

## The evidence for the constraint MINIMALITY in casual French speech

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Although careful speech and what the pronunciation dictionaries dictate in a language have been widely studied in Optimality Theory or OT ([9]), speech that is uttered in casual settings has not been extensively studied in phonological computation, focusing on language variation ([1;2:11;12]). The constraints in the OT literature are posited mostly based upon careful speech. Following up on published data in French ([2; 4]), this study formalizes varied pronunciations of the French word *ministre* /ministʁə/ → [ministʁ] ~ [minist] ~ [minis] in non-careful speech within OT. Word-final consonants are truncated before the consonant onset of the next word ([10]). (These variants are shown in descending order of relative frequency ([2]).) The categorically reduced forms without a schwa are more easily recognizable among the listeners if they are frequently used ([2]). It would seem that the mental lexicon of native French speakers allows for a categorical reduction in part of the word-final obstruent-liquid-schwa (henceforth, OLS) or [ə] or [ʁə] or [tʁə] ([2]). Brand and Ernestus inquire what would enforce the deletion of the word-final OLS without skipping it from the final schwa in phonology ([2]). The present study considers this issue, building a constraint ranking which accommodates each of the varied outputs which compete for grammaticality. Some outputs, such as [minisʁə], [minisʁ], and [ministə], are rarely produced ([2]), and they are deemed sub-optimal.

The present study suggests that the combinatorial effects of MINIMALITY or MINI ([8]), ALIGN-LEFT ([6]), and CONTIGUITY or CONTI ([7]) all rank the highest. MINI stipulates that the output consists of two moras, whereas ALIGN-LEFT requires the left edge of the word to align with the left edge of the prosodic word. CONTI stipulates that a continuous string in the input remains continuous in the output, which eliminates incorrect outputs such as [minisʁə] and [minisʁ]. MAX-IO ([7]) is crucially outranked by the higher-ranked constraints. MAX-IO stipulates that the input segments are preserved in their correspondent segments of the output. Thus, MINI, ALIGN-LEFT, CONTI » MAX-IO would seem to explain competing interactions, whereby the actual outputs, such as [ministʁ], [minist], and [minis] are accounted for. The intact output [ministʁə] is ruled out because this output bears three syllables, which is in violation of MINI. The modified ranking argument MINI, ALIGN-LEFT, NOCODA » MAX-IO can account for a categorical reduction of the word-final OLS in the phrase *peintre dans* /pɛ̃tʁə dɑ̃/ → [pɛ̃.dɑ̃] ([2]) as well. NOCODA ([7]) penalizes the use of a coda in the syllable. In addition, the combinatorial ranking of MINI, ALIGN-LEFT and CONTI over MAX-IO also holds its own in the analysis of truncation in French common words, as exemplified below:

### (1) Truncated words in French ([3])

*certificat* /sɛʁtifikɑ/ → [sɛʁtif], *cinéma* /sinema/ → [sine], *chronomètre* /kʁɔnɔmɛt/ → [kʁɔnɔ],  
*aluminium* /alyminjɔm/ → [aly], *accumulateur* /akymylatœʁ/ → [aky]

The phonology of truncated forms, as addressed here, contrasts with that of monomoraic words, which are numerous in French ([5]). This freely violates word minimality.

### References

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