

Let's bury the skeleton! (We don't want to have the cake and eat it...)

Emilie Caratini (Nice University)

Much debate occurs about the structure of the upper (UL – syllabic constituents) and the lower (LL – melody) levels of the architecture of syllables. However, almost nothing is ever said about the intermediate level (IL – the skeleton) which links UL and LL and appears as the only answer to two several phenomena (e.g. liaison – Encrevé [1988]). As far as we are aware, all theories agree on the idea that IL is useful. This is valid for *all* branches of Generative Phonology (Cairns & Feinstein [1982], Nespor & Vogel [2007:73]).

CVCV entertains a problematical relationship with IL: it ignores it. Scheer [2004:lvii] makes this explicit: “The skeleton appears to be redundant since there is a one-to-one relation between constituents and timing-units. (...) but the reader should keep in mind that this [the absence of the skeleton in the representations] may turn out to be a graphic oversimplification”.

The study of ambisyllabicity (AM) is at the heart of the problem. AM enables authors to get round the problem caused by consonants which *behave like geminates* but are *phonetically simple*, by making it possible for a consonant to associate to *one x-slot* but *two syllables* (i.e. to have the cake and eat it). Several arguments have been found against AM. Some of these are language specific (e.g. in German AM is incompatible with phonotactics (ambisyllabic consonants – AC – do not exhibit the same properties as coda or even onset consonants; Wiese [1996:202ff]). Others are more general (e.g. no language exhibiting a contrast between AC_s and geminates has ever been reported – van der Hulst [1985]).

Two solutions are available: either an artificial ban on AM (constraint, principle or axiom of the type “AM must be avoided”) is integrated to phonological theory (i.e. procedural encoding), or the representation of the syllable is modeled in such a way that it becomes incompatible with AM. We believe that a phonological theory which has an open door to ambisyllabicity will always be less preferable than one in which ambisyllabicity is completely ruled out.

Standard representations of the syllable are inherently compatible with AM. IL makes it possible for a single (short) piece of melody to be associated to two syllables: the skeleton is guilty of opening a door to AM. The existence of IL, therefore, is problematical: if we want to get rid of AM, we (might) need (to) get rid of IL. It seems, therefore, that some approaches to the syllable are less fit to eradicate AM than others: standard ones – which clearly rely on the existence of IL – are simply inadequate. CVCV, however, can easily dispense with the IL. Up to now, CVCV has adopted a neutral position as far as the existence of IL is concerned: IL is present in CVCV but useless (it is redundant), but does not play any (phonological) role. Hence, CVCV can become better equipped than other theories of the syllable by i) adopting a clearer position as far as IL is concerned and ii) stating that there is simply no IL.