Word accent: Primary Accent First Theory (A synopsis)

Harry van der Hulst

[All references to my own work can be going to the #number next to the references which refer to items under 'Publications: https://harry-van-der-hulst.uconn.edu/'. Other references cited here are provided in the text below. Many other relevant references, among others to related work by others, can be found in my publications.]

In van der Hulst (1984) I observed that in standard metrical theory at that time, there is a recurrent correlation between direction of footing and the edge at which the head foot (and thus primary 'stress') is located. In a great majority of cases, the head foot lies at the edge where iterative footing starts. In standard metrical theory this correlation is an 'accident', so I proposed that the correlation can be explained if we adopt a theory in which primary stress is assigned first and the footing that accounts for secondary stresses is literally secondary, with feet that account for rhythmic stresses being typically applied from right to left, if primary stress is on the left edge, and vice versa. This ordering of the assignment of primary stress and rhythmic stress allows for so-called bidirectional systems and systems that have a single 'polar' secondary stress.

The idea to separate primary and non-primary stress was developed in subsequent work; van der Hulst (1997 [#82], 1999 [#87], 2010 [#135], 2012 [#145]). In these articles I refer to others (within metrical or other frameworks) who have made similar suggestions. A further development of this primary stress first approach was that primary stress assignment would typically apply lexically (which allows for lexical exceptions), while secondary stress is assigned post-lexically (which then makes it more of an automatic process and impossible for secondary stress to be sensitive to lexical exceptionality). A further change was that rather than focusing on stress systems, I broadened the approach to all *accentual systems* (thus including stress-accent, pitch-accent and tonal accent systems). For all such systems, the idea was that the privileged syllable is accented, with accent being devoid of intrinsic phonetic content; see van der Hulst (2011 [#139], to appear [#180], 2025 [#181]).

Within the Primary Accent First model, we arrive at the same, formal analysis for both unbounded and bounded systems, the difference being that the size of the *accentual window* comprises the whole word in unbounded systems and a smaller *foot-like* window in bounded systems, both subject to the option of an extra syllable *on either side* of the accentual domain, which are called *satellites*. Within the accentual window the accent location can be dependent on syllable weight. In addition, two parameters are needed, one for designating a 'winner' (*resolution*) when there is more than one accent in the window and one for the default location of the accent. In van der Hulst (2022 [#173]) it is shown that resolution can be linear or hierarchical.

It is shown that, for bounded systems, no variant of metrical foot inventories is sufficient to account for the attested variety, which is why the bounded window is not a foot, but simply a domain within which the accent is located. Systems in which the location of primary accent appears to be dependent on prior exhaustive footing (so-called *count systems*) present a problem for the primary accent first approach and various analyses of such systems have been entertained, the most promising of which attribute the primary 'stress' in such a system to intonational tones (see van der Hulst 1997 [#82]).

In Optimality Theory, my proposal that primary accent comes first has in fact been taken as an argument to adopt a non-procedural constraint-based approach which allows constraints

bearing on head feet (primary ‘stress’) to outrank constraints bearing on dependent feet (non-primary ‘stresses’) or vice versa to deal with count systems.

Van der Hulst (2014 [#150]) provides a theory of word rhythm which does not appeal to feet either but adopts a grid-only approach, using simple rules that assign rhythmic beats.