

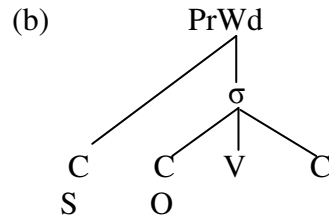
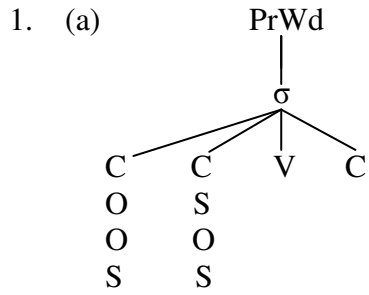
To Onset or not to Onset, that is the question.

Sonority reversed word initial onset clusters, Sonorant + Obstruent (SO) have been treated in the literature as having a special phonological status (Steriade 1982, Levin 1985 *among others*). Since these clusters have a declining sonority, rather than a sonority incline as required by the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP) (Selkirk 1984), they are assumed to have a different phonological representation from clusters that do not violate the SSP. In word initial onset position OS, OO, and SS clusters, but not SO clusters, are syllabified as in (1a); SO clusters are syllabified in some other fashion, for example, as in (1b).

I argue that the phonological representation of SO clusters is the same as that for OS, OO and SS clusters. My claim is based on a cross-linguistic survey of word initial onset clusters in 62 languages from 22 language families. The survey shows that, of 15 logically possible combinations of OS, OO, SS and SO clusters, listed in (2), only 4 language types emerge, as in (3). The relevant implicational relations are stated in (4). Emerging from (3) and (4) is the fact that SO clusters do not behave differently from other clusters and participate in the typology. If SO clusters had a special status, we would expect SO clusters not to integrate into the onset typology, but rather, freely combine with other language types to yield the typology in (5). However, the types predicted by (5) are not empirically attested. Rather SO clusters occur in a language only if all other cluster types, OS, OO, and SS, also occur. The scarcity or markedness of SO clusters is attributed to the fact that SO clusters are implied by all other clusters, as in (4), and not because they have a special phonological status. Since all four cluster fit into the proposed typology in (3), which has been empirically attested, we need not assume that SO clusters have a special status, or more specifically, a special phonological representation. If SO clusters do not have a special phonological representation, two issues must be addressed, (i) a unified account must be given for the representation of all clusters in word initial position (ii) the overwhelming cross-linguistic observation that syllables tend rise in sonority and the rare occurrence of SO clusters cross-linguistically must be accounted for.

To address the first issue and offer a unified representation for all cluster types, I propose to revive the Onset (Ω) as a sub-syllabic unit of organization that dominates pre-vocalic consonantal material, as in (6). All clusters have the same phonological representation regardless of the sonority values of the members of the cluster. This includes SO clusters which I claim do not have a special phonological representation.

To address the overwhelming cross-linguistic tendency that syllables rise in sonority towards the peak, I argue that Ω is subject to sonority constraints imposed on prosodic units in the spirit of de Lacy (2004) and Zec (2007 and references therein). Prosodic constituents gain their sonority value through a process of feature percolation, outlined in Zec (2000). The Ω node inherits its overall sonority value from the segments it immediately dominates, C1 and C2. The typology presented in (3) can be accounted for by placing maximal sonority restrictions on Ω . In (7), in the column **onset** I list the maximal sonority values admitted by every language type for the Ω , which interact with the constraints listed in **additional constraints**. If a language admits onsets which have the overall value [-son], and has a constraint which specifies that C2 must have a greater sonority value than C1, the language will only have OS clusters, as in a type 1. If, however, a language allows Ω s to have the maximal overall sonority value [-son] but the sonority value of C2 is equal to or greater than C1, then the language will admit both OS and OO clusters, as in a type 2 language. Type 3 languages allow C1 and C2 to have the same sonority value and requires that the overall sonority value of the Ω be [+cons], and type 4 require that Ω be [+cons], without any further restrictions on the relative sonority of C1 and C2.



2. (a) {OS}
 {OO}
 {SS}
 {SO}
- (b) {OS,OO}
 {OS,SS}
 {OS,SO}
 {OO,SS}
 {OO,SO}
 {SS,SO}
- (c) {OS,OO,SS}
 {OS,OO,SO}
 {OS,SS,SO}
 {OO,SS,SO}
- (d) {OS,OO,SS,SO}

3.

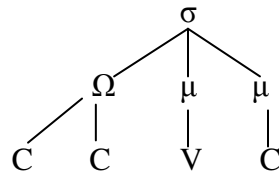
Type	OS	OO	SS	SO	Language	Occurring clusters
Type 1	✓				Basque, Wa	{OS}
Type 2	✓	✓			Kutenai, Modern Hebrew	{OS, OO}
Type 3	✓	✓	✓		Greek, Irish	{OS, OO, SS}
Type 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	Georgian, Pashto	{OS, OO, SS, SO}

4. OS ⇒ OO ⇒ SS ⇒ SO

5.

Language type	Combining with SO
{OS}	{OS, SO}
{OS, OO}	{OS, OO, SO}
{OS, OO, SS}	{OS, OO, SS, SO}

6.



7.

	Onset	Additional constraints
OS	[-son]	SON - C1 > SON - C2
OS, OO	[-son]	SON - C1 ≥ SON - C2
OS, OO, SS	[+con]	SON - C1 ≥ SON - C2
OS, OO, SS, SO	[+con]	