GRADIENT WELLFORMEDNESS IN GERMAN I-TRUNCATIONS

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This study provides evidence for gradient wellformedness of phonotactic phenomena (cf. Coetzee (2004, 2006, 2008), Berent et al. (2007), Berent & Lennertz (2008)). We investigated syllable contact restrictions in German i-truncation nickname formations. In German, i-truncation nicknames are formed by shortening a name and adding the suffix [-i], as in the nickname *Kathi* for the name *Katharina*. These i-truncation nicknames do not allow syllable contact sequences of rising sonority although German phonology does not usually restrict the type of syllable contact sequences allowed. The i-truncation for a name like *Gabriele*, for example, cannot retain the word-medial [br] sequence: *Gabriele* can only be shortened to *Gabi*, but not to **Gabri* (Itô & Mester 1997). **Gabri* is argued to be ungrammatical because it contains a consonant sequence with rising sonority in syllable contact position, [b.r]/[p.r]. An alternative syllabification of this impossible form, *[ga.bri], is shown to be ruled out by an emergent constraint against complex syllable margins in word-medial position (preliminary $\text{NoComplMargins}_{(\text{i-Trunc})}$, Schuhmann 2007). These syllable contact restrictions are accounted for by the emergence of a universal markedness scale that ranks all potential syllable contact cases in a hierarchy of strata from least marked to most marked with language-specific cut-off points (Gouskova 2004).

A grammaticality judgment task with nonce i-truncations was conducted to test the hypothesis that syllable contact markedness leads to different degrees of acceptability. It was predicted that the relative position on the syllable contact scale, i.e. the relative degree of markedness, of one ungrammatical syllable contact sequence (e.g., *[s.n]) with respect to another ungrammatical, but less marked syllable contact sequence (e.g., *[n.l]) would be reflected in acceptability judgments of nonce i-truncations. It was further predicted that the relative markedness of one grammatical syllable contact sequence (e.g., [n.s]) with respect to another grammatical, but more marked syllable contact sequence (e.g., [l.n]) would be reflected in acceptability judgments of nonce i-truncations. Overall, relatively more marked cases of syllable contact were predicted to be relatively less acceptable, everything else being equal.

36 native speakers of German participated in a web-based study. The participants rated the acceptability of 56 i-truncations on a scale from 1 to 10, "1" being "very good" and "10" being "very bad". The i-truncation stimuli (e.g., *Valni* and **Vanli*) as well as their corresponding full names (e.g., *Valnenke* and *Vanlenke*) were nonce words.

The results of this study support the hypothesis that underlying markedness levels of consonant sequences in syllable contact position are reflected in different degrees of acceptability judgments. The results for the five ungrammatical strata show a steady five-step trend of increasing rejection that epitomizes the five levels of increasing syllable contact markedness in the stimuli. The grammaticality judgments for stimuli in the four grammatical strata show a three-step trend of decreasing acceptance that epitomizes three of the four levels of increasing syllable contact markedness in the stimuli. A Spearman rank-order coefficient (r_s = 0.87) confirms that the trend throughout these ten strata of testable syllable contact sequences is significant at the <.01 level.

In addition to the predicted gradient wellformedness judgments about the emergent syllable contact restrictions in i-truncation, the results of this study also suggest other cases of the

emergence of unmarkedness (TETU, McCarthy & Prince 1994). These additional TETU effects include OCP and L-C (lateral-consonant) similarity and dissimilarity requirements, and the emergence of two syllabification strategies for word-medial consonant sequences (syllabification as either heterosyllabic or tautosyllabic consonant sequences).

To conclude, this study provides empirical evidence for different degrees of acceptability with regard to syllable contact consonant sequences in German i-truncation nicknames: speakers do not rate all grammatical forms to be equally good or all ungrammatical forms to be equally bad. Further, these gradient wellformedness judgments reveal subtle markedness effects that the speakers could not have inferred from their German grammar or lexicon. This suggests that speakers have inherent knowledge about the degree of markedness of consonant sequences in syllable contact position.

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