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The emergence of the unmarked: Optimality in prosodic morphology

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Abstract

This paper identifies and illustrates a key consequence of Optimality Theory called 'emergence of the unmarked'. In OT, a constraint can be active even if it is crucially dominated. A low-ranking markedness constraint, then, can decide between candidates, as long as they tie on all higher-ranking constraints. The linguistic structure that is unmarked with respect to this constraint can emerge in such circumstances.

This notion is applied to a core problem in the theory of Prosodic Morphology, that of defining templates. The frequently encountered minimal-word template is shown to emerge from markedness constraints on prosodic structure.

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