

Once you know where the primary accent is, rhythm is simple (or is it)

Harry van der Hulst - University of Connecticut

In van der Hulst (2009) I offer a theory for *primary accent* assignment. This theory is founded on the hypothesis that primary accent assignment and non-primary, or rhythmic accent assignment is separated (explicitly stated earlier in van der Hulst 1996). I suggest in the 2009 article that it is reasonable to expect that algorithms for assigning non-primary accentual structure can probably be fairly simple given that the apparent complexities of such procedures in traditional metrical approach were largely caused by the intricacies of primary accent location which have been factored out from the account of rhythmic accents. Earlier in that same article I claim that procedures for rhythmic organization not only follow primary accent assignment, but in most cases are lexical post-cyclic, post-lexical if not part and parcel of phonetic implementation.”

In this talk I will propose a theory for rhythmic structure assignment. Focussing first on some facts from Dutch (specifically the selection of the various allomorphs of the diminutive suffix) I will first discuss the consequences of the fact that the so-called long form of this suffix is selected when, among other conditions, the final syllable of the stem is accented. However, this accent can be primary or secondary and this would suggest that secondary accent assignment much feed an apparent lexical process of allomorph selection which makes a post-lexical treatment of rhythm problematic. As a matter of fact, the assignment of primary accent in Dutch (of all languages) raises some interesting question, perhaps a problem, for the theory of primary accent assignment in van der Hulst (2009) for which I will propose a solution.

After having discussed the “Dutch issues”, I will try to substantiate the claim that, with primary accent in place, rhythmic structure assignment is indeed simple. I will propose that the only relevant parameter is whether the rhythmic wave moves away from the edge that is opposite to the primary accent edge (polar rhythm) or instead “ripples” away from the primary accent itself (echo rhythm).

Finally, I will ask what kind of “structure” rhythm and, in fact, the entire accentual structure of words involves. Is it an arboreal as in traditional metrical theory or something simpler (as suggested in Prince’s grid-only variant), or something that is neither (cf. Idsardi’s theory)? My suggestion will be to use dependency structures (as proposed in Dependency Phonology) which, strictly speaking, do not involve constituent structure while, at the same time expressing the notion that strong syllables are ‘heads’.

Hulst H.G. van der (1996). Separating primary accent and secondary accent. In: R. Goedemans, H. van der Hulst & E. Visch (eds.). *Stress patterns of the world. Part I*. HIL Publications 2. The Hague: Holland Academic Graphics, 1-26

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