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Abstract
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Why is it that people allow for slack in the phonetic interpretation of vowels, but not of consonants?

On the account of their behaviour, practitioners of Element Theory are inclined to allow for some (considerable) slack between the elemental identity of a segment and its phonetic realization, both within a language (e.g. palatalizing [i] being I, but non-palatalizing [i] being empty) and cross-linguistically (e.g. [e] = I.A in one language but A.I in another, heads being mentioned first). For some reason, the same cannot be said about consonants: strong feelings were expressed in the past regarding the identity of velars for example, which were held to be empty-headed and from which U was thought to be absent, regardless of the language and their behaviour. Today U is widely recognized as a co-articulator of velars, but there does not appear to be more (intra- or cross-linguistically) variation admitted for the elemental identity of velars (Backley says labials are headed by U, while velars have U as an operator). The talk looks at the this issue from the point of view of the interface with phonetics, i.e. phonetic interpretation in GP, which in a modular environment is a spell-out relation converting one vocabulary set into another and whose prime property is its arbitrary character (just like at the upper spell-out the relationship between morpho-syntactic and phonological items is arbitrary).