

Reading guide: Zec (2007), "The syllable"

- The author's name is Serbian/Croatian, and the (English-adapted) pronunciation is [zɛts].
- Note:* When this reading is first assigned, **do not worry about the details of the OT analyses**. Instead, focus on the parts of the reading that are related to the discussion questions presented here. (We will come back to the OT details later in the course.)

Day 1: Read through end of section 8.3
Sections 8.1–8.2

- (1) What *is* the syllable? Does it have a phonetic or a phonological definition?
 - What are the implications of this? How to assign syllable boundaries, given a data set?

Section 8.3.1: "Typology"

- (2) Terminology (note that (b)–(d) are addressed more formally later in §8.4)
 - (a) nucleus
 - Note: There is a problem with Zec's definition of *nucleus*
 - (b) onset
 - (c) coda
 - (d) margin
- (3) Setting aside complex onsets and complex codas for the moment:
 - (a) What are the four types of "simple" syllables?
 - (b) What are the implicational relationships among these syllable types?
 - (c) What part of syllable structure is universally required?
 - (d) For the parts of syllable structure that are potentially optional, what are the actual "options"? Are they the same for both of the optional syllable parts?
- (4) Are there any implicational relationships between complex onsets and complex codas?
- (5) When there is a single consonant between two vowels/nuclei (...VCV...), how is that consonant syllabified? Note that this is a *universally predictable* pattern.

Section 8.3.3: "Syllable-related phonological processes"

- (6) What two basic kinds of phenomena do we observe when a language is faced with segment strings that do not meet that language's requirements for syllable structure?
- (7) What sorts of featural asymmetries are observed between codas and onsets? What is the implication of such asymmetries for our theory of phonological representations (i.e., what must rules or constraints be able to refer to)?

Day 2: Section 8.4 to end

Section 8.4.1: "Representing the nucleus"

- (8) Conceptually, what is the nucleus of a syllable? Zec argues that it is necessary to encode the nucleus as part of the phonological representation; does she give any evidence for this assertion? Can we add additional evidence?

Section 8.4.2: "Representing weight"

- (9) Why do we need to distinguish between light and heavy syllables?
- (10) How are long vowels represented in Zec's approach?
- (11) Does a coda consonant have a mora?
- (12) If a syllable has two moras, are they represented identically?
- (13) According to Zec's formal model of syllable structure, how are the following formally defined?
- (a) onset
 - (b) nucleus
 - (c) coda
- (14) Near the bottom of p 176, Zec writes, "We will take the strong position that the nuclear node is a defining structural property of the syllable, and as such is not subject to the whims of constraint interactions." What does this mean?
- (15) What is the nature of the arguments that Zec uses against the representation of subsyllabic structure presented in (32)?

Section 8.5: "Sonority"

- (16) What is the sonority scale? How is it ordered — which segment types have high vs. low sonority?
- (17) What two formal representations of the sonority level of a segment does Zec consider? Which does she prefer, and why?
- (18) Near the middle of p 178, Zec writes, "...the arrangement of segments within the syllable follows a clear pattern: the most sonorous segment occupies the nucleus, while the less sonorous ones occur towards the margins." Can you find any counterexamples to this claim from English? Think about onset and coda clusters as well as the relationship between onsets and nuclei.

- (19) At the bottom of p 178, Zec writes, “The head of the syllable is the leftmost mora, which bears the *h* subscript...” She does not say explicitly whether she is merely describing the structure in (34) or is making a universal phonological claim, but consider the following facts from Spanish:
- The syllable [be] is light.
 - The syllable [bwe] is heavy.

How should we draw a structure for the syllable [bwe] in Spanish? Is this compatible with the diagram as shown in (34)?

Section 8.5.1: “Sonority thresholds”

- (20) What is a sonority threshold? How many different ones does Zec propose there to be? What is an example (cite data) of a sonority-threshold effect at work?

Section 8.5.2: “Sonority distance”

- (21) What is the Sonority Sequencing Generalization? What restrictions does it place on the structure of a syllable?
- (22) What is sonority distance? What is an example (cite data) of a sonority-distance effect at work *within* syllables? *Between* syllables?
- (23) Are the sonority distance scale in (59) and the “MSD” constraints in (60) compatible with what Zec has said above about whether or not to use a numerical-level sonority feature? Can we interpret (59) and (60) in a way that makes them more compatible? What kind of phenomena, if we observed them, might make this hard to do?
- (24) Consider the last paragraph before section 8.6. Zec writes, “Under this perspective [i.e., of the proposal by Gouskova (2004)] light closed syllables do not [i.e., are predicted not to] participate in syllable contact effects, and it remains to be seen whether this is empirically substantiated.” How does the model of syllable structure proposed by Zec lead to this prediction? If the prediction turns out to be empirically falsified, what changes could we make to the model, or to Gouskova’s proposal as described by Zec?

Section 8.6: “Closing remarks”

- (25) What alternative to syllable structure as an organizing principle does Zec raise here? What is her response to this challenge?