

What a trout can tell us about the primacy of onsets

Geoffrey Schwartz (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Wright (2001, 2004) advocates a perceptually motivated account of the sonority hierarchy. However, he provides only a general discussion of the perceptual underpinnings of phonotactic preferences, instead of a concrete proposal that may serve as a building block for phonological analysis. Prominence phonology (Schwartz, in preparation) provides an explicit account of phonotactics in terms of an 'element' ? that represents how well a segment may serve as an onset. The framework employed in this talk provides a formal rendering of a well-known phenomenon from the auditory perception literature (e.g. Delgutte and Kiang 1984), namely the 'boost' in neural activity that coincides with the onset of an acoustic stimulus. By this account, it is onsets rather than nuclei that are the driving force behind phonotactic preferences. In this view, the /s/ in Polish *pstrąg* 'trout' serves as a nucleus because it is both preceded and followed by unvoiced stops, segments that project a prominent realization of the onset element. Some remarks on the emergence of codas will also be provided.

References

- Delgutte, B. and N.Y.S. Kiang (1984). Speech coding in the auditory nerve IV. Sounds with consonant-like dynamic characteristics. *JASA* 75: 897-907.
- Schwartz, G. (in preparation). *Phonology for the listener and language learner*.
- Wright, R. 2001. Perceptual cues in contrast maintenance. In E. Hume and K. Johnson (eds.), *The role of speech perception in phonology*. San Diego: Academic Press, 251-77.
- Wright, R. 2004. Perceptual cue robustness and phonotactic constraints: rethinking sonority. In B. Hayes, R. Kirchner, and D. Steriade (eds.), *Phonetically based phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 34-57.