

**The Fabulous Destiny of  
Certain Consonant Clusters in English**  
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**1. Typology of two-member consonant clusters in English** based on their possible word positions:

	#_	V_V	_#	Typically:
Initial/“onset”, e.g. /tr/	✓	✓	-	Non-homorganic rising-sonority cl.
“Coda(-onset)”, e.g. /lt/	-	✓	✓	Homorganic and/or coronal-final non-rising sonority cluster
Bogus, e.g. /gn/	-	✓	-	Other 😊

(+ sC?)

**2. Vowel length in VCC(V) Part 1**

a. coronal clusters:

*hinder/mind, hint/paint, foster/post, elder/mild, shelter/bolt ...* (medial=final, Harris 1994:73-74) (Pöchtrager 2006: further interactions between V length and V/C coronality/C voice (p.60))

b. non-coronal “ill-behaved”:

*amber/chamber\* (example) ...*

c. non-coronal:

*anger\*, anchor, lamp, chapter, wasp...*

\* medial only

a-b-c.: no empty N / “deactivated” empty N sandwiched: “coda(-onset)”<sup>1</sup>  
a-b.: VCC can be long (i.e., “superheavy rhymes”)  
coronals have *more* potential

- Harris (1994:164): post-short “codas” are doubly licensed, languages having superheavy rhymes allow for single licence
- CVCV: long V’s need licence/PG from following nonempty V; Polgárdi (2014: 9-11): trochaic PG, long V’s are (L-to-R) governing domains, governed V2 cannot govern a following empty V => no difference betw. “coda-onset” and bogus (cf. fn.1 and section 3 below)
- Kaye (p.c., cited in Pöchtrager 2006:58): dummy morphology: *fiend* [[fɪ:n]d]
- Pöchtrager (2006:4.2.2, etc.): A seems to have the property of licensing extra structure, it provides “extra room”

**Coronal vs. non-coronal asymmetry: a summary**

- /aʊ/ can only be followed by coronal consonants (*shout, crowd, south, town*, etc.)
- /ɔɪ/ can only be followed by alveolars (*exploit, void, voice, noise, coin, coil, moist, point*, etc.)
- a long vowel is only possible before a consonant cluster if the cluster is made up of coronals (*mind, boost, faint*, etc.)
- nasal+voicedC# is only possible if both are coronals (cf. *hum#ed*)
- (+ regular consonantal suffixes (-s, -’s, -ed))
- (+ universally, coronals are special)
- (+ yod-dropping (see below))

**3. Vowel length in VCC(V) Part 2**

“classical” bogus cluster: *Atkins, chutney, atlas, magnet...*

(+ rarely (/not?) followed by stressed V -- Szigetvári 1999)

empty N sandwiched  
VCC canNOT be long

long V’s need licence/PG from following nonempty V, etc. (cf. section 2 above)

**4. Vowel length in VCC(V) Part 3**

a. classical “onset”/”TR”:*petrol/patron...*

VCC can be long, BUT: stressed rhyme binarity/stress-to-weight/length-dependent ambisyllabicity (cf. Giegerich 1992:221)

“closed domain” created by C-to-C interaction, or C<sub>v</sub>C acting like a non-empty N (constituent gvt, C-to-C licensing, IG, etc.): licence/PG can hit R-to-L  
VCC can be long

<sup>1</sup> Standard GP: interconstituent gvt, “coda”-licensing; Szigetvári (1999): C-toC gvt; BUT: Scheer (e.g., 2004): coda-onset = bogus, both require R-to-L PG; Polgárdi (2014): both require L-to-R PG.

b. “R”=glide:

*venue*, etc.

vs.

*frequent/equal/loquat, debut/zebu, prepuce/scrupulous, ague, Tokyo, uvula...*

VCC can be long BUT *only if* CC is non-coronal  
coronals have *less* potential  
non-coronal + glide: “onset” (cf. section 4a)  
coronal + glide: ??

c. coronal + /j/

- initial, pre-stress, post-consonantal (i.e., **onset**): in non-yod-dropping accents only (*new, avenue, intuitive/intuition/Neptune...*)
- when post-tonic, stressed V is short (*venue...*): **bogus** (cf. stressed rhyme binarity)
- that is, in non-yod-dropping accents: a bogus cluster unless “forced” to form onset: word-initially (no initial bogus in “TR-only”/“restricted”/“strict” languages -- *new...*), before stressed V (stressed onset maximisation + bogus dispreference (cf. section 3) -- *avenue...*), post-consonantally (\*CvCvC -- *intuition, Neptune...*)
- “yod-dropping”: (historical) uniformisation to bogus

~ the historical development of, e.g., /kn/:

- in Present-day English, bogus only:
- \*#kn (\*kn#)
- VCCV canNOT be long: *acne, arachnid, cockney, picnic, technical*, and just a few others: historically, a bogus cluster unless “forced” to form onset (i.e., word-initially); its word-initial simplification: uniformisation to bogus

## References

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- Polgárdi, Krisztina. 2014. Syncope, syllabic consonant formation, and the distribution of stressed vowels in English. *Journal of Linguistics*, available on CJO2014. doi:10.1017/S0022226714000486.
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