The perceptual dimensions of sonority-driven epenthesis

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Abstract

Vowel epenthesis often appears to preferentially target consonant clusters with rising sonority. One explanation for this is perceptual faithfulness (Fleischhacker 2002, Steriade 2006): rising sonority clusters are more susceptible to epenthesis because the perceptual distance between the underlying /C_1C_2/ sequence and its correspondent output sequence [C_1VC_2] is small, thus incurring a smaller faithfulness cost. This raises the question of how to compute the perceptual distance between two sonority contours /C_1C_2/ and [C_1VC_2] in terms of the sonority of C_1, C_2 and V. In this paper, I propose that the appropriate metric is SONORITY ANGLE, the angle formed by the contours C_1C_2 and C_1V, and apply it in analyzing two case studies of sonority-driven epenthesis, Chaha and Irish. A comparison is made to another possible metric, SONORITY RISE (Flemming 2008), the ratio of the gradients of the two contours, as well as to Syllable Contact, which represents an alternative, markedness-based approach to the problem of sonority-driven epenthesis.

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