

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
NUMBERING AND TRANSCRIPTION.....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xi
CHAPTER 1: Syllabification and Syllable Structure.....	1
1.1 Goal of the Dissertation.....	1
1.2 Evidence for the Syllable.....	2
1.3 Syllabification.....	5
1.4 Syllable Structure.....	7
1.4.1 Onset-Rhyme Model.....	8
1.4.2 μ-Model.....	9
1.5 The Mora-Constituent Interface Model.....	12
1.5.1 Evidence for constituency.....	14
1.5.2 Evidence for moras.....	15
1.6 Typological and Prosodic Implications of MCI.....	15
CHAPTER 2: The Constituency Dimension.....	17
2.1 N: Nucleus, Necessity.....	18
2.1.1 Nuclear consonants.....	18
2.1.2 Diphthongs as nuclear units.....	21
2.2 Syllable-internal Sonority Domains.....	23
2.2.1 Sonority scales.....	24
2.2.2 Sonority domains in English.....	27
2.2.3 Sonority domains in Adhilabad Gondi.....	29
2.2.4 Suspicious demi-syllabic domains.....	33

2.3	Rhyme-based Phonological Phenomena.....	34
2.3.1	Rhyme-based dissimilarity.....	34
2.3.2	Rhyme-based similarity.....	37
2.3.3	Rhyme-mediated nasalisation.....	39
2.3.4	Rhyme-based allomorphy.....	44
2.4	Glides and Constituents.....	46
2.4.1	Onset [w] in American English.....	47
2.4.2	Coda [h] in Adhilabad Gondi.....	51
2.4.3	Non-nuclear [j] in Tamil.....	53
2.5	Segmental Constraints and Constituents.....	56
2.5.1	Bi-segmental Nucleus in English.....	58
2.5.2	Bi-segmental Rhyme in Sixian Hakka.....	61
2.5.3	Bi-segmental Coda in Tamil.....	63
2.5.4	Mono-segmental Onset in Tamil.....	65
2.6	Chapter Summary.....	66
CHAPTER 3: The Moraic Dimension.....		68
3.1	Compensatory Lengthening.....	69
3.1.1	Nuclear vowel lengthening.....	69
3.1.2	Pre-nuclear consonant lengthening.....	72
3.2	Consonants and Moras.....	73
3.2.1	Consonant moras by context.....	74
3.2.2	Consonant moras by sonority.....	77
3.2.3	Consonant moras by parametrisation.....	82
3.2.4	Consonant moras and long vowels.....	85
3.2.5	Moras versus constituents.....	88
3.3	Moraic Constraints.....	89
3.3.1	Bimoraic words in English.....	90
3.3.2	Bimoraic disyllables in Chungli.....	92
3.3.3	Bimoraic initial syllables in Adhilabad Gondi.....	94
3.3.4	Moraic shortening in English.....	97
3.3.5	Moraic gemination in Tamil.....	99
3.4	Moras in a Language Game.....	101
3.5	Chapter Summary.....	105

CHAPTER 4: Some Typological Implications of MCI.....	107
4.1. Geminates and Long Consonants in MCI.....	108
4.1.1 Heterosyllabic geminates.....	109
4.1.2 Tautosyllabic geminates.....	111
4.1.3 Long consonants.....	116
4.2 Other Implications.....	117
4.2.1 Moraic and Rhyme-based constraints in Kwakwala.....	118
4.2.2 Two-dimensional ‘echoes-shmechoes’.....	121
4.2.3 Moraic pre-nuclear consonants in Bella Coola.....	123
4.3 One-Dimensional Objects in MCI.....	125
4.3.1 Consonants in the C-Dimension.....	125
4.3.2 Consonants in the M-Dimension.....	129
4.3.3 Syllables sans M-Dimension.....	132
4.3.4 Syllables sans C-Dimension.....	134
4.4 Chapter Summary.....	138
 CHAPTER 5: Towards a Generalised Theory of the MCI: Segments, Melodies and Feet...140	
5.1 Segment-Melody Affiliations.....	141
5.1.1 The place of melodies.....	141
5.1.1.1 Melodies in the C-Dimension.....	142
5.1.1.2 No melodies in the M-Dimension.....	145
5.1.2 The place of segments.....	146
5.1.2.1 Segments in the M-Dimension.....	146
5.1.2.2 No segments in the C-Dimension.....	149
5.1.3 Further discussion.....	151
5.1.3.1 X-slots and root nodes.....	151
5.1.3.2 Inter-dimensional alignment.....	155
5.1.3.3 Two-dimensionality revisited.....	155
5.2 Moraic Feet in MCI.....	157
5.2.1 Mora-sensitive systems.....	158
5.2.1.1 Syrian Arabic.....	158
5.2.1.2 Hixkaryana.....	160
5.2.2 Mora-insensitive systems.....	163
5.2.2.1 Paumari.....	163

5.2.2.2	Finnish.....	167
5.2.3	Whence M-σs.....	170
5.3	Chapter Summary.....	172
CONCLUSIONS.....		173
C.1	Implications and Significance of MCI.....	173
C.2	Limitations of MCI.....	174
C.3	Terminus.....	175
APPENDIX I Languages and language varieties discussed in this dissertation.....		176
APPENDIX II Data from the reverse language project (GRF-HKBU250712).....		177
APPENDIX III Orthographic support for the Onset-Rhyme division.....		178
REFERENCES.....		181
CURRICULUM VITAE.....		193