explain why compensatory lengthening exists, even in principle.

Synchronic representation of a lengthening pattern

The argument I'm making here is even stronger than this: the phonology, an explanatory role is if they explained why changes happen the way they do.

I argue, using a case study of compensatory lengthening, that a theory of synchronic phonology can't explain a sound change.

But even if this lengthening is represented as a rule of the grammar, an explanation of why this particular rule appears will have to account for where it came from. Following Blevins (2004) and Hale and Reiss (2008), a diachronic explanation for compensatory lengthening would mean we don't need to 'explain' it in the synchronic phonology.

The argument I'm making here is even stronger than this: the synchronic representation of a lengthening pattern couldn't explain why compensatory lengthening exists, even in principle.

Some interpretations

- What if speakers whose grammars use moras are likely to misproduce /tade/ as [tad]}, so the change happens in production?
  - This would make the change just a random but widespread speech error with no link to the outside world; so we lose the explanatory connection with phonetics.

- What if the phonetics-phonology interface tends to bias surface [tade] towards being real into as [tad]}?
  - If this property of the interface is universal, we'd just have to stipulate it (again losing any connection to the world); and if it's parameterized, we'd have to explain why it comes to be acquired.

- What if mora theory restricts the set of possible languages, so patterns that don't conform can't be phonologized?
  - We have attested languages that delete final vowels without lengthening (e.g. modern French), so learners can phonologize it when it appears.

- What if children first acquire the adult grammar, including the second mora, and then acquire the rule later?
  - We'd still have to explain why the child acquires lengthening, specifically: this doesn't follow from deletion alone (see above).

- What if there was variation in the input between [tade] and [tad]}, which the child interprets in terms of an optional rule?
  - If [tad]} was in the input to start with, we'd still have to explain where it came from; if it wasn't, we'd have to explain why the child innovated it.

References


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