

Preface

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The topic of the papers in this special issue of *Rivista di Linguistica* is "The phonetic origins of sound change". The choice of this topic was inspired by the complaint of an Italian colleague, a phonetician, that there has been great interest among Italian linguists in the study of philology, but considerably less in phonetics. My scheme, on my colleague's behalf, was to foment interest in phonetics, and particularly in experimental phonetics, in Italy by educating philologists (and interested others) on the necessity for understanding sound change of exploring its origins in the articulatory activities and perceptual characteristics of language users.

I was very fortunate to have been able to obtain contributions to the special issue from researchers who hold important and divergent theoretical views on the phonetic origins of sound change. John Ohala has long held the view (e.g., 1974, 1981) that systematic misperceptions by listeners are primary sources of sound change. His paper with coauthor Grazia Busà offers experimental support for this idea as it applies to the loss of nasal consonants before voiceless fricatives. In contrast, Richard Mowrey and William Pagliuca propose that articulatory reduction invariably underlies "internal" sound changes (that is, changes that are phonetically motivated, not, for example, those due to language contact), and they offer interpretations in articulatory terms of sound changes that have, in the literature, been ascribed to mishearings. Finally, Björn Lindblom and his coauthors offer the compromise view (and the one I find most plausible) that both perceptual and articulatory factors must underlie the development of sound inventories of languages at a slow time scale as well as the more transient variability in speaking style from "hyper" to "hypo" articulation.

Happily, too, I was able to obtain contributions from researchers working to develop these competing theoretical positions by means of experimental investigation. Papers by Ohala and Busa, by Beddor and Evans-Romaine and by Widdison offer findings that they interpret as evidence for mishearing as an origin for the sound changes they are examining (respectively, nasal loss before voiceless fricatives, assimilation of nasal consonants to the place of articulation of a following consonant, and /s/ aspiration in dialects of Spanish). Romero's paper provides

evidence that he interprets in the framework of Browman and Goldstein's (e.g., 1992) theory of articulatory phonology-based, by the way, on a quite different theory of speech production than the account in terms of muscle activity offered by Mowrey and Pagliuca – as favoring a gestural source of /s/ aspiration in dialects of Spanish. Although I did not intend it to happen when I invited Kirk Widdison and Joaquín Romero to submit papers for publication in this issue, it did happen that they focused on exactly the same sound change, the development of /s/-aspiration in dialects of Spanish. Accordingly, the reader can compare and contrast the relative strengths of the arguments and evidence each offers, respectively, for a perceptual and a gestural account of the development of /s/-aspiration.

I would like to thank *some* of the contributors to this special issue for the promptness of their submissions, and I would like to thank all of them for the excellence of their contributions. I learned a great deal by reading the collection of papers. I expect the readership of the journal to benefit in the same way. I thank Pier Marco Bertinetto for the opportunity to serve as guest editor of this special issue of the journal and for his advice, patience, and encouragement along the way.

References

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