

METATHESIS IN VERLAN: REDUCING SYLLABLE REVERSAL TO SEGMENT REVERSAL

Sophie Moracchini (MIT) - *smoracc@mit.edu*

This presentation offers an analysis of French Verlan, a language game which is part of the family of Backward Languages (cf. Bagemihl 1989). In Verlan, the method of encryption involves a reordering of segments that creates an illusion of ‘sequence reversal’:

(1) *Patterns of Verlanization:*

	<i>Non-ludling</i>	<i>Ludling</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
(a)	fu bõ	uf õb	‘crazy’ ‘good’
(b)	bizæ meʃã	zarbi ʃãme	‘weird’ ‘wicked’
(c)	sigæʔet veʔite	ʔetsiga, ʔetgasi, gaʔetsi teveʔi, teʔive	‘cigaret’ ‘truth’

An interesting feature of *Verlan* is that it utilizes more than one type of reversal at once. Specifically, both total segment reversal ([fu] → [uf]) and total syllable reversal ([bi.zaʁ] → [zaʁ.bi]) are attested. However, a few data indicate that Verlan does not rely on the syllabification of French. The disyllable [mis.tik] for example, is verlanized [stik.mi] instead of *[tik.mis].

In the first part of this presentation, I argue for a single mechanism of verlanization. I propose that the basic constraint specific to *Verlan* is \neg ANCHOR-LR which requires the non-identity of initial/final segments in the base and the Verlan form. The faithfulness constraints MAX and DEP militate against deletion and epenthesis respectively, so that movement is enforced in Verlan.

The constraint that governs the size of the displaced constituent is ONSET, which preserves transitions between vowels and their preceding consonant. From this perspective, it is possible to analyze in a unified way the *Verlan* forms that appear to reverse syllables (mo.to → to.mo) and those which appear to reverse segments (fu → uf): in both cases, \neg ANCHOR-LR together with ONSET favour the optimal candidate. In a second time, I extend the analysis to closed monosyllables and closed disyllables, and I investigate the treatment of consonant clusters in Verlan.