

Formal restrictions on supernumerary consonants at word edges in English

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This paper proposes a formal treatment of the limitations imposed on obstruent clusters found in monomorphemic words in English, analysed within a Government Phonology-based setting. The proposal is to constrain the complexity of these clusters by restricting the number of melodic primes and skeletal slots available to supernumerary segments, at the cost of breaking away from one-to-one correspondence between phonological representation and phonetic interpretation.

The cases at hand are initial triples of the STR type, and final doubles of the ST/TS/TT type, where S stands for [s]-like fricative, T for plosive, and R for sonorant. In STR initials and ST/TS finals the only sound found at S is [s], while [t] is the only sound to occupy the peripheral T in TT finals. Additionally, the only other final obstruent double in semantically non-vacuous monomorphemic words — proper names, and foreign words are excluded from the study — is [ft]. On standard accounts (e.g. Kaye 1992, Scheer 2004), these clusters are given full skeletal/timing recognition. Each segment occupies a syllabic constituent of its own, and its Government and Licensing demands are accounted for. This may imply that any consonant of the relevant manner of articulation should also be able to occupy the slots in question, contrary to fact.

Two solutions are submitted for discussion. The less radical solution is to restrict the number of elements available to the consonant that is the only one found at the relevant position. It is proposed to limit the number of melodic elements available to the peripheral segment in STR initials, and TS/TT finals, possibly also in [ft] finals. Specifically, this is a single manner-defining element, viz. {h} for [s], and {ʔ} for [t], which also entails that coronal be the unmarked, if not underspecified, place of articulation in English. The missing voice specification is derivable from the adjacent member of the cluster. This solution only constrains the complexity of the outermost segment, and does not venture to reduce the number of skeletal slots occupied by STR initials, nor does it involve ST finals.

For STR initials a more radical solution is also proposed: to fuse the elementary melody of S ({h}) into that of T ({ʔ} and POA specifier, if any). This allows for representing two obstruents — [sp], [st], or [sk] — as one, and getting rid of the notion *Magic Licensing*. The idea of contoured segments in this context is not innovative — Scheer (2004: 444) refers to earlier proposals of this sort — but has a rather welcome new application for final doubles. ST finals can also be reduced to single-slotted expressions; the only elements found in the unary representation thereof are: {ʔ} (the head of the expression), {h}, and a POA specifier for the plosive part of the expression, viz. labial or dorsal. This can also accommodate the heavy [kst] final in *text* within limits of Government, i.e. two empty nuclei in a row; if [st] is represented as {h•ʔ}, without POA specifier, it might explain the lack of other ST parts in TST finals.