Metrical government in English

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Empty categories have been around in linguistics for a long time already. In phonology empty nuclei or vocalic positions have been recognized in particular. Strict CV-phonology has attempted to push these observations to their logical conclusion by promoting a strictly alternating CV skeleton, and as a result, some of the vocalic positions must be designated as empty while others as contentful, i.e., ones that have phonetic substance. It is even more intriguing that among the empty vocalic positions we find statically empty positions that are never realised phonetically, and also alternating empty vocalic positions that are realised depending on the phonological environment. Moreover, contentful vocalic positions can also be of different types: some of them are always stressed (strong) while others are always unstressed (weak). To complicate the picture, we also encounter contentful vocalic positions that are sometimes strong, sometimes weak depending on a lot of factors. Furthermore, strong vocalic positions can host different degrees of stress, and therefore they can also belong to different subgroups.

The aim of the proposed presentation is to seek a principled account for the distribution of different types of vocalic position, perhaps by proposing a single algorithm that treats all vocalic positions deployed in the phonological skeleton. I will attempt to demonstrate that vowel-reduction and static/dynamic silence are but two different sides of the same coin, manifestations of *relative* and *absolute* silence in the phonological string. Ultimately all contentful vocalic positions are incorporated into the metrical hierarchy, and all empty vocalic positions are incorporated into the phonological hierarchy. The structural force that seems to control the distribution of different vocalic positions is government, which has two different manifestations: *proper government* and *metrical government*.

Contrary to mainstream assumptions, I wish to argue for bidirectional government in Phonology. Unidirectional theories have been promoted mainly in the phonological literature. For Scheer (2004) government is strictly right-to-left, while for Rowicka (1997) it is left-to-right. One of my goals is to demonstrate that government goes in both directions but in a principled manner, following a strict algorithm. Evidence in favour of the proposed framework comes from different languages. I will attempt to demonstrate that English stress-assignment, syncope, the distribution of different "consonant clusters" and the minimal word-constraint in English can be accounted for in a unified manner if the proposed algorithm is adopted. Furthermore, the proposed bidirectional framework can also be useful when we attempt to account for Hungarian shortening stems, low-vowel lengthening and stem-internal vowel-zero alternation.

References

Rowicka, Grazyna (1999) On Ghost Vowels: A Strict CV Approach. The Hague: Holland Academic Graphics.
Tobias Scheer (2004)A Lateral Theory of Phonology, vol. 1: What is CVCV, and why should it be?: Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.