

Lexical Reflexes of the Syllable Contact Law

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The Syllable Contact Law (Vennemann, 1988) predicts that, diachronically, sound change will tend to enhance a drop in sonority across syllable boundaries. Synchronically, the SCL predicts only a categorical preference, but I hypothesize that the gradience underlying the diachronic preference must also operate synchronically in the grammar of a language. In this talk I examine CELEX corpus data for evidence of gradient lexical reflexes of the SCL in British English using pointwise mutual information (PMI), a metric familiar to computational linguists. In general, the evidence appears to support a gradient hypothesis and to be inconsistent with a strictly categorical model.