Introducing the Cross-Linguistic S-Cluster Inventory Database

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Background

S-clusters are often unique compared with non-s clusters:

- More likely to violate SSP (e.g. /s/+stop)
- More likely to violate minimal distance restriction (e.g., /s/+nasal in English, MD = 2)

How should we determine markedness relationships among s-clusters?

- SSP & MD? What else matters?
- Need a typological study

Initial typological research on relationships of s-clusters suggests sonority may not be constructive way to study s-clusters (Morelli, 1998)

Our goals:

- To build a shareable database of cross-linguistic s-cluster inventories
- To investigate the cross-linguistic typology of s-clusters (and other clusters)

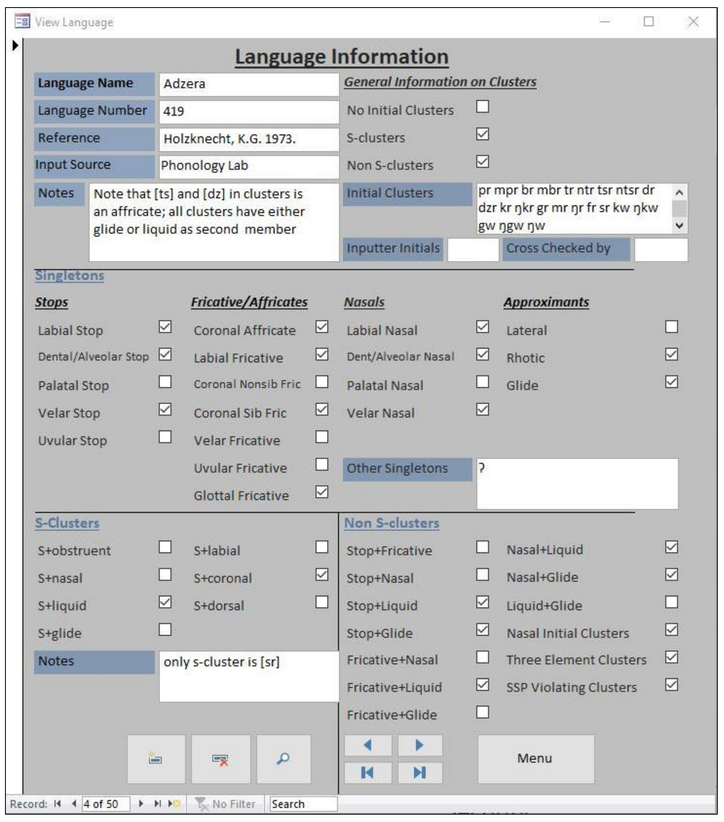
The Database

Built in Microsoft Access

- Valuable for ease of inputting, viewing, searching data
- Database will soon be available online

231 languages from UPSID database (Maddieson, 1984)

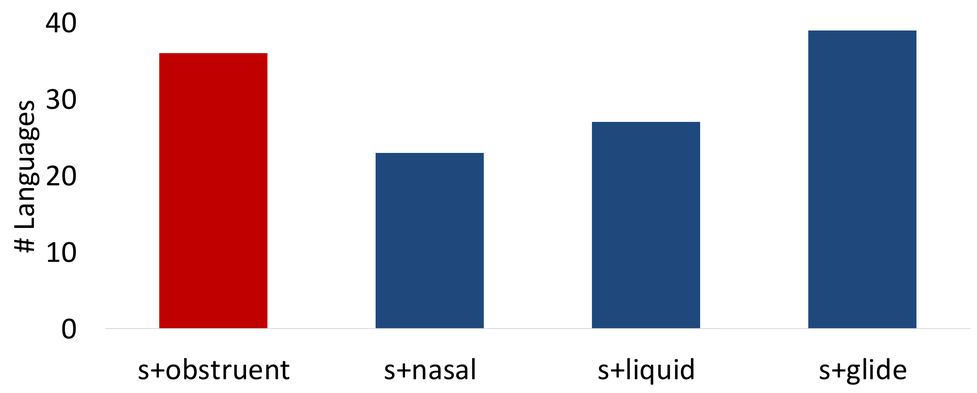
- Original singleton info included in database
- Word-initial clusters by type



Typology

62 languages in database have some s-cluster

- /s/+glide and /s/+obstruent clusters most common
- /s/+nasal clusters least common
- Every language with an /s/+nasal cluster also has an /s/+obstruent cluster



30 languages have s-cluster inventories counter to SSP or MD

- Marked-leaning inventories (e.g., Tsou has /s/+obstruent and /s/+nasal clusters only)
- Gapped inventories (e.g., French lacks /s/+liquid clusters only)

Must also take singleton inventories into account

- E.g., languages that lack liquids lack /s/+liquid clusters

Conclusions & Future Directions

- Some generalizations based on the Sonority Sequencing Principle and Minimal Sonority Distance seem to hold
- But markedness of s-clusters does not rely on SSP and MD exclusively
- Additional in-depth analysis of inventories required

- Database coming soon to an internet near you at www.sfu.ca/phono

Selected References

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