

Licensing in Multiple Contexts: An Argument for Harmonic Grammar

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Positional licensing constraints in Optimality Theory predict that there should be only a single privileged context per feature – e.g., onset or initial syllables licensing independent place, not both. Evidence from various languages shows this to be an empirically- problematic fact, however. Weighted-constraint models such as Harmonic Grammar (HG; Smolensky & Legendre 2006) avoid these undesirable predictions. Positional licensing constraints can license features in multiple contexts in HG, with the result that positional faithfulness constraints are not needed to model the attested asymmetries. A more limited constraint set may thus be possible if constraints are weighted rather than ranked.