

Substance-free (structure-free) elements?

Eugeniusz Cyran
(KUL Lublin)

Recent Government Phonology related literature provides at least three reasons (theoretical proposals or analytical results) which directly or indirectly point to the necessity to assume that subsegmental categories, be they features or elements, must be devoid of phonetic substance, and their relation with phonetic categories must be due to arbitrary spell-out. Admittedly, such a claim is quite natural within GP, in which phonology is considered separate from phonetics, and phonological computation is not a derivation of surface forms, but rather of other phonological representations which are then subject to ‘phonetic interpretation’. Despite this well-known property of GP, a lot of effort is currently put to establish a predictable and non-arbitrary relation between some phonological properties of subsegmental categories and their phonetic exponence (e.g. [A] as particular structure in GP 2.0), or between phonetic exponence, e.g. particular acoustic cues and phonological representation (e.g. full voicing in obstruents as [L] in Laryngeal Realism).

Reason 1: Kaye’s (2005) *phonological epistemological principle*, which says that the only source of phonological knowledge is phonological behavior. It follows that a particular phonetic property will be overridden by the workings of phonology in a final decision as to the phonological representation. Of course, there is one problem here. We do not seem to have a clear set of criteria to tell that a given phenomenon is a case of phonological behavior or an effect of spell-out...

Reason 2: Scheer’s (2014) *arbitrariness of post-phonological spell-out* which follows from general theoretical considerations on the nature of grammar and inter-modular communication. There is a slight problem here too: the typical diagnostic criteria for modular status of morpho-syntax and phonology are not so obvious with respect to phonetics. For example, it is not clear what would constitute domain-specific computation within phonetics.

Reason 3: Cyran’s (2014) *Laryngeal Relativism*, which claims, on the basis of an analysis of two Polish dialects, that identical phonetic systems may result from opposite phonological marking. Specifically, it is claimed that full voicing is phonological in Warsaw dialect and represented as [L], and passive / unmarked in Cracow-Poznań dialect. This leads to the proposal that FOD is phonological in the former but merely interpretational (phonetic?) in the latter. The inverted systems, if correct, allow for a neat analysis of pre-sonorant sandhi voicing, but also disprove the validity of Laryngeal Realism, and point to arbitrary spell-out.

Consequences of arbitrary spell-out: 1) subsegmental categories must be viewed as substance-free and emergent, 2) a fresh look is needed at the acquisition of such elements, and the nature of so ‘derived’ phonological representations, 3) a fresh look is needed at phonological computation – can there be inherent phonological properties of elements that determine their phonological behavior, or should they be treated equal? (e.g. [j] palatalizes not because of its phonological properties?). Does computation refer only to the presence and number of categories, but not to types? How are particular categories singled out for given processes?, e.g. palatalization, FOD, etc., 4) what with the Universal set of elements? Overgeneration? What with subsegmental hierarchy (feature geometry)? – if the dimensions such as place, manner and source are derivable from phonetics, should they be part of phonological representation, and if so, how? 5) Finally, a fresh look at spell-out itself is needed: one which is acquisition-centred rather than production-centred.

Some of these questions will be given potential answers. Others are mentioned to facilitate discussion. The substance-free view separates phonology from phonetics even more radically than current GP. Even if it might be on the wrong track, it is worth pursuing, as it explores the extreme peripheries of the phonology-phonetics relationship, and might yield, it is hoped, some criteria to talk about the nature of speech-related phenomena. GP as it stands today, is in the middle of nowhere.

References mentioned:

- Cyran, E. (2014) *Between Phonology and Phonetics. Polish Voicing*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kaye, J. (2005) GP, I’ll have to put your flat feet on the ground. In H. Broekhuis, N. Corver, R. Huybregts, U. Kleinhenz, and J. Koster (eds.), *Organizing Grammar. Studies in Honor of Henk van Riemsdijk*, 283-288. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Scheer, T. (2014) Spell-out, post-phonological. In E. Cyran, and J. Szpyra-Kozłowska (eds.), *Crossing Phonetics-Phonology Lines*, 255-275. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.