

Colin Wilson (Johns Hopkins) Universals Talk

Title: An articulatory-phonetic account of vowel epenthesis into nonnative consonant clusters

Vowel epenthesis processes in native phonological systems are insensitive to the voicing of surrounding obstruents (e.g., Lombardi 2001), but many interlanguage and L2 studies have reported higher rates of epenthesis in the environment of voiced stops and fricatives (e.g., Eckman 1981; Edge 1991; Baptista & Silva Filho 2006). In this talk, I compare the results of two series of experiments in which English speakers produced or transcribed words beginning with unfamiliar consonant sequences. A robust voicing asymmetry in vowel epenthesis was observed in production, but not found in the results of transcription, despite identity of the stimuli and other similarities between the two response patterns. Cognitive analysis of the two tasks locates voicing-dependent vowel epenthesis in a post-phonological component. In particular, I argue that gestural mistiming (Davidson 2003, 2006) is more likely to result in epenthesis when a surrounding obstruent is voiced, due to well-known phonetic properties of the voice contrast in English. This analysis eliminates a counterexample to the otherwise successful hypothesis that native and nonnative phonological systems conform to a common set of principles (e.g., Broselow et al. 1988), and has implications for how acoustic-phonetic similarity affects processes and computations in the perceptual and phonological components.