

Building bridges: Labial harmony in Altaic languages

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Since Steriade (1981), it has been recognized that labial harmony sometimes requires trigger and target to share a particular feature F. In this talk, I argue that labial harmony is always subject to further requirements, which can be stated in terms of additional licensing relations. Working within Radical cv Phonology (van der Hulst 2005, 2012), which employs a limited set of elements that can be involved in such licensing, this leads to a restricted typology of labial harmony.

Furthermore, I propose a difference between lexical elements, which are always visible, and elements derived by harmony, which become visible in cycles. Crucially, elements derived by labial harmony do not have access to elements derived by tongue root harmony, thus accounting for the lack of labial harmony in high vowels in tongue root harmony systems. This architecture also accounts naturally for the discrepant behaviour of /i/ which is opaque to labial harmony in Tungusic languages but transparent to labial harmony in Mongolian languages.