15
Harmony

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15.1 Introduction

Broadly speaking, a harmony system requires that two or more not-necessarily-adjacent segments must be similar in some way. Here, we address a range of phenomena fitting this description, considering which features tend to harmonise and in what ways. Our focus is to explore the various parameters along which harmonic patterns vary (such as direction, iteration, morphological requirements, etc.).

Two central points become apparent while reviewing harmonic properties. First, the term ‘harmony’ is a descriptor of a class of similar phenomena, rather than a technical term referring to phenomena with a clearly defined set of properties. We may not expect any single formal operation common to all harmony systems. We may not expect any pre-theoretical way of distinguishing between an ‘assimilatory’ pattern (see Baković Ch.14) and a ‘harmonic’ one. Second, the necessary formal capabilities are not specific to harmony, but rather are necessary independently of harmonic patterns, to account for other types of phenomena as well. It may be, for example, that both local assimilation and non-local harmony are derived by a single set of constraints or it may be that distinct formal devices are responsible for the two classes of patterns. From these two points, we draw the obvious conclusion: harmony is an effect or epiphenomenon, not a phenomenon with a single unified formal explanation. While this means that non-harmonic phenomena must be understood to gather a full understanding of harmony, it also means that harmony provides a lens for the examination of phonological patterns in general.

This chapter is organised as follows. We begin with a sketch of the prototypical harmony pattern, used throughout the chapter as a point of departure for discussion. We then explore variations on that canonical theme, considering conditions on harmonic triggers, targets, and both; the various domains of harmonic patterns; and consideration of direction,