

## Reading: Odden Chapter 6

## Distinctive Features

Remember Saussure's approach to phonemes: defined by being different from other phonemes in a system. Two schools of phonological analysis **changed Saussure's concept**:



Trubetzkoi is one of the most famous members of the Prague school. Three ways **Trubetzkoi** differs from **Saussure**:

- 1) emphasis on the phonetic reality underlying the phoneme: the phoneme is the particular **collection of (ideal) phonetic properties** that define it
- 2) phoneme is a **partially specified entity**, it does not contain any specification for redundant, non-phonological, sub-phonemic properties
- 3) the **system of phonemes (phonological contrasts) has internal structure**.

As a result of the positive approach, phonology began to define phonemes and allophones (and now underlying/lexical and surface/phonetic representations) by these phonetic features.

### Why break segments into features?

Phonemic analysis of a language gives us a system of segments as unique individual units. We **break segments into smaller units** to be able to recognize similarities among segments that are functionally distinct phonemes.

**Inventories** are **symmetric**: a phonetic property used to distinguish between two phonemes can be **exploited throughout the system** to distinguish other pairs of phonemes.

**Rules**: often change one sound to become more like some sound nearby in some phonetic property, e.g., voicing assimilation of liquids (l, ɹ) in English to voiceless stops.

pray	[pɹej]	train	[tɹejn]	crane	[kɹejn]
brain	[brɛjn]	drain	[dɹejn]	grain	[gɹejn]

**Phonotactics/Sequential Redundancy constraints**: Constraints on sequences of sounds also need to refer to sets of segments (natural classes) which are allowed in certain positions of a word or syllable, like stops plus /l, ɹ/ at the beginning of English syllables, but not the other way around (no /l/ or /ɹ/ plus stops).

