

Title: **The typology of syllable structure**
Category: Oral presentation
Theme session: not applicable

Phonotactic complexity has been claimed to correlate with geography (Maddieson 2011). This talk examines geographic and phonological correlates of phonotactic structure, based on a large and detailed database of phonological variables.

Currently the major large sample of cross-linguistic information on syllable types is WALSL (Dryer & Haspelmath 2011). Only two maps, however, are dedicated to phonotactic questions, one representing 469 languages, and one displaying 486 languages; we use a database with 1600 languages. More importantly, WALSL's description of syllable structure lacks granularity, with only three categories used to account for all variation in onset and coda possibilities: a) simple (CV only); b) moderately complex (CCV or CVC); and c) complex (freer than moderately complex). More detailed divisions are not only possible, but desirable: the distribution of languages allowing (C)VC or (C)VCC syllables is different from that of languages allowing (C)VCCCC syllables, for instance. In particular, combining the two very different 'moderately complex' syllable types in b) collapses the distinction between constraints on the onset and constraints on the coda, which have different distributions.

We draw on a new compilation of sources, the World Phonotactics Database (<http://phonotactics.anu.edu.au>). Using this database we test Maddieson's claims about areal distribution, examine the stability of phonotactic constraints in families and areas, and explore the typological ramifications of syllable structure.

References:

- Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.). 2011. *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library. Available online at <http://wals.info/>. Accessed on 2013-01-15.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2011. Syllable Structure. In: Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library, chapter 12. Available online at <http://wals.info/chapter/12>. Accessed on 2013-01-15.