An Element-based Approach to the Back Fricatives in Ukrainian

Anna Bloch-Rozmej (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

The explanatory potential of the *Element Theory* which is part of the *Government Phonology* framework is contingent on the paradoxical interplay of prime autonomy and inter-element relations. Thus, specific lexical representations of individual segments depend, on the one hand, on the number and kinds of phonological primes and, on the other, upon the status the elements enjoy as well as the licensing constraints delimiting the combinability of melodic primitives imposed by particular linguistic systems.

The ensuing presentation will focus on the distribution, phonetic shape, phonological representation, and behavior of the back fricatives in Ukrainian. The segments that the analysis will focus on will be the voiceless velar fricative [x], the voiced velar strident [ɣ], and the voiced laryngeal (glottal) fricative [ɦ]. It is noteworthy that many of the existing accounts treat the system of Ukrainian as asymmetrical in terms of the fricative voiced/voiceless pairs by refusing the glottals the consonantal status (e.g. Clements and Hume, 1995). In the present analysis, it will be proposed that the actual phonetic shape of the relevant consonants derives from specific element configurations within the melodic plane in the structure of phonological domains. Furthermore, we shall address the issue of element status as either segment's head or operator with a view to pointing out possible interpretational consequences of elemental headship for the phonetic output. It should be observed that apart from determining the salient property of the melodic expression, headedness itself can be, depending on language-specific settings, interpreted as adding a special phonetic dimension to the overall manifestation of the segment. In order to verify the explanatory power of this representational solution, the behavior of the back fricatives in a number of Ukrainian dialects will be considered. Moreover, our attention will have to be drawn to the existing alternations involving the fricatives and plosives, [g] in particular. A closer look will also be taken at the consonant-vowel interactions in which the segments in question participate. More specifically, we shall try to determine the impact of the licensing strength of nuclei upon the manifestation of the preceding consonantal expressions. To be precise, we predict that the onset position intervening in the inter-nuclear relation (i.e. the intervocalic one) and the site before an empty nucleus favor the occurrence of autosegmentally weaker melodies as these receive less licensing potential from their nuclei.

In sum, the aim of the discussion will be to put forward concrete phonological representations of the back fricatives in Ukrainian along with Ukrainian-specific licensing constraints on element interactions whose operation to a large extent determines the phonetic manifestation of segments.

References
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