

## A Unified Account of the French Language Game of Verlan

In this paper I present an analysis of the French language game known as Verlan. I begin by justifying the study of Verlan as a phenomenon that is within the overall phonological system of the French language. Verlan is not spoken independently; rather, Verlan lexical items are sprinkled within otherwise French-only speech, and without the prosodic break often associated with a switch in code. I propose that contrary to arguments that Verlanization is not technically a morphological process because the alteration of the lexical item is semantically empty (cf. Sanders 2000), the use of a Verlan form carries sociolinguistic meaning given Verlan's associations with urban youth, in its origins Parisian youth of Arab descent.

Prior analyses of this phenomenon (Lefkowitz 1991, Weinberger and Lefkowitz 1992, Azra and Cheneau 1994, Plénat 1995, Méla 1997) have been unable to account for the process as reflective of one operation. These disjunctive analyses reflect the popular notion that Verlanization involves the reversal of syllables for polysyllabic words and the reversal of segments for monosyllabic words. Using Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993, McCarthy and Prince 1995) and drawing from analyses of language games by Sanders (1999, 2000) and Itô, Kitagawa, and Mester (1996), I show that through a reanalysis of the mechanics of Verlan, as similar to processes of reduplication (cf. McCarthy and Prince 1995), Verlanization can be accounted for in a unified manner.

### References

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