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PERSISTENCE OF THE LATIN ACCENT IN THE NOMINAL SYSTEM OF  
CASTILIAN, CATALAN AND PORTUGUESE

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The Latin Stress Rule is well known and is the object of centuries-long study through various theoretical prisms, including, most recently, generative phonology, autosegmental phonology, metrical theory, and optimality theory. The basic facts are that primary accent of stressable words is never word final; it falls on the penultimate syllable if and only if that syllable is heavy. However, the loss of quantitative differences in the vowel system in the transition from Latin to Romance necessitates a new basis for assignment of the primary accent of a word. In generative phonology terms the Latin Stress Rule is opaque because the required environment for application of the rule may or may not be present.

Optimality theory (OT) provides a mechanism for the study of diachronic phenomena that is not based on rules or the existence of a particular environment to trigger change. Rather, OT establishes ranked constraints to account for the relationship between input and output forms. The input/output forms selected for this study are Latin nouns that have correspondents in the three major Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Castilian, Catalan, and Portuguese. The tension between faithfulness to the

input form and conformity to preferred constraints, often universal in scope, is reflected in the set of active constraints and their ranking. The link between primary accent and the segment that displays the effect of that accent (through duration, quality, and intensity) is rarely broken. However, major differences among the languages of this study are evident in the treatment of final unstressed vowels of second and third declension nouns. Deletion of the unstressed final vowel in such cases, giving rise to patterns of ultimate accent, is an important innovation in Ibero-Romance and corresponds to a constraint that rewards right alignment of word edge and head foot. Frequency of occurrence of this new accentual pattern follows an East to West gradient with the highest rate of frequency in Catalan and the lowest in Portuguese. This study also shows that universal retention of the final unstressed vowel of first declension nouns does not correspond to a facile morphological explanation; rather, it manifests the desirability of a trochaic foot at right word edge with the familiar pattern of duple rhythm. Such a pattern is obtained when the rightmost syllable contains an optimal peak, not subject to elision, as is the case of /a/.

Limitation of this study to Castilian, Catalan, and Portuguese nouns with common etymon provides an opportunity to view the effect of language specific constraints on common input forms through comparison of resulting outputs. Within this reduced linguistic microcosm it is possible to examine the role of positional prominence, optimal syllable architecture, alignment with word edges, and rhythmic preferences as constraints that influence outcomes. The divergence of Catalan with regard to preference for a monosyllabic head foot in nouns from the second and third declensions is expected. However, the areas of coincidence are of greater import and correspond to linguistic

universals: light syllables are generally preferred; alignment of the head foot is at the right word edge; the optimal trochee consists of two light syllables. The single heavy syllable that emerges as variant of the head foot may be viewed as a potential disyllable with an empty nucleus, a concept reinforced by paragoge in poetry and music.