

Linguistics 103
Short Essay #2
Imperfect Rhyme

Directions:

Step 1. Find a pop/rock/folk artist of your choice whose song lyrics rhyme. Collect about 30-40 imperfect rhyme pairs and transcribe the rhyming words using phonetic transcription as introduced in class. (If three words rhyme, this counts as 2 pairs, but perfect rhymes do not count).

Step 2. Analyze the type of rhyme which is occurring. If you are unsure how to begin, you can consider two extreme hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: All rhymes are ‘perfect’: every segment from the nucleus of the stressed syllable until the end of the word must be identical.

Hypotheses 2: Any two words can rhyme, irrespective of the sounds they contain.

Obviously both hypotheses will be false if you have followed step 1 correctly, since you were instructed to find rhyming lyrics (disconfirming Hypotheses 2) which do not rhyme perfectly (disconfirming Hypothesis 2). It should be easy to disprove Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2, however, requires you to consider the patterns of partial rhyme which you observe as well as those possible patterns which could have occurred in principle but which you *do not observe*.

Part of your analysis should involve postulating equivalence classes for segments which, although not identical, nevertheless are sufficiently similar to be *counted as if equivalent* for the purposes of establishing a rhyme for the artist in question.

You should try to construct the best hypothesis, consistent with the data you have, that lies somewhere between the two extremes 1 and 2 above. Bear in mind that sometimes there will be a piece of data that is inconsistent with your general findings. This might be a fluke, where the artist has relaxed his or her own basic rules, or it might be an indication that your general hypothesis is too restrictive or not restrictive enough. In such a case, you can note the discrepancy and suggest what kinds of further data you might want to look for to help decide what is really going on.

Step 3. State how your equivalence classes, or any other requirements on the rhyme that you may have hypothesized, can be defined using phonological properties introduced in class. You will want to say what members of an equivalence class share, as well as how they may differ in terms of these properties.

Example: Suppose words ending in {p, t, k} rhyme. The equivalence class is then voiceless stops (or, if you use distinctive features [–voice –sonorant –continuant]), and the property that varies within the class is place of articulation (Labial, Coronal, Dorsal).

Although this assignment is styled an 'essay', it does not have to be structured like a typical paper. However, you should try to summarize in prose any general conditions which appear to hold of the rhymes examined, and what data remains as an unexplained 'residue', i.e. where the rhyme relation is too complex or too loose to be adequately characterized given the amount of data you have and the tools introduced in class.

Four pages (including transcriptions of rhyme pairs) should be sufficient for a well-done assignment.