Vowel Unpacking of French Loanwords in German and Norwegian: Evidence for dorsal unmarkedness
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Oral Presentation Preferred

This paper focuses on the process of vowel unpacking (Paradis and Prunet 2000), where a nasal vowel in a loanword is realized as two segments (an oral vowel and nasal consonant) in a borrowing language which disallows nasalized vowels. This can be seen in the French word [kopɔ̃], which is realized as [kopan] (‘coupon’) in English. The present analysis focuses on French loans in German and Norwegian. In these languages, French vowels are realized as a corresponding oral vowel and velar nasal before a fricative or word-finally. For example, the French word for ‘chance’, [ʃɑ̃s], is produced as [jaŋsa] in Norwegian, where the nasal vowel is realized as [aŋ] before the fricative [s], and the word-final nasal vowel in the French word ‘restaurant’, [resturɑ̃], is also realized as [aŋ] in German. These two contexts (before a fricative and word-finally) are non-assimilatory contexts (as opposed to assimilatory contexts, such as the French word for ‘pomp’, [pɔ̃p], which is realized as [pɔmp] in German when the nasal consonant assimilates the place of the following stop). I will give a large set of vowel unpacking data for German and Norwegian and reject previous analyses of this process for German, such as (Wiese 1996), where he argues that the features [+nas] and [DORS] spread from the nasalized vowel to a new segment; Wiese argues that these data require an assimilation, where the spreading of [+nas] and [DORS] somehow create a new segment. In Wiese’s view, all vowels, both front and back, are dorsal; thus, when a nasalized vowel spreads [+nas] and [DORS] (and all dependent features), the result is a dorsal nasal. This analysis appears to work, until one looks more closely at Wiese’s account of German phonology, where both palatals (e.g. [ç]) and velars are dorsal. Thus, under Wiese’s analysis, one would expect a palatal nasal after a front vowel, since both would share the features [DORS] and [-back], but [ɲ] does not occur in German. Another previous account of this process, Laeufer (2010), simply describes these nativized loans, but does not explain why they surface as they do. The goal of the current analysis is to use an Optimality Theory (OT) framework to account for the nativization of French nasal vowels in German and Norwegian and explain why they are realized with the velar nasal. It will be argued that the realization of the velar nasal is not the output of an assimilation (c.f. Wiese 1996); rather, it is a process involving both neutralization and epenthesis. Thus, it is asserted here that the output of unpacking will be less marked than the input nasal vowel. I will present an OT analysis where the constraints *V (‘no nasalized vowel’) and MAXNAS (‘don’t delete the feature [+nasal]’) are undominated and motivate the process of unpacking. This analysis features a freely rankable place hierarchy (Hume and Tserdanelis 2002, Hall 2010), where *DORS is ranked above *COR and *LAB in German and Norwegian. This ranking accounts for the unmarked oral vowel plus dorsal nasal output of unpacking. I argue against a universal place hierarchy in which coronals are unmarked (Prince and Smolensky 1993), such as *DORS, *LAB >> *COR, and against a stringent hierarchy (de Lacy 2002, 2006): *{dors}, *{dors,lab}, *{dors,lab,cor}, *{dors,lab,cor,gl}, because these hierarchies do not allow dorsal to be analyzed as the unmarked place. With these Norwegian and German data, the markedness hierarchy must determine place. Only a place markedness hierarchy which is non-stringent and freely-rankable can account for dorsal being the output of unpacking in German and Norwegian.
References: