

Picard Verbal Morphology: What It Tells Us about Syllable Structure

Ryan Hendrickson and Julie Auger
Indiana University

The study and documentation of endangered languages is a domain that continues to gain in importance as these languages continue to lose speakers. Just as important is the applicability of the analysis to greater linguistic theory. The present analysis of the subjunctive in Picard, a Romance variety spoken in northern France and southern Belgium, sheds an interesting light on possible syllabic structures. Specifically, a number of forms provide evidence for the existence of complex codas, a type of structure that is rejected by many phonologists (e.g., Kaye, Lowenstamm, & Vergnaud 1990; but Levelt 2008 about the acquisition of complex codas in Dutch).

In Picard, the subjunctive is marked by the addition of a /ʃ/ morpheme, as illustrated in (1). What is interesting about this morpheme, from a phonological point of view, is that its occurrence is restricted to stems that end in vowels or in liquids, as seen in (2), and that its relative ordering with respect to the person is not constant. As we can see in (3), /ɔ̃/, the 1pl suffix, precedes the subjunctive suffix, but /t/, the 3pl morpheme, follows the subjunctive suffix.

- (1) a. *j'finis* [ʃfɛni] 'I finish.indicative.present'
b. *qu'èj finiche* [ʃfɛniʃ] 'I finish.subjunctive.present'
- (2) a. *qu'èj meurche* [zmœʁʃ] 'I die.subj.pres.'
b. *qu'o brûlche* [ɔ̃brɥlʃ] 'one.burn.subj.pres.'
c. *qu'i freum't* [ifrœmt] 'they.close.subj.pres.3pl'
d. *qu'i s'érclaque* [isɛrklak] 'he.collapse.subj.pres'
- (3) a. *qu'os mouronche* [ɔ̃murɔ̃ʃ] 'we die.1pl.subj.pres'
b. *qu'i meurche't* [imœʁʃt] 'they.die.subj.pres.3pl'

In this paper, we attribute the facts described above to the restrictions that Picard imposes on its syllables. Specifically, we propose that voiceless stops are the only possible word-final appendices and that this explains why the 3pl suffix can be overtly realized with any type of verb. We attribute the more restricted distribution of /ʃ/ to the fact that it must be part of the syllable, which means that it can only follow segments that are more sonorous than itself. Finally, we attribute the reversal of morpheme order in 3pl to a constraint that favors the overt realization of as many morphemes as possible: if /ʁʃ/ is a complex coda and /t/ an appendix, both morphemes can co-occur, but the reverse order, /ʁʃt/, would force deletion of one of the two morphemes. Independent evidence that /t/ can follow a sequence of consonants is found in verbs such as (4).

- (4) *iz hurl't* [yʁlt] 'they yell.3pl'

In addition to throwing light on the limits of possible syllable structures and providing support for branching codas, our analysis shows that even languages that have undergone substantial losses and are spoken by small numbers of relatively isolated speakers remain governed by principals of Universal Grammar. Indeed, the data analyzed here, as well as research by Auger (2000, 2001, 2003) on vocalic epenthesis in Picard and José & Auger (2005) on gemination, reveal sophisticated linguistic behaviors that must be attributed to linguistic competence.

References

- Auger, Julie. 2000. « Phonology, variation, and prosodic structure : Word-final epenthesis in Vimeu Picard », in J. M. Fontana et al, (éds), Proceedings of the First International Conference on Language Variation in Europe (ICLaVE), Barcelona : Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 14-24.
- Auger, Julie. 2001. « Phonological Variation and Optimality Theory : Evidence from Word-Initial Vowel Epenthesis in Picard », *Language Variation and Change* 13 : 3, 253-303.
- Auger, Julie. 2003. "Pronominal clitics in Picard revisited". In Rafael Núñez-Cedeño, Luís López, & Richard Cameron (eds.), *Language Knowledge and Language Use: Selected Papers from LSRL 31*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. pp. 3-20.
- José, Brian & Julie Auger. 2005. "Geminates and Picard pronominal clitic allomorphy". *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* 4:127-154.
- Kaye, Lowenstamm, & Vergnaud 1990. Constituent structure and government in phonology. *Phonology*, 7 , pp 193-231.
- Levelt, Clara 2008. Phonology and phonetics in the development of schwa in Dutch child language. *Lingua*, 118, pp 1344-1361.