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The phonological structure of words: An introduction

By Colin J. Ewen and Harry van der Hulst

Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. 288. hardback $70.00, paper $25.00. ISBN 0521350190 (hardback), 0521359147 (paperback).

Reviewed by Joost Zwarts
Utrecht University

This book is an introduction to the representation of the sound structure of words in modern, nonlinear phonological theory. If you want to know what Optimality Theory is about or need help with analyzing and describing the phonemes of an "unwritten" language, then don't reach for this book. It is meant for those who want to learn about *theories* of phonological *structure*.

Throughout the book the reader is introduced to a variety of current phonological subtheories within the broader framework of formal, generative phonology that grew out of Chomsky and Halle's monumental *The sound pattern of English* (1968). In the two chapters about segments and features one can find extensive discussion of autosegmental features, feature geometry, underspecification, single-valued features, and dependency phonology; the chapter about syllables explains the X-bar approach to syllable structure, morae, skeletal structure, licensing, and government phonology; metrical theory, and more specifically the theory of the bracketed metrical grid, is extensively explored in the chapter about stress. The reader gets a good taste of the linguistic arguments for and against certain phonological primitives or structures.

The authors intentionally concentrate on phonological representations as opposed to phonological processes and derivations, a focus that is almost opposite to that of Optimality Theory, where, roughly speaking, the major concern is to derive a correct surface form by a particular ranking of universal constraints. In this respect, this book is nicely complemented by another recent book from the same Cambridge series, René Kager's *Optimality Theory* (1999).

The book is more or less structured in a bottom-up fashion, starting with the smallest phonological elements, the segments, in chapter 1, and showing how these can be analyzed in even smaller primitives, the phonological features. After discussing the nature of features in more detail in chapter 2, the book moves one level up in chapter 3, to the syllable and its parts and from there to the structure of words in chapter 4 and the role of metrical feet. There are aspects of phonological structure that are shown to play a role at more than one level, the most important of which is prominence. In a word, the accented syllable is the most prominent syllable, the head, of the word, the most prominent part of a syllable is the nucleus (i.e., the vowel), on which all other segments depend, and the authors suggest that even within segments one feature can be more prominent than another. In some languages the difference between /e/

and /ɛ/ is that in /e/ the feature **i** ‘high frontness’ is more prominent and in /ɛ/ the feature **a** ‘lowness’.

The book covers a variety of phonological phenomena, some of which—like vowel harmony and stress—are worked out in considerable detail; but with only four pages, the topic of tone is perhaps treated in a somewhat stepmotherly fashion. This probably reflects the research interests and experience of the authors. Most examples are taken from English and Dutch, but one can also find discussions of French, Turkish, Yawelmani, and Yoruba and a somewhat wider range of languages in the typological overview of stress systems in chapter 4.

Every chapter is concluded by a section with generous references to the literature, but no exercises. There is a combined index of subjects, names, and languages and an appendix with the International Phonetic Alphabet.