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THE CONTRASTIVE HIERARCHY IN PHONOLOGY

'Contrast' – the opposition between distinctive sounds in a language – is one of the most central concepts in linguistics. This book presents an original account of the logic and history of contrast in phonology. It provides empirical evidence from diverse phonological domains that only contrastive features are computed by the phonological component of grammar. It argues that the contrastive specifications of phonemes are governed by language-particular feature hierarchies. This approach assigns a key role to abstract cognitive structures, challenging contemporary approaches that favour phonetic explanations of phonological phenomena. Tracing the evolution of the hypothesis that contrastive features play a special role in phonology, it shows how this insight has been obscured by misunderstandings of the role of the contrastive feature hierarchy. Questioning the widely held notion that contrast should be based on minimal pairs, Elan Dresher argues that the contrastive hierarchy is indispensable to illuminating accounts of phonological patterning.

B. ELAN DRESHER is Professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Toronto. His recent publications include *Formal Approaches to Poetry: Recent Developments in Generative Metrics* (ed., with Nila Friedberg, 2006) and *Contrast in Phonology: Theory, Perception, Acquisition* (ed., with Peter Avery and Keren Rice, 2008).

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B. Elan Dresher
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

Acknowledgements *page* xi

1 Introduction 1
1.1 Approaches to contrast 1
1.2 Two poles: contrast (negative) versus substance (positive) 5
1.3 Plan of the book 8

2 The logic of contrast 11
2.1 Contrastive specification: an elusive problem 11
2.2 Contrastive specification by pairwise comparisons 13
2.3 Contrastive specification by feature ordering 14
2.4 Contrastive specification as a logical problem 17
2.5 Arguments against the pairwise approach to contrastive specification 19
2.6 Feature ordering 29
2.7 Other issues in a theory of contrastive features 31
2.8 Conclusions: one approach to contrast left standing 35

3 Contrast in structuralist phonology 37
3.1 Introduction 37
3.2 Sapir: phonetics versus phonological patterning 38
3.3 Trubetzkoy: a theory of oppositions 42
3.4 Martinet: French contrasts based on place 59
3.5 Jakobson and Lotz (1949): French contrasts based on continuousness 61
3.6 Hockett: French contrasts and the 'odor of pure game-playing' 65
3.7 Prolegomenon to a theory of contrastive specification 71

4 The rise and fall of the contrastive hierarchy 76
4.1 Introduction: Jakobson and his collaborators 76
4.2 The dichotomous scale 77

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-88973-5 - The Contrastive Hierarchy in Phonology
B. Elan Dresher
Frontmatter
More information

4.3	The dichotomous scale as an acquisition sequence	78
4.4	Feature ordering and efficient coding	81
4.5	Inconsistent approaches to contrastive specification	82
4.6	Ordered rules and the contrastive hierarchy	89
4.7	Summary: the contrastive hierarchy on the edge	95
4.8	Stanley (1967) and the end of zeros in generative phonology	96
5	**Generative phonology: contrast goes underground**	103
5.1	Chomsky and Halle's revolution in phonology	103
5.2	Markedness	104
5.3	Contrast and underspecification	117
5.4	Theories of feature organization	130
5.5	Conclusions	136
6	**Contrast in Optimality Theory**	138
6.1	Introduction	138
6.2	Optimality Theory	138
6.3	Early treatment of contrast in OT	140
6.4	The contrastive hierarchy in OT	144
6.5	Constraint hierarchies not corresponding to a contrastive hierarchy	149
6.6	Inputs containing illicit feature combinations	153
6.7	Underspecified inputs	157
6.8	Summary	161
7	**Evidence for the contrastive hierarchy in phonology**	162
7.1	Introduction	162
7.2	Modified Contrastive Specification	163
7.3	Ubiquitous feature hierarchies	169
7.4	Vowel harmony	175
7.5	Metaphony and contrast limited by domain	190
7.6	Consonant co-occurrence restrictions	196
7.7	Loanword adaptation as evidence of phonological organization	198
7.8	The acquisition of distinctive features and contrasts	202
7.9	Refining the Contrastivist Hypothesis	206
7.10	Summary	210
8	**Other approaches to contrast in phonology**	211
8.1	Introduction	211
8.2	A perceptual-functional account of labial harmony triggers?	212
8.3	Dispersion-theoretic approaches to contrast	214

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978-0-521-88973-5 - The Contrastive Hierarchy in Phonology
B. Elan Dresher
Frontmatter
More information

8.4 Structured Specification theory and contrast via natural classes 228
8.5 Clements's approach to contrastive specification 235
8.6 Calabrese (2005): Visibility Theory 237
8.7 'Minimal contrast' 245

9 Conclusion 250

References 252
Index of names 268
Subject index 272

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978-0-521-88973-5 - The Contrastive Hierarchy in Phonology
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