Confluence in phonology: evidence from Micronesian reduplication

Description

This dissertation explores the phonological systems of Micronesian languages, in search of patterns that are consistent throughout the family and others that are unique to subgroups and individual languages. Using data from Pohnpeian, Mokilese, Pingilapese, Puluwat, Chuukese, Woleai, Marshallese, and Kosraean, the study focuses on reduplicative morphology as an illustrative window into the phonology of each language. Each language is treated with an Optimality-Theoretic analysis, and consequently the phonology of each is attributed to the same set of principles. However, as a whole, the analyses cannot explain the existence of common and unique patterns within the family. A model of language change called Confluence is presented in order to account for typological trends among related languages. The model acknowledges that learners of languages settle on a grammar based on ambient data; thus, the acquired grammar should approximate the grammar that produces the ambient data. However, a number of perceptual and articular factors have the result that the set of data that the learner perceives is unlike the set of data that the ambient grammar would predict. As a consequence, the learner’s grammar may differ from that of the ambient grammar. Because of the inclusion of perceptual and articulatory biases in the model, Confluence predicts several outcomes. First, a particular pattern might be resistant to change, or the same innovation might be likely to occur independently in different languages, and either way it is an observable property of otherwise divergent languages. Second, two or more co-occurring grammatical traits of a particular language can be shown to have a common source. Each of the predictions of Confluence is supported in the language analyses. Examples of robust patterns include codas, consonant restrictions, moraic feet, and bimoraic reduplicative prefixes. Two examples of recurring innovations are the introduction of final vowel deletion and the avoidance of initial geminate consonants in favor of some other structure. Phonological patterns that co-occur in a principled manner include geminate inventories and morpheme alignment, foot structure and final vowel lenition, and a cluster of properties that consists of length contrasts, word maximality, morpheme alignment, and segment inventories.

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