

The stuff of features

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In this paper it is argued that phonological segments are events. Phonological features indicate event types and spatial relations between the participants of these events, i.e., the articulators, in a predefined area. Event types are the same as those used cross-linguistically in the classification of verbs and the spatial relations are the same as those expressed in adpositions and in deictic particles. This conception of features differs substantially from previous and current theories of phonological representation, which employ signal- or channel-dependent features, that directly refer to the articulatory and/or acoustic properties of segments. The proposal made here has the following advantages. The use of features that are also linguistically relevant concepts in syntax and semantics is more parsimonious than in theories that use completely different concepts in the different linguistic modules. Encoding of segments as events renders representations modality-independent, that is, the same features are used in spoken and signed language. Regularly observed correlations between phonological structure and meaning, as in onomatopoeia, phonaesthemes or mimetics can be explained via the parallel between phonological properties of segments and semantic properties of events and entities.