THE QUALITY OF NASAL CLUSTERS IN PRASUN

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Georg Morgenstierne, NTS 15 (1949) p. 210 § 50, has stated correctly that in Prasun a nasal is assimilated not only to a following unvoiced plosive, but also to a following voiced plosive or *z*. Thus we get such forms as *wūtu* 'road', *wuču* 'five', *wōzu* 'holly-oak'.

The vowels of Prasun have been declared by Morgenstierne to present many a baffling problem, but as with our experience with other languages, I feel that with careful analysis the uncertainties are by no means as great as they may at first seem. In the case of the present set of phenomena under discussion I believe that we may bring a further point of clarification to the observed vocalisms of Prasun. If one studies the words descending from the above-mentioned features attentively, one notices a rather large proportion of front vocalisms. These vocalisms become readily justified if one supposes that in a great many cases the vowel was fronted by the neighboring nasal cluster, which subsequently has been resolved according to the above rule.

Specifically it seems that this fronting occurs whenever the vowel does not follow a labial element, i.e. a segment which we may characterize as [+round]. In the above examples it will be noted that a labial element clearly precedes the vocalism, and in almost all such cases we have a very clear idea of the ancestry of this labial element.

Examples where fronting has occurred are as follows: *lātəm* 'tooth', *žlūtu* 'leopard', *etāre* 'entrails', *wyōidə* 'to laugh' (**khand-*), *ūglī* 'finger', *iškyöp/b* 'bridge', *üštyobu* 'tree'.

Since these vowels appear to have been fronted in this specific

environment we must suppose that the fronting was caused by the nature of the consonantism which once possessed the nasal. Since moreover there is nothing about the resulting consonants that shows any such essential feature we must presume that the feature in question which caused the conditioning was originally in the nasal segment which has now disappeared. In order to explain such a fronted articulation it seems most likely that the nasal segment once contained a palatalized articulation. We therefore presume that the nasal segment in such clusters was somehow palatalized before its disappearance, and that this palatalization was then transmitted to the neighboring vowel in the form of fronting. If, however, a labial element preceded this vowel the fronting was blocked.

The mechanism which caused such a palatalization in clusters is not immediately apparent, but the fact of its occurrence and its subsequent effect seems inescapable.

A reasonable, but purely hypothetical, interstage would have been the development of a nasalized syllabic span which closed with a glide element. Such a set of features would parallel somewhat the development found e.g. in Polish, where for *VN we find [Źw], with a labialized glide. Somewhat differently in our case, the glide would have developed with front articulation. Hence *VNC > *ŹiC > *ŹC₁C₁ > ŹC /[-round]—. Perhaps [±round] was better specified at that time as [±back].

On the basis of these observations we may now improve the account of two important names in the Prasun valley (see *op. cit.* 192). The Prasun name Ūš'ü't now seems preferably to be reconstructed **kusantā*; and the Prasun form Uš'ü't seems to be best reconstructed as **pā(r)śanta-* or **pā(k)śanta-*. These two names seem to share the same suffix -(a)nt-.

Since the last named place is located on a huge cliff¹ it is reasonable for it to be called 'the place of the rock', and we may compare Waigali *paš'ā*, Katī *paršī*: Skt. (< Pkt.) *pāṣya-* *pāṣāna-* 'stone' < 'rock, crag'; Cf. E. P. Hamp, *Journal of Linguistics* 3, 1967, 89, and "An amendment to Fortunatov's Law", S. K. Chatterjee Felicitation Volume (forthcoming).

¹ I am indebted to Georg Buddrus for this information.