Reading guide: Blevins & Garrett (2004)

Blevins, Juliette, and Andrew Garrett. 2004. The evolution of metathesis. In Bruce Hayes, Robert Kirchner,
     and Donca Steriade, eds., *Phonetically Based Phonology.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 117-156.

Background

     This paper continues to explore some of the questions that Hyman has raised: What
alternatives are there to models of phonetically driven phonology? What are the roles of
synchronic and diachronic factors in explaning phonological patterns?
     Section 2, where phonetic motivations for metathesis are discussed in the abstract, may
seem hard to follow at first because of B&G's constant references to different types of
metathesis; try re-reading it along with section 3, where the metathesis types are exemplified.

Questions to keep in mind while reading

*   Why is metathesis generally considered to be hard for phonological theory to handle?

*   What do B&G mean by the term *phonetic optimization?* Does their description of this
    approach to the phonetics-phonology interface seem to fit any of the papers we have read
    this semester?

*   What are the characteristics of the *evolutionary phonology* view of the phonetics-
    phonology interface that B&G develop?

*   How does the "listener-based reinterpretation" view of sound change work? (See also the
    summary of Ohala's (1993) model of sound change in Hyman (2001:173).)

*   What distinct types of metathesis do B&G recognize? For each type, what do B&G
    present as its phonetic basis?

*   B&G support their view of the motivation behind metathesis with arguments about
    typological patterns. What are these arguments? Can you identify any problems or
    potential alternative views here?

*   On p 141, B&G say,
        "Apparent counterexamples to observed typological patterns highlight important
        provisos on the general role of phonetics in phonology. Such examples demonstrate
        that regular synchronic phonological metatheses are a superset of those that can arise
        through purely phonetic sound change, and thereby contribute to the literature on
        phonological alternations that do not reflect phonetic naturalness or phonological
        markedness."
    Any comments?

Some points for further thought and discussion

- What can we deduce about the nature of the (synchronic) phonological model that B&G endorse? (They don't say much about this.)

- Can we think of any additional predictions that we could use to distinguish between synchronically and diachronically based models of functional grounding?

- B&G make a kind of economy argument against synchronic functional grounding. Does this argument seem well-founded? How many of B&G's arguments do *not* rely on considerations of theoretical economy?