

The Morass Of Moras: Formal And Empirical Considerations Bearing On The
Phonological Representation Of Timing And Subsyllabic Constituency
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What subsyllabic structure (if any) do we need to assume in the phonological component of the grammar? Though the precise nature of phonological representations has not been a central concern since the advent of Optimality Theory in 1993, the *communis opinio* appears to involve some form of Moraic Theory, with X-slots, Onsets, Nuclei, Codas, and Rimes considered *de trop*.

But have we been too quick to abandon these staples of pre-1989 prosody? Is there actually good reason for calling our workhorse constraints "Onset" and "NoCoda", or are these just convenient shorthand for alignment constraints and the like? Conversely, can the evidence adduced in support of the existence of moras be recast in terms of Onset-Rime structure?

In this talk I begin from Steriade's (1982, 1988) observation that traditional diagnostics for subsyllabic structure typically do not in fact reveal anything relevant (e.g. a process deleting English /r/ in Coda can be equally well modeled non-prosodically, as deletion in non-prevocalic position), and show that the same holds for most arguments for and against moras and their competitors in subsequent research. I point out in addition that the most appealing claims invoked in support of Moraic Theory by Hyman 1985, Hayes 1989, etc. no longer hold water. I then present a range of internal and external phonological arguments which are not subject to these problems, and which suggest that the inventory of phonological elements must include Onsets, Nuclei, Codas, and Rimes. I conclude by considering whether in addition to being necessary, this set of subsyllabic constituents is sufficient, or whether moras are required as well.

References:

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