

Manner as a skeletal relation

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In current phonological frameworks the phonetic identity of segments is generally defined by a set of phonological primes. These primes can be distributed in three categories: manner, place and laryngeal, as is the practice in the various feature geometric proposals (e.g., Clements 1985). In certain respects the two of these classes, place and laryngeal, pattern together to the exclusion of the third, manner. For one thing, place and laryngeal properties readily assimilate in consonant clusters, while the same can hardly be claimed of manner properties (this observation is incorporated by locating them directly under the root node by, e.g., McCarthy (1988)). For another, while place properties are quite standardly associated with both consonants and vowels, and there is some tradition of doing the same with laryngeal properties (e.g., aspiration=high tone, voicing=low tone), manner primes, like continuancy or stridency, have no interpretation in vocalic segments. It is also noteworthy that in the case of laryngeal properties consonant lenition clearly targets the universally unmarked voiceless, unaspirated state and the loss of place also results in unmarked places of articulation, alveolar, velar and/or glottal, lenition affecting the manner of a consonant typically heads towards the more marked state, an increase in sonority (e.g., flapping, spirantization, etc.).

The talk argues that charging some properties of segments to the skeleton is an idea worth pursuing. Steps have already been taken in this direction: the difference between high vowels and glides is usually seen as one derived from association with different positions on the skeleton. The consonantalness and vocalicness contributed by the two types of skeletal slots is also exploited by Rennison (1997), who uses the empty melodic element for channelling these properties “into the segments”. Another proposal is that of Jensen (1994), according to which manner distinctions could be encoded by positing virtual codas on the skeleton before a stop but not before a glide. Lowenstamm (*voce*) also suggests that certain segmental contrasts should be modelled by virtual geminates (in languages that lack true geminates, of course).

Following and elaborating on Kaye & al. (1990) and Ségéral & Scheer (1999), I accept that there is an intricate system of relations between the slots of the skeleton and propose that it is these relations that are to be made responsible for manner distinctions in consonants. As it always happens, the proposal is not unproblematic, but it shows promise of getting rid of manner elements altogether, pushing these distinctions to where they seem to belong: the “syllabic” level.

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