Syllable-word-interaction: Sonority as a foundation of (mor)phonotactics

Hans Basbøll, University of Southern Denmark <hba@language.sdu.dk>

I shall start by showing the importance of the notion *phonotactically possible word* which allows, without regard to any phonetic/phonological content whatsoever, an account of the distribution of the allomorphs of the English regular inflectional morphology. The *frequency* of those allomorphs is relevant in the account.

The main part of my talk will be devoted to a demonstration of how the *sonority syllable* can be a well-defined and non-circular foundation of (mor)phonotactics. Sonority is not a phonological or phonetic primitive, but can be derived from independently needed distinctive features, only referring to *possible vs. excluded segment types*.

The prototypical peak of a syllable is a *vocoid* that can be *defined* as a *non-lateral non-stop sonorant.* My Sonority Syllable Model (e.g. Basbøll *The Phonology of Danish*, Oxford UP 2005: 173-201, see the figure below) predicts the following five sonority types: vocoids, consonantal sonorants, voiced obstruents, voiceless obstruents with non-spread glottis, obstruents with spread glottis (where "spread glottis" means "widely spread glottis").

In my talk I shall discuss, mainly illustrated with Danish and French data, the basically mirror-image character, and its limitations, of the prototypical isolated syllable (a *monosyllable*). I shall demonstrate the *major classes* predicted from the model and discuss their relevance. Emphasis will be on methodological issues, and also acquisitional perspectives of the model will be discussed.
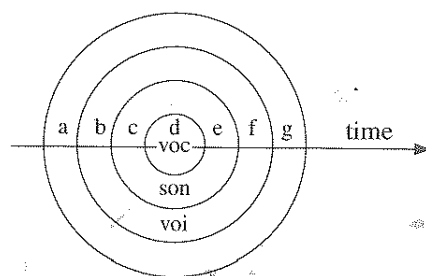

FIGURE 6.7. The Sonority Syllable Model of Figure 6.6 where each of the letters represents the part of one circle which is not part of any of the smaller or larger circles of the figure. a and g: segments which are not voiced = voiceless segments; b and f: voiced segments which are not sonorant = voiced obstruents; c and e: sonorant segments which are not vocoids = sonorant contoids (consonantal sonorants); d: vocoids.

The figure just above (fig. 6.7 from op. cit., p. 184) illustrates the model: when the arrow of time is disregarded, the figure exemplifies a set of Euler's circles: [vocoid] *implies* [sonorant] (all vocoids are sonorant, not the other way round, cf. sonorant nasals/laterals); [sonorant] *implies* [voiced] (all sonorant segments are voiced, not the other way round, cf. voiced obstruents). When the time dimension is introduced in figure 6.7, the model is turned into a non-circular model of sonority sequencing in the syllable.