Reading guide: Pater 1999


Background — why we are reading this paper

This paper represents one view of the phonetics-phonology relationship in a constraint-based phonological theory. It is useful to understand this approach for its own sake, and also as a basis for comparison with some alternative or extended proposals that we will look at in the next few weeks.

Additionally, this paper is an example of how various kinds of supporting evidence can be brought together in order to justify a newly proposed constraint.

Questions to keep in mind while reading

• What phonetic motivation does Pater introduce in support of the *NC constraint?

• Other than these strictly phonetic factors, Pater discusses additional evidence in §1 that the *NC constraint is well motivated. What is this additional evidence?

• Why does Pater discuss the languages that he does? What do they have in common, and why is it important for his argument? (Yes, the answer to this question is as easy as you think it is, but it’s also important to have in mind.)

• How complete is the typology of "logically possible" ways to repair a *NC violation? Are all possibilities attested? Can you think of any additional possible repairs that Pater doesn’t discuss?

• In §4, Pater uses the term "license" without defining it. However, the meaning should be fairly clear from the discussion and examples. See if you can figure this out.

• Why does Pater feel that the *NC approach to post-nasal voicing is better than that taken by Itô, Mester, & Padgett (1995)? How is the phonetic motivation behind *NC important in his argument here?

• Any comments on the details of the phonological analyses? Complaints, alternatives, points of confusion?
Some points for further thought and discussion

• Is phonetic grounding only relevant for markedness constraints, or could it be relevant for faithfulness constraints as well?

• Are we ever justified in proposing a (markedness) constraint with no clear phonetic basis? If yes, what kinds of evidence would justify proposing such a constraint? If no, why not?

• At the end of §1, Pater states, "One of the primary strengths of a constraint-based theory like Optimality Theory is that phonetically grounded contextual markedness constraints like *NC can be directly incorporated into the phonology." Is phonetic grounding (Archangeli & Pulleyblank 1994) really specific to constraint-based frameworks, or is it more general? What are some of the similarities and differences that might arise in thinking about phonetic grounding in a rule-based vs. a constraint-based framework?

• Bonus question, if time permits: What is the problem with "standard" IDENT[ nasal] that Pater identifies in the discussion on pp 17–20? Why is Pater's solution dependent on [nasal] being a monovalent feature? Can you think of a different way of making IDENT[F] constraints "asymmetrical" that is not dependent on monovalent features?

Update on the analysis of Austronesian nasal substitution

Pater (2001) reanalyzes the Austronesian cases of nasal substitution, using constraints other than *NC. However, he argues that the other cases of *NC discussed here still hold, and the arguments in favor of *NC over a constraint calling for post-nasal voicing are still valid.