

Re-examining default-to-opposite stress in Kwak'wala: An approach using Harmonic Serialism

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Kwak'wala (North Wakashan: British Columbia, Canada) has a default-to-opposite side stress system: in words with one or more heavy syllables, stress is assigned to the leftmost heavy syllable, and in words with no heavy syllables, stress is assigned to the rightmost syllable (Boas 1947, Bach 1975). This pattern, although typologically rare, is commonly assumed to fall neatly into the typology of quantity-sensitive unbounded stress systems, exhibiting one of four logical possibilities for the settings of edge and weight parameters (Hayes 1995). However, there are several reasons to re-examine the stress system of Kwak'wala and the existent OT-based analyses of default-to-opposite stress systems (e.g. Zoll 1997, Bakovic 1998, McCarthy 2003), which require stipulation of the patterns of conflicting directionality, and oversimplify (and arguably misanalyse) the system of weight-sensitivity in the language.

In this talk, I propose a serial account of stress assignment in Kwak'wala using Harmonic Serialism (McCarthy 2016, i.a.), in which the assignment of stress interacts with epenthesis in an opaque fashion, building on the theory of stress-epenthesis interactions proposed in Elfner (2016). In this theory, stress and epenthesis are assumed to be faithfulness-violating, and hence separate, sequential operations in Harmonic Serialism, whose order of application in the derivation is determined via constraint ranking.

As explored in this talk, this theory predicts that in words with multiple epenthetic vowels, these vowels will be inserted one at a time, rather than all at once. This predicts that in a language where epenthetic vowels avoid being stressed, the order and direction of epenthesis may interact and affect stress assignment. I argue that Kwak'wala is such a language, and that the putatively quantity-sensitive, default-to-opposite stress system may be reanalyzed as a system with a single edge-alignment preference for stress assignment (leftmost), which is sometimes disturbed by opaque stress-epenthesis interactions. I show that a Harmonic Serialism analysis of the patterns of epenthesis and their interaction with stress assignment can derive the default-to-opposite pattern of stress without the need to stipulate constraints regarding conflicting directionality for stress assignment and provides a clearer picture of the language's prosodic system.