

Phonotactic complexity and morphology in interaction : a proposed typology

**Shelece Easterday (Laboratoire Dynamique du Langage,
CNRS & Université Lyon Lumière 2)**

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In this talk I present results from a project investigating the relationship between the phonotactic patterns of word-initial biconsonantal sequences and morphological complexity. I test the common claim that the phonotactic patterns of heteromorphemic (morphologically complex) and tautomorphemic (morpheme-internal) consonant clusters are structurally different from one another in a sample of 32 unrelated languages. Specifically, the manner of articulation patterns of heteromorphemic and tautomorphemic word-initial biconsonantal sequences are analyzed and compared.

Contrary to expectations, the results show that heteromorphemic patterns are in fact more restricted than tautomorphemic patterns in a number of ways. They are less numerous and diverse in type frequency, both within and across languages. Additionally, typologically rare and purportedly dispreferred word-initial consonant sequences are more likely to occur in solely tautomorphemic contexts in the data. I identify four general language types according to interactions between the patterns of word-initial CC inventories and morphological complexity and propose some diachronic sources for these types based on other phonetic/phonological patterns occurring in the languages.

Short bio :

Shelece earned her Ph.D. from University of New Mexico. Her dissertation on highly complex syllable structure and its correlates was supervised by Caroline Smith, and her committee included Ian Maddieson, Joan Bybee, Bill Croft, and Ioana Chitoran. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Laboratoire Dynamique du Langage in Lyon, working on a typological project exploring how morphology affects phonotactic complexity.