

Schwartz – Phonetic arguments for phonological abstraction

In the seemingly endless debate on the role of phonetics in phonological theory, failure to communicate has been rife among scholars from different theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, one camp has talked about “substance abuse” (Hale & Reiss 2000), as if phonetic investigations are unnecessary undertakings for phonologists. On the other hand, phoneticians have sometimes presented their results as if undermining established tenets of phonological theory was their primary motivation (see e.g. Port 1996). Meanwhile, scholars attempting to describe the phonetics-phonology relationship often focus solely on the question of gradience vs. categoricity (e.g. Flemming 2001), while taking established phonological categories for granted. That is, in this research there is a primary focus on HOW, rather than WHICH, phonological categories may be extracted from speech. In this course we will take a fresh look at the phonetics-phonology relationship, focusing on the question of WHICH phonological categories may be derived from speech. In doing so, we will adopt the perspective of the Onset Prominence representational framework (OP; Schwartz, many references). OP is an essentially substance-free phonological model, but one which incorporates many perceptual ambiguities inherent in the acoustic signal. From the perspective of OP, we will see that phonological abstraction is, in fact, frequently derivable from phonetic considerations.