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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,<sup>1</sup> and include change to another nasal consonant (such as [ŋ] 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 *vinum* > Ptg. *vinho*, Gal. *viño*, etc. A number of scholars, including Meyer-Lübke, Bourciez, Lausberg, 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,<sup>2</sup> we

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke, 'Die Entwicklung von zwischensilbischem *n*,' *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 41 (1921), 555-65.

<sup>2</sup> 'Portuguese *vinho*: diachronic evidence for biphonemic nasal vowels,' To appear in *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 15 (1973).

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, spelled *ūa* (found in the old texts), and this pronunciation is still preserved in some dialects of northern Portugal. In standard Portuguese, *ūa* 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 *ūa* developed the velar nasal [ŋ] to become *unha* [úŋa]. 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.

Nobiling<sup>1</sup> has seen in the rise of Galician *unha* another case of a purely physiological development. After outlining the process by which *ūa* could become *uma*, he remarks (p. 148): 'Wurde aber statt der labialen die lingual-velare enge zum verschluss, so musste (úŋa) entstehen, und auch diese entwicklung scheint in portugiesischen dialekten vorzukommen . . .' While the development of *ūa* 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 *lua* (< *lūnam*), *xexua* (< *jejúnam*), etc. did not similarly evolve a velar nasal instead of denasalizing the first

<sup>1</sup> Oskar Nobiling, 'Die Nasalvokale im Portugiesischen,' *Die Neueren Sprachen* 11 (1903), 129-53.

vowel.<sup>1</sup> It is not sufficient to claim at this point, as many investigators have done, that the peculiar fate of Galician *unha* (Ptg. *uma*) is due to analogical influence of the corresponding masculine form *un* (*um*), since under these circumstances one could equally well expect other types of analogical formation, such as *xexua* > *\*xexunha* (Ptg. *\*jejúma*) based on 'analogy' with *xexun* (Ptg. *jejúm*). Furthermore, in those Galician and Portuguese dialects which share (or shared) such alternations as *cabrum* : *cabrua*, *comum* : *comua*, etc., there is again no discernible analogical pressure. These various discrepancies preclude finding a totally phonetic solution to the problem of Galician *unha*, at least along the lines suggested by Nobiling.

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* [paŋ], etc. These same scholars have also noted that, contrary to the normal rules of syllabification, the nasal consonant in *unha* appears to belong to the first syllable rather than to the second. Speaking of this division, Otero<sup>2</sup> (p. 21) states: 'Desde Sarmiento hasta D. Alonso . . . están de acuerdo los autores en que la *h* de *unha* representa una linde.' Dámaso Alonso<sup>3</sup> (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, *uŋ-a*, y no *u-ŋa*.' 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 *unha* 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 *unha* 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 fol-

<sup>1</sup> The form *luma* for *lua* occurs in some Portuguese dialects. A parallel development, however, is unattested in Galician.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos P. Otero, *Letras, I*. London, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Dámaso Alonso, "Gallego-asturiano 'engalar' 'volar,' casos y resultados de velarización de -n- en el dominio gallego," In *Homenaje a Fritz Krüger* v. 2. (1954), pp. 209—215. Mendoza, Argentina, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo.

lowing 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 *ũa* as *un + a*, whence [úŋa], the current pronunciation. Looking backwards from the present situation, and noticing in particular the striking correspondence between the pronunciation of *un* and *unha*, 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 *ũa* [úa]. Thus, in order to insert the velar nasal after the *ũ*, in imitation of the masculine form, the speakers would have to have separated *ũa* into two discretely pronounced mutually independent syllables: *ũ . . . 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*, *ladron* : *ladroa*, *padron* : *padroa*, 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 *unha*, together with its derivatives, such as *algunha*, *nunha*, *cunha*, *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.<sup>1</sup> In this dialect, posterior nasal vowels or glides are followed by [ŋ] in word-final position, thus: *um* [uŋ], *pão* [pãŋ], 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 *estum* [estũŋ] and *esta* by *estunga* [estũŋa] or *estũa* [estũa]. These forms probably came from combinations like *\*este um* and *\*estaũa*, 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,

<sup>1</sup> Graciete Nogueira Batalha, 'Estado actual do dialecto macaense,' *Revista Portuguesa de Filologia* 9 (1958—9), 177—213.

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* [uŋ]. 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.<sup>1</sup> Coming closer to the matter, one may observe the analogical leveling of the plurals of Portuguese words in *-ão* to the most common ending *-ões*. The analogical tendency for the Old Galician indefinite article *ũa* 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

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gerhard Ernst, *Die Toskanisierung des römischen Dialekts im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen, 1970, pp. 121–25.

*un*, does still not yield a satisfactory explanation for the rise of the velar nasal in *unha*, for one still has to account for alternations like *xexun* : *xexua*, where there is both loss of *n* following *u* and a corresponding paradigmatic alternation with a form in *-un*, but where the velar nasal did not arise. It is at this point that one can turn to additional observations about Galician which have not previously been considered in connection with this particular problem, but which may contain the key to a more nearly complete characterization.

In view of the rather unusual appearance of intervocalic [ŋ] in *unha*, a promising direction for future research would seem to be a closer examination of the phonotactic combining possibilities of the velar nasal in Galician. In Portuguese, it is not at all uncommon to find [ŋ] occurring after word-final nasal vowels, thus *lã* may be realized as [lãŋ], while *um* is often [ũŋ]. When combining with a following word beginning with a vowel, however, this nasal consonant generally disappears: *lã azul* [lãvezúl], and in fact this phenomenon has been cited by some authors in favor of a monophonemic interpretation of the Portuguese nasal vowels.<sup>1</sup> In Galician, however, the situation is substantially different, for the word-final velar nasal is preserved when immediately followed in the next word by a vowel. In the literature, one may find ample documentation of this fact in the extensive phonetic transcriptions of such noted scholars as Ebeling, Krüger, Schneider, and Cortes y Vásquez.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the velar nasal sometimes becomes so reinforced as to evolve a *g* in the following word; thus Dámaso Alonso<sup>3</sup> cites *gome* for *ome*, resulting from the frequent combination *un ome*. A similar situation also obtains in certain dialects of Spanish, where word-final *ŋ* is velarized.<sup>4</sup>

Consider now the combinatory characteristics of *un* and *unha*. These

<sup>1</sup> See Jorge Morais-Barbosa, 'Les voyelles nasales portugaises, interprétation phonologique,' In *Proceedings of the 4th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences* (Helsinki, 1961), pp. 691–708. The Hague.

<sup>2</sup> W. Ebeling, 'Die landwirtschaftlichen Geräte im Osten der Provinz Lugo (Spanien),' *Volkstum und Kultur der Romanen* 5 (1932), 50–151. W. Ebeling and F. Krüger, 'Ländliches Leben als Motiv des galizischen Volksliedes,' *VKR* 10 (1937), 129–156. H. Schneider, 'Studien zum Galizischen des Limiabeckens,' *VKR* 11 (1938), 69–281. Luis Cortes y Vásquez, *El dialecto Galaico-Portugues hablado en Lubian (Zamora)*, Salamanca, 1954, esp. pp. 55–56.

<sup>3</sup> Dámaso Alonso, *op. cit.* p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> For a typical description of this phenomenon, covering the dialect of Nicaragua, see Ruth L. Hyman, '[ŋ] as an allophone 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 *gome*, cited above.

Such a statement must be clarified a bit, however, since as rigorously defined for example, by Pulgram,<sup>1</sup> 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 configuration 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 *os*, *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 *os* is followed by a word beginning with a vowel. In addition, lenition 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 [ŋ] in *un* does not change to [n] when immediately followed in the next word by a vowel, since [ŋ] 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 [ŋ] 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-

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Pulgram, *Syllable, Word, Nexus, Cursus*. The Hague, 1970.

sulting the phonetic transcriptions cited above, abundant evidence that word-final [ŋ] 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 *ũa* with a word beginning with a vowel, particularly with *a*. *Un amigo* would be pronounced roughly as [uŋamigo], while *ũa amiga* would be [ũamiga]. Consider further the results obtained by applying the indefinite article to words whose endings give no clue as to gender; for example *un árbore* [uŋárboŋe] vs. *ũa ambición* [ũambisjón]. 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 consonant. Thus the above examples show the enormous potential for both analogical leveling and confusion as the old indefinite articles *un* and *ũa* 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 *árbore*, 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.<sup>1</sup> These two factors combined could very plausibly lend to the evolution of the velar nasal in *ũa*, and may also partially account for the fact that partially similar paradigms 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:

<sup>1</sup> Cortes y Vásquez, *op. cit.*, esp. p. 70 cites certain contemporary examples of gender confusion of such forms.

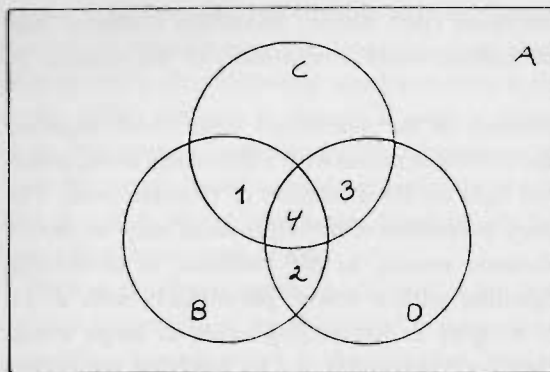


Figure 1. A: Forms with loss of intervocalic *n*. B: forms with loss of *n* in the environment *u\_a#*. C: Forms capable of entering into a nexus with following words. D: Forms with corresponding paradigmatic variants in *-n*. 1: *lua*, etc. 2: *xexua*, etc. 3: *boa*, etc. 4: *unha*.

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 [ŋ] may be found. Dámaso Alonso<sup>1</sup> cites such examples as *engalar* [eŋalár] from *en+alar*, *anoite* from *a noite*, *fungueiro* from \**funariu*, *milango* or *miango* for *milano*, while Aníbal Otero<sup>2</sup> cites forms like *cañal*, *pangeira*, etc. Further forms of this nature include *engader* or *engadir* from *ñ addere* (cf. Spanish *añadir*). 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, *eñ-ader*, *eñ-adir*, *eñ-alar*.' 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 *añadir*.' 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 *ñ* 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*

<sup>1</sup> Dámaso Alonso, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-14.

<sup>2</sup> Aníbal Otero, 'Hipótesis etimológicas referentes al gallego-portugues,' *Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos* 6 (1951), 83-114 (esp. p. 87).

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+alar*, *un ome*, etc., was mistakenly identified as *an+oite*, in which case a velar nasal would appear, giving the cited pronunciation [aŋójte].

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 *pangeiro*.

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 combinatory 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.