lead to the cited form paŋeiro.

It would seem, then, that the additional cases of velarization of n in Galician cited above cannot be explained as a principled interaction of definable factors, such as we have attempted for unha, but stem from a somewhat random and sporadic set of potential developments or confusions. Like unha, however, they appear to have been influenced by the general phonotactic possibilities of the language.

In conclusion, it is evident that any solution to the problem of Galician unha, together with similar forms in other dialects, will have to be founded on the interaction of several factors, some of which have been suggested in this paper.

One possibility not hitherto studied in detail, and only briefly mentioned in the present study, lies in an examination of the various combinatorial roles played by the velar nasal, the articles, and similar clitic forms within the total phonotactic structure of Galician. Further investigation of the problem, from whatever direction, will doubtless lead to additional problems and complications, but it is to be hoped that at the end, the pooling of results from various approaches will yield a satisfactory and complete solution.

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