

Anne-France Pinget

The actuation of sound change

This dissertation is a sociophonetic study on sound change in progress and addresses the actuation problem, i.e. the question as to why a particular change takes place in a particular language at a given time.

The study is implemented in the framework of exemplar-based theories, which incorporates individual variation and the influence of the ambient language on individuals.

Two sound changes in progress in the Dutch language are selected: the de-voicing of initial labiodental fricatives and of initial bilabial stops. The study is articulated around a series of experiments, which provide insight into the role of four aspects of linguistic competence involved in sound change: speech perception, speech production, phonetic imitation and language attitudes. These are tested on the same pool of participants, and subsequently linked together both at the group and the individual level. Participants are recruited from five regions of the Dutch language area, representing different stages of sound change.

It is argued that sound change is an iterative process in which an individual's production changes incrementally. The actuation of change happens within the individual every time speech perception and speech production make an attempt to align with each other. Actuation is directly linked to individual differences in exemplars stored in the perception and production systems and to differences in the strength of the link between these systems. Individuals use their phonetic imitation ability to convert the details of segments they perceive into production. Positive language attitudes associated with specific linguistic features reinforce this process.

This book will be of interest for researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics, phonetics, language change, psycholinguistics, as well as social psychology.

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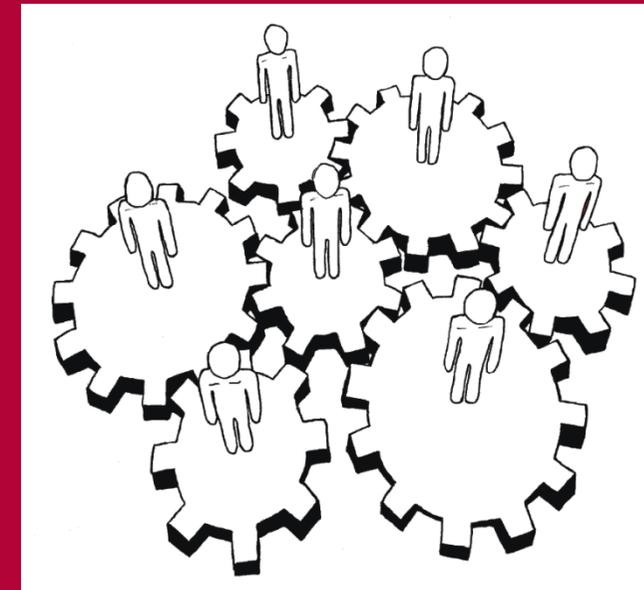
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