English Phonology

The Syllable

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- the syllable is a very useful tool in phonology
- allows the characterization of a number of properties
- provides a structure for the description of processes such as phonotactic constraints, syllable weight, stress assignment, etc.

Motivation for the Syllable

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- we will examine several cases where having access to a hierarchical syllable structure improves our phonological analysis

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- all rules must be stated in terms of the linear sequence of consonants and vowels
- no regard to the internal structure of syllables
- a rule applying to the vowel of the second syllable of a word in English might be formulated as:
  - "the position after 0–3 consonants at the beginning of the word, followed by a vowel and then up to five additional consonants"

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- Inside the word the sequences may be even longer
  - a. se**mpstr**ess [mpstɹ]
  - b. po**stscr**ipt [stskɹ]
  - c. hu**sk-scr**aper [skskɹ]

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- at the end of the syllable, English may have up to 4 Cs, but there are a number of restrictions on which consonants can occur where
- the statement of rule environments becomes awkward and unintuitive if we simply count consonants in a row

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- then, no matter how many syllables are combined, the restrictions will tell us what is and isn't possible

Phonological Domains

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- if we find that certain phonological processes are best described in terms of a domain such as the syllable, then this constitutes a good argument to employ such structures

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- English allows many two-consonant onset clusters, but it does not permit an onset with [gn]
- *English *gn*
  - a. gnarl [nɑɹl]
  - b. gnome [noʊm]
  - c. gnostic [ˈnɔstɪk] agnostic [ægˈnɔstɪk]

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- the rule in (a) will fail, because it does not distinguish between tautosyllabic and heterosyllabic clusters

a. $\underset{[-\text{cont}]}{C} \rightarrow \emptyset \;/\; \_\_\_ \; \underset{[+\text{nas}]}{C}$

- In order for the description of the constraint to work properly, it must appeal to syllable boundaries like (b)

b. $$\underset{[-\text{cont}]}{C} \rightarrow \emptyset \;/\; \left\{ \begin{matrix} \$ \\ \# \end{matrix} \right\} \_\_ \; \underset{[+\text{nas}]}{C}$$

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- the simplest way to do so is to employ a constraint:

$$*\begin{matrix} \sigma \\ \wedge \\ g\ n \end{matrix}$$

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- using or not using nasalization in French is equivalent to using [u] instead of [i] in English: *wooed* vs. *weed*

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- in order to explain such cases, we may propose a rule in the traditional fashion of SPE

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- this requires a further rule of nasal deletion

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- it is clear that the actual condition on nasal deletion is the coda of the syllable
- the treatment above misses generalizations about the nature of the environment where the process happens
- this is best described by the use of the syllable

Vowel Shortening in English

- Another rule that is improved by the use of syllable structure is the English Trisyllabic Shortening (or laxing) rule
  - opaque [oʊˈpeɪk] opacity [oʊˈpæsɪti]
  - sane [ˈseɪn] sanity [ˈsænɪti]
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- these vowels have moved from being in the final syllable of the word to being in the third syllable from

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  Too Much Talent in Tennessee? (alliteration)
- *rhyming* occurs at the end of the word
- *alliteration* occurs at the beginning
- stress placement is sensitive to rhymes, doesn't care about onsets

Welcome Back to School

"Dear students, the summer has ended.
The school year at last has begun.
But this year is totally different.
We're going to only have fun.

"We won't study any mathematics,
and recess will last all day long.
Instead of the pledge of allegiance,
we'll belt out a rock-and-roll song.

"We'll only play games in the classroom.
You're welcome to bring in your toys.
It's okay to run in the hallways.
It's great if you make lots of noise.

"Your video games are your homework.
You'll have to watch lots of T.V.
For field trips we'll go to the movies
and give away candy for free.

"The lunchroom will only serve chocolate
and triple fudge sundaes supreme.
"Yes, that's what I heard from my teacher
before I woke up from my dream.

--Kenn Nesbitt

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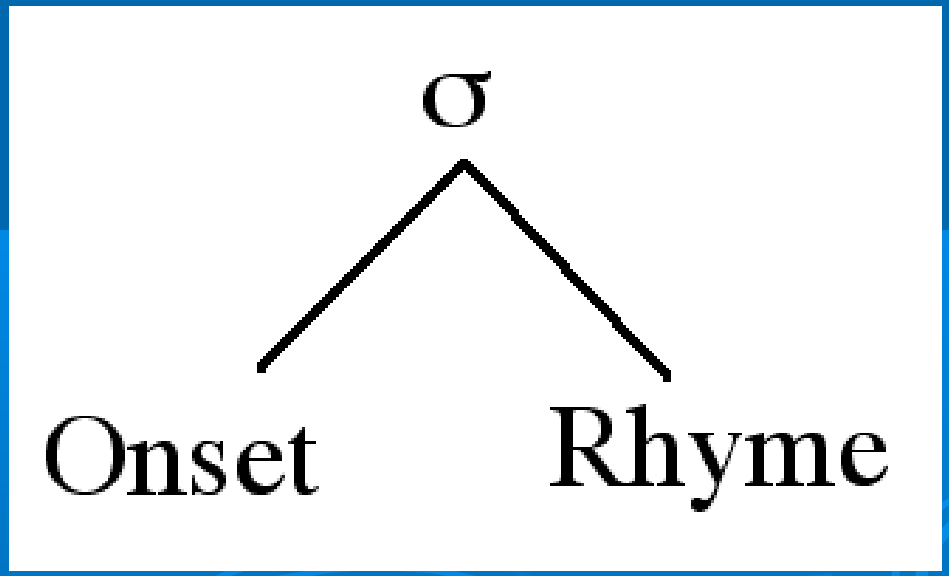
- Greek σ represents ‘syllable’



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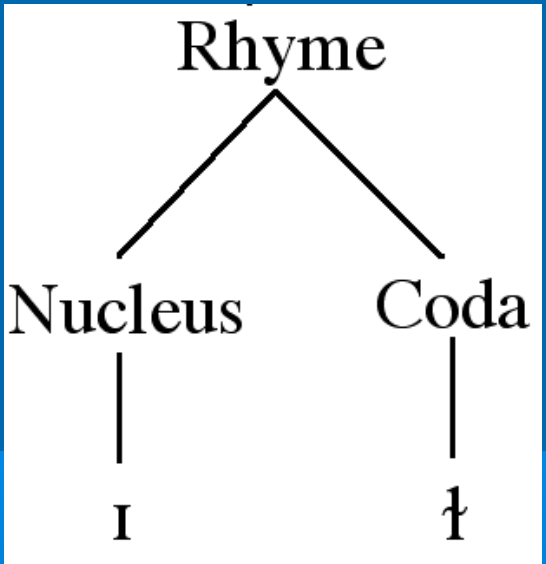

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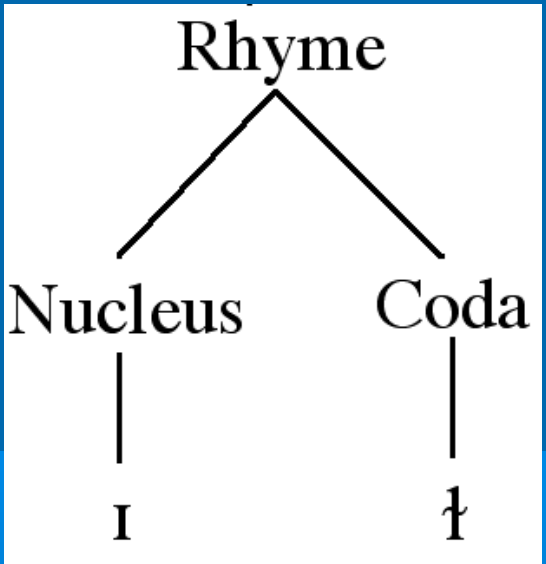

- nucleus is the core of every syllable, without it, there is no syllable (obligatory)

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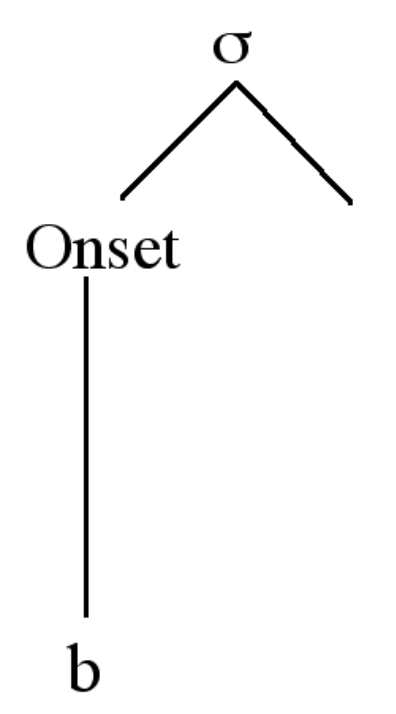

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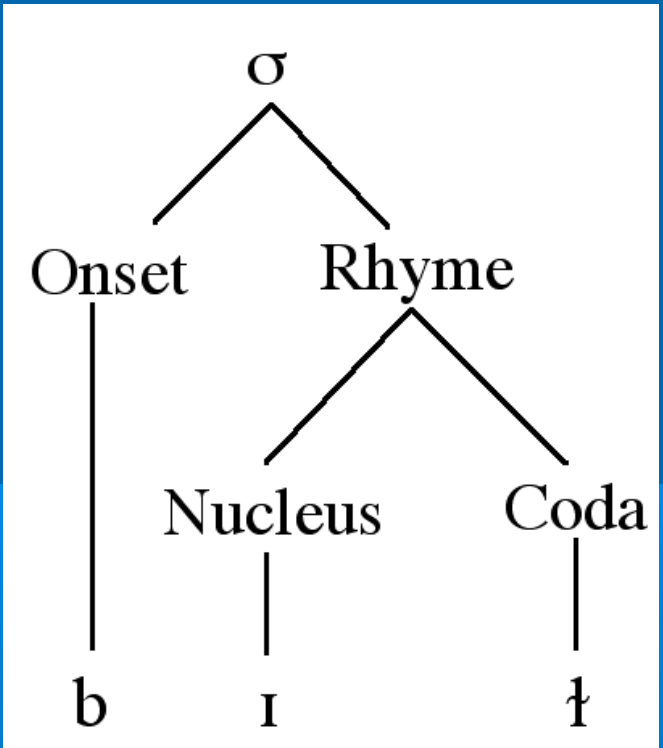

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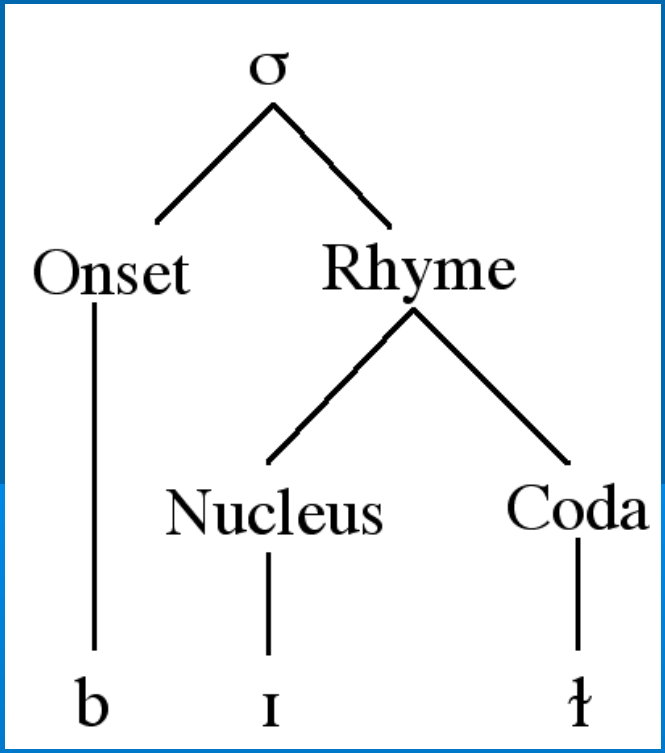

- note that the /l/ will be dark-l, [l], if it is in the ***rhyme***

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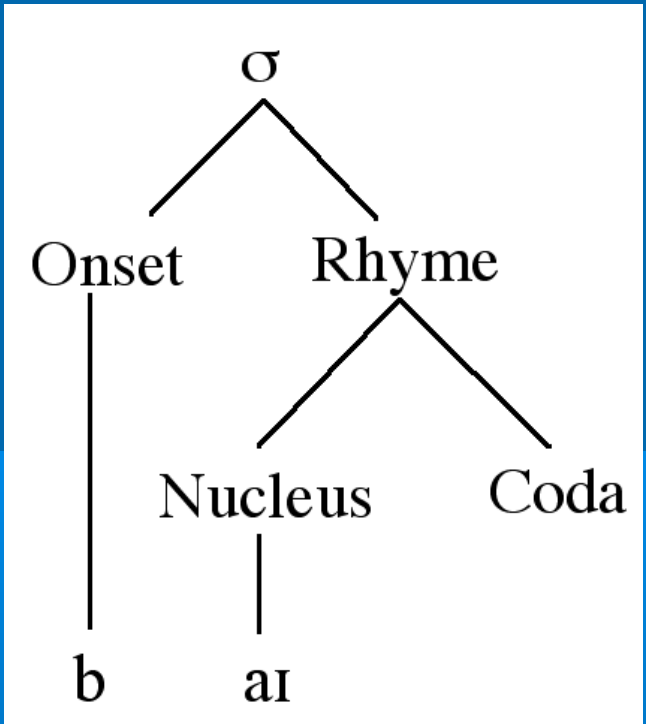

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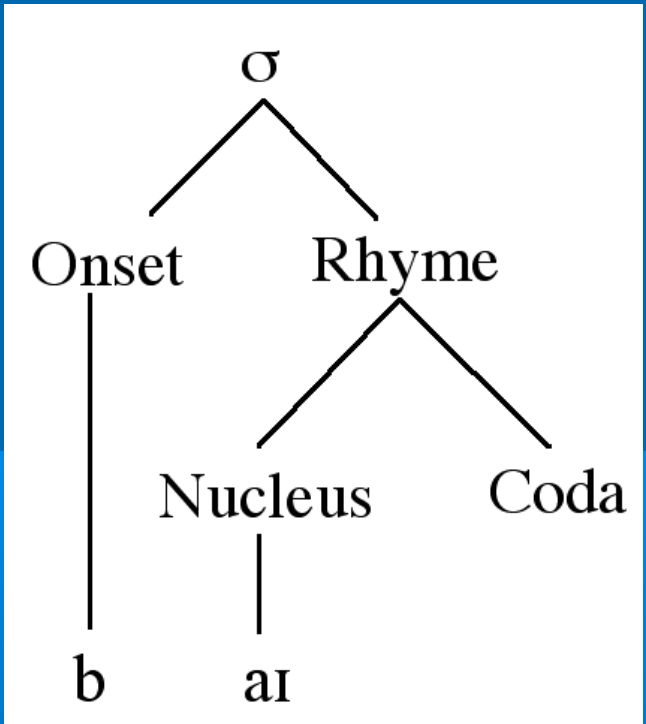

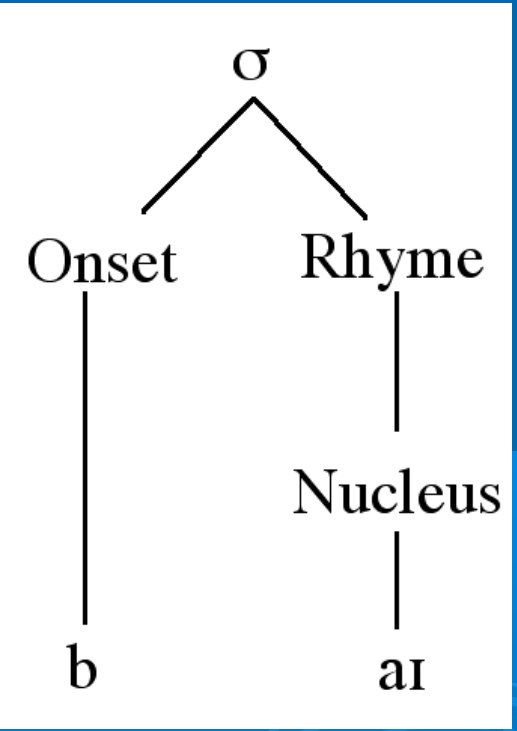

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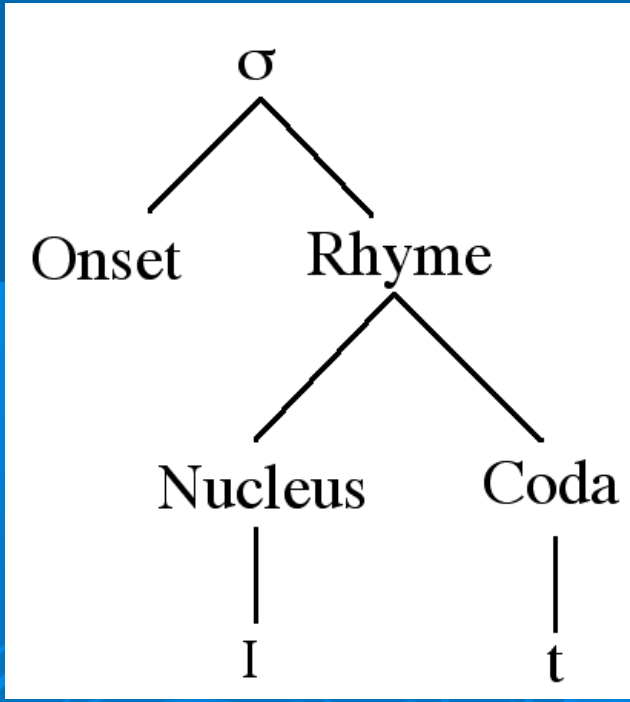

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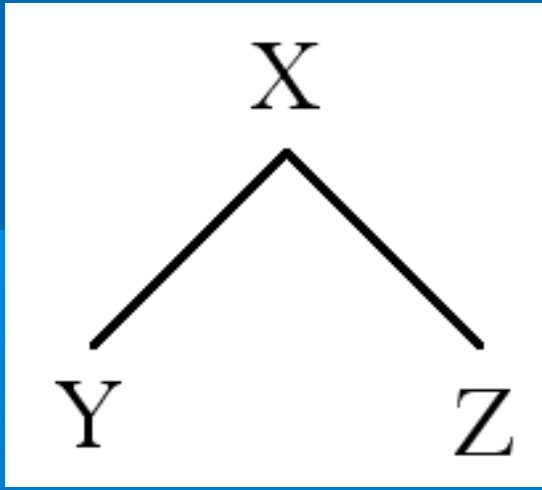

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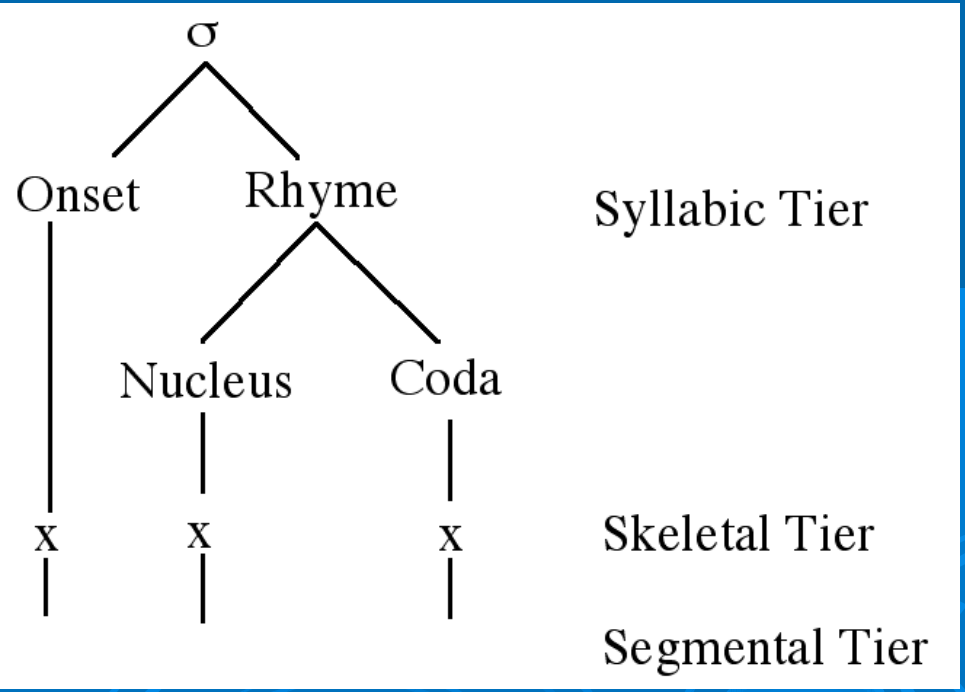

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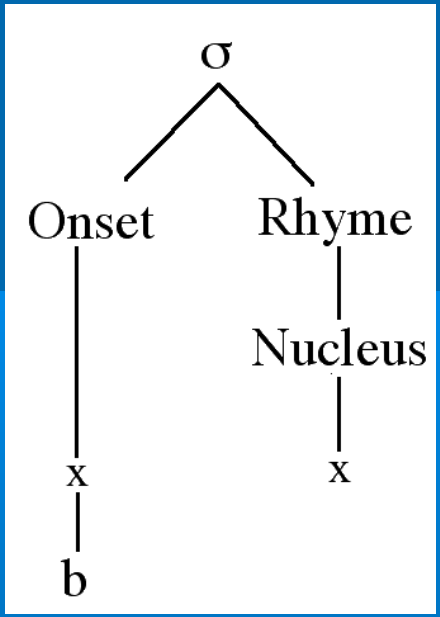

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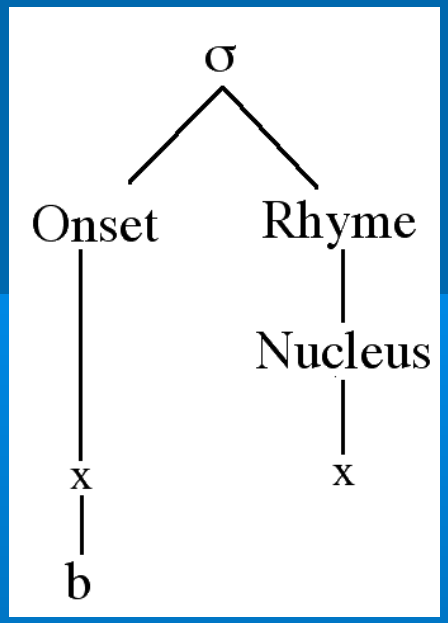

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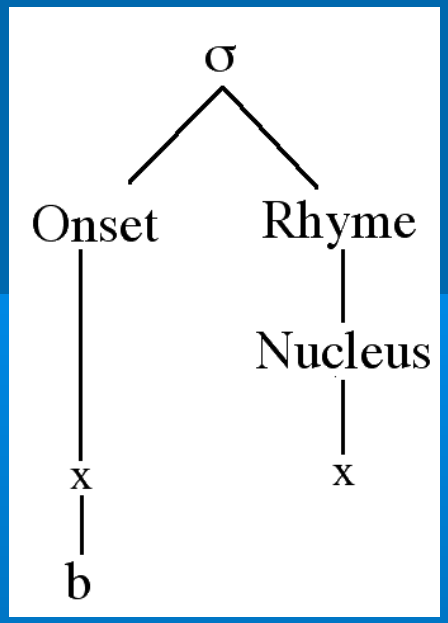

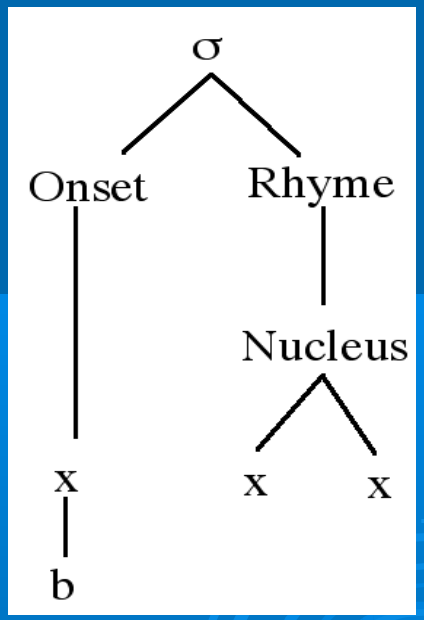

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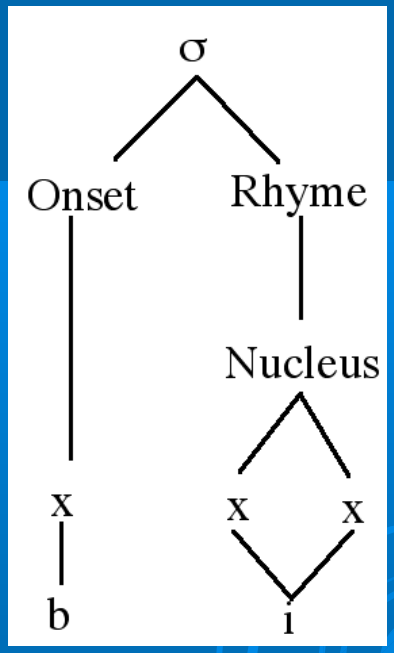

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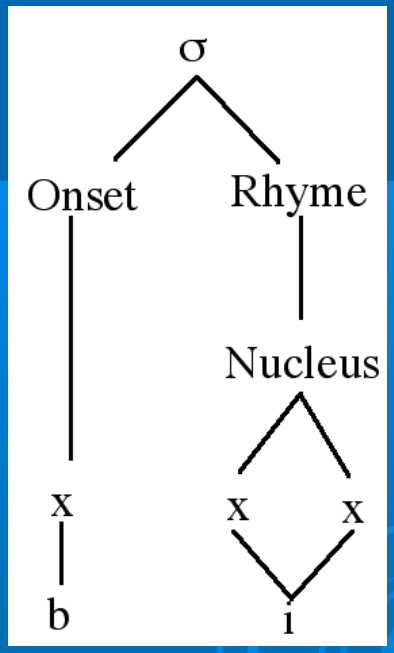

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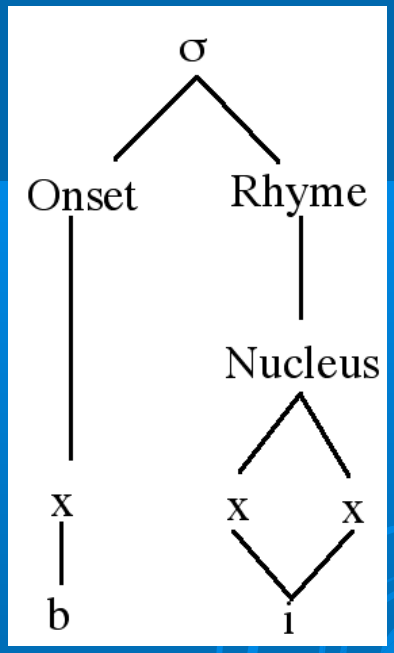

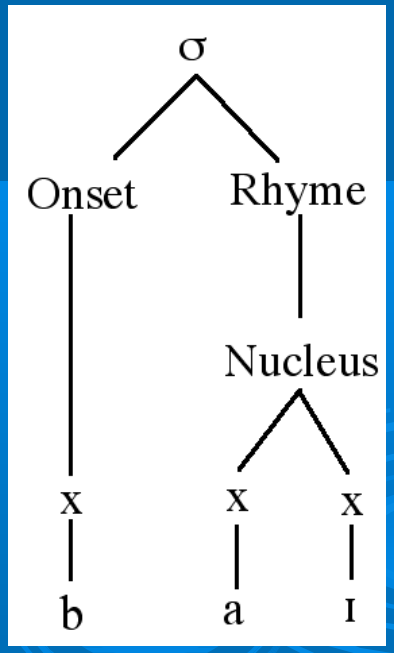

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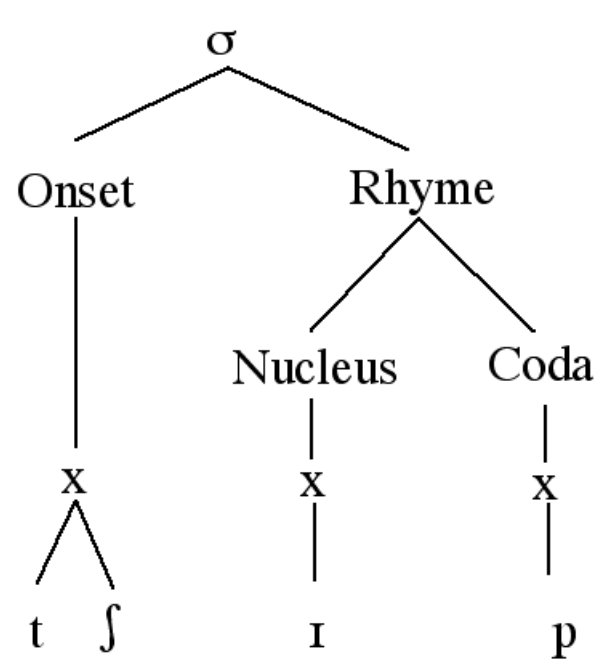

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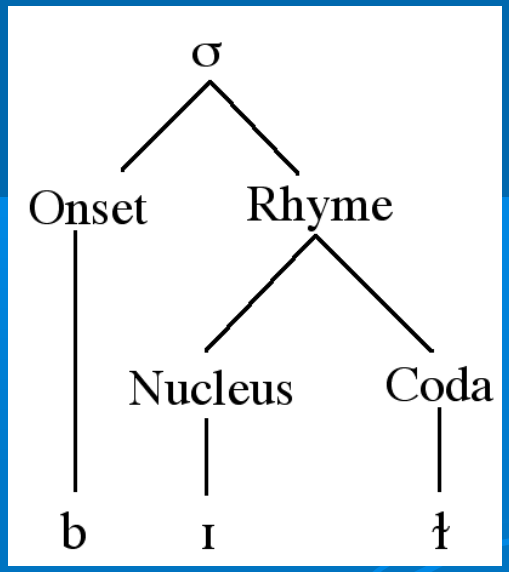

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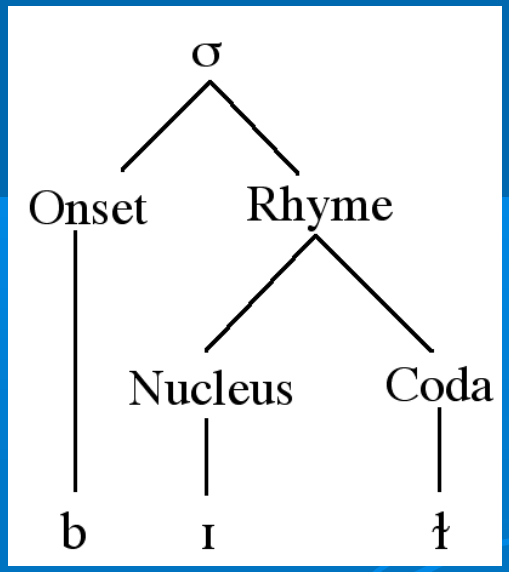

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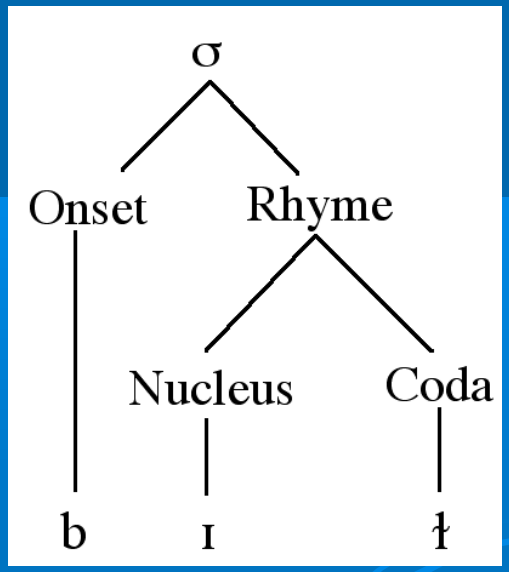

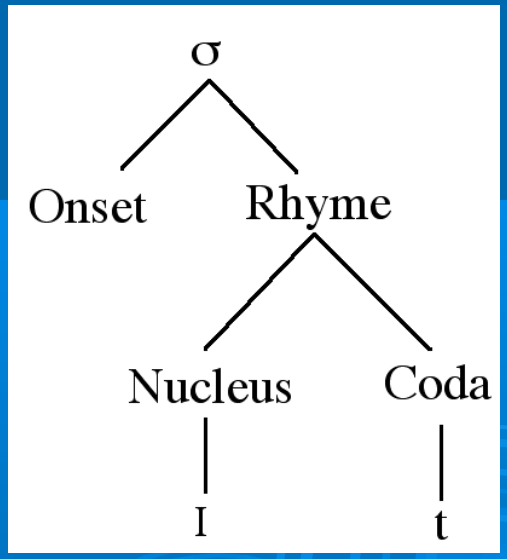

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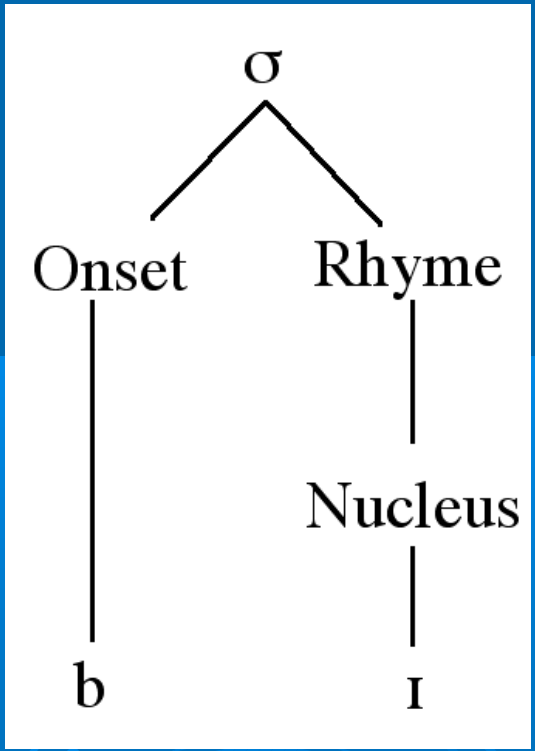

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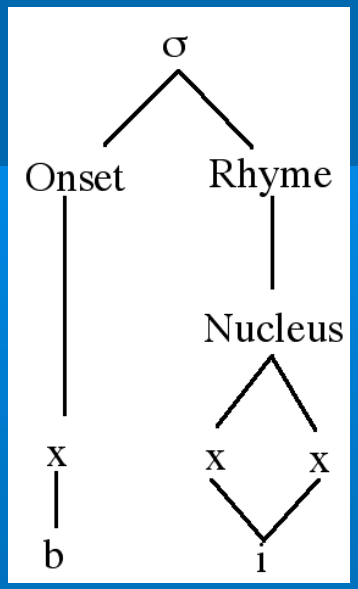

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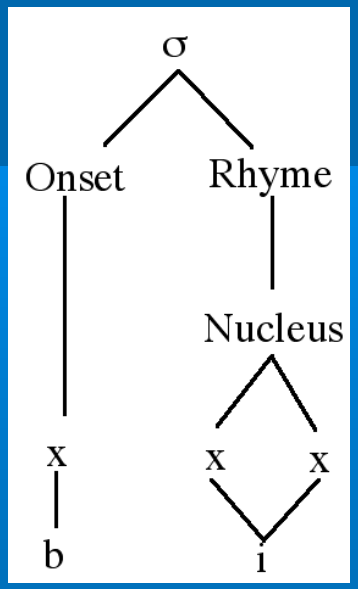

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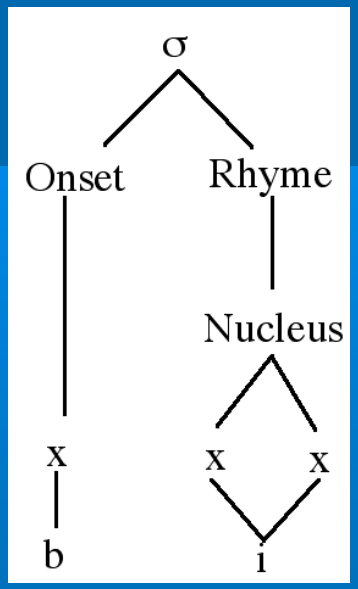

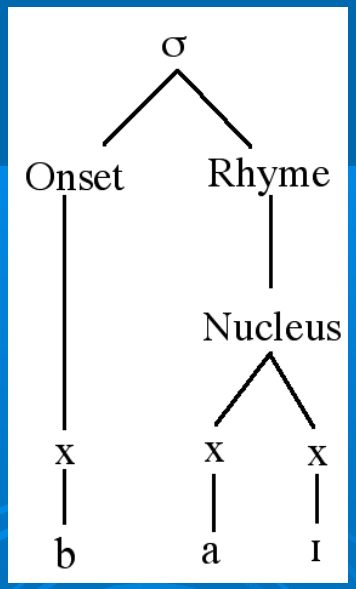

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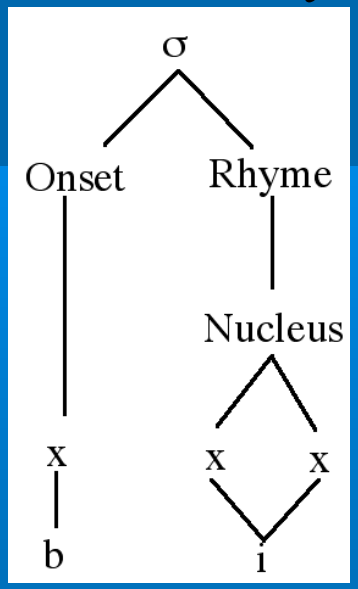

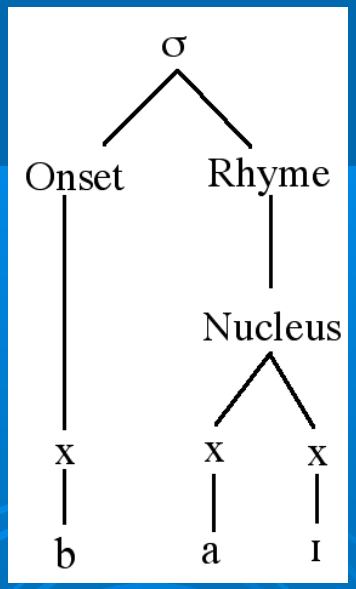

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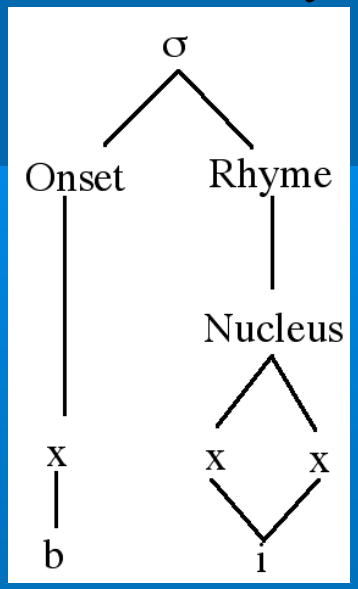

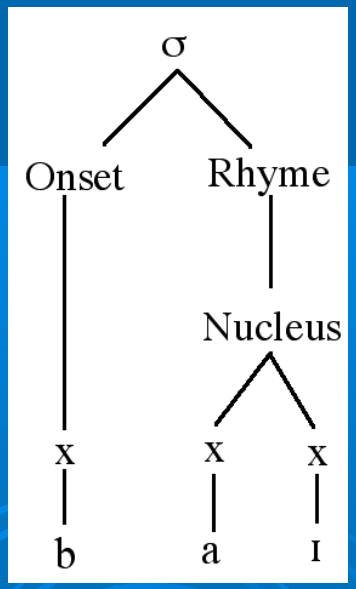

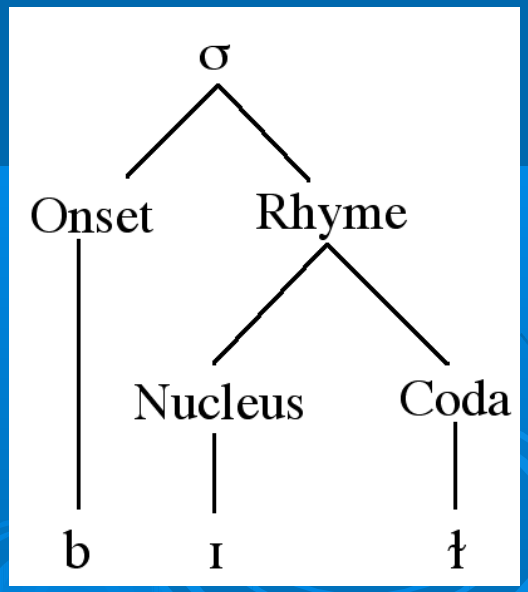

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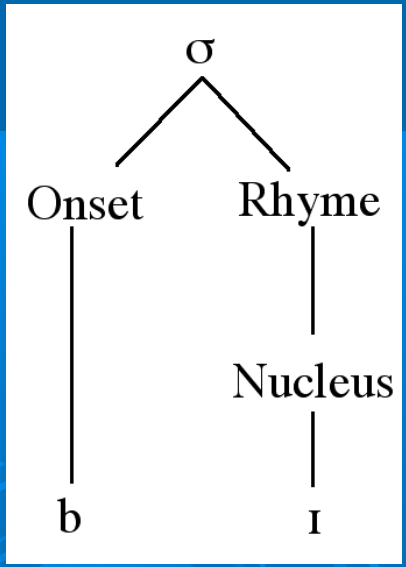

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Degree of Sonority

highest ← → lowest

a, æ > e,o > i,u > j,w > ɹ,l > m,n,ŋ > v,ð,z,ʒ > f,θ,s,ʃ > b,d,g > p,t,k

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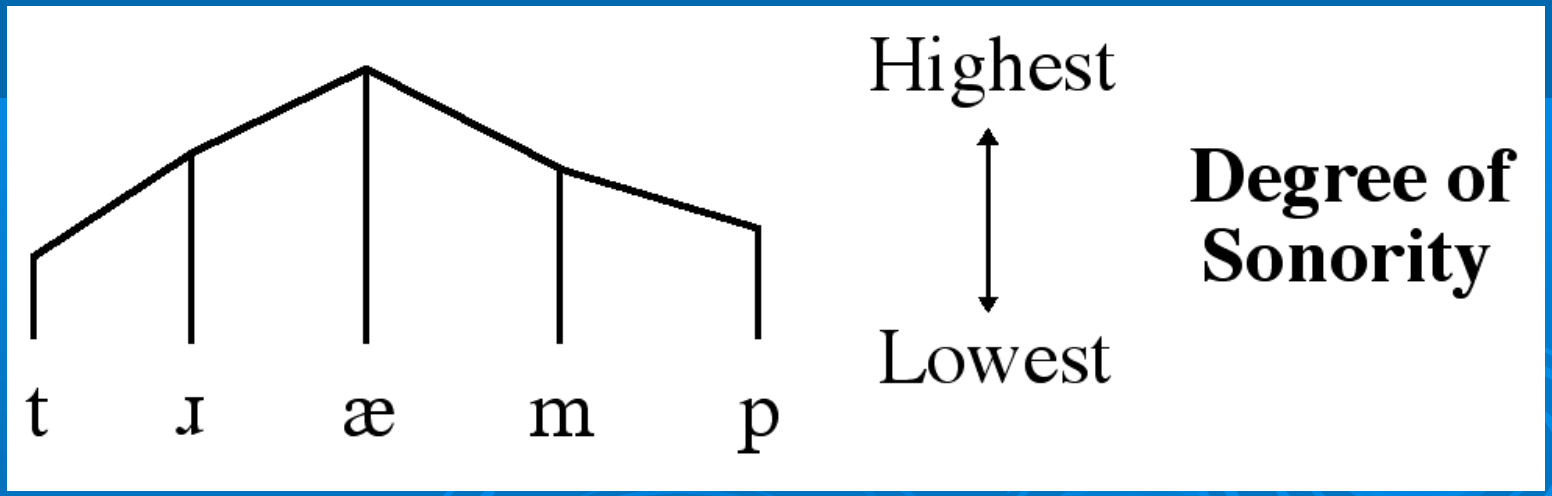

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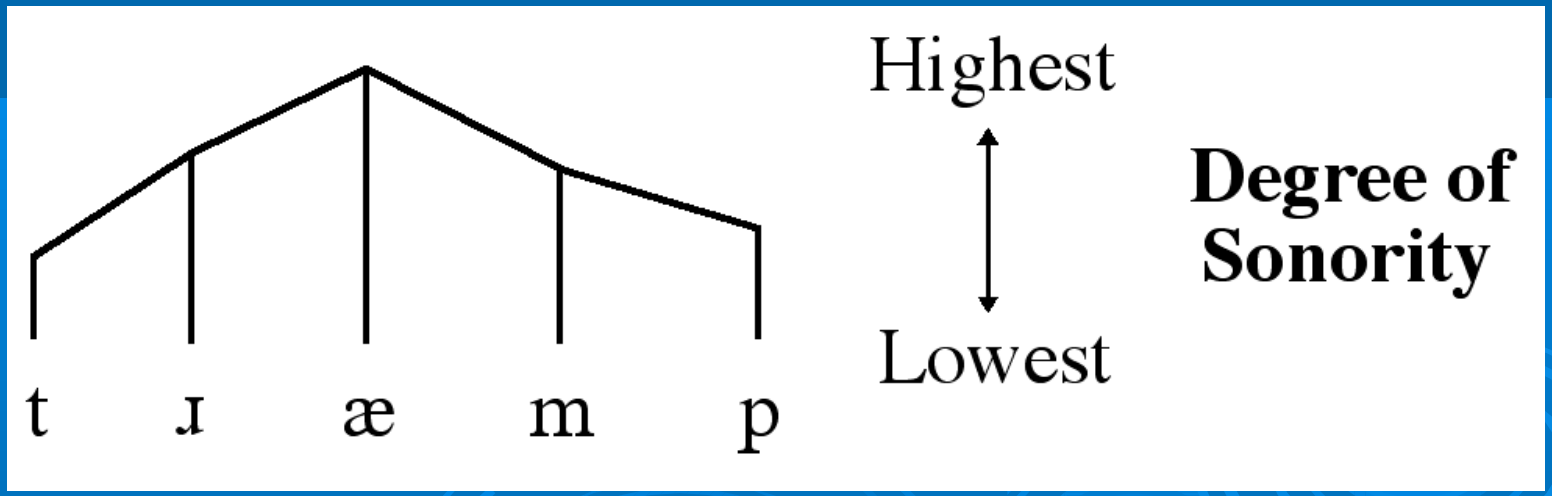

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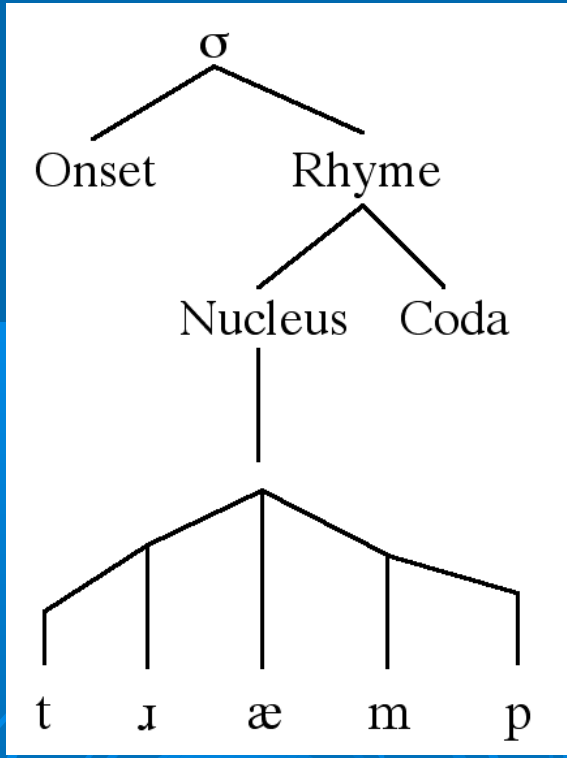
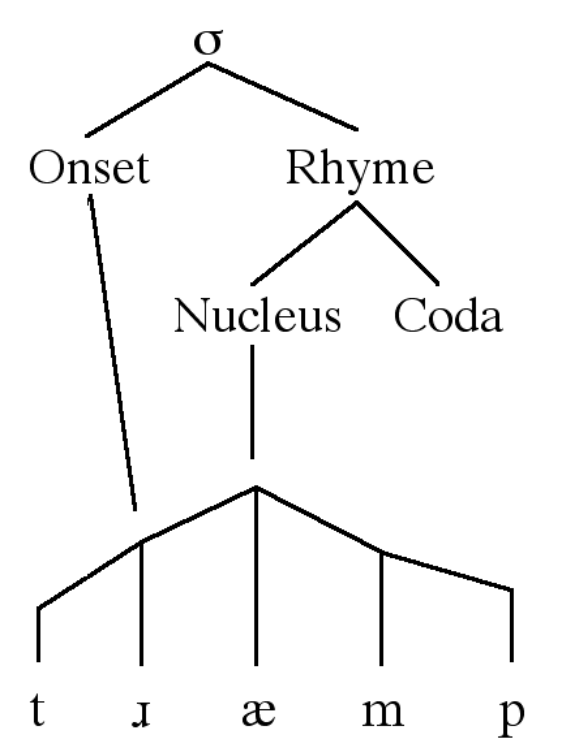


- then the next most sonorous element:



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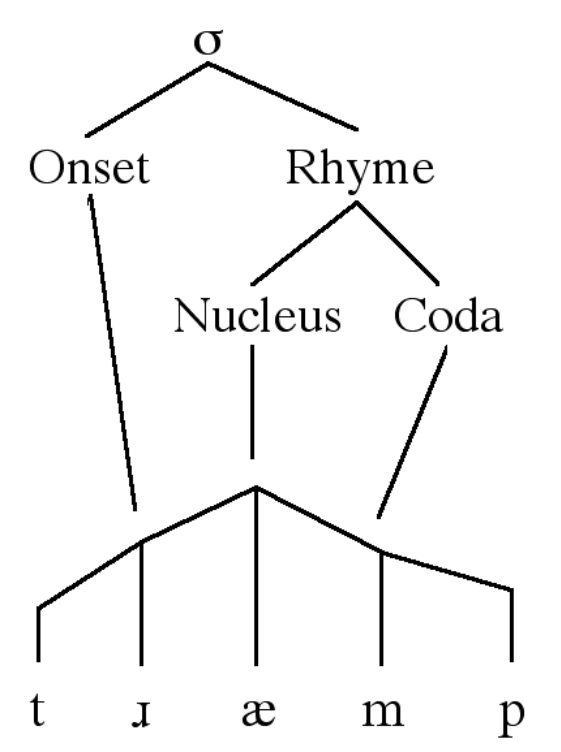

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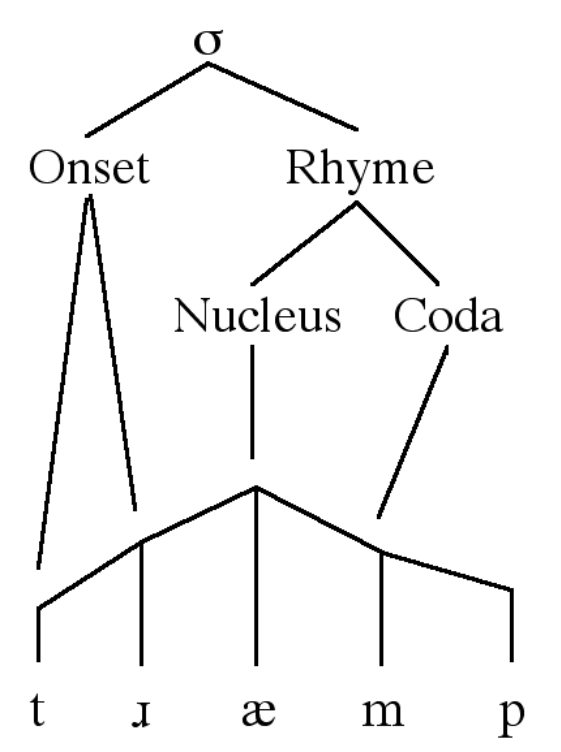

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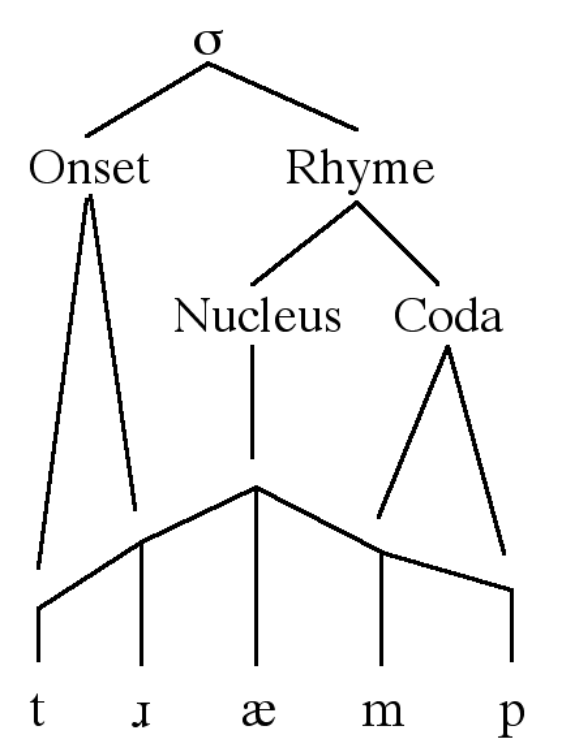

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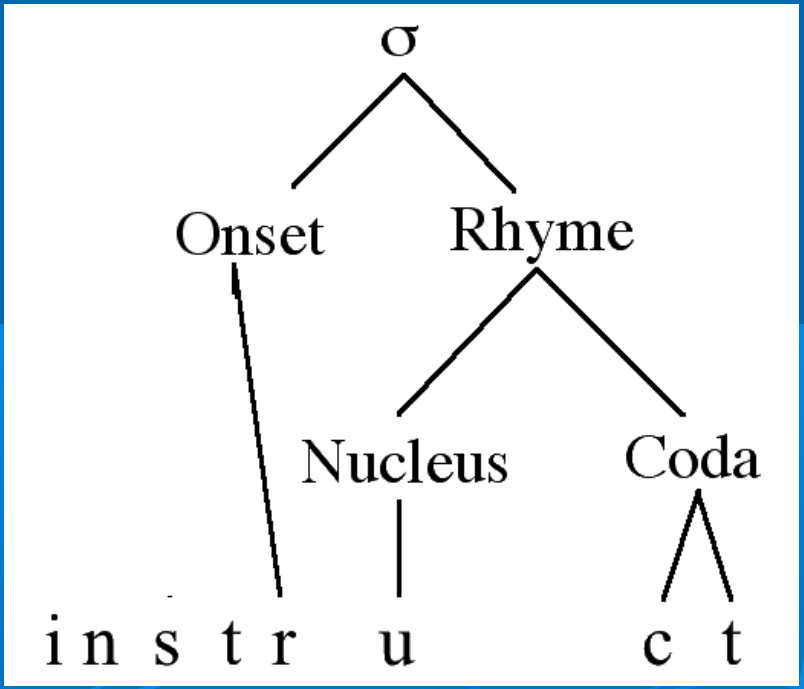

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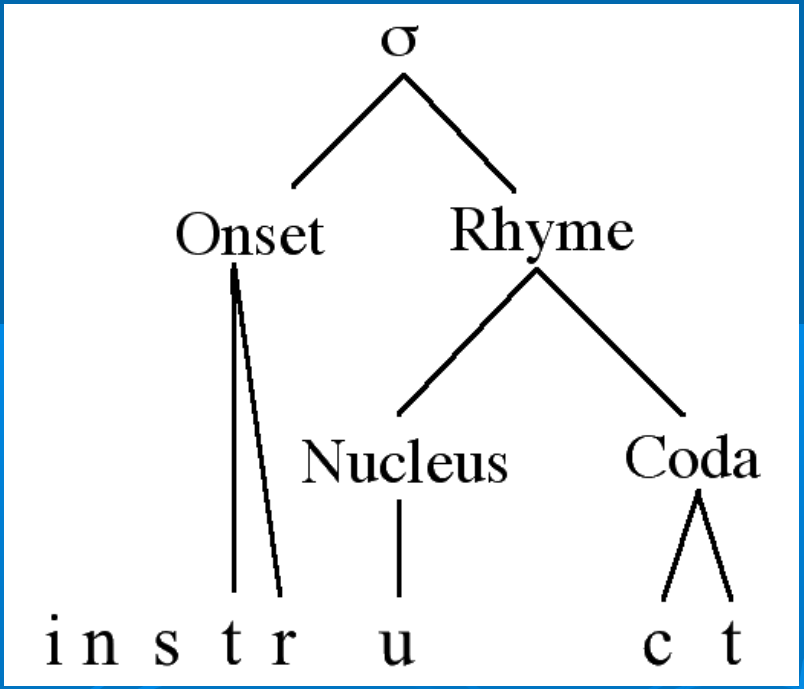

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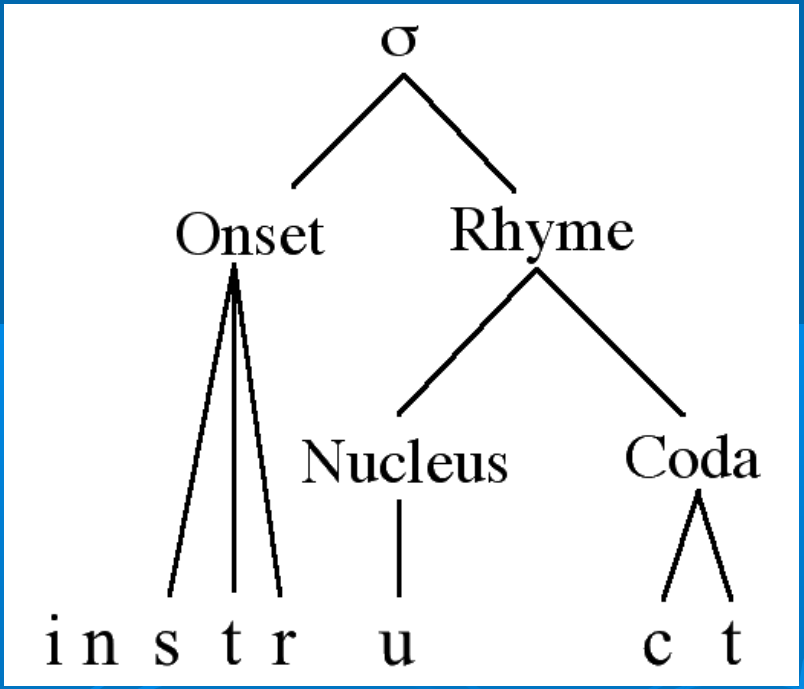

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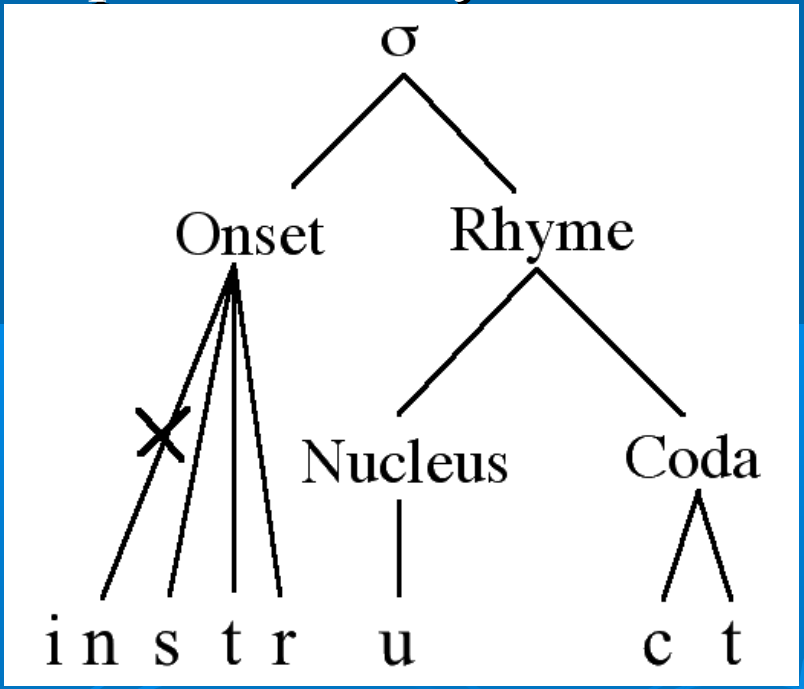

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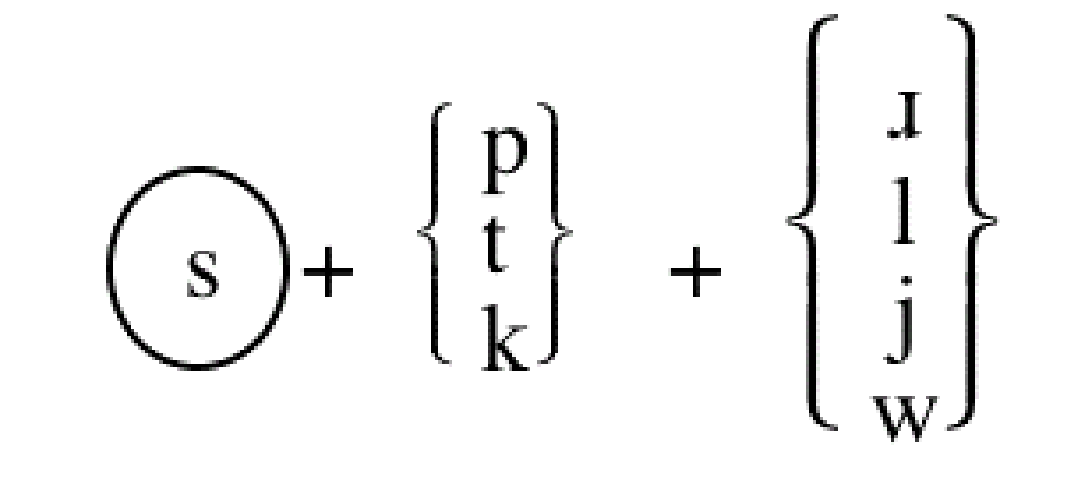

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- in codas, there are other restrictions:
  - */gn/, */mn/, */alm/ (but ‘helm, overwhelm’ okay)

The End