

DOCTORAL THESIS

The Mora-constituent interface model

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ABSTRACT

Phonological phenomena related to the syllable are often analysed either in terms of the constituents defined in the Onset-Rhyme Model; or in terms of moras after the Moraic Theory. Even as arguments supporting one of these theoretical models over the other continue to be unfurled, the Moraic Theory has gained significant currency in recent years. Situated in the foregoing theoretical climate, this dissertation argues that a full-fledged model of the syllable must incorporate the insights accruing from both constituents and moras. The result is the Mora-Constituency Interface model (MCI).

Syllable-internal structure as envisioned in MCI manifests in a Constituency Dimension as well as a Moraic Dimension. The dimensions interface with each other through segment-melody complexes, whose melodic content is associated with the Constituency Dimension and whose segmental (i.e. X-slot) component belongs to the Moraic Dimension. The Constituency Dimension and the Moraic Dimension are both thus necessary even to represent the atomic distinction between segments and melodies in a typical syllable.

In terms of its architecture, the Constituency Dimension in MCI is formally identical to the Onset-Rhyme Model and encompasses the Onset, the Nucleus and the Coda, with which melodies are associated. The Nucleus and Coda together constitute the Rhyme. In the Moraic Dimension, moras are assigned to segments on universal, language-specific or contextual grounds. From a functional perspective, the Moraic Dimension is where the metrical relevance of segment-melody complexes is encoded (as moras), while feature-based information pertaining to them is structured in the Constituency Dimension.

The independent functional justification for both the dimensions in MCI predicts that segment-melody complexes, though typically split across the dimensions as segments and melodies, may also be associated entirely with the Constituency Dimension or with the Moraic Dimension of a syllable. The former possibility finds empirical expression in extrametrical consonants, and the latter in moraic ambisyllabic consonants. Analogously, a syllable itself may have either just the Constituency Dimension (e.g. extrametrical syllables) or just the Moraic Dimension (e.g. catalectic syllables). The prosodic object called the syllable is thus a composite formal entity tailored from the constituent-syllable (C- σ) and the moraic-syllable (M- σ).

While MCI is thus essentially a model of syllable-internal structure, it also exerts some influence on prosodic structure beyond the syllable. For example, within MCI, feet can be directly constructed from moras, even in languages whose metrical systems are

traditionally thought of as being insensitive to mora count. The upshot is that a fully moraic universal foot inventory is possible under MCI.

That MCI has implications for the organisation of elements within (segment-melody complexes) and outside (feet) the syllable suggests that the model has the potential to be a general theory of prosodic structure. The model is also on solid cross-linguistic ground, as evidenced by the support it receives from different languages. Those languages include but are not restricted to Kwakwala, Chugach Yupik, Hixkaryana, Paumari, Leti, Pattani Malay, Cantonese, Tamil and English.

Keywords: Syllables, constituents, moras, segments, melodies

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