

Intervocalic lenition, contrastiveness and neutralization in Catalan

In this presentation I will review the main results on some research that I have been doing with several coauthors over the last decade or so on the role of phonological factors in the lenition of intervocalic consonants in Catalan and other languages. This work investigates the phonetic realization of stops, fricatives and affricates in the same phonetic environment, but under different conditions of phonological contrast. I will concentrate on my work in progress involving the comparison of word-final plosives preceding a vowel in Catalan and Basque.

Both in Catalan and in Basque there is a contrast between voiced and voiceless plosives in syllable-initial position that is neutralized word-finally. The hypothesis being tested in this study is that word-final intervocalic voiceless plosives (**VC#V**) will show greater lenition than word-internal and word-initial intervocalic tokens (**VCV**, **V#CV**), since in word-final position the voice contrast is neutralized. Lenition should be manifested acoustically as greater intensity, shorter duration and greater voicing.

Overall, the predicted effect of context was found. Compared with the results for Basque however, the effects of word context appear to be much weaker in Catalan, with smaller differences in reduction between **VC#V** and other intervocalic contexts. This suggests the existence of language-specific patterns of reduction, even when the same phonological condition (word-final devoicing) obtains.

My phonological interpretation of the phonetic results is that in Basque, word-final stops are phonologically unspecified /D G/. In Central Catalan, on the other hand, final stops in **VC#V** are phonologically voiceless /p t k/. The consequences of this analysis will be discussed.