

Defining Domains, Scope and Boundaries in Prosody: The Challenge of Recursivity in Kwa Languages

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Recursion may be generally defined as an operation that applies to its own output. It is neither repetition nor iteration. Linguistically It involves some embeddedness as in morphology, syntax and in semantics. It has been assumed to be a biological feature of human language as opposed to animal language. We argue that there is independent evidence for recursion in phonology. We will examine the evidence from tone, intonation and vowel harmony in a few typologically diverse languages and then in Kwa, a Niger-Congo language. In the latter, we will need to make a difference between domains and scope when analysing downstep, upsweep, vowel harmony. For instance, If the scope refers to the potential capacity of an operation and infinity, then the domain will refer to the actual complex constraints and the extent set by the language. The assumption of phonological recursion has some implications for the Strict Layer Hypothesis.