

## Monopositional syllabic consonants: Evidence from Slovene and English

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In various versions of (standard) Government Phonology and Strict CV (or CVCV) Phonology, a number of proposals have been made for the representation of syllabic consonants, with two major solutions. Certain authors, e.g., Szigetvári 1999, Scheer 2004, Garami 2019, argue for a left-branching structure, in which a consonantal head spreads onto a vocalic position on its left, eventually occupying a VC sequence. In contrast, Rowicka 1999 and Blaho 2004 (among others) assume the mirror image of that situation, i.e., a right-branching structure composed of a consonantal head and a vocalic target in a CV string. Moreover, independently of each other, Caratini et al. 2011 and Polgárdi 2015 suggest that the choice between VC and CV is subject to parameter setting: syllabic consonants in Germanic languages (specifically, English and German) behave as left-branchers, while there is evidence to analyse them in Slavic languages (Czech, Slovak, Serbian) as right-branchers. At the same time, both studies explicitly argue against the monopositional representation, when the syllabic consonant solely occupies a V position.

In the present paper we aim to pursue the idea appearing in Toft 2002 (and subsequently adopted in Balogné Bérces 2005), that syllabic consonants may not have a uniform structure within a phonological system: data from Southern British English (Toft 2002) and tapping accents of English (mentioned in Toft 2002 and analysed in detail in Balogné Bérces 2005) lead to the conclusion that syllabic /n/ is indeed a left-branching structure including the historical consonantal position, but syllabic /l/ is a monopositional nuclear element in synchrony. The primary argument we use here is that while syllabic /n/ produces a consonantal environment for a preceding /t/, which may undergo glottalling as a result even in a tapping accent (cf., e.g., General American *button* [ʔ]), syllabic /l/ will trigger tapping (e.g. *bottle* [r], cf. *Betty* [r]). We propose to extend the monopositional analysis to syllabic /r/ in rhotic accents of English, and show that it behaves as a short, zero-stressed vowel (schwa) when unstressed (cf. *better* [r]).<sup>1</sup> When stressed, however, syllabic /r/ patterns with long/’tense’/’bimoraic’ vowels: not only does it trigger no tapping (cf. words like *taciturn*), but distributional evidence (Hammond 1999: 143–147) also indicates that stressed syllabic /r/ behaves as a complex “bimoraic” sequence. In CVCV phonological terms, this leads us to assume that it occupies a VCV sequence.

To supplement the English (Germanic) example with illustration from a Slavic language, we also discuss Slovene. In contrast to other Slavic languages (we have Polish, Czech and Slovak within the scope of our investigations), the syllabic consonant of Slovene, /r/, enjoys surprising freedom in its distribution: not only does it appear word-finally and preconsonantly (e.g., *vrh* ‘top’), but it is also possible at the beginning of the word (e.g., *rdec* ‘red’), where other Slavic languages typically treat historically yer-related sonorants as “trapped” rather than syllabic, i.e., as non-nuclear.<sup>2</sup> We attribute this to its monopositional structure: it behaves as a vowel (hence the distributional freedom); it may even receive stress, in which case it behaves as a long vowel similarly to the “plain” vowels of Slovene.

Throughout the discussion, CVCV phonological representations are assumed.

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<sup>1</sup> As a reviewer points out, a related proposal is made in Szigetvári (2011: 72f), claiming that English syllabic /r/ (or an r-coloured schwa) is singly linked to a V position, while other syllabic consonants occupy VC sequences.

<sup>2</sup> Liquids in word-initial position in examples like Czech *lhát* (‘to die’), Russian *rta* (‘mouth GenSg’), Slovak *rmut* (‘haze NomSg’) are ‘trapped’, which means that they do not form syllables. These examples are not discussed in the current paper.

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