4

Markedness in phonology

Keren Rice

4.1 Introduction

The concept of markedness in linguistics came to prominence in the twentieth century, and continues to play a central role in the discipline. A number of important questions arise about markedness in phonological theory. The most basic ones are: What is markedness? What are its diagnostics? What role does it play in a phonological system, if any? Can markedness be characterized universally in terms of substance, or is it language-particular, or are there both universal and language-specific aspects to it?

This chapter concentrates on features and markedness in phonology. Markedness is a contentious subject in phonology. The chapter focuses on the evidence for a view of featural markedness that relates to contrast; see Lombardi (2002) and de Lacy (2002a, 2006), for example, for alternative views. It begins with an examination of the ways in which the term markedness is used in phonology (Sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.4), and then surveys the commonly used markedness diagnostics (Section 4.5) and some of the factors that must be taken into account to understand markedness (Sections 4.6, 4.7).

4.2 Defining markedness

The term markedness is used in phonology to capture the central observation that not all elements in a phonological system are of equal status. The term was introduced by Trubetzkoy (1939/1969) to refer to relations between elements of a phonological class (e.g. place of articulation, phonation types) on a language-particular basis. Over the years, the use of this term has grown and expanded in many ways so that today, while the notion of markedness is core to phonological theory, capturing exactly what it means is not straightforward. The terms in (1) are often used to