

Preantepenultimate stress in Italian: Paradigm uniformity or big window?

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Italian stress is said to be lexical in a three-syllable window at the right edge of the word (e.g., D'Imperio & Rosenthal 1999, though cf. Krämer 2009). In nouns, for instance, we find stress on the ultima (1a), penult (1b) and antepenult (1c), but not never on the preantepenult. Default stress is assumed to be either penultimate or antepenultimate, with a weight effect on the penult (Krämer 2009, 2022 and reference cited there).

(1) Stress in Italian nouns

- a. possibili'ta, 'possibility', kaf'fɛ 'coffee', vir'tu 'virtue'
- b. aŋ'kora 'again', ba'nana 'banana', vita'jolo 'bon vivant'
- c. 'aŋkora 'anchor', 'azino 'donkey', 'pɔpolo 'people'

For verbs, the situation is a bit more complicated. We focus here on first conjugation verbs. Object clitics can be added at the right edge, which can result in stress quite far removed from the right edge (2a). These clitics, however, are usually not considered to be part of the stress domain. Within the word, stress is on the ultima (2b), penult (2c), antepenult (2d), but also the preantepenult (2e,f).

(2) Stress in Italian verbs

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|----|----------------------|-------------------------|----|--------------|-------------------|
| a. | mo'd-ifik-a-no=me=lo | 'modify-3.PL it for me' | d. | de'riv-ano | 'derive-3.PL' |
| b. | litig-e'rɔ | 'argue/fight-1.SG.FUT | e. | 'litig-ano | 'fight-3.PL' |
| c. | liti'g-ja:mo | 'fight-1.PL' | f. | e'sadʒer-ano | 'exaggerate-3.PL' |

It is tempting to analyse the 3rd pl forms in (2def) as dependent on the 3rd sg, which is the same without the last syllable *-no*, e.g., ['litiga] 'fight/argue' and with stress on the same vowel, i.e., in the antepenult. A problem with this analysis is that there is no other reason in the verb paradigms to assume it, to the contrary. Other plural forms move the stress (2c). And palatalization, which causes affrication of velar plosives in second and third conjugation verbs, applies transparently in the 3.SG and is blocked in the 3.PL (3a,b).

(3) Palatalization

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|----|------------|--------------------------|----|----------|-------------|
| a. | fi'niʃe | 'finish-3.SG' | d. | 'peska | 'fish-3.SG' |
| b. | fi'niskono | 'finish-3.PL' *fi'niʃono | e. | 'peskano | fish-3.SG' |
| c. | 'peski | 'fish-2.SG' | | | |

The same process, however, does not apply in first conjugation verbs, as testified by (2c) (*[liti'dʒa:mo], and (3c) *['peʃi]. In addition, the verb 'to fish' is presumably derived from the noun 'fish' *pesce* ['peʃe], and the regular palatalization in the noun does not overapply in the verb (*pe[ʃ]are). This makes a base-derivative effect also a less likely explanation in other denominal verbs, such as *telefono* – *telefonano* 'telephone – call.3PL'.

While three-syllable lexical stress windows are commonly assumed for Italian (e.g., D'Imperio & Rosenthal 1999), English (e.g., Pater 2000), and many other languages (Kager 2012), a four-syllable window is usually thought to be unexpected (though English has preantepenultimate stress like 'Abernathy and 'catamaran). We argue that a four-syllable

lexical stress window for exceptional words falls out from Direct Optimality Theory (DOT, Golston 1996), *cum* Coloured Containment (van Oostendorp 2007, 2008), as recently argued for Ancient and Modern Greek, and English (Golston & Paulsen 2025, 2026). In DOT, lexical representations are constraint violations. A constraint violation that is part of an underlying representation is a Desideratum and does not make a candidate worse than one without that violation, to the contrary. Outputs always contain their inputs.

Penultimate stress, *ba('nana)*, is the default and intentionally violates nothing. Exceptional final stress, *(possi)(bili)('tà)*, intentionally violates FTBIN ('Feet are $\mu\mu$ or $\sigma\sigma$ '). Exceptional antepenultimate stress, *('asi)no*, intentionally violates NOLAPSE. Preantepenultimate stress, *('liti)(gano)*, intentionally violates RIGHTMOST ('Main stress is on the rightmost foot'). This relies on the assumption of a secondary stress foot on the last two syllables. Secondary stress is controversial in Italian, but argued for by Lepschy & Lepschy (1977), Vogel & Scalise (1982), Peperkamp (1996), Krämer (2009).

Five-syllable exceptions are possible to model in principle and at least one is found in English, *'fliberty.gibbet* [*'flɪbətɪ. dʒɪbɪt*] 'overly talkative person' (US), also [*flɪbətɪ. dʒɪbɪt*] (UK), from 15th century Middle English, which violates RIGHTMOST and NOLAPSE. *Áligàtor* likewise violates RIGHTMOST and NONFINALITY, and *cátamaràn* violates RIGHTMOST and TROCHEE. Exceptional words in modern Greek and Italian are limited to one stress-related Desideratum each. A four-syllable window, as found in Italian, is limited by this restriction that only one constraint on stress placement is violated intentionally per word and that RIGHTMOST is part of this set of prosodic constraints.

Our analysis captures all the data (unlike Faust & Ulfsgjorninn 2024, which fails on preantepenult cases), without needlessly multiplying grammars (cophonologies, Inkelas et al. 1997) or constraints (coindexed constraints, Pater 2000). The morphologically constrained strata of Stratal OT (Kiparsky 2000, 2015; Bermúdez-Otero 2018) offer no help in Italian, as the exceptions are not limited to specific morphological strata. Exceptional stress in Direct OT, on the other hand, uses the same grammar and same constraints as regular stress, which seems to us more parsimonious.

Selected references

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