
Proposal for a final project for the course ‘Phonological Typology’ (#41842)

Title: A diachronic and typological study of alveolar lateral fricatives

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TOPIC	The alveolar lateral fricatives are not very common, yet are not extremely uncommon: plain /ɬ/ is represented in 133 of the 2155 phonological inventories in PHOIBLE (MORAN et al. 2014), plain /ɮ/ in 43. ¹ They are found in languages from diverse language families, spoken in different areas. These properties make them ideal for a small-scale study: they are not too common or too complex, yet they occur in enough languages allowing one to draw interesting conclusions.
RESEARCH QUESTION	My research question is twofold: it has a diachronic component, a synchronic one, and hypothesis that combines the two:
DIACHRONY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The diachronic component aims at describing what diachronic pathways lead to and away from these sounds. Alveolar lateral fricatives are reconstructed in several proto- and ancient languages (see BDPROTO, MARSICO et al. 2018), and they seem to have evolved independently multiple times.
SYNCHRONY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The synchronic component aims at describing alveolar lateral fricatives within phonological systems: be it in terms of allophony, phonotactics and other kinds of structural relationships with other phonemes.
HYPOTHESIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My hypothesis is that we would find similar patterns in both components, as synchronic systems constitute the material for diachronic changes, and diachrony is a major factor in the shaping of synchronic systems.
DATA	My plan is to use both large-scale databases, in order to be able to see the larger picture, and grammars and reconstructions for specific cases:
DATABASES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Databases include BDPROTO (MARSICO et al. 2018; for proto- and ancient languages), PHOIBLE (MORAN et al. 2014; a large meta-database of phonological inventories), PBase (MIELKE 2008; for phonological patterns), and the World Phonotactics Database (DONOHUE et al. 2013), as well as areal databases such as the Database of Eurasian Phonological Inventories (NIKOLAEV et al. 2015).
SOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grammars and reconstructions depend on the language(s) in question. Sources given in the databases can be good starting points.
CASE STUDIES	Currently I’ve looked into three case studies, demonstrating three distinct pathways:
WELSH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welsh /ɬ/ (written ⟨ll⟩) evolved from earlier /l²/ and still shows a synchronic connection with it within the consonant mutation system (see BALL and MÜLLER 1992): compare <i>ei llygaid</i> ‘her eyes’ with the mutated <i>ei lygaid</i> ‘his eyes’.
SINITIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least two Sinitic dialects have alveolar lateral fricative reflexes for Middle Chinese /s, ʃ/: in Tǎishān dialect /s/ > /ɬ/, but /ʃ/ > /s/; in Púxiān dialect both /s/ and /ʃ/ > /ɬ/ (KURPASKA 2010, §6.5.7.2).
SEMITIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is strong evidence for alveolar lateral fricatives in Proto-Semitic (at least two: one plain, *š, and one emphatic, *ṣ̌); see STEINER (1977, 1991), KOGAN (2011, §1.3.3), and GOLDENBERG (2012, §7.3). While in most Semitic languages these evolved into other phonemes (mainly sibilants), in South Arabian languages their realization seems to stay close to the ancient one.
FEATURES	These cases demonstrate the affinity of the alveolar laterals fricatives with both non-lateral, sibilant (post-)alveolar fricatives (/s, ʃ/) and the non-fricative lateral approximant /l/.

¹Including secondary articulations and affricatives (with /t-/ and /d-/, respectively) increases these numbers to some degree.

²E.g. *llygad* /ˈɬəɡad/ ‘an eye’, from Proto-Brythonic **lugad* ‘an eye’, ultimately from Proto-Indo-European **leuk-* ‘bright, to shine, to see’.

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