Towards a theory of stem alternations

This talk looks at the status of alternations in the grammar, and, in particular, at what evidence there is for treating certain alternations as "morphological", and others as "(morpho)phonological". I bring evidence from locality considerations to bear on _stem alternations_, and argue that that in at least some cases, it is clear that a "morphophonological" treatment is superior to a morphological alternative that treats stems as contextual allomorphs. Three main points are discussed. First, when the locality conditions on contextual allomorphy for elements other than stems (see Embick 2010) are taken into account, stem alternation does not behave like the contextual allomorphy that is seen with other types of morphemes. This is an argument for treating such alternations as non-suppletive, i.e., as morphophonological. Second, cases of stem alternation that really are suppletive must obey the locality conditions on contextual allomorphy. Third, there appear to be some differences between the alternations that occur under strict adjacency, and those that do not; some comments regarding the importance of such patterns are offered in conclusion.