

Complex syllable types in Romance languages: *central* or *peripheral*?

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The syllabic typology of Romance languages displays, on the one hand, an overall diachronic drift towards the simplification of syllable structure already visible in Latin (cf. Lehmann 2005) – on the other, the persistence of complex structural patterns (be they phonetic outcomes or, at first glance, mere graphic representations) is evident. This holds especially for Romance languages with long-standing written tradition such as French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan. In some of those languages complex syllable types are found mostly in specialized lexical strata, i.e. in texts belonging to single discourse traditions, e.g. the CVCC and VCC types in Spanish that are characteristic of the learned vocabulary (cf. Latin borrowings like Sp. *perspectiva*, *abstracción*). The occurrence of syllabic complexity in Romance varieties may also depend on speech-rate and will then result in two quite opposite patterns: (1) varieties with complex syllable types arising from learned forms and occurring in careful *lento* pronunciation styles only, whereas in *allegro* realizations complexity may be reduced (this applies to many varieties of Spanish), as opposed to (2) varieties (such as European Portuguese and Standard French) in which, due to the weakening of unstressed vowels, *allegro* realizations characteristically favour syllabic complexity, while fully articulated *lento* forms maintain (unstressed) vocalic nuclei, thereby producing a higher amount of simple syllable types (the major syllabic complexity of learned forms tends to be preserved here, too).

The presence of such complex syllable types, countering the general evolutionary trend towards simplification seemingly so pervasive in the phonological typology of the Romance languages, is discussed within a *centre* vs. *periphery* account of the functioning of language systems, according to which in some of the languages under discussion complex types systemically belong to the periphery while being part of the centre (or core) in others.

Lehmann, Christian (2005): “Latin syllable structure in typological perspective”. In: Calboli, Gualtiero (ed.): *Latina lingua! Proceedings of the Twelfth International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics (Bologna, 9-14 June 2003)*. 2 vols. Roma: Herder (Papers on Grammar, 9). Vol. I, 127-147.

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