

Evidence-based phonology – the elimination of ghosts

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Supporting the view held by adherents of Government Phonology ('GP') that there is no evidence for the syllable or the coda *qua* constituents, I will claim, *contra* GP, that there is also no evidence for any inaudible categories, be they structural (e.g., inaudible empty onsets or nuclei), or melodic. This specifically argues against the assumption that, universally, onsets and nuclei/rhymes, or consonants and vowels, come in pairs, or that it is possible for melodic expressions to be part of a phonological representation without being attached to any structural unit (so-called 'floating' expressions).

There are a number of interesting corollaries of these claims: (a) Two vowels/consonants can now be attached to two adjacent nuclei/onsets without any intervening empty onset/nucleus (respectively). This proposal draws on and extends the finding of Ploch (in prep.) that the 'greater simplicity of the strict CV approach' is achieved on the basis of an increase of unscientific existential statements (i.e., those not verifiable by observation). In this way, my proposal eliminates all p-licensed (silent) empty categories in GP, e.g., "There is an empty inaudible nucleus between O₂ [k] and O₃ [n] in English *acne*."

(b) I will show that on-off parameters, e.g., "Domain-final empty nuclei are p-licensed", are not testable since all falsifiers are systematically discounted (when the parameter is said to be "off"). Importantly, if there are no more inaudible nuclei, one can also do without untestable on-off parameters catering for the distribution of their (in)audibility.

(c) The typology of the possible (and impossible) ways to end a phonological word/domain can now be explained in terms of what an audible final nucleus can or cannot license, and in terms of what an audible final onset can or must be licensed by, rather than in terms of what an unverifiable inaudible nucleus cannot do.

(d) The Projection Principle ('PP') has been argued for by claiming that it is metatheoretically better to have one and the same lexical representation for morphologically related forms than different representations. Based on Ploch (in prep.), I will show that such a view stems from a flawed version of Occam's Razor and non-*ad-hoc*-ness, and that it is the more scientific approach to abandon the PP, and, as far as vowel-zero alternations are concerned, to propose an empty nucleus when there *is* an audible vowel and *no nucleus* when there is not.

(e) With the abandonment of the PP, there is also no longer any need to account for the presence of certain melodic units *M* in one form and their absence in other morphologically related forms by the proposal of unverifiable melody ghosts, usually called 'floating' segments. I will explain why it is better science to have lexicalised forms containing and not containing *M*.

(f) The insights gained by insisting on evidence-basedness as outlined in my paper also argue for the abandonment of any phonological derivation (or of conceptually different but scientifically identical substitutes thereof, e.g., the widely acclaimed 'non-derivational' generation of outputs from inputs as proposed by supporters of the Optimality pseudotheory).

Having shown that where the standard view and my view on empty categories are extensionally identical the standard approach is always less scientific, while mine always wins by Occam's Razor, I will point to a case where they are extensionally different and illustrate on the basis of an analysis of the variation between [-əm], [-ən] and [-m̥] (as pronunciations of the German infinitival ending *-en*) in what way my evidence-based analysis, but not the standard view, can explain the observable distribution of labiality and coronality.

To sum up, it is the declared aim of this paper to show how unverifiable existential statements can be avoided, and how a theory does not lose and even gains explanatory power by not assigning any inaudible structural or melodic categories to phonological representations.