

Phonotactics and the sonority sequencing generalisation: an application to Cypriot Greek

Photini Coutsougera
University of Cyprus, Department of English Studies

Although the notion of sonority is rather broadly accepted in the literature it is at the same time surrounded by a great deal of controversy (see, among others, Ohala 1992; Carnie 1994; Ohala & Kawasaki-Fukumori 1997 etc).

The Cypriot Greek syllable does not conform to sonority requirements for the following reasons: 1. it features obstruent clusters of falling sonority (e.g. ft, xt, fk etc), which are by far the most frequently-attested clusters both word-initially and word-internally 2. it bans all Cj clusters of rising sonority (*Cj) 3. it features j on its own in an onset position and not as a member of a cluster, defying the cross-linguistic preference for low sonority onsets. 4. it allows word-initial geminates (debatable as to whether they are tautosyllabic or heterosyllabic).

As a result, it seems that, in Cypriot Greek, sonority principles such as the Sonority Sequencing Generalisation (SSG) or the Minimum Sonority Distance Principle (MSD) fail to handle cluster phonotactics successfully as they totally fail to predict them.

The present paper aims at seeking explanation for distribution and sequencing of segments of Cypriot Greek outside sonority, and within the context of Steriade's Licensing-by-Cue approach, i.e. a non syllable-based approach to phonotactics.

Selected references

- Carnie, A. (1994). Whence Sonority? Evidence from Epenthesis in Modern Irish. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 21, 81-108.
- Ohala, J. J. (1992). Alternatives to the sonority hierarchy for explaining the shape of morphemes. *Papers from the Parasession on the Syllable. Chicago Linguistic Society*. Chicago. 319-338.
- Ohala, J. J. & Kawasaki-Fukumori, H. (1997). Alternatives to the sonority hierarchy for explaining segmental sequential constraints. In Stig Eliasson & Ernst Håkon Jahr (eds.), *Language And Its Ecology: Essays In Memory Of Einar Haugen. Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs*, Vol. 100. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 343-365.
- Steriade, D. (1999). Alternatives to the syllabic interpretation of consonantal phonotactics. In O.Fujimura B.Joseph and B.Palek (eds.) *Proceedings of the 1998 Linguistics and Phonetics Conference*. The Karolinum Press, 205-242.