Turning to “polysynthesis” to evaluate current phonology-syntax interface theories

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INTRODUCTION

- Widely accepted that phonology applies within and across domains
  - e.g., English Stress (word vs. compound vs. phrase)
  - BLUE vs. BLUE Berry vs. blue BERRY
- How are phonological domains delimited?
  - Four main P-S Interface models
  - Some – but not all – models have been compared5,7
- This Project:
  - Systematic comparison of all four main P-S Interface models
  - Evaluated using the same data set from two languages
  - “Polysynthetic” languages used as crucial test case for models

SUMMARY: This study systematically compares the four main phonology-syntax interface models using data from two “polysynthetic” languages: Kiowa and Saulteaux Ojibwe. Ultimately, Relational Mapping is the only successful model for both languages. This is not without theoretical concerns, however, as Relational Mapping is the only model that assumes a strict separation between syntax and morphology.

CURRENT P-S INTERFACE MODELS

- RM and Spell-Out predict verb-internal domains
- Processes like Cluster Devoicing confirm verb-internal domains
- Overall: RM is sole successful model in predicting all domains

SAULTEAUX OJIBWE

- Construnctions of Interest:
  - Clause: Pronom-Tense-Mod(s)-Stem-Infl-Obj.No. Object Subject
  - Compound: Root1 + Root2
- Crucial Differences: Does the model predict verb-internal domains?

- Processes like FSVD and FD confirm verb-internal domains
- FSVD and FD indicate a split in the inflectional suffixes
- RM and Spell-Out predict verb-internal domains, but only RM succeeds
- Overall: RM is sole successful model in predicting all domains

PHONETICAL PROCESSES EXAMINED

- Examples: Final Short Vowel Deletion
  - Short vowels delete at the end of a ‘word.’
  - Final Devoicing
  - Obstruents become voiceless at the end of a ‘word.’

- Examples: Cluster Devoicing
  - Stops become voiceless after a voiceless obstruent

CONCLUSIONS

- Current interface models face substantial challenges with polysynthetic languages
- RM is the only successful model, but at a theoretical cost3
- Question: Is it possible to account for the same generalizations while also avoiding the need for a morphological module?
- Work underway towards a new syntax-only model (see Miller, forthcoming)
- Future Research: expand to more languages, formalize a new model

REFERENCES