Reciprocal metathesis: The transposition of two non-adjacent segments

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In this paper, I present an outline of the little-studied reciprocal metathesis (Ultan 1978), which refers to the cases of metathesis that involve two different non-adjacent segments that exchange their positions with one another without directly affecting the rest of the sequence. This kind of metathesis is exemplified by examples such as Lat. ***l*e*r*iquiae** < Lat. ***r*ē*l*ĭquĭae** 'relic', Fr. *mous**t**i**qu**e* 'mosquito' (cf. Lat. *musca* 'fly') and non-standard English *irre**v**e**l**ant* < standard English *irre**l**e**v**ant*. Although this process is not as widely discussed in the literature as other kinds of metathesis, it has been known since the early 20th century (cf. Brugmann 1904 [1970]).

In order for reciprocal metathesis to occur, the two affected segments typically need to be in the same syllabic position —i.e., onset, nucleus or coda— and they need to share some crucial phonological features. In languages such as Basque or Greek, reciprocal metathesis affects not only consonants, as in Basque ***b**a**g**e* > ***g**a**b**e* 'without' or *era**k**u**ts**i* > *era**ts**u**k**i* 'show', but vowels as well, as shown by ***a**te**r**a* > ***e**ta**r**a* 'come out' or *alk**a**ndo**r**a* > *alk**o**nd**a**r**a* 'shirt' (Egurtzegi 2014). This paper presents examples of reciprocal metathesis from a wide variety of languages, including Greek, Spanish, Sardinian, Polish, Saraiki and Basque.

I hypothesize that, unlike other kinds of metathesis such as perceptual metathesis (Blevins & Garrett 2004), reciprocal metathesis originates in motor planning errors, being similar to the speech error usually regarded as *spoonerism* (MacKay 1970), in which the sequential order of two segments is involuntarily reversed (cf. *overin**fl**ated **st**ate* → *overin**st**ated **fl**ate*; *p**u**s p**o**cket* → *p**o**s p**u**cket*; Goldstein 1968). These speech errors are the consequence of the influence of some planning elements —such as gestures— in others through priming, coactivation, inhibition, etc. (Garrett & Johnson 2013). I propose that reciprocal metathesis involves cases of gesture exchange errors that can be incorporated into a language, thus yielding sound change. This hypothesis implies that not only segments, but also lower units in the speech chain can exchange their sequential positions with one another as an instance of reciprocal metathesis at the feature level. This is the case in Standard Polish *iz**d**ɛ**p**ka* > North Mazovian Polish *iz**b**ɛ**t**ka* 'room (dim.)' and Hindi ***bi**t̪**t̪**i*ː to Saraiki (Western Punjabi, Indo-Aryan) ***pi**ɖ**ɖ**i*ː 'small'.

This study aims to build on the typology of metathesis presented by Blevins & Garrett (2004) by adding a different kind of phonetically driven metathesis, which can be understood under the same assumptions accepted for any other phonetic process.

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