

Some reasons why ambisyllabicity is a crucial tool in the phonology of English

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The aim of this paper is to prove that ambisyllabicity is a crucial tool in the phonology of English. Ambisyllabicity refers to the syllabification of a consonant as both the coda of a syllable and the onset of the next. Though a rather controversial notion, both in terms of where it occurs and what it can explain, I argue that a certain number of phenomena, forming inconsistencies with the phonology of English, can be accounted for using ambisyllabicity and cannot without it. I also argue that the notion of ambisyllabicity is superior to that of resyllabification in many respects. This paper confirms some of the assumptions that can be found in the literature, while it clearly invalidates others.

I firstly provide evidence for the existence of ambisyllabicity through a description of two psycholinguistic experiments (i.e. Fallows (1981) and Treiman & Danis (1988)) both showing the speakers' attitude towards ambisyllabicity, and of phenomena such as *stress assignment*, *vowel shortening*, cases of *allophony* and cases of *assimilation* which occur even in environments in which they should not. I argue that these provide evidence for the notion of ambisyllabicity. This section also serves to clarify the environment in which ambisyllabicity may or may not occur.

Secondly, I analyse phenomena that can only be explained with ambisyllabicity. Given a clear description of the environment for ambisyllabicity (provided by the material discussed above), we can link it to phenomena that occur only in this particular environment. These phenomena include *liaison* which essentially entails the same syllabification as ambisyllabicity, some cases of *weakening* such as /t/ and /d/ *affrication*, /t/, /k/ and /d/ *spirantisation* and /h/ *deletion*, two /r/-related phenomena (i.e. /r/-flapping and *schwa epenthesis* in RP English) and finally *some exceptions to the blocking of the Canadian Raising*. This part also serves to clarify the environment in which ambisyllabicity may or may not occur, especially the section on *liaison*.

References:

- Fallows, Deborah (1981) 'Experimental evidence of English syllabification and syllable structure'. *Journal of Linguistics* 17, 309-317
- Treiman, Rebecca & Danis, Catalina (1988) 'Syllabification of intervocalic consonants'. *Journal of Memory and Language* 27, 87-104