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Variation and opacity in morpho-phonology

The course focuses on the consonantal alternations found in Polish and referred to in the literature as palatalizations (Gussmann 1978, 1980, 2007; Rubach 1984; 2003; Dressler 1985, Szpyra 1995 among many others). The palatalization rules in Polish are examples of opacity in phonology: they cannot be accounted for if one takes into consideration the surface phonological properties of participating segments. Palatalizations have been given two kinds of analyses: they were analysed either as involving abstract triggers and intermediate stages of derivation, or they were assumed to be triggered by special diacritics marked on exponents of different morphemes.

In this class we are going to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both those approaches. I am also going to present the details of a third possible approach: palatalizations may be triggered by morpho-syntactic features.

This kind of approach requires a principled theory to morpho-syntactic features and a principled theory of the interaction between morpho-syntactic and phonological features.

Provided that it is possible to construct a coherent theory which treats palatalizations as triggered by morpho-syntactic features, the next question is how this theory deals with the typical problems that other approaches to palatalizations faced. In particular, how it approaches the issue of opacity inextricably linked with palatalizations in Polish.

Yet another, no less nagging issue, is how such an approach deals with the variability observed with respect to some consonantal changes in Polish.

References:

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