Complexity and licensing scales in Government Phonology

The talk outlines a research programme in which the basic principles of phonological organisation boil down to the interaction between the strength of nuclei as licensers of phonological structure and various non-rerankable scales of complexity occurring at different levels of phonological representation. Thus, two familiar concepts developed outside Government Phonology (GP), such as *Licenisng* (e.g. Itô 1986) and *Structural Analogy* (e.g. Anderson and Ewen 1987) find a reflection here.

The licensing relation between nuclei and the preceding onsets on the one hand, and governing relations between consonants, which are to a great extent determined by their internal melodic structure, allow us to view the phonological representation as a self-organizing system.

Although the basic tenets of this model originate from standard GP (Charette 1990, 1991, Harris 1990, 1994, 1997, Kaye 1990, 1995, Kaye, Lowenstamm and Vergnaud 1985, 1990), the central underlying principle of the self-organization in phonology due to the interaction between complexity scales and licensing strength leads to a number of dramatic modifications of the standard GP model. Firstly, a lot of most cherished principles and parameters are eliminated or redefined as part of non-rerankable scales. Secondly, a change of philosophy is proposed concerning the employment of empty nuclei in representation: from striving to develop mechanisms of their licensing – muting mechanisms which allow empty nuclei to remain silent – to determining their own licensing properties. Their formal function is viewed as generally the same as that of other nuclei, while their special status stems from the fact that they are substantively empty. And thirdly, the phonological representation is viewed as a consecution of CVs (Lowenstamm 1996, Polgárdi 1998, Rowicka 1999, Scheer 2004).

Complexity itself is not a new concept in GP, but it has mostly been discussed in the context of the melodic make-up of segments (Harris 1990, 1994). This substantive complexity, defined in terms of the number of elements making up a segment throws light on such aspects of segmental phonology as sonority effects, relative markedness, segmental inventories and susceptibility to phonological processes, as well as the interaction between consonants in syllabification. At syllabic level, we are dealing with formal complexity. The proposal transforms the original idea of Government Licensing (Charette 1990, 1992) into a non-rerankable scale of progressively more complex structures which demand progressively stronger licensers. This leads to a definition of 'syllabic space' in therms of just two parameters: formal complexity and licensing scales.

The resulting model may account for both fairly basic and also quite complex issues connected with syllabification and word structure, such as phonotactics, lexical patterns, syllabically driven phonological processes, syllable typology, markedness, and acquisition. There are other areas of phonological theory which can be expressed in this model. These include the role of nuclear strength scales in register switches, dialectal variation, and historical development. Most of these aspects will be briefly illustrated and argued for on the basis, of familiar chunks of data from a range of languages such as Polish, English, Welsh, Irish, Malayalam, and Dutch.

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