Vowel Quality and Phonological Projection

Description

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Description  This thesis examines some consequences of the hypothesis that syllables are headed constituents. In particular we examine to what extent phonological features of prototypical heads, that is to say: vowels, have an influence on the structure of the syllable around the head. Central to the discussion are Standard Dutch and some Dutch dialects, such as Tilburg Dutch and Rotterdam Dutch, but also other languages, such as Javanese, French, Gothic and Norwegian receive some treatment. After a general introductory chapter the following topics are discussed. In the chapters 2 and 3 we analyse the contrast between tense and lax (or long versus short) vowels in Standard Dutch. It is claimed that this difference can only be described in a satisfactory way when using the feature Retracted Tongue Root (RTR). We also posit a constraint which relates this feature to the open versus closed nature of a syllable. Very strong evidence for this relation is drawn from languages such as Andalusian Spanish and Eastern Javanese which combine the open-closed contrast with vowel harmony on the feature RTR. Also a dialect like Tilburg Dutch is of interest, because it has both a tense-lax and a long-short contrast. In this dialect we can also see that vowel length in Dutch-type systems corresponds to +RTR, not to -RTR, as is usually assumed on the basis of Standard Dutch. In chapters 4 and 5 we discuss Dutch schwa. This vowel has to be analysed as almost empty, both from a phonetic and phonological point of view. This featurelessness corresponds to several special properties of this vowel: it is the reduction vowel, the epenthetic vowel and as an underlying vowel it only supports syllables with a very simple structure, viz. a simple onset and a coda in which we only find a sonorant consonant. It is shown that all of these properties are indeed directly dependent on the emptiness of schwa. In chapter 6 the analysis of Dutch schwa is applied to a number of other languages, especially French and Norwegian. French schwa allows a complex onset but no coda and therefore seems markedly different from its Dutch counterpart. Norwegian has both a French (eple) and a Dutch schwa (tiger). These schwas however still have a different status in the language: we do not find words such as *katrel. It is shown that the three languages still show a few very remarkable similarities. In chapter 7 we discuss the occurrence of vowels in a position outside the head. The main topic of discussion here is a striking alternation between the high vowel /i/ and the syllable [j@] we find in Rotterdam Dutch monomorphemic forms, second person singular clitics and diminutive forms. The competition between these two forms can be described in Optimality Theory. It appears that /i/ acts as a better nuclear head and that the form with schwa only surfaces where a realisation of the full vowel is blocked. A comparison of the Rotterdam process to Sievers’ Law in Gothic additionally provides us with extra evidence against a length analysis of Standard Dutch. Chapter 8 gives an overview of the family of constraints which form the backbone of most analyses in the thesis: the family of projection constraints. All of these constraint connect the occurrence or non-occurrence of a certain feature to the occurrence or non-occurrence of certain types of prosodic structure. It is shown that the notion of a constraint family provides us with an elegant and satisfying metatheory of phonological projection.

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The hierarchy of phonological units. Phoneme as the smallest discrete phonological unit and its functions. Phonology, or functional phonetics, is a linguistic branch of phonetics. It studies sounds as units, which serve people for communicative purposes. Hierarchical relationship of phonological units may be represented in the following way: feature~phoneme~mora~syllable~rhythmic group (or foot, or phonetic word)~intonation group~intonation pattern~utterance~text. Diaphonic variation affects the quality and quantity of particular phonemes. It is caused by definite historical tendencies active in certain localities. Diaphonic variants inform the listener about the speaker’s origin and his social standing.

4 Tense/lax, the English vowel system and phonological theory. The IPA account of vowel structure has remained relatively stable over the years. With the rise of acoustic phonetics, some specialists have argued that it was not articulatorily but auditorily based. The quality of the opposition between the two types of ‘a’ deserves some comment. While in RP, it is true that the opposition takes the form [æ] (or [a]) vs. [ɔː] (in their standard IPA values), it is interesting to note that some RP speakers have.

4.5 Projection problems. In the traditional account, it is assumed that [+tense] vowels attract two skeletal positions; but, if the first element of diphthongs such as /eɪ, ai, ao, aw/ is tense, how does one avoid overprojecting skeletal positions?