The development in French of Gallo-Roman -sk in final position

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THE DEVELOPMENT IN FRENCH OF GALLO-ROMAN *-SK* IN FINAL POSITION [1]

The development in French of the Gmc. suffix *-isk* > *-ais*, of Lat. *discu* and *luscu* > O. Fr. *deis* and *lois*, of Gmc. **frisk* and **marisk* to *frais* and *marais*, etc., is passed over very briefly in most books and articles on French phonology. Typically, there is a brief reference to the metathesis of *sk* > *ks* before final vowels other than *a*, and to the passage of the group, with *ks* from other sources, to *is* [2]. Only in Elise Richter's *Chronologische Phonetik des Französischen bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts* [3], and earlier, in W. Meyer-Lübke's *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen* [4] and A. Stimming's article, « Labiale und Palatale vor *u* der Endung im Französischen » [5], is there any real attempt to *explain* the postulated metathesis and to account for the difference between, say, O. Fr. *freis* and the feminine form *fresche*, or, in more general terms, between the regular development of *sk* before final *a* in words like *musca* > *mouche*, *piscat* > *pêche*, Gaul. **rusca* > *ruche*, etc., and its much less predictable evolution in secondary final position, i. e. where the final vowel was not *a*, and fell.

1. I should like to thank Professor Brian Woledge for his valuable comments on the first draft of this paper.

2. Cf. the following text-books (in alphabetical order) : E. and J. Bourciez, *Phonétique française : Étude historique*, Paris, 1971, § 136, Rem. II, p. 145-46 ; A. Ewert, *The French Language*, 2nd ed., London, 1943, § 97, p. 73 ; P. Fouché, *Phonétique historique du français*, vol. II, Paris, 1958, p. 269 ; K. Nyrop, *Grammaire historique de la langue française*, vol. I, Copenhagen, 1914, p. 413 ; M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French*, 2nd ed., Manchester, 1952, § 325, p. 134 ; H. Rheinfelder, *Altfranzösische Grammatik*, Munich, 1963, § 585, Anm. 2, p. 229 ; Schwan-Behrens, *Grammaire de l'ancien français*, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1913, § 146, p. 102 ; H. van Daele, *Phonétique historique du français*, Paris, 1929, § 56, Rem. (c), p. 76, § 67, p. 90.

3. *Beihefte zur Z. rom. Phil.*, No. 82, Halle, 1934.

4. Leipzig, vol. I, 1890, § 470, p. 389.

5. *Z. rom. Phil.*, vol. XXXIX (1917-19), p. 129-55.

It is clearly not sufficient simply to state that metathesis of the group occurred, and leave it at that. A first step would be to distinguish the different types of phonetic environment in which the transposition of *sk* > *ks* occurred, rather than to print — as some scholars have done in their manuals — a list of words containing the *sk* sequence not only in secondary final position, but also in medial and secondary pre-consonantal position. The development of *sk* in words like *vascellu* > *vaisseau*, *nascit* > *naît*, **conoscit* > *connaît*, etc., appears to be, like that of *-ska* > O. Fr. *-sche*, perfectly regular in French : in such cases, the palatalization of *k* and its passage to a yod which combines with the preceding vowel to form a diphthong, is an evolution which is paralleled by that of many other palatalized groups, and specifically by that of medial *-skj-* (cf. *muscione* > O. Fr. *moisson* « sparrow »).

Professor Richter explains [1] the development of such forms as *cresco* > *crois* « I grow », **conosco* > *connais*, **nasco* > *nais* in terms of analogy with the forms of the 2nd and 3rd persons, where the development of *-sk-* > *is* can be accounted for in terms of the palatalization of the *k* before a front vowel. This is clearly a possible explanation, though it is a little unsatisfactory to speak without qualification, as she does, of « Systemzwang » (« Die Formen auf -o, -a, -u sind durch Systemzwang entwickelt ») without commenting on the fact that morphological solidarity did not prevent many forms of the first person developing independently of those of the second and third (cf. the cases of *puis*, *faz*, *muir*, etc., in Old French), and indeed did not prevent the corresponding forms in Italian or Old Provençal from diverging (cf. Ital. *conosco*, *conosci*, *conosce*, with their alternation between [sk] and [ʃ]). Nor, as we have seen in a rather similar case, did morphological solidarity prevent the differentiation of the masculine and feminine forms of adjectives such as O. Fr. *freis/fresche*, *angleis/anglesche*, etc.

« Systemzwang » plays a very important part in the explanations given by both Stimming and Elise Richter not only in the case of the verbal forms, but also in that of the nouns. Following Meyer-Lübke, Stimming attributes [2] the *-sk-* > *-is* development of a word like *discu* to the simplification of the group produced by the coming together of *-sk-* and the flexional *-s* brought about by the fall of the unstressed vowel of the final syllable. The postulated development is *discus* > **desks* > **deks* through the simplification of the complex group (cf. O. Prov. *quecs* < *quisque* + *s*), > *deis*

1. *Op. cit.*, § 93, p. 121.
2. *Art. cit.*, p. 144.

through the palatalization of *k* > *j*, as in other environments where *ks* occurred. Miss Richter's explanation may be seen as a variant on Stimming's, since she also attributes the *sk* > *is* development to the special treatment of the *sk* group in contact with flexional *s*. As she points out, the fall of the vowel of the final syllable produced an unfamiliar consonant group — indeed one which she describes as being not only unfamiliar but 'undesired' [1]. The group was accordingly simplified to *is* through intermediate stages such as *sχs* and *sçs* [2]. One is forced to admit that the processes of reduction postulated by these two scholars are plausible, but again without feeling that their accounts of the change meet all possible objections. Certainly, the explanations fit in with the reduction of the parallel group *st* + *s* > *z* ([ts]) in, say, *hostis* > O. Fr. *oz*, while the further reduction of *ks* > *is* is perfectly regular in Gallo-Romance (cf. *coxa* > *cuisse*, *sex* > *six*, etc.). What is not regular in Gallo-Romance, however, is the passage of *k* + flexional *s* > *is* : a word like *saccus* reduces not to **sais*, but to *sas*. It is of course possible that the difference is due to the original presence of a geminated consonant in *saccus*, *siccus*, *coccus* and similar words, but since there is no sign of any palatalization of *k* in *queux* < *coquus* (V. Lat. **kokos* ?), it would seem that the evolution *k* + flexional *s* is not quite parallel to that of *ks* of the stem. Even more significant, to my mind, is the lack of parallelism between the postulated development of *discu*, **frisk*, **marisk*, etc., on the one hand, and that of *hostis*, **diurnus*, **soliculus* and the like, on the other, when one considers their paradigms as a whole. Lat. *hostis* may develop regularly to O. Fr. *oz*, but *hostem* develops, equally regularly, to *ost*, not *oz*. Such alternations are in fact normal — cf. O. Fr. *jorz/jorn*, *soleuz/soleil*, or *sas/sac*, *nes/nef*, etc. [3] — and we therefore have to ask ourselves why, if Professor Richter's explanation is correct, the series represented by *discu*, **frisk*, **marisk*, etc., should show no sign of any alternation between case forms, since analogy did not prevent the development of alternations elsewhere, or indeed, of the type of difference between masculine and feminine represented by O. Fr. *freis/fresche*. It is difficult to see why the « Systemzwang » should have been so strong that it completely prevented

1. *Op. cit.*, § 96 C.
2. *Ibid.*, §§ 96 A, 96 C and 161 A. In the latter paragraph, Professor Richter suggests that *sçs* represented only a brief transitory stage before the reduction of the group.
3. Except in the case of certain imparisyllabics, which like O. Fr. *dois*, *marais*, etc., become indeclinables, but the imparisyllabics do represent a special case.

the appearance of variants based on case-differences, while failing to inhibit those based on gender-differences.

What everybody is agreed on is that the final *-is* of words like O. Fr. *dois, mareis, freis, bois* (< **busk*), as of *franceis, angleis* and other terms relating to nationality, is most reasonably accounted for in terms of the palatalization of a group *ks* which most scholars attribute to an unexplained metathesis of *sk* > *ks*. Meyer-Lübke, Stimming and Richter at least do try to *explain* the presence of *is*. The question is whether the fullest solution, that adduced by Professor Richter, is the best that can be devised. It leaves some threads untied, as we have seen, and does not provide a single, unified explanation. In the case of the verb-forms (*conois, nais*, etc.), she invokes the analogical influence of the forms in which *sk* is followed by a front vowel, while in the case of the nominal and adjectival forms, the solution is basically a phonetic one. Analogy is however invoked to explain the fact that the *is* is also found in those forms of the nouns or adjectives which did not have a flexional *s*.

The explanation which I wish to propose is so obvious and so simple that I hesitate to put it forward. Like most of the scholars who have commented on the changes concerned, I see the essential stage in the process as the metathesis of *sk* > *ks*, which then developed to *is* along with *ks* from other sources. What I wish to add is a possible *reason* for such a metathesis taking place. When one seeks to establish what is common to all the forms affected, including the 1st person forms of the verbs and the noun and adjective forms that did not have a flexional *s* at the end, the only thing that comes to mind is that they are all words in which *sk* was brought into final position by the fall of the following vowel. The « unfamiliar and undesired » sequence to which Professor Richter referred could in fact be not the postulated **sks* of the nominative, but the apparently simple *sk*. Although the group occurs in Latin, it does so only as an initial and intervocalic group. Indeed, in Popular Latin, the introduction of prosthetic glide vowels before *s* + C groups [1] makes it more and more an intervocalic sequence. When one considers the development of words like *vascellu* > *vaisseau*, that of the masculine and feminine adjectives, or that of unrelated words like *luscu* > O. Fr. *lois* « one-eyed » and *lusca* > Fr. *louche*, it appears that the group develops in a regular way when it remains intervocalic : it is only when it becomes final through the slurring of vowels other than *-a* that the unex-

1. C = consonant, and V (used later in this article) = vowel.

pected metathesis occurs. It seems obvious that there must be a connection, and it would appear that the cause of the differentiation must lie in the distinction between consonantal clusters that are normal in given positions in Latin words, and those which are not. In Classical Latin, only a certain number of consonantal combinations occurred in final position. The main types were C + *t* (*-st* in *est, potest, post, -nt* in *amant, habent, sunt,* etc.) and C + *s* (*-ps* in *princeps, forceps, -ns* in *dens, glans, amans,* etc., *-ks* in *falx, rex, sex, vox, nux,* etc.). It is true that the group C + *k* is represented — cf. *tunc, nunc, hunc,* etc. — but not by oral consonant + *k*. Of the groups concerned, *-st* and *-nt* must have remained in constant use because of their occurrence in high frequency forms such as *est* and in the verb-endings of the third person plural. The C + *s* sequences became less frequent in final position because of the analogical remodelling of many of the third declension nouns and because of the early weakening of *n* before *s* — but remained in some words. The *-nk* sequence, however, seems to have fared badly, since none of the words listed appear to have survived into Gallo-Roman (words such as *banc* were, however, assimilated from Gmc.). Further, in line with the tendency towards the simplification of consonant groups in popular Latin, *ks* would appear to have begun to move through *χs* towards a V + *s* articulation. During the same general period, however, the fall of final vowels other than *a* must have begun to affect Gallo-Romance, and therefore to bring *sk* into secondary final position.

Clearly, it was not impossible for previously unknown sequences to be assimilated, and therefore for the system to be modified : one of the most typical series of final sequences in Gallo-Romance, *r* + C (cf. *mort, port, porc, arc,* O. Fr. *corn,* etc.) did not occur in Latin, nor did the parallel series in *l* + C which later reduced again through the vocalization of *l* (*colp, halt,* etc.). On the other hand, certain groups which were brought into being by the slurring of vowels were *not* accepted : the most outstanding example is that of *-tl-*, which is avoided even in semi-learned words by a variety of expedients (cf. the varying fates in Gallo-Romance of Lat. *vetulus, rotulus* and *titulus*). The case of final *-sk* is not quite parallel, since *tl* was a group unknown to Latin in any syllabic position, and *sk* was merely unknown in final position. The fact remains that in no case did secondary final *-sk* survive into Old French, and that in each case it was replaced by *is,* the regular development of the well-established final group *ks*. The substitution of *-ks* for secondary final *-sk* would then be comparable, *mutatis mutandis,* to the substitution of *kl,* etc., for secondary *tl*. Clearly, there was no

difficulty with intervocalic *-sk-* — indeed, there were sporadic cases of the substitution of *-sk-* for *-ks-* (cf. the dual development of *laxare* to *laisser*, and, from a hypothetical **laskare*, to *lâcher*). There is, however, a considerable difference between the intervocalic group, which was presumably divided between two syllables, and the final group, which was not.

It may be objected that the fall of final unstressed vowels also made *-sk* a secondary final group in Occitan, and that in the latter the sequence was not transposed, but assimilated to the inventory of permitted final clusters — hence Old Prov. *bosc*, *fresc*, *maresc*, etc. The point is taken, but the objection can hardly be regarded as conclusive. In the first place, Occitan showed itself in other ways to be more accommodating in accepting complex consonant clusters than did Northern Gallo-Romance (cf. Old Prov. *rotle*, *crotle*, *crotlar*, *temps*, *temptador*, etc.) [1]. Secondly, languages become languages precisely because they evolve in different ways, developing their own « sound laws » in response to what may be very similar stimuli. This explanation of the fact that the *ks* > *is* metathesis is so limited in extent may or may not carry conviction. It is difficult to see how one can finally prove or disprove it, any more than one can prove or disprove the explanations given by Miss Richter. Both her explanations and mine are open to objections. If I feel that on balance mine is more satisfactory, it is largely because it accounts for the known facts in a simple and consistent way, rather than by assuming implausible uniformity in the working of analogical changes, operating on a piecemeal basis. What I have in common with Professor Richter is the fact that we have both sought to *explain*, however imperfectly, the phenomenon of the *-sk* > *-ks* metathesis. This would appear to be at least a step in the right direction.

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1. The question does arise, of course, whether these spellings are all to be taken as representative of actual speech. Some certainly are. Similar forms are found in Catalan, which, like Occitan, retains final *-sk* : cf. *fresc*, *llosc*/*llusc* (< Lat. *luscu*), *rotllar*, *temps*, etc.