

ABSTRACT

The study examines siSwati segmental phonology. It highlights how various phonological processes eliminate dispreferred phonological structures, as conditioned by the morphological domains in which they occur. I use hiatus resolution patterns, loanword adaptation, /mu/ reduction, and word minimality to present evidence for the siSwati syllable structure and permissible minimal word size.

Firstly, the study demonstrates how the selection of hiatus resolution patterns is contingent upon the morphological context in which they occur, displaying the intricate relationship in the phonology-morphology interface. The study also presents an analysis of loanword nativisation in siSwati to further account for how the siSwati grammar eliminates mismatched output forms. The analysis of /mu/ reduction provides evidence for single C-Slot and V-Slot specification in the siSwati grammar. Lastly, word minimality effects demonstrate the strategies that siSwati uses to maintain its preferred minimal word size.

Leaning on native speaker intuition, the analysis employs Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky, 1993/2004) to present a unified account of markedness and faithfulness constraint interaction in parsing CV syllables and minimally well-formed Prosodic Words. Analytical insights from Feature Geometry (Clements & Hume, 1995) are used to explain feature spreading in the epenthesis patterns attested in the language. The model is deployed to account for the representation of complex segments such as NCs and CGs in the grammar, displaying how they optimally fit into the preferred CV syllable structure.

The goal in each of the phonological processes under investigation is to ensure that all output forms are harmonious with the siSwati CV syllable template and word minimality restrictions in the grammar. The study places the syllable at the centre of phonological analysis, highlighting how markedness and faithfulness constraints in the various phonological processes under investigation conspire to eliminate ill-formed phonological structures in all surface forms. This thesis is motivated by the desire to ensure that siSwati grammar parses onsetful syllables and minimally well-formed Prosodic Words in all surface representations.