Assimilation of conjunct consonants in Prakrit and Greek

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In a recent book published in a couple of months back, a renowned scholar of Indo-European Linguistics rightly remarks that the Middle Indo-Aryan studies have been comparatively neglected for Indo-European comparative grammar. In the same context the same scholar further says that from the point of view of linguistic change Greek is comparable to Middle Indo-Aryan. But in that book no actual comparison is instituted perhaps because there was no scope for the same. In the following paper I propose to take up one important aspect of linguistic change i.e. assimilation of conjunct consonants which will substantiate the above view. With this end in view for the first time a comparative study of assimilation of conjunct consonants in Prakrit and Greek is presented here.

As a rule in Middle Indo-Aryan no heterogenous conjunct is allowed. They are either assimilated or divided by anaptyxis. In Greek several heterogenous conjunct are allowed but many are assimilated. The process of assimilation works according to certain principles in Prakrit and Greek which are discussed below.

The general rule for assimilation in Prakrit is that between equals the second prevails and between unequals the stronger prevails. In Greek also between two equal plosives the second prevails.

Moreover the consonants can be arranged according to their strength in decreasing order as follows as for as assimilation in Prakrit is concerned.

(i) Mutes (ii) nasals (iii) d (iv) S (v) V (vi) y (vii) r.

But Greek shows the reverse order of strength as far as assimilation of unequal consonants is concerned.

Now a comparative study of Prakrit and Greek is taken up considering the rules of assimilation given above. According to the above rule between equals the second prevails i.e. \( k + t > tt, \ g + dh > ddh, \ d + g > gg \) etc.

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e.g. Skt. *yukta > Pkt. *jutta
Skt. *dugdha > Pkt. *duddha
Skt. *udgama > Pkt. *uggama

Similar phenomenon is also noteworthy in Old Greek where in a
combination of plosive + plosive the second prevails i.e. $d/t+p > pp$.

e.g. Gk $hopp$ < *$hod$-pos

In a combination of mute+nasal, mute prevails in Prakrit and
nasal is assimilated. i.e. $g+n > gg$, $gh+n > ggh$ etc.

e.g. Skt. *agniḥ > Pkt. *aggi
Skt. *vighna > Pkt. *viggha

But Greek does not agree with Prakrit in this respect, because in
case of mute+nasal, nasal prevails in Greek and the plosive becomes a
class nasal.

i.e. $ph/b/ ph+m > mm$

e.g. grāmma (<-ph-m-) and $bn > mn$

e.g. omnos (<*abmos) and $gn < gn$ (written gu)

e.g. gignomai (<*gignomai)

In case of a combination of mute+$l$, mute prevails and $l$ is assimi-
lated in Pkt.

e.g. Skt. *vākala > Pkt. *vakkala
Skt. *alpa > Pkt. *appa

But Greek shows the reverse example of this principle. In Greek
in a combination of plosive+liquid, liquid prevails.

i.e. $dl > ll$ in Greek.

e.g. hellā < *sedlā

In a combination of mute and sibilant when sibilant comes first it
is assimilated and the mute is aspirated in Prakrit. i.e. $st < th$. e.g.
$asti > aththi$. But when the sibilant follows the mute they become $cch$.
i.e. $ts < cch$, $ps > cch$ etc.

e.g. Skt *vatsa > Pkt *vaccha
Skt *matsara > Pkt *macchhara

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Skt aṣparā > Pkt accharā

But S+mute is not assimilated in Greek e. g. gkt esti (< IE esti),
gk basko < IE gʷnisko etc.

Mute+sibilant is sometimes assimilated in Greek.
  i. e. dental (t|θ|d)+s > ss in Gk
  e. g. pod + si > possi
    ornith + s > ornis (< *orniss) ‘bird’.

V with a mute is assimilated and the mute prevails in Prakrit.
  i. e. kv > kk and
    ḫv > jj etc.
  e. g. Skt pakva > Pkt pakka
    Skt ujjala > Pkt ujjala

But in Greek unassimilated v is lost or becomes u. In most of the
conject in V, v is lost. In a few cases it has a clear trace of assimilation.
(It should be noted that in conjuncts v always follows another consonant,
it does not precede. That is the case with Υ)

  i. e. IE kw > pp in Greek and tw > dialectally ss or tt. e. g. IE
ekwos > Gk hippos
    IE qʷewares > Gk tessares, tettares

Υ with a mute is assimilated and the mute prevails in Prakrit.
  i. e. kγ > kk and
    bhγ > bhh etc.
  e. g. Skt cāṇakya > Pkt cāṇakka
    Skt abhyantara > Pkt abbhintara

Υ with a mute is assimilated in Gk and it has various treatments
depending on the preceding consonants.

  i. e. t|θ|h+y > ss in Gk and k|kh+y > dialectally tt/ss.
  e.g. IE medhynos > *methyos > Gk messos / mesos.
    *pikya > pittā / pissā in Gk.

r with a mute is assimilated and the mute prevails in Prakrit.
  i. e. rg > gg, kr > kk etc.

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e.g. Skt mārga > Pkt magga
Skt čakra > Pkt cakka etc.

But r with a mute is not assimilated in Greek.

e.g. IE pro > pra in Gk
IE rudhros > eruthros in Gk.

There are also other cases of comparison of assimilation between Prakrit and Greek. Only the important ones are dealt with in this paper. Others are omitted for the time being.

Thus Middle Indo-Aryan and Greek both have assimilated consonants. The difference lies in the fact that the strength of consonants differ in MIA and Gk as shown above. Further it is also observable that Gk does not assimilate some conjuncts like first MIA where conjuncts with r and s are not assimilated in some dialects. (e.g. Asokan Inscription asti bramana etc). So Greek is more like Prakrit than Sanskrit, since Skt does not assimilate any heterogenous conjuncts in internal sandhi.

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