

## THE OPTIMAL LEVELING OF LATIN IMPARISYLLABIC NOUNS

The Classical Latin noun paradigm consisted of five cases. Often nouns displayed an alternation in the nominative stem that affected consonants, vowels, or both. Nouns displaying this alternation are traditionally called “imparisyllabics,” since the nominative form has one fewer syllables than the remaining forms. In some instances this was because the nominative form consisted of a bare (unsuffixed) stem.

	Stem	Nominative	Genitive	
V deletes	/pa:k/	<i>pāx</i> [pa:k+<i>s]	<i>pācis</i> [pa:k+is]	‘peace’
	/lu:k/	<i>lūx</i> [lu:k+<i>s]	<i>lūcis</i> [lu:k+is]	‘light’
V changes	/no:men/	<i>nōmen</i> [no:men]	<i>nōminus</i> [no:min+us]	‘name’
	/lu:men/	<i>lūmen</i> [lu:men]	<i>lūminis</i> [lu:min+is]	‘light’
C deletes	/pu:lmo:n/	<i>pūlmō</i> [pu:lmo:<n>]	<i>pūlmōnis</i> [pu:lmo:n+is]	‘lung’
	/la:kt/	<i>lāc</i> [la:k<t>]	<i>lactis</i> [lakt+is]	‘milk’
V deletes & V changes	/prinkep/	<i>princeps</i> [prinkep+<i>s]	<i>principis</i> [prinkip+is]	‘foremost’
C deletes & V changes	/homo:n/	<i>homō</i> [homo:<n>]	<i>hominis</i> [homin+is]	‘man’
C deletes & V deletes	/nokt/	<i>nox</i> [nok<t>+<i>s]	<i>noctis</i> [nokt+is]	‘night’
	/gent/	<i>gens</i> [gen<t>+<i>s]	<i>gentis</i> [gent+is]	‘people’

(Buck 1933; Sihler 1995; Baldi 2002)

In Late Latin, the alternation was leveled in favor of the non-nominative alternant; thus in the modern Romance daughter languages, nouns generally retain phonological evidence of this form (e.g. Spanish *pulmón*, French *poumon*, Italian *polmone*, Portuguese *pulmão*, Rumanian *plămîn* all originate with the Latin stem *pūlmōn-*, not *pūlmō*). A key factor in leveling is frequency; the higher the frequency, the greater the resistance to reformation in leveling (Bybee 2001). Although the nominative imparisyllabic alternation clearly had the lowest *type* frequency among the Latin cases, it is debated whether it had the highest *token* frequency (cf. Meillet & Vendryès 1927; Slobin 1970; Hooper 1976; Wetzels 1984), and therefore whether leveling occurred in the expected direction. Nevertheless, the Latin nominative was often zero-marked morphologically (cf. *nōmen*, *lūmen*); when this was so we would have expected the nominative stem to lead in leveling rather than follow (cf. Kuryłowicz 1949; Mańczak 1958; Bybee 1985; Bybee 1994).

This paper argues that imparisyllabic leveling may be explained straightforwardly as an effect of phonological markedness formulated in the principle of ATTRACTION TO THE UNMARKED (McCarthy 2005). In McCarthy’s Optimal Paradigms (OP) model of leveling, candidates for evaluation are entire paradigms, which incur constraint violations collectively. For example, the leveled paradigm *pūlmōn~pūlmōnis* is preferable to *pūlmō<n>~pūlmō<n>is* (with deleted *n*) because the latter introduces a (fatal) violation of ONSET. The paradigm *pācis~pācis* is judged better than *pāx~pāx* because the latter incurs more violations of \*COMPLEXCODA. In similar fashion, the paradigm *nōmin~nōminis* is deemed superior to *nōmen~nōmenis* because the latter violates a well-established prosodic principle whereby posttonic /e/ raises to /i/ in three-syllable words, here expressed as WEAKENING. Key morphosyntactic details such as case affiliation are incorporated as ranked (and therefore violable) constraints.

By clarifying the mechanism whereby the non-nominative imparisyllabic stem “won” in leveling, this analysis sheds light on the fate of the imparisyllabic nouns in the modern Romance languages. It also offers further support for the Optimal Paradigms model of leveling.

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