Lexical Classes in Phonology

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August 2006

Lexical class distinctions, such as Germanic vs. Latinate in English, occur in virtually all languages. The synchronic status of such lexical strata is controversial in linguistics, and Japanese plays a prominent role in the discussion, partially because lexical class distinctions are so clearly visible, even in the writing system. With the shift in phonology from a rule-based derivational framework to a system of ranked and violable constraints that came with Optimality Theory, a new perspective on this topic has developed. This paper takes up some of the conceptual issues connected with the theoretical shift, and its empirical predictions and problems.