

## On the role of margin phonotactics in Colloquial Bamana complex syllables

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**Abstract** Data from two closely related varieties of Bamana (Bambara), a Mande language spoken in West Africa, reveal that these varieties differ significantly from one another in terms of the syllable shapes they permit in their inventories. A comparison of normative ‘standard’ Bamana and that spoken by a young cohort of individuals in the Malian capital, Bamako, reveals that the latter colloquial variety has synchronically developed complex CCV and CVC syllable shapes, while the normative variety permits only maximal CV syllables. We posit that this development of complex syllable shapes in Colloquial Bamana is a result of an overall drive towards word minimization in the language and that the language’s chosen trajectory of minimization is predicted and best analyzed in reference to the Split Margin Approach to the syllable (e.g., Baertsch 2002). This paper formalizes Colloquial Bamana in an optimality-theoretic framework and details preferential vowel and consonant deletion patterns that create complex syllable shapes, the role of syllable margin phonotactics in driving these patterns, and other important phonological characteristics of the language that interact with and/or prevent minimization from occurring.

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