

On the Scansion of the Sequence *-eyā-* in the Vedic Root Aorist Optatives

Adam A. CATT

In his 1927 paper on laryngeal effects in Indo-Iranian, Kurylowicz suggested that certain sequences spelled *-VCV-* in the *Samhitā* text of the *Rigveda* (RV) which derive from earlier **-VCHV-* sequences (where H is a laryngeal) still scan with a heavy first syllable, reflecting a syllabification *-VC.HV-*. This phenomenon was treated in two detailed articles by Gippert (1997, 1999), who concluded that many of these sequences do in fact make position in the cadence of dimeter and trimeter verses. Recent studies by Gunkel (2010: 76–135) and Kümmel (2014), however, have raised serious questions about the validity of these claims. Take, for example, the word *pr̥thivī(m)* ‘earth,’ which should scan as HLH (H = heavy, L = light) if laryngeal effects are still present and as LLH if not. As the data in Gunkel (2010: 112) makes clear, the distribution of this word within the line does not differ significantly from that of all other LLH-shaped words. Kümmel also observes that words with the shape LLH are rather difficult to place metrically, especially in dimeter verse, and that words derived from *seṭ* roots are *ipso facto* more likely to have the shape LLH, e.g., *savitár-* (*seṭ*) vs. *bhartár-* (*aniṭ*). Taking these factors into consideration, it is not surprising that we often find LLH-shaped words in positions where HLH would be expected metrically.

While the evidence for syllable weight effects due to post-consonantal laryngeals is dubious, the evidence for laryngeal-induced effects in intervocalic position in the RV as well as in Old Avestan (OAv.) is overwhelming and need not be repeated here. As is well known, laryngeal-induced hiatus is in general more faithfully maintained in OAv. than in the RV. In the RV the situation is complicated by the fact that distracted forms that have no historical phonological basis are sometimes present alongside distracted forms that do. Although such secondarily distracted forms can often be explained on the basis

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of related forms in the same paradigm or similar paradigms (e.g., nom. sg. *giriṣṭhāḥ* /*giriṣṭhāaḥ*/ distracted after the acc. sg. *giriṣṭhām* /*giriṣṭhāam*/) or by appealing to metrical factors (Vine 1990), not all can be easily accounted for. The evidence presented by the scansion of words in the RV is often ambiguous or even deceptive, and we are well-advised to exercise caution in proposing explanations, especially when appealing to diachronic factors such as the effects of laryngeals to explain anomalous phenomena. Here I take up the much-discussed issue of the scansion of the sequence *-eyā-* in root aorist optatives and propose further refinements to be made to previous literature.

In the RV, root aorist optatives built to laryngeal final roots in *-ā* show the curious sequence *-eyā-* (and one 3pl. in *-eyur*). From the five roots *jñā-* ‘know,’ *dā-* ‘give,’ *dhā-* ‘place,’ *pā-* ‘drink,’ and *sthā-* ‘stand,’ there are a total of ten attestations: *jñeyāḥ* (x1), *pārā... deyām* (x1), (*ā... dheyām* (x2), *dheyur* (x1), *peyāḥ* (x2), and *úpa... stheyāma* (x3). While a later *e*-precative for roots in *-ā* is recognized by Pāṇini (6.4.67–68) for the classical language, the forms found in the RV are unique and confined to that text. Many, it should be noted, are hapax forms. Even the most frequently attested *stheyāma* suggests formulaic usage, as it is always used with the preverb *úpa* in *pāda*-initial position, twice in collocation with *śaraṇā-* ‘sheltering.’

Since the early days of modern philological studies on the RV, scholars have noted that trisyllabic scansion of the sequence *-eyā-* is required by the meter in some cases. Jamison (1999) provides a thorough analysis of the scansion of these forms and shows that only the following two appear to require trisyllabic scansion: *pārā śulkāya deyām* (8.1.5b = Bṛhatī), *u pamām dheyām ṛcā* (5.64.4b = Anuṣṭubh).¹⁾

Most recent treatments of the scansion of *-eyā-* can be distilled into two basic approaches, both involving laryngeal-induced effects.²⁾ The first approach, usually advocated by those who see *-eyā-* as originating from a Pre-Vedic sequence **-aH-īyaH-* (vel sim.),³⁾ is to distract the first vowel *-e-*. Jasanoff (1991: 102), for example, explicitly states that the former presence of a laryngeal between the root and the vowel *-ī-* is responsible for the occasional trisyllabic scansion of these forms.⁴⁾ The second approach draws attention to the fact that the forms which require trisyllabic scansion—*deyām* and *dheyām*—are both 1sg.,⁵⁾ and thus explains the scansion as due to the former presence of the laryngeal between the optative suffix and the 1sg. ending, i.e.,

*-yaH-am (Harðarson 1993: 143 n. 185, Lubotsky 1995: 216–217, Gotō 2013: 95 n. 221).⁶⁾

The second approach is often attributed to Cowgill (1963: 270), but Cowgill in fact considered analogical distraction of the optative suffix on the model of the distracted genitive plural to be more likely than laryngeal-induced distraction of *-yām*. He writes, “[I]t might be better to read *deyaam*, *yāyaam*, etc., with (probably) an analogic distraction of the ending on the model of the genitive plurals, which were *-ām* in ordinary speech, but which poets (for whatever reason) often treated as *-aam*; or (less likely) *-yaam* might be a relic of an original syllabification **-yeEm*” (Cowgill 1963: 270).

Indeed, appealing to the historical laryngeal in the sequence **-yaH-am* to explain the distracted reading is problematic when considered against the backdrop of the scansion of all other optatives in *-yām*. Including the forms built to present, aorist, and perfect stems, there are forty-four 1sg. optatives in *-yām* in the RV. Of these, only the forms in question—*yāyām* (5.64.3b), *dheyām* (5.64.4b), and *deyām* (8.1.5b)—seem to require trisyllabic scansion, and two of the three are in successive stanzas.⁷⁾

As pointed out by Jamison (1999: 167–168), *dheyām* at 5.64.4b is directly preceded by the trisyllabic optatives *yāyām* and *āśyām*, all three of these in the same metrical position (syllables 4–6). In addition to these three optatives, we should note the hapax *jāryām* in the same metrical position at 5.64.2c. One possibility is that the poet here wished to maintain the homoioteleutic sequence *-iyām* from 5.64.2c to the end of 5.64.4b and thus exercised poetic license in scanning *yāyām* and *dheyām* in a similar fashion:⁸⁾

5.64.2c *śevam híjār_iya_m v_aām*

5.64.3a *yán nūnám āś_iyām gátim*

5.64.3b *mitrásya yā_iyām pathá*

5.64.4b *_upamám dhe_iyām ṛcá*

Returning now to Cowgill’s solution involving analogy from the distracted genitive plural in *-ām*, we find some features in this hymn which are suggestive. In addition to the rhyming distracted genitive dual *v_aām* at 5.64.2c, all of the genitive plurals in *-ām* — four in total in this short seven-stanza hymn—are distracted. This approach may also explain our remaining trisyllabic optative form *deyām* at 8.1.5b, as a distracted genitive plural *jānān_aām* appears in the preceding stanza in identical metrical position:

(28) On the Scansion of the Sequence *-eyā-* in the Vedic Root Aorist Optatives (CATT)8.1.4b *a₁ryó vípo jánā_anām*8.1.5b *pārā śulkāya dey_anām*

We see that Cowgill's solution may have some explanatory power. It is worth considering, however, that the factors involved in the scansion of the forms in 5.64 may be different from those in 8.1. The unique metrical characteristics of Book 8 are well known (van Nooten and Holland 1994: 634). Of importance for us is the fact that Book 8 contains a considerable number of heptasyllabic lines, the highest number occurring in 8.2 and 8.81, hymns which are composed entirely in Trochaic Gāyatrī. Vine (1977: 250) proposes that Trochaic Gāyatrī as a verse form allows optional heptasyllables as a consistent feature.

The line with *deyām* quoted above is part of a Bṛhatī stanza and not in Trochaic Gāyatrī, so we need to check the frequency of heptasyllabic lines in Bṛhatī. The results of a comprehensive survey of the RV show that Bṛhatī stanzas with heptasyllabic lines are almost exclusively found in Book 8.⁹⁾ Given these figures, we cannot exclude the possibility that 8.1.5b is to be analyzed as a heptasyllabic line, perhaps with catalexis of the final syllable, producing a trochaic cadence.

As *deyām* in Book 8 need not have trisyllabic scansion, we are left with only one form, i.e., *dheyām*, that requires special scansion, and this in a stanza following the present optative *yāyām*, also with trisyllabic scansion. Thus the scansion of these forms may be unique to the hymn 5.64. While it cannot be excluded that the irregular metrical treatment of these two optative forms in 5.64 originates from the former presence of a laryngeal, the lack of such distraction elsewhere in identical sequences suggests rather that a solution that appeals to synchronic poetic or metrical factors, e.g., analogy after the distracted genitive plural in *-ām* or maintaining the rhyming sequence *-iyām*, is more feasible. Most importantly, it should be clear that we should be highly skeptical of any theory about the origin of the *-eyā-* optative that appeals to the scansion of these forms.

Notes

1) That only two of the ten forms require trisyllabic scansion was first noted in passing by Tedesco (1968: 12).

2) By “laryngeal-induced effects” I mean only that these forms show effects that can be explained by appealing to the former presence of a laryngeal, not that the laryngeal of Proto-Indo-

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Iranian was necessarily still present as a phoneme for the composers of the hymns of the RV.

3) Jasanoff (1991) explains the sequence *-eyā-* by starting with an original paradigm 1sg. **dhīyām* (apparently with vocalized laryngeal or a Lindeman variant) beside 1pl. **dhema* and introducing the full grade root *dhā-* into the 1sg. **dhīyām* to get *dheyām*; *-eyā-* from the singular would then replace *-e-* in the plural. For various views on the origin of this type of optative, see the discussion and references in Tedesco (1968), Harðarson (1993: 126–145), and Jamison (1999).

4) So also Kortlandt (1987: 222 n. 2), although he derives the relevant forms from a different proto-paradigm than Jasanoff.

5) Harðarson (1993: 143 n. 185) reads the other 1sg. *dheyām* at 10.52.5c as trisyllabic, but the standard restoration of *bāh_uvór* is clearly the preferable way to produce an eleven-syllable line; see Tedesco (1968: 12) and Jamison (1999: 168 n. 12). To the trisyllabically-scanned 1sg. optative forms we may add the present optative *yāyām* (5.64.3b), which is discussed below.

6) As supporting evidence for his analysis of *-yām* as being disyllabic, Lubotsky (1995: 217) cites the OAv. aorist optative *dīīqm* (Yasna 44.14) and OAv. present optative *xiīām* (Yasna 43.8, 50.9), both of which are scanned disyllabically. The obvious problem with this is that the Avestan forms may not be directly comparable to those in Vedic. As noted above, OAv. more faithfully preserves laryngeal-induced distraction, so while disyllabic *dīīqm* and *xiīām* may in fact reflect **-yaH-am*, this does not mean that the Vedic forms also must. It is now generally agreed upon that *dīīqm* is an archaic optative with zero grade of the root, so we are dealing with a much different creature than the rebuilt Ved. *dheyām*, etc. Furthermore, we cannot exclude the possibility that both *dīīqm* and *xiīām* are disyllabic as Lindeman's variants. More recently, Gotō (2013: 95 n. 221) has sided with disyllabic *-yām*, also citing OAv. *xiīām*, stating that *-ā-* (for usual *-q-*) indicates disyllabicity of that vowel. However, as de Vaan (2003: 464) notes, the reason for *-ām* here is unknown and may simply be a Young Avestan reinterpretation of older **-qm*.

7) While it is possible to scan *sy_aām* at 8.14.2c, van Nooten and Holland's (1994) *s_iyām* is more likely, as the other two disyllabic forms of *syām* (6.50.9c, 8.19.25b) are to be scanned as *s_iyām*. Also note that there are almost no 1sg. sequences in **-aH-am* (for example, class IX imperfects) that must be distracted. The only example is *d_aām* (10.49.1a); however, we also find *d_aāh* (8.2.15b, 10.148.4b) and *d_aāt* (6.63.9c, 10.80.4a), showing that this is a characteristic of athematic monosyllabic nouns and verbs in general and not of 1sg. forms in particular (Arnold 1905: 82, 91).

8) Arnold (1905: 91), Oldenberg (1909: 357), and others considered such a scansion with a syllabic *-i-* even before a vowel as a possibility. Although it is located in a different metrical position, note also the rhyming *uchánt_i yām* at 5.64.7a.

9) Heptasyllabic lines in Bṛhatī in the RV: 8.1.5b(?), 8.4.7a, 8.46.11b, 8.50.9a, 8.70.7a, 8.71.10b, 8.103.2a, 9.107.9b.

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(Lecturer, Kyoto University)