

## Alignment constraints

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**Abstract** Alignment is among the principal constraint families found in Optimality Theoretic approaches to phonology. Much of the discussion in the recent literature (Eisner 1997; Kager 2001, 2005; McCarthy 2003; Buckley 2009), however, has focused on difficulties arising within the standard Generalized Alignment (McCarthy and Prince 1993a, 1993b) framework. In this article, I propose a definition of alignment constraints that differs from the Generalized Alignment definition in several fundamental respects. The most important, perhaps, is that the proposed approach does not require alignment directly. It encourages alignment indirectly by prohibiting specific configurations of misalignment (Ellison 1995; Zoll 1996; McCarthy 2003). Additional differences include an alternative to gradient evaluation for deriving distance-sensitive violation assessment and the crucial use of both distance-sensitive and distance-insensitive assessment to produce basic directionality effects. The article draws on examples from metrical stress theory, the area in which alignment constraints have been most heavily employed, to demonstrate that the proposed definition produces the same essential directionality effects as the Generalized Alignment definition while avoiding its most significant shortcomings.

**Keywords** Alignment · Optimality theory · Harmonic serialism

### 1 Preliminaries

The Generalized Alignment (GA; McCarthy and Prince 1993a) definition of alignment constraints has played a key role in Optimality Theoretic (Prince and Smolen-

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