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The Sociophonetics and Phonology of Dutch *r*

Rhotics, or *r*-sounds, are known to display a large amount of variation, both cross-linguistically and within particular languages. Dutch is an example of such a language: even within what is generally regarded as the standard variety, around 20 different variants can be distinguished, and the variation among them is governed by both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. The present study has both empirical and theoretical aims. Its main empirical aim is to catalogue Dutch *r*-variation, based on the collection and analysis of a corpus of acoustic speech data from over 400 speakers (~20.000 tokens) in ten cities in the Netherlands and Flanders. In addition, it presents a detailed articulatory (ultrasound) study of an innovative coda approximant variant. The theoretical contribution of the thesis lies in the development of a model of progressive sound change to account for the origins, development and current status of Dutch *r*-variation. In doing so, it tries to unite the interests of sociophoneticians and phonologists in the study of *r*-variation: while the former may seek to untangle the geographical, social and linguistic factors involved, the latter might attempt to explain what unites the many variants, in order to define *r* as a category. This thesis shows the relevance of detailed sociophonetic analysis for answering phonological questions, and argues that the unity among *r*-variants is established by tracing the diachronic links between them.

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