Reading guide: Blevins & Garrett (2004)


Background
This paper continues to explore some of the questions that Hyman has raised: What alternatives are there to models of phonetically driven phonology? What are the roles of synchronic and diachronic factors in explaining phonological patterns? Section 2, where phonetic motivations for metathesis are discussed in the abstract, may seem hard to follow at first because of B&G’s constant references to different types of metathesis; try re-reading it along with section 3, where the metathesis types are exemplified.

Questions to keep in mind while reading

• Why is metathesis generally considered to be hard for phonological theory to handle?

• What do B&G mean by the term phonetic optimization? Does their description of this approach to the phonetics-phonology interface seem to fit any of the papers we have read this semester?

• What are the characteristics of the evolutionary phonology view of the phonetics-phonology interface that B&G develop?

• How does the "listener-based reinterpretation" view of sound change work? (See also the summary of Ohala's (1993) model of sound change in Hyman (2001:173).)

• What distinct types of metathesis do B&G recognize? For each type, what do B&G present as its phonetic basis?

• B&G support their view of the motivation behind metathesis with arguments about typological patterns. What are these arguments? Can you identify any problems or potential alternative views here?

• On p 141, B&G say,
  "Apparent counterexamples to observed typological patterns highlight important provisos on the general role of phonetics in phonology. Such examples demonstrate that regular synchronic phonological metatheses are a superset of those that can arise through purely phonetic sound change, and thereby contribute to the literature on phonological alternations that do not reflect phonetic naturalness or phonological markedness."
Any comments?
Some points for further thought and discussion

- What can we deduce about the nature of the (synchronic) phonological model that B&G endorse? (They don't say much about this.)

- Can we think of any additional predictions that we could use to distinguish between synchronically and diachronically based models of functional grounding?

- B&G make a kind of economy argument against synchronic functional grounding. Does this argument seem well-founded? How many of B&G's arguments do not rely on considerations of theoretical economy?