

Thesis of PhD dissertation

Orsolya Dóryné Zábrádi

The behaviour of nasals in different languages

Consultant: Dr. András Cser

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
PhD School for Linguistics
Workshop of Theoretical Linguistics

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1. Previous research, problems

This thesis investigates the behaviour of nasals (primarily consonants) in a variety of natural languages. Generalisations made earlier in the literature about nasals are abundant, and the goal of the present thesis is partly to verify these on the basis of available data, partly to relate these to phonological issues of representation. It is argued here that a phonological theory that does not have a dedicated representational primitive to express nasality has great difficulties accommodating important and fairly widespread phenomena such as the spread of nasality to neighbouring consonants and this is not counterbalanced by representational simplicity.

2. Methods

The thesis is structured as follows. After a brief introduction on the physiological and acoustic aspects of nasality, a survey of the phonotactics and the phonological behaviour of nasals in Hungarian follows. After this, the different categories of nasal segments and their incidence in various languages is presented. After this, the nasal consonants in the languages surveyed are presented in some detail. The particular languages are the Slavonic, the Romance and the Germanic languages, along with Basque, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Hungarian. This is followed by a survey of various phonological processes induced or undergone by nasals. In particular, these are co-

articulation and assimilation, palatalisation, depalatalisation, the nasalisation of vowels and the nasalisation of consonants. In the final chapter (before the conclusion) the representation of nasality in various theories throughout the history of phonology is briefly surveyed and the theories are critically assessed from this specific point of view.

3. Results

The main findings of the thesis are related to the central questions to which the answers are sought: (1) what are the phonological phenomena that impinge on nasality in the languages surveyed here and how do these relate to the generalisations made in the literature earlier? (2) how do theories of representation capture nasality and what are the advantages and disadvantages of these solutions?

The argument made here is that processes affecting nasality (assimilation in the first place) appear to be in harmony with the implicational relations adduced earlier in the literature, and that theories of representation that do not have a dedicated feature or element of nasality have problems capturing certain phenomena that should be accounted for because of their wide-spread incidence in human languages.

4. Relevant publications

- The Cambridge handbook of phonology. In: *Magyar Nyelv* (106. évfolyam). Bp. 2010. 96–100. p.
- Különböző nyelvek nazális mássalhangzóinak összehasonlítása. (= The comparison of nasals in different languages.) In: *A kommunikáció nyelvészeti aspektusai* (Segédkönyvek a nyelvészet tanulmányozásához 99.). Bp. 2009. 85–89. p.
- Különböző nyelvek nazális mássalhangzóinak vizsgálata. (= The investigation of nasals in different languages.) In: *Értékkörzés és értékteremtés* (Apáczai-napok 2007, konferenciakiadvány). Győr. 2008. 192–198. p.
- A nazális mássalhangzók viselkedése a különböző nyelvekben. (= The behaviour of nasals in different languages.) In: *Kommunikáció az információs technológia korszakában* (XVII. Magyar Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Konferencia, konferenciakiadvány) Siófok. 2007.