

Triggers and Targets in Voicing Assimilation: The Inevitability of Russian /v/

Russian /v/ patterns with obstruents in devoicing to [f] under Final Devoicing (FD) and Regressive Voicing Assimilation (RVA), but patterns with sonorants in not triggering RVA. Such asymmetric patterning of /v/ is not unique to Russian; it is attested in Czech (Hall, 2003a), Hebrew (Barkai and Horvath, 1978) and Hungarian (Kiss and Bárkányi, 2006). Phonetically-based accounts (e.g. Padgett (2002) for Russian) seek to explain the phonological intermediacy of /v/ by appealing to a language-particular phonetic intermediacy of [v] between obstruents and sonorants. We argue that neither the phonological nor phonetic intermediacy of /v/ is unique to these languages, but is an inherent property of all voiced spirants (/β, v, ð, ɣ/). We present a typology of voicing assimilation (VA) and show that there exists an asymmetry with respect to the kinds of segments that trigger VA and those targeted by it, challenging the standard assumption that obstruents pattern symmetrically with respect to the trigger and target positions of VA. Specifically, we show that voiced spirants do not trigger VA unless sonorants are also triggers, thereby distinguishing them from voiced sibilants (/z, ʒ/), which may trigger VA independently of sonorants. The peculiar patterning of /v/ in languages like Russian is therefore simply a manifestation of general trigger/target asymmetries. Finally, we argue that the typology presented calls for a representational analysis, in line with formal proposals advocated for in Rice (1993), Avery (1996) and Hall (2003a,b).

References

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