The Syllable in Optimality Theory

The syllable has always been a key concept in generative linguistics: the rules, representations, parameters, or constraints posited in diverse frameworks of theoretical phonology and morphology all make reference to this fundamental unit of prosodic structure. No less central to the field is Optimality Theory (OT), an approach developed within (morpho)phonology in the early 1990s, which at this point is the dominant paradigm in the field and recently has made significant inroads in syntax and even semantics. This book thus combines two themes of central importance to linguists and their mutual relevance in recent research. It provides an overview of the role of the syllable in OT and ways in which problems that relate to the analysis of syllable structure can be solved in OT. Not only do the contributors to the book show that the syllable sheds light on certain properties of OT itself, they also demonstrate that OT is capable of describing and adequately analyzing many issues that are problematic in other theories. The analyses are based on a wealth of languages.

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Preface

This book presents 15 chapters that are all concerned with the role of the syllable in Optimality Theory. The idea for this book arose during a conference with the same theme held from June 30 to July 2, 1998 in Tübingen, Germany. During this conference it was felt that a book about the role of the syllable in a relatively new theory of grammar was necessary. Apart from the participants of the conference a number of phonologists were invited to contribute to the book to do justice to the many different aspects of the syllable.

The financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Seminar für Sprachwissenschaft at the University of Tübingen, which made the conference possible, is gratefully acknowledged.

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Regine Eckardt made the illustrations, sacrificing much of her free time. Her efforts are greatly appreciated by the editors.

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