

# Phonotactic theory

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## Synopsis

English speakers, it is said (Halle 1978), know that [blɪk] is a “possible” word in their language (though *Blick* means ‘glance’ in German), but [bni:n] and [mɣla] are not (even though the former means ‘delicious’ in Maltese and the latter means ‘darkness’ in Russian). The theory of **phonotactics** is concerned with the origin and nature of these language-specific intuitions.

In this class, we will review and critique theories of phonotactic knowledge and the experimental methods used to study it. According to one tradition, phonotactic knowledge reflects speakers’ knowledge of **morpheme structure constraints** (MSCs), redundancy rules over underlying representations; according to another—strongly associated with Optimality Theory and its forebears—it reflects **surface structure constraints**. Is one account preferable, or are both needed? Does phonotactic knowledge reflect prosodic structures like the syllable (cf. Pierrehumbert 1994, Blevins 2003) or putative universals like sonority sequencing (Daland et al. 2011)? What role do phonological processes play (e.g., Kisseberth 2011, Paster 2013, Durvasula and Kahng 2015)? Are wordlikeness intuitions influenced by similarity to existing words (e.g., Bailey and Hahn 2001, Hayes and Wilson 2008, Albright 2009)? What evidence can be gleaned from loanword adaptation (e.g., Peperkamp 2005, Daland et al. 2019) or sound change (e.g., Iverson and Salmons 2005)?

## Schedule (always subject to change)

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Monday:	<b>Background; morpheme structure constraints</b> Halle 1978, Stanley 1967:§1–2
Tuesday:	<b>Surface structure constraints</b> Kager 1999:§1.5–7, Paster 2013 (Kisseberth 2011, Durvasula and Kahng 2015)
Wednesday:	<b>The syllable and sonority</b> Pierrehumbert 1994, Blevins 2003, Daland et al. 2011
Thursday:	<b>Wordlikeness</b> Bailey and Hahn 2001, Hayes and Wilson 2008, Gorman 2013: ch. 2 (Zimmer 1969, Albright 2009, Kostyszyn and Heinz 2022)
Friday:	<b>Further evidence</b> Iverson and Salmons 2005, Peperkamp 2005, Daland et al. 2019

## Select references

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