

## Reading guide: Hall (2007), "Segmental features"

There are two reasons for doing this reading. Try to keep both goals in mind as you work through the chapter.

- Specific goal: To become familiar with the use of phonological features to describe segments, characterize natural classes, and describe phonological phenomena
- General goal: To understand that when we make choices about how to set up our phonological model, we are making different predictions about what kinds of patterns we should see in language—so we can compare and evaluate different formal models on the basis of the predictions that they make

### Background and discussion questions

- The idea that phonological segments can be decomposed into a set of (binary) features was first explicitly developed by Jakobson, Fant, and Halle (1952) in *Preliminaries to Speech Analysis*, although this idea has origins in earlier work by European structuralists. Chomsky & Halle (1968), in *The Sound Pattern of English* (SPE), proposed a system of binary features that was widely used in generative phonology for many years and is the basis of many of the features included in Hall's discussion.
  - Post-SPE developments in feature theory include feature geometry and privative (unary, monovalent) features; Hall includes these in his discussion.
    - Note that the "feature matrix" in Hall's ex (1) is an older model, and the "feature geometry" approach exemplified in Hall's ex (2) is a newer model
- (1) Hall asserts (p 312), "Features are psychological entities defined in terms of acoustic and/or articulatory realization which provide the link between cognitive representation of speech and its physical manifestation." Hall then goes on to present "two arguments for features". What are these two arguments? If these arguments are taken to the extreme, do they pose any difficulties for Hall's initial definition of features?
- (2) p 313: "It is usually assumed that if a feature is distinctive in a language then only the sounds for which it is distinctive are marked underlyingly for that feature."
- I would strongly dispute that this is "usually assumed"
  - To consider: What are the implications of such an assumption?

### Hall's feature system

- For each distinctive feature proposed in the reading, make a note of:
  - how it is defined
  - its formal status: binary? privative?
  - what natural classes it distinguishes between
  - where Hall places the feature in a feature geometry
  - any controversies or typological inconsistencies concerning the feature

Use these notes as a handy reference for working with phonological features in this course.

## Major class features

consonantal

sonorant

approximant

## Laryngeal features

voice

spread glottis

constricted glottis

## Manner features

continuant

nasal

lateral

strident

## Place features

LABIAL

round

CORONAL

anterior

distributed

DORSAL

back

high

low

PHARYNGEAL

ATR

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## Some issues to consider

- (3) What questions or problems concerning liquids (laterals and rhotics) are raised in note 4?
- (4) How is the contrast between glides and high vowels represented in Hall's model?
- (5) What are the options for representing palatal place of articulation?
- (6) What are the options discussed for representing affricates?
- (7) What issues does Hall address for glottals?
  - Note: Some linguists propose that on a language-particular basis, glottals may be [-consonantal] or [+sonorant]