

The Tocharian B Accent

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The so-called “basic rule” of Tocharian B accentuation, which placed the word accent on the first syllable of disyllables and on the second syllable of polysyllables, is uncontroversial. This paper deals with exceptions to the basic rule — cases where polysyllables are irregularly accented on their first syllable.

These exceptions, as succinctly stated by Malzahn (2010: 6), fall into three groups:

- 1) class I and V subjunctives;
- 2) causative presents, subjunctives, and preterites; and
- 3) other forms in which a “full” (= non-high) vowel in the first syllable is or was followed by a Fremdvokal (= schwa) in the second.

Malzahn calls the accentuation principle in group 3 the “*pātār* (accentuation) rule,” but offers no formulation of the rule in historical terms. According to the position taken here, the historical accentuation system of Tocharian B was preceded by a stage in which all words had initial accent. This was followed by a sound change that moved the accent one syllable to the right in words of more than two syllables, *except* in sequences of the form *-ÁC_oə- (A = “full” vowel). The result was the accentual difference seen in the declension of the past participles *yāmu* ‘done’ and *ltu* ‘gone out’:

masc. (< nt.) sg.	<i>yāmu</i>	<	* <i>yáməwə</i>	vs.	<i>ltú</i>	<	* <i>lətəwə</i>	(< *- <i>uwus</i>)
masc. nom. pl.	<i>yāmoṣ</i>	<	* <i>yáməwəṣə</i>	vs.	<i>ltúweṣ</i>	<	* <i>lətəwəṣə</i>	(< *- <i>uwoses</i>)
fem. (< nt.) pl.	<i>yāmuwa</i>	<	* <i>yáməwa</i>	vs.	<i>ltúwa</i>	<	* <i>lətəwa</i>	(< *- <i>uwōs</i>)

The non-advancement of the accent in *-ÁC_oə- sequences will be called the “*yāmu* rule.” I will try to show that the *yāmu* rule and its analogical aftereffects were responsible for the irregular initial accent of the subjunctive and causative.

Reference:

Malzahn, Melanie. 2010. *The Tocharian Verbal System*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.