

A typology of suprasegmental structure

One of the major properties (and advantages) of speech errors is their sensitivity to structural constraints. This sensitivity allows us to determine what structural representations are built up in the language production process and how these are built up. The linguistic analysis of phonological slips of the tongue reveals that different languages build up different suprasegmental structures. Three distinct types have been uncovered so far. Languages may divide words into onset and (super)rimes or into syllables or have hardly any suprasegmental structure. The first type may be associated with the Germanic languages, the second with the Romance languages and the third with the Semitic languages. Whether a fourth type is required to deal with error data from Finnish remains to be seen. The reasons for the different strategies adopted presumably lies in the structural complexity of syllables and words as well as in the morphological structure of the languages under consideration.