

Syllabic 'space' and cluster size – Polish phonotactics and Universal Grammar

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The consonant clusters in Polish, especially at the edges of words, appear to defy universal principles of speech sound organisation. They violate both the widely recognised Sonority Sequencing Generalisation (SSG) which relates to the melodic patterns in cluster phonotactics, e.g. *kto* 'who', *rteć* 'mercury' and the formal restrictions on the size of syllabic constituents that are proposed in, for example, Government Phonology (GP), e.g. *krtan* 'larynx', *pstry* 'gaudy'.

First, this presentation reviews some GP arguments pointing to the fact that it is possible to define the 'self-organisation' of speech sounds in phonological representation in such a way that neither the traditional SSG, nor the maximal binarity of syllabic constituents needs to be viewed as violated even in the most outrageous-looking Polish forms. After all, the clustering in Polish is in many respects very restricted. This can be achieved under certain conditions. The most important one is that one should not identify word edges with syllable edges.

The analysis is couched in a version of Government Phonology called Complexity Scales and Licensing (CSL). Crucial in the understanding of the phonotactic patterns of Polish clusters is the theoretical distinction between 'true' and 'false' clusters defined in terms of different configurations of Government and Licensing. The two types of clusters may also be defined in terms of the familiar distinction between phonological and phonetic adjacency, in that both 'true' and 'false' clusters are adjacent phonetically but only the former are adjacent phonologically and subject to the conditions defining the syllabic 'space', that is, SSG and maximal binarity. In CSL terms, the 'true' clusters are those which involve Government and correspond to traditional branching onsets and coda-onset contacts. 'False' clusters are separated by an empty nucleus which must possess licensing abilities and is itself subject to universal constraints, such as, for example, the ban on sequences of empty nuclei.

Polish is unique in that it possesses both types of clusters, and the phonotactic patterns it exhibits are not violations of Universal Grammar. They are rather a result of utilising the syllabic 'space' to the full, coupled with the possibility of having one empty nucleus in a given consonant sequence.

Finally a comparison is made between the left and the right edge phonotactics in Polish.