

Variation in Romance languages : insights from large corpora

Lenition processes in Romance languages have been widely studied from both a typological and a diachronic point of view, taking classical Latin as a starting point. Such studies have contributed, for example, to the separation of Romance languages into Western and Eastern Romance branches, each with specific paths to lenition.

Conversely, linguists make use of the written forms of Romance languages, supplemented when possible with pronunciation knowledge, to reconstruct proto-Romance from the observed variation in Romance languages

over time. Beyond Romance languages, lenition is a pervasive phenomenon crosslinguistically

(Gurevitch 2004, Brandao de Cavalho et al, 2008, Lavoie 2016) which is of great importance to phonology, in line with

Ohala (1981) who argues that phonological processes emerge from phonetic variation and that studying lenition synchronically can be of help to linguistic domains, such as phonetics, phonology, typology and historical linguistics.

This contribution builds upon these well-established procedures, to investigate lenition phenomena in oral corpora from a synchronic point of view. We make use of large data sets of broadcast speech in 5 major Romance languages (Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian and Romanian) to explore lenition phenomena which are frequent in fluent, naturalistic speech. Following Hualde & Chitoran (2016), "what is an active

process at the phonetics-phonology interface in one language may mirror a completed sound change in another language", the proposed synchronic investigations aim to contribute by shedding light on ongoing or future

sound changes in the studied languages.

Automatic speech processing techniques, and in particular automatic forced

alignment with specific lenition variants allow us to quantify lenition phenomena as observed in today's speech in these five Romance languages.

The

proposed method may be considered as an addition to the linguist,Äôs ever-expanding toolkit.

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