

Insertions from a phonetic and phonological perspective

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Phonological investigations (Lombardi 2002, Rubach 2000, Uffmann 2005, de Lacy 2006, Blevins 2007) have shown that although every consonant can be a potential candidate for insertion, only few of them are in fact selected for the insertion processes. The most frequent sound which is claimed to be inserted is the glottal stop [ʔ] found, for example, in Chadic, Cupeño, English, Larike, Mohawk, and German. The second most frequent sound which is epenthesized appears to be the glottal fricative [h] found, e.g. in Chipewyan, Huariapano, Tigre, Tucanon, Yagua (de Lacy 2006). Another frequently inserted consonant is the coronal stop [t] and the sonorants [j w l r r̥].

Lombardi (2002) proposes to explain insertions by the following place markedness scale:

*Dorsal, *Labial > *Coronal > *Pharyngeal

in which *Pharyngeal (in Lombardi's account including laryngeal and pharyngeal sounds) is the least marked segment and therefore the most optimal candidate for epenthesis.

The present approach significantly differs from Lombardi's (2002). First and foremost, it addresses the question *which context conditions which insertions*. A careful cross-linguistic study reveals that the selection of sounds for insertion processes is not arbitrary but depends on the context as well as the function inserted sounds fulfil: glottal stops and glottal fricatives are epenthesized at prosodic boundaries serving the function of marking edges of prosodic constituents and/or repairing syllable structures by inserting an onset (see also Blevins 2007). It is extremely rarely the case that other sounds are inserted at this place. A possible explanation of this pattern will be discussed by considering phonetic properties of glottals. Secondly, the study shows that glides [j, w] are inserted intervocally. Interestingly, the context of insertions appears to be well-defined and it is found in typologically different languages (Japanese, Polish, Shona). It will be demonstrated that insertion of [j] and [w] (and not other sounds) is a natural consequence of perceiving transitions of flanking vowels. Phonologically, it serves the function of resolving hiatus. In the same vein, several stop insertions found cross-linguistically are not accidental but result from the phonetic properties of the surrounding segments. Finally, other insertion cases will be discussed (e.g. r insertion in Bavarian) which – as it is argued in the present paper – are also prosodically conditioned.

Bibliography

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