Voicing in transition
Laryngeal characteristics in West-Germanic and Italo-Romance Dialects

Geographical patterns in language can be very informative for the study of language variation. In this dissertation, patterns of variation are studied in two transition zones: geographically adjacent areas between which a change in the realisation of a linguistic characteristic is found. In the Low Saxon dialect continuum in the Netherlands and Germany, the transition between voicing and aspiration languages is studied. In the dialect continuum between Emilian-Romagnol and Tuscan varieties in Italy, the transition between varieties with and varieties without intervocalic /s/-voicing is studied. This study shows that both linguistic and socio-geographic factors influence patterns of linguistic variation.

In the first region, the change between the two systems is gradual, and characterised by a phonologically intermediate system and phonetic variation. This is caused by the presence of conflicting input in the transition zone, which provides evidence for a voicing system and an aspiration system simultaneously. In the second region, the change between the two systems is phonologically abrupt, and phonetically abrupt for older and phonetically gradual for younger speakers. The absence of a phonological transition can be attributed to the fact that the difference between varieties can be reduced to a distributional difference. The phonological characteristics of the studied phenomena can explain the differences in phonological characteristics of the transitions. The phonetic differences between the regions, on the contrary, cannot be explained by linguistic characteristics, because any linguistic phenomenon should allow for phonetic variation. Instead, it must be explained by socio-geographic factors such as speakers' regional orientation.

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