

## HOW ALLEGRO SPEECH RUINS THE PRINCIPLES OF GRAMMAR

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**Abstract.** Allegro speech violates all kinds of universal as well as language specific constraints. For example, Dutch allegro forms like [l̥ 'kœ:ɐ] *likeur* 'liqueur' (cf. lento form [li 'kœ:ɐ]) violate a universal constraint on possible onsets which excludes sonorant + obstruent sequences. Similarly, English allegro forms like ['pt̥eɪt̥əʊ] *potato* (cf. lento form [pə 'teɪt̥əʊ]) violate a language specific rule on possible onsets. Is then allegro speech 'unconstrained'?

**Keywords:** universal and language specific constraints; clusters by default; possible onsets.

A number of constraints, both universal and language specific, on possible onsets have been postulated, one of them since sonorant + obstruent onsets are universally excluded.

Polish obviously violates this constraint, which may be demonstrated by the existence of such words as:

- 1.(a) *rdest* [rdɛst] 'knot-grass'
- (b) *lgnie* [lgɲɛ] 'he clings'
- (c) *mgła* [mgwa] 'fog'

These words are monosyllabic and the sonorants that occur in potentially syllabic contexts, do not exhibit any phonetic characteristics different from the sonorants in typically syllabic contexts (cf. Awedyk 1994).

Onsets like /rd-/, /lg-/ and /mg-/ may be termed 'clusters by default' since speakers often simplify them or insert a vowel between the sonorant and the obstruent, for example, Polish children often pronounce [mɪgwa] for [mgwa] (cf. Awedyk 1990). One would therefore expect speakers to avoid default onsets rather than produce them intentionally, for example, in allegro style. Dutch data demonstrate that speakers produce different types of default onsets (cf. Hamans 1992):

- 2.(a) sonorant + obstruent: *likeur* 'liquor' [li'kœ:ɐ] → [l̥'kœ:ɐ]  
 (b) sonorant + sonorant: *nomade* 'nomade' [no'ma:də] → [n̥'ma:də]  
 (c) obstruent + obstruent: *patat* 'potato' [pa'ta:t] → [p̥'ta:t]

In English there is also a constraint on onsets containing two positions: 'the first consonant must be [-sonorant] and the second [+sonorant]' (Giegerich 1992:153). This constraint is violated in allegro style and reductions like *p'tato* are tolerated (cf. Kaisse 1985:33). The problem now arises how *p'tato* is actually pronounced: [p̥'teɪtəʊ] or ['ptɛɪtəʊ].

Wells (1990:241) discusses similar examples like *terrific* [tə'rɪfɪk] → ['trɪfɪk], except that here reduction results in a possible English onset /tr-/.

Laver (1994:264-5) distinguishes three levels of style\*: (a) formal, (b) informal and (c) extremely informal, and thus *support* may be pronounced in three ways:

- |                 |          |                   |
|-----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 3.(a) [sə'pɔ:t] |          | 4.(a) [pə'teɪtəʊ] |
| (b) [s̥:'pɔ:t]  | likewise | (b) [p̥'teɪtəʊ]   |
| (c) ['spɔ:t]    |          | (c) ['ptɛɪtəʊ]    |

In 4 (b) and in 2(c) the [p̥] is syllabic, which is not an attractive solution either for English or Dutch. There are, however, languages that have syllables composed of voiceless stops only. One of those languages is Bella Coola where words like [t̥'ɬ] 'strong' are found (cf. Laver 1994:249). This word is disyllabic and both the released stop [t̥'] and the dental lateral [ɬ] function as syllabics.

A possible solution for Bella Coola as well as for English and Dutch is to postulate a segment having only one feature [+OPEN] that follows the release of the stops in those forms (cf. Awedyk 1990:9).

The form in 4(c) violates phonotactic constraints since the /pt-/ onset is not permitted in English although stop+stop onsets are not universally excluded and they are found, for example, in Polish as in *ptak* [ptak] 'bird'.

Thus both 4(b) and 4(c) violate some constraint since neither syllabic stops nor stop+stop onsets occur in English in formal style. Syllabic [p̥] or no, speakers have to pronounce a [p] followed by a [t] without any vowel in between, that is, they *de facto* produce an onset cluster [pt-], which they normally do not pronounce, e.g., *Ptah* [ptɑ:].

## CONCLUSION

What is surprising is the intentional violation of universals in allegro style but what is even more surprising is that speakers of different languages 'behave' in the same way, for example, both Dutch and English speakers produce inadmissible forms in allegro style like [p 'tɑ:t] and [p 'tɛɪtəʊ], respectively.

The boundary between lento and allegro styles is not clearly marked as Wells indicated: 'Some people have [pli:s] as the only form for *police*' (Wells 1990:241 - cf. formal/lento [pə 'li:s]). If more and more allegro forms become the only forms, they may invalidate universal constraints.

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\*Similarly, in their article on fast speech in Polish, Dressler and Madelska (1989) differentiate between fast/casual and 'sloppy' speech. The phrase *na przykład* 'for example' could be pronounced in three ways:

- 5.(a) formal        [na 'pʃɪkwat]
- (b) fast/casual [na 'pʃ:kwat]
- (c) sloppy     ['na pʃkwat]

In 5(c) the [ʃ] is non-syllabic, thus resulting in an inadmissible onset /pʃkw-/ as well as in a shift of stress which now falls on the proclitic according to the Polish penultimate stress rule.

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