

Second Workshop on Sound Change, 2-4 May 2012

What metathesis tells us about sound systems

This poster will examine the phonetic phenomenon of metathesis and consider what insights its various manifestations may have for the interpretation of the phonological system of a language. The data will be taken from Irish, from the study presented in Hickey (2011) and that in Hickey (2012) with further consideration of historical data from the history of the language. A number of remarkable facts which attend metathesis will be discussed, noticeably the fact that with consonant metathesis between the onset and coda of syllables, or across syllables, the value for [palatal] which pre-metathesis consonants may have is retained despite the operation of metathesis. What this shows is that, because the palatal and non-palatal nature of consonantal segments in Irish is central to the morphology of the language and to the lexical structure of words, the value of [palatal] remains unaltered. There are implications here for the phonological interpretation in Irish, above all that those phonetic segments which are the realisation of systemic distinctions in the language occupy a privileged position in the language and are not affected by such non-systemic, but highly constrained processes as metathesis.

The poster will also consider the opinions contained in the literature on metathesis (see references below) and consider a number of further examples, notably from varieties of Romance languages, to stress that metathesis is a non-systemic but rule-governed phonetic process which in some languages/varieties licenses an unordered linearity for segments in the phonetic stream.

References

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