

## The syllable is not a valid constituent: evidence from two Serbo-Croatian language games

The goal of this talk is to present two Serbo-Croatian language games known as *šatrovački* and *utrovački* and to show how their functioning gives us an insight into the architecture of phonological representations. Namely we will see that the functioning of *šatrovački* calls for the existence of empty nuclei after word-final consonants ; we will also see how both *utrovački* and *šatrovački* suggest that the syllable doesn't qualify as a constituent.

### 1. Šatrovački

- (1) Šatrovački is a Serbo-Croatian (S-C) language game, or ludling, quite comparable to French *verlan* (e.g. *herbe* 'grass' [ɛʁb] > [bɛʁɛ], *bouger* 'to move' [buʒe] > [ʒebu], see among others Bagemihl 1989, Plénat 1992). The basic organising principle of both is usually described as a total reversal of syllables.
- (2) The data that are presented come from work with "native" speakers of *šatrovački* that I have conducted in summer 2004 (Rizzolo 2004). The corpus collected contains 194 words.
- (3) Relevant evidence for the purpose of the talk comes from S-C CVC inputs. These become systematically bisyllabic in *šatrovački* through the epenthesis of a schwa that is absent from the input. The choice of schwa is remarkable for this vowel is absent from the vocalic inventory of S-C. The location of its insertion is always the same: a  $C_1V_1C_2$  input will come out as  $C_2\emptyset C_1V_1$ , e.g. *led* 'ice' > *døle*, *beč* 'Vienna' > *čøbe*, *vic* 'joke' > *cøvi*.

=> Point (3) is strong evidence for the existence of final empty nuclei after word-final consonants: among other voices, Government Phonology (e.g. Kaye 1990) holds that consonant-final words actually end in an empty nucleus. This nucleus can remain mute when occurring in word-final position, but must be segmentally expressed in morpheme-internal situation. Thus the schwa observed on the surface in *šatrovački* is nothing but the spell-out of the lexical final empty nucleus, which has been moved from a final to an internal location:  $C_1VC_2\emptyset > C_2\emptyset C_1V$ , then vocalisation of the empty site,  $\emptyset > \text{ə}$ .

### 2. Utrovački

- (4) The corpus of *utrovački* that I have collected contains 120 words. This S-C language game is based on moving and inserting syllables, e.g. words like *radio* 'radio', *kobila* 'female horse', *sunce* 'sun' turn into *udiozaranje*, *ubilazakonje*, *uncezasunje*.
- (5) As for *šatrovački*, the theoretical interest of such data lies in the insight of the architecture of phonological representations. Namely, the data presented here suggest that the syllable in its classical meaning doesn't qualify as a constituent: whatever the shape of the first syllable, either CV or CVC, the only material that is moved is an Onset/Nucleus pair.
- (6) A look back at *šatrovački* shows that the same holds true for this language game: the coda of the first syllable is never moved. All this strongly suggest that the syllable doesn't qualify as a constituent, neither do the rhyme nor the coda.

### 3. References (some)

- Bagemihl B. (1989). The crossing constraint and 'backward languages' , *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 7, 4 : 481-549.
- Kaye J. (1990). 'Coda' licensing , *Phonology Yearbook* 7, 2 : 301-330.
- Plénat M. (1992). Notes sur la morphologie du verlan : données et hypothèses, *Cahiers de grammaire* 17 : 171-208.
- Rizzolo O. (2004). Šatrovački : la construction et l'exploitation d'un corpus de verlan serbo-croate. *Corpus 3* (usage des corpus en phonologie) : 261-310.