

Vowel quantity and the melody of consonants

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The paper takes up the problem of interaction between melody and structure. An attempt will be made to identify the dependencies between the two levels of phonological representation. Traditionally, it is assumed that melody and structure belong to separate layers and have no influence on one another. Nevertheless, evidence from some languages shows that melody and structure are not fully independent and that they exert some influence on each other. Here, we would like to introduce relevant data from Breton, a Celtic language spoken in the North of France. More specifically, the analysis will concern the dialect spoken in the area of Leon, western Brittany. The attention will be drawn especially to the relation between vocalic and consonantal length. First of all, long and short vowels occur in complementary distribution. The former appear in open, the latter in closed syllables. Moreover, the length of vowels is stress-dependent, i.e. only stressed vowels can be long (e.g. *logod* [lo:got] ‘mice’ vs. *logodenn* [logo:den] ‘mouse’). Furthermore, vocalic length is sensitive to the voice value of the following consonant. Long vowels precede voiced, while short vowels precede voiceless obstruents, e.g. *ober* [o:ber] ‘fair’ vs. *tapout* [taput] ‘to seize’. As for sonorants, [m, w, j] are followed by short vowels whereas [n, l, r] may be preceded either by short or long nuclei (e.g. *tennan* [tena] ‘to draw’ vs. *rener* [re:ner] ‘director’). Voiceless obstruents and certain sonorants, then, seem to behave in a fashion similar to closed syllables, in that they are invariably preceded by short stressed vowels. Accordingly, we propose that objects in question be identified with so called virtual geminates. Most interestingly, as far as obstruents are concerned, this structure is reserved for voiceless objects, which we assume to contain the high tone element (H). Interesting phenomena are observed at morpheme and word boundaries. In internal sandhi, toned obstruents that follow a full vowel are able to maintain the structure of a (virtual) geminate, e.g. *tokou* [toku] ‘hat (pl.)’. On the other hand, if such obstruents follow an empty nucleus, the geminate is simplified and the preceding vowel is lengthened, e.g. *tok* [to:k] ‘hat’. In external sandhi, however, the geminate does not reappear. What is more, a single/degeminated onset is interpreted as voiced, e.g. *tok uhel* [to:g y:el] ‘high hat’. To sum up, untoned objects have the structure of single onsets, while toned objects have the structure of geminates. In other words, the structure of Breton obstruents seems to be connected with their melodic content.

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