# INTRODUCING CONTEMPORARY PALATALISATION

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*Abstract*

New instances of palato-alveolars have been reported in various regions and countries of the English-speaking world over the past few decades. Those new instances of /ʃ, tʃ, ʒ, dʒ/, which I propose to bring together under the common name of *Instances of Contemporary Palatalisation* (henceforth, ICPs), are the results of processes of palatalisation. I argue that ICPs can be seen as the products of a phonological process that finds its roots in the context of significant post-World War Two social and political changes, both within and beyond the British Isles. What is common to all four ICPs is not the input but the output of the process, that is to say systematic palato-alveolars. The phonological view adopted is therefore that Contemporary Palatalisation expresses product-oriented, rather than source-oriented generalisations (cf. Bybee, 2001: 126). I argue that ICPs are the continuation of a historic pattern endemic to English, which has systematically yielded palato-alveolars throughout the history of the language. This paper presents selected results of a corpus study based on a PhD project undertaken at the University of Lyon.

## *1. Introduction*

Palatalisation is a particularly productive process that lies at the heart of linguistic change in Indo-European languages. While some instances of word palatalisation are considered to be standard in a great many varieties of English (e.g. *issue*, *nature*), the status of others, mostly associated with the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, is more controversial from a prescriptive point of view. I have labelled such phenomena *Instances of Contemporary Palatalisation* (ICPs). As to the phonological process which leads to ICPs, I have called it *Contemporary Palatalisation* so as to distinguish it from previous processes in the history of the English language. ICPs are variants mostly associated with younger speakers.

First, I will focus on the process of palatalisation that underlies ICPs and explain how it operates in four phonetic environments. In order to see how ICPs fit within the larger context of sound change at the end of the 20th century, the reader will be reminded of the correlation that can be found between World-War two social and linguistic changes in Britain and in the USA.

After briefly surveying the different varieties of English in which ICPs may occur, I will explain how the phenomenon mirrors diachronic patterns that have led to palatalisation throughout the history of English. Then, I will present some of the results taken from a corpus study undertaken for my PhD thesis. Finally, I will propose an explanation for the development of ICPs within the framework defined by Smith (2007), whose cognitive model of change posits that sound change typically goes hand in hand with *social* change. Smith's


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theory will be used to explain the emergence of ICPs in the context of significant post-World War Two social and political changes, both in Britain and in the USA.

## *2. Instances of Contemporary palatalisation (ICPs)*

### *2.1 Yod coalescence after* /t, d/ *in stressed syllables*

This is a type of assimilation where the approximant /j/ (yod) fuses, or coalesces, with preceding /t, d/, resulting in affricates /tʃ, dʒ/, e.g. *tune* /ˈtjuːn/ → /ˈtʃuːn/ ; *dune* /ˈdjuːn/ → /ˈdʒuːn/. The yod is the assimilator.

In an article on Received Pronunciation (RP), Wells (1997: 22-23) writes that 'English has long had a tendency to convert /tj/ into /tʃ/ and /dj/ into /dʒ/' (e.g. *nature*). Indeed, in Early Modern English, borrowings from French were gradually palatalised in items like *nature* and *fortune* (Crystal 2003). Wells observes that the process spread to new words in the mid-twentieth century to include words like *actual, perpetual, gradual, graduate*, whose everyday forms contain the affricate /tʃ/ or /dʒ/, their variants with /j/ being 'mannered' or 'artificial'. Wells finally notes that a new change occurred in the late 20th century, whereby coalescence continued to 'widen its scope', to reach stressed syllables in words like *Tuesday, dune*. Following the results of my corpus study (cf. section 5.1), I suggest that this is the period of history when all four ICPs really started to diffuse into the community. Therefore, ICPs are originally non-standard variants whose diffusion has become noticeable since the last few decades of the 20th century.

First, there was considerable resistance to accept coalescence in stressed syllables, as is shown in Ramsaran 1990, Wells 1997 and in various editions of the *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (henceforth, LPD), and the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (henceforth, EPD). Linguists were reluctant to consider it as part of the standard accent and to include it in the description of RP. However, a study by Hannisdal (2006) turned the tables. As a direct consequence of her work, Wells decided to include coalescence in stressed syllables into descriptions of RP (LPD 2008). On his blog, he even explains that he had been wrong not to do it before:

> In LPD I labelled these variants "non-RP". Clearly I was wrong to do so (even if it's true for people of my own advanced age).
>
> (Wells 2007)

Wells implies that these variants constitute a change in progress, mostly associated with younger speakers, which is confirmed by various pronunciation preference polls in LPD 2008. Cruttenden (2008: 81) also considers that yod coalescence in stressed syllables as a change that is "well-established" in RP.

Of course, most accents of North America and other varieties in which yod elision is particularly prominent do not display this ICP.

### *2.2. Yod palatalisation after* /s, z/ *in stressed syllables*

Words like *presume* and *assume* have traditional forms /prɪˈzjuːm, əˈsjuːm/ that can be palatalised into /prɪˈʒuːm, əˈʃuːm/. The assimilator is /j/, which retracts the articulation of both /s/ and /z/. Therefore, underlying /sj/ is palatalised into /ʃ/ and underlying /zj/ is

palatalised into /ʒ/. The phenomenon is widely accepted in unstressed syllables but it is less so in stressed syllables. For instance, the palatalised variants are listed as non-standard variants in LPD 2008 and they are not even listed at all in EPD (the remarks made in this article concern all editions of EPD. This is the reason why no date is mentioned.). The phenomenon is not as common as coalescence in /tju, dju/ sequences, partly because yod dropping is more common in these environments and partly because fewer items contain /sju, zju/ than /tju, dju/ sequences in the English lexicon. Nevertheless, these variants appear to be progressing, even in the standard accent:

> Coalesced forms in the onset of accented syllables, e.g. in *assume*, *presume* are increasingly heard in RP
>
> (Cruttenden 2008: 227)

As with the first ICP, most accents of North America and other varieties in which yod dropping is particularly prominent do not display this ICP.

### *2.3. Palatalisation of* /s/ *in initial* /st, str, stj/ *clusters*

Our third ICP concerns words like *stop, start, stress, street, student, stew,* which display the palatalised variants /ˈʃtɒp, ˈʃtɑːt, ˈʃtres, ˈʃtriːt, ˈʃt(j)uːdənt, ˈʃt(j)uː/. In items like *stress*, *street* and *student*, *stew*, it is the /r/ and the /j/ which respectively retract the articulation of the alveolar fricative. In the case of /st/, the cluster that is the least likely to yield palatalisation, identification of a particular assimilator is much less obvious, as /s/ and /t/ are both alveolars. Such instances of palatalisation may well be the result of a *paradigmatic* type of assimilation[1].

EPD does not list any palato-alveolars in these environments while the existence of palatalised variants of /str, stj/ is only mentioned in passing in LPD 2008 (52).

In a study about the palatalisation of /str/ clusters, Rutter (2011) uses acoustic measurements to compare ten English speakers' realisations of the onsets /ʃ/, /ʃr/, /ʃtr/, and /s/. He finds out that most of the occurrences of /str/ clusters produced by these speakers fall within their normal range for /ʃ/, as opposed to various intermediate phonetic realisations falling somewhere between a typical /ʃ/ and /s/. The results indicate that the change towards /ʃ/ is complete for those speakers.

### *2.4. Palatalisation of* /s/ *by* /r/

This fourth- and last- ICP can be found in items like *anniversary, classroom, estuary, grocery, nursery*, which have palatalised variants /ˌænɪˈvɜːʃri, ˈklɑːʃruːm, ˈeʃtjʊri, ˈgrəʊʃri, ˈnɜːʃri/ (LPD 2008). It is again the /r/ that triggers the assimilation process by retracting the articulation of /s/. These palatalised variants are listed in LPD, for both British and American English, but not in EPD.

[1] Paradigmatic assimilations occur when sounds interact on a paradigmatic axis (Pavlík 2009: 5). The high frequency of palatalised variants of /str, stj/ patterns may contribute to the palatalisation of the /st/ cluster.

## *3. The diachronic aspect of English palatalisation*

Overall, linguists have shown reservations as to the inclusion of ICPs within standard English accents. It therefore seems perfectly reasonable to assume that they are originally non-standard variants. From a diachronic point of view, ICPs seem to be the continuation of a historic process whereby palato-alveolar fricatives and affricates have gradually diffused into English. It is assumed that the only proto-Germanic palatal was /j/ (Stévanovitch 2008: 21). Throughout the history of the English language, new palato-alveolars have repeatedly been created as allophones of pre-existing phonemes. The phonetic innovations thus produced were eventually fossilised (phonologised).

(1) In Old English, [k] → [tʃ] in certain environments (e.g. Old English *Cinn* [k] → Contemporary English *chin* [tʃ]; Old English *tæcan* [k] → Contemporary English *teach* [tʃ]).

(2) In Middle English, then Modern English (15th century: rare, 16th end 17th centuries: more common), [sj] → [ʃ] (e.g. *nation* [nasjõ] → [neɪʃən]; *sure* [syr] → [sjuːr] → [ʃʊə]).

(3) In the 17th century [zj] → [ʒ] (e.g. *measure* [məzyr] → [mezjuːr] → [meʒə]).

(4) In the 17th century [tj] → [tʃ] (e.g. *nature* [natyr] → [naːtjuːr] → [neɪtʃə]; *fortune* [fortyn] → [fortjuːn] → [fɔːtʃən]).

(5) In the 17th century [dj] → [dʒ] (e.g. *soldier* [soldjər] → [səʊldʒə]).

(Stévanovitch 2008: 24).

## *4. Post-World War Two social and linguistic changes in Britain and the USA*

In Britain, RP began to lose ground in the second part of the 20th century. At the same time, media's interest in non-standard pronunciations arose. Regional accents appeared on the BBC[2] and have been on the increase in all media ever since. That phenomenon has had tremendous psychological repercussions. Prescriptivism in pronunciation had been particularly well-developed since the end of the 18th century. As a result of that long prescriptive tendency, non-standard speakers of British English felt linguistically insecure. *Linguistic insecurity* can be defined as the lack of confidence experienced by speakers when they believe that the way they speak does not conform to - and is inferior to - the standard variety (Calvet 2011: 47). Linguistic insecurity started to decline with the increase of exposure of non-standard varieties in the media.

The decades following World War Two were characterised by significant social changes in Britain. Hannisdal (2006) makes a link between this socio-historical context and the decline of RP:

> Up until the middle of the 20th century RP reigned supreme as the unrivalled English pronunciation standard. But in the decades after the Second World War Britain underwent radical social changes which also left their marks on the linguistic development and on the attitudes towards accent. Along with the general social changes, the role of RP also changed considerably. Between 1944 and 1966 the number of universities in Britain doubled and higher education became available to people from diverse social backgrounds. The increased democratisation in the

[2] In the 1920s, the BBC had decided that all its presenters had to be RP speakers (hence the term *BBC English*). That decision would help give special importance to RP. 'By using only RP speakers as announcers and newsreaders, the BBC underlined the social importance of the accent, and in the public mind RP became even closer linked with high status and intellectual competence' (Hannisdal 2006: 13).

> educational system extended into the occupational and public life. Professional and academic careers became open to people from the lower social strata, who of course were non-RP speakers. Regional accent features "massively invaded the realms of the social elite" (Wotschke 1996: 221) and the hegemony of RP was broken. An educated speaker was no longer synonymous with an RP speaker, and RP was no longer the exclusive property of a narrow social class.
>
> (Hannisdal 2006: 15)

In 1970, Gimson wrote:

> The acceptance of the BBC accent, *i.e.* some form of RP, as a standard can no longer be said to be common amongst the younger people. The social structure of the country is much less rigid than it was forty years ago, and the young are particularly apt to reject authority of any kind. This general rejection includes the accent of the "Establishment", *i.e.* RP.
>
> (Gimson 1970: 18-19)

Thus, the decline of RP coincided with major social changes that went hand in hand with an increasingly equalitarian ideology in Britain. Kerswill (2007: 38) also notes that the loss of RP's privileged status accompanied the strong social mobility in post-World War Two Britain. In addition, the emergence of non-standard pronunciations in new contexts should be seen 'in the context of the ideology, first emerging in the 1960s, of gender and racial equality and the legalisation of contraception, abortion and homosexuality – coupled with a generally greater access to education' (Kerswill 2007: 51).

The decline of RP as a sort of international standard after World War Two extended far beyond Europe at a time when Britain lost its Empire. In the United States, some sort of international English based on RP served as a model in high society. Thus:

> r-less pronunciation, as a characteristic of British Received Pronunciation, was also taught as a model of correct, international English by schools of speech, acting, and elocution in the United States up to the end of World War II. It was the standard model for most radio announcers and used as a high prestige form by Franklin Roosevelt[3].
>
> (Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006: 46)

Furthermore, the post-World War Two decades also witnessed the decline of a certain form of formal speech in public contexts in the USA.

The art of oratory has long been part and parcel of American culture. One easily recalls having heard important speeches from the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century (e.g. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Barack Obama). Some other speeches have been passed down from one generation to the next even in the absence of recordings (e.g. Abraham Lincoln). McWhorter (2012: 109) explains that listening to speeches used to be a form of entertainment in the USA. For example, 'before Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address, a professional orator named Edward Everett delivered a two-hour formal speech to entertain the crowd'. McWhorter (2012: 109-110) observes that the 20th century witnessed a gradual shift from formal and written-based types of public speaking to speeches that became more informal and much closer to real spoken English. The shift was part of a more general change. Indeed:

> the difference between spoken and written language has been key in a general transformation in American language culture over the past several decades from one focused on written forms to one focused on spoken ones. This has been influenced in part by the spread of recording technology and in part by late 20th-century countercultural movements that rejected traditional forms of oratory.
>
> (McWhorter 2012: 109)

[3] A passage from a speech by F.D. Roosevelt can be heard at the address below. This speech exhibits a great many similarities with RP.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Wo9Q3WJHjA

Let us leave aside the question of technology and focus on the countercultural movements. McWhorter (2012: 111) explains that the major changes came after the 1960s 'and the general trend toward questioning the establishment'. One of the linguistic consequences of the ideology of the time was that a more natural, much less ceremonial form of language became the preferred style, which had longer-term repercussions:

> By 1981, at which point countercultural America had settled back down into something more conservative again, American rhetoric, even in the most formal settings, had changed. Modern speechmaking was more like talking, and orators took pride in sounding more like the common man.
>
> (McWhorter 2012: 111)

## *5. The spatial and temporal dimension of ICPs*

ICPs have perhaps mistakenly been associated with the south-east of England and/or with Estuary English (Altendorf 2003: 69, Altendorf and Watt 2008: 213, Cruttenden 2008: 87, Coggle 1993: 51-52, LPD 2008: xix, Wells 1982: 331). However, Contemporary Palatalisation has been noted in many varieties of English in England (including RP), in Scotland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, as well as in several varieties of US English (see Glain 2013: 141-147 for detailed references).

As it is often implied in the literature that the variants that I call ICPs are associated with younger speakers, I wanted to check whether they constituted a change in progress. Such changes should be observed through the apparent time method:

> The first and most straightforward approach to studying linguistic change in progress is to trace change in apparent time: that is, the distribution of linguistic variables across age levels.
>
> (Labov 1994: 45-46)

### *5.1. A corpus study*

In order to compare recordings of speakers of all ages from various parts of the English-speaking world, I turned to the IDEA[4] public website (*International Dialects of English Archives*), created by Paul Meier and hosted by the University of Kansas. I studied recordings of people from England, Scotland, the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

On this website, informants are asked to read a text and are then interviewed (in most cases). I will now present a selection of the results that I obtained for British English. The study was based on 216 recordings of the text entitled "Comma gets a Cure", that contains a number of potential ICPs[5], and on 315 recordings of interviews of speakers of both sexes and of all genders. Therefore, the IDEA corpus allowed me to study both scripted and unscripted speech.

Let us first turn to some of the results for England and Scotland[6]. The corpus clearly shows that there have been more and more speakers with some degree of contemporary palatalisation over the years. Speakers who do not palatalise at all are becoming the minority. In a number

[4] Special thanks to IDEA (International Dialects of English Archive).

[5] The words that may contain ICPs are the following: *story*, *district*, *duke*, *street*, *stressed*, *strut*, *strong*, *stroking*, *tune*.

[6] Welsh speakers are not included in my study of Britain. I did not find a single Welsh speaker whose speech displayed contemporary palatalisation in the IDEA British corpus.

of cases, the period in time when the change appears to gather momentum coincides with the speakers who were born in the late 1960s/early 1970s. This pattern seems to repeat itself with different ICPs, as illustrated with the graphs below (the point in time when the change becomes more apparent has been circled in figures 2 and 3). It corresponds to the end of the 20th century and it therefore matches the evolution noted by Wells about yod coalescence (cf. section 2.1). The analysis of the American corpus has yielded similar results (Glain 2013: 298-303).

In the USA, palatalised variants become more and more common as we move from one age group to the next. The pattern described about Britain applies there too: the change becomes more noticeable with the speakers born in the late 1960s/early 1970s.

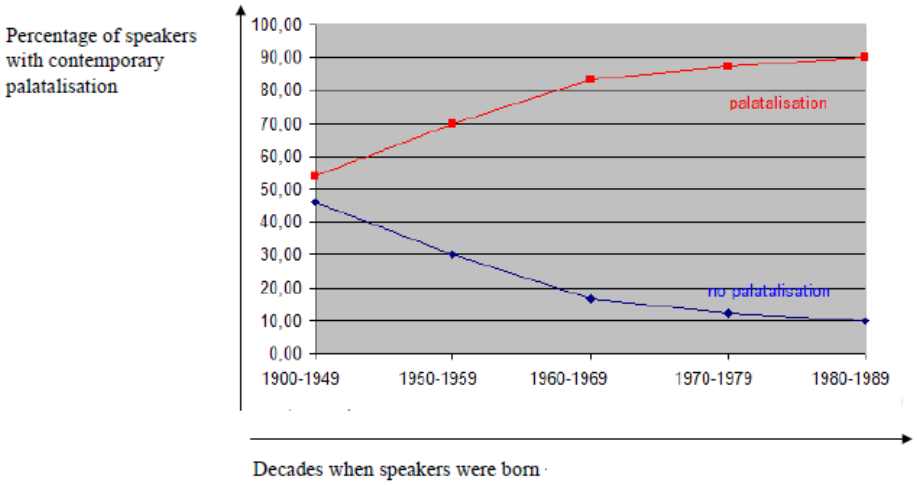



Figure 1: Overall palatalisation, England and Scotland, scripted speech

Figure 1 shows people who have some degree of contemporary palatalisation[7] in their speech vs. those who display no contemporary palatalisation at all.

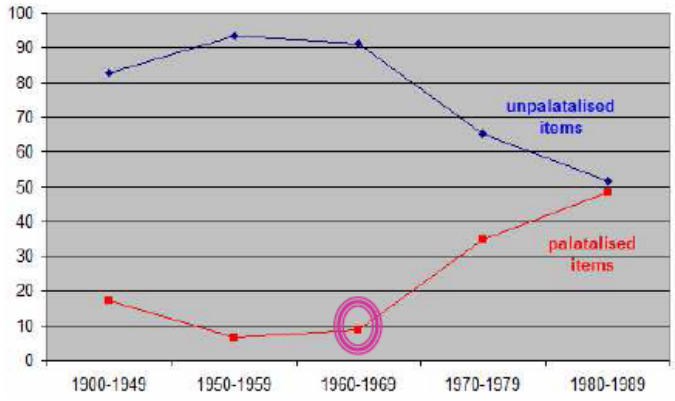



Figure 2: /str/ palatalisation, England and Scotland, scripted speech

For each age group, figure 2 shows the percentage of the items with /str/ that have been palatalised vs. the percentage of those that have not.

7 No speaker from the IDEA has exclusive contemporary palatalisation.

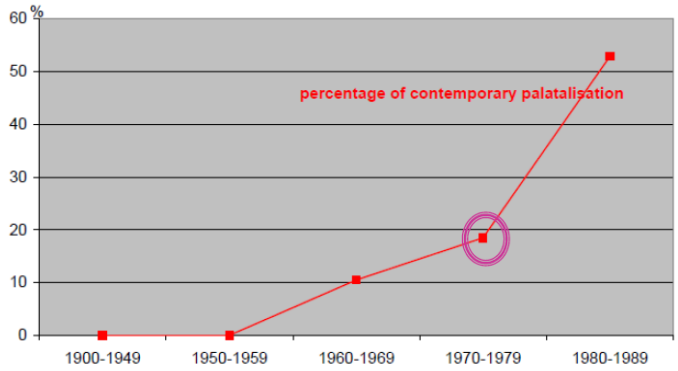



Figure 3: Overall palatalisation, England and Scotland, unscripted speech

Figure 3 only concentrates on the percentage of speakers who display some degree of contemporary palatalisation. The overall pattern is quite clear and the change gathers momentum in the 1970s.

The figures will be interpreted in the next section.

### *5.2. Some sociolinguistic observations*

Let us consider the figures for scripted speech. In Britain, Scottish speakers display a higher rate of overall contemporary palatalisation than English speakers (93% vs. 75%). Within England, the only speakers who do not display any contemporary palatalisation in their speech are those from the north-east. Indeed, I could not find a single ICP in the speech of speakers from the following counties/regions: Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham, Yorkshire. London and south-eastern speakers do not seem to palatalise any more than their counterparts from other regions. Men palatalise a little more than women (84% vs. 74%).

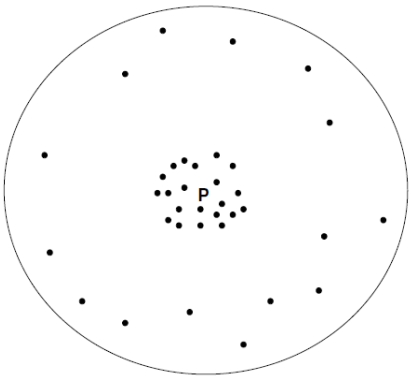
In the USA, the speakers who display the highest rate of contemporary palatalisation are those associated with the varieties known as *Southern American English* and *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE). As regards Southern speakers, 63% of them display some degree of contemporary palatalisation (vs. 53% for the national average). A massive 82% of AAVE speakers display contemporary palatalisation (vs. 53% for speakers of other varieties). That those two varieties should exhibit similar patterns is not really surprising as it is well-known that AAVE shares a number of features with Southern varieties of US English (Edwards 2008: 182). As was the case with Britain, men palatalise more than women (64% of men display overall palatalisation vs. 45% of women). This might seem a little surprising as women are typically viewed as the leaders of linguistic change when we are dealing with supra-regional innovations (Labov 2001: 516).

The figures obtained from the study of unscripted speech (Glain 2013: 307-320) reflect the same sociolinguistic differences. There appears to be no significant differences between scripted and unscripted speech in relation to the effective production of ICPs. That is surprising insofar as the opposition scripted/unscripted speech has sometimes been considered as an important principle of variation when reduction processes are concerned, unscripted speech being much more likely to yield reduced forms such as assimilations (e.g. Shockey 2003: 17). The principle of variation that best characterises ICPs is that of lexical frequency,

whereby high-frequency items are much more likely to undergo reduction. This has been corroborated by a survey of the phonetic transcriptions of the lexical items that may potentially undergo contemporary palatalisation, both in EPD and in LPD (Glain 2013: 267-279). In the IDEA corpus, the items which are most often palatalised are *during*, *straight*, *strong*, *street*, *strange*, *restaurant*, *grocery*/*groceries*. They are all fairly common words.

### *6. Explaining the change: Smith's cognitive model*

Smith (2007) proposes a model that includes elements from theories of change based on the coarticulatory nature of speech (Lindblom 1986, 1990; Ohala e.g. 1981, 1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 2003 ; Blevins 2004). At the same time, Smith includes the social dimension of change in his model. The traditional dichotomy between internal and external change is not relevant as Smith (2007: 74) works within the framework of cognitive linguistics. Cognitivists 'posit an intimate, dialectic relationship between the structure and function of language on the one hand, and non-linguistic skills on the other' (Taylor 1996: ix). In other words, within a cognitive framework, there is no clear-cut boundary between the mental processes associated with human language and those related to the rest of human experience.
Smith (2007: 19) writes that, for any given phone, speakers have a repertoire of variants that they can choose from according to the situation. Among those variants, there exists a prototypical realisation of the phone that corresponds to its phonological representation. Smith reminds the reader that Jones's definition of the notion of phoneme is 'a family of related sounds' (Jones 1956: 172). These related sounds are organised around the prototypical value, as illustrated below.




. = actual realisations
P = prototypical realisation
Illustration 5: A family of sounds (Smith, 2007: 20)

The prototypical value can vary from a speaker to another. It follows that the listener may change his/her pronunciation, through a process of identification with and adoption of the prototypical value of his/her interlocutor. Smith (2007: 11) maintains that a true phonological change occurs at the level of the individual if the adoption of the new value modifies the listener's phonological system. The more frequent the contact with speakers whose phonological system is different, the more significant the change in the listener's system.

Yod coalescence after /t, d/ can clearly illustrate the model proposed by Smith. When a speaker (A) who only has palatalised forms in unstressed syllables (e.g. *actually, fortune, duality, durability*) interacts with another speaker (B) who has palatalised forms in both

unstressed *and* stressed syllables (e.g. *actually, fortune, duality, durability, tune, tutor, dune, reduce)*, adoption of the prototypical values of B may lead to a modification of the consonantal system of A. Indeed, /tj, dj/ may merge with /tʃ, dʒ/, modifying A's system from A1 to A2.

**A1 (initial system of A)**

| | |
|---|---|
| /tʃ/ | *actually, fortune* |
| /dʒ/ | *duality, durability* |
| /tj/ | *tune, tutor* |
| /dj/ | *dune, reduce* |

→

**A2 (A's modified system, following contact with B)**

| | |
|---|---|
| /tʃ/ | *actually, fortune, tune, tutor* |
| /dʒ/ | *duality, durability, dune, reduce* |

A's consonantal system is partly modified following a process of imitation.

The reason why the ongoing evolution of sounds does not lead to the complete breakdown of communication is that the vast majority of the innovations that come from the interaction between two speakers are not diffused into the speech community (Smith 2007: 12-13). If change is always potential within variation, there has to be an interaction between extra- and intralinguistic factors at a particular time in order for a particular change to occur and then to diffuse into the community (Smith 2007: 10). This raises the question of the *actuation* of change on a large scale. Why is a given change actuated at a particular time? Why not earlier? Why not later? Smith (2007) argues that the reason why some innovations catch on in the community is often related to social considerations. The evolution may even originate in major historical events or ideological changes (Labov 2010: 44).

If we consider Britain, the emergence of ICPs in the latter part of the 20th century clearly coincides with the period when RP began to lose ground on account of a particular socio-historical context (cf. section 4). Such a context is likely to stimulate linguistic change within a cognitive model of change such as that proposed by Smith. It is therefore theoretically sound to posit that the development of ICPs, non-standard variants, was indeed triggered by an interaction between intra- and extralinguistic factors that led to the decrease of the standard accent.

American English does not have yod coalescence after /t, d/ or yod palatalisation after /s, z/. However, the loss of an international prestige model and of traditional forms of oratory (cf. section 4) certainly contributed to the rise of the other two ICPs in the USA. It is entirely possible that, in shifting away from written, overarticulated speeches, modern speechmaking has participated in an overall change favourable to processes of phonetic reduction based on coarticulation and hypoarticulation, such as ICPs. In the USA, like in Britain, the 1945-1970 period witnessed a radical change in speaking standards. Those innovations seem to have been triggered by social changes.

## *7. Are ICPs phonetic or phonological phenomena?*

Like previous instances of palatalisation in the history of English (cf. section 3), it is clear that ICPs originate in purely phonetic assimilations. However, as those previous palatalised variants were gradually phonologised, it is worth wondering if ICPs remain strictly as phonetic phenomena today. Can we consider that they might be phonological variants? In order to try and answer those questions, I carried out an experiment with 30 speakers (15 were English and 15 were American).

I came up with a list of words which I asked my 30 informants to read slowly and syllable by syllable. They also had to read a text that contained the same words. The point of the experiment was to determine whether the ICPs that were actually produced were connected speech phenomena or rather corresponded to the speakers' citation forms of the lexical items considered. The words were *tube*, *astute*, *dune*, *reduce*, *assume*, *presume*, *resume*, *student*, *street*, *stop*, *start*, *Australia*, *grocery*, *classroom*.

Some speakers palatalised certain items when they read the text, but not the list of words, which is not surprising considering the particularities of connected speech phenomena. On the other hand, some speakers palatalised the same items both in the text and in the list of words, which seems to be an indication that there might be more than connected speech phenomena at work. The really surprising part of the experiment was that other speakers occasionally palatalised an item when they read it syllabically, but not when it was part of the text. It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that the apparent variation in the citation forms of the items considered reflects a true underlying variation within the group considered. There appears to be *variable phonological representations* of the items considered. Indeed, the speech is slower and less variable when the informants read the words syllable by syllable, which is more likely to bring the true underlying representations to the fore. Such representations are more easily lost in more rapid connected speech.

For English speakers, the most productive ICP was yod coalescence after /t, d/ in stressed position, which yielded 47% of palatalised forms in the syllabic reading. The second most productive ICP was yod palatalisation after /s, z/ in stressed syllables (37% of palatalised forms), followed by /stj/ palatalisation (25%), palatalisation of /s/ by /r/ (19%) and /str/ palatalisation (12%). As far as American speakers were concerned, palatalisation of /s/ by /r/ was the most frequent ICP (with 25% of palatalised forms), followed by /str/ palatalisation (19%).

Of course, there is no absolute certainty that the palatalised variants are phonological for those speakers, but it still seems to be an indication that some lexical items are stored with palato-alveolars for certain speakers. ICPs might be a little more than mere surface phenomena.

## *8. Conclusion*

In this paper, I have introduced the phonological phenomenon which I have labelled *Contemporary Palatalisation*, as well as its lexical manifestations, *Instances of Contemporary Palatalisation* (ICPs).

While being phenomena mostly associated with the last fifty years, ICPs are the continuation of a long historical process which has systematically led to palatalisation in English. Contemporary Palatalisation is therefore an example of a synchronic process that is in fact the manifestation of systematic, diachronic ones. Ohala (1994: 375) maintains that the coarticulation of phonemes in synchrony have the exact same effect as other co-occurrences, which have been identified at the diachronic level. Blevins (2004: 18) shares the same view,

arguing that phonetic innovations often mirror diachronic processes. Therefore, Contemporary Palatalisation may well be triggering a real change within the community, as there seems to be variation at the underlying level, as some speakers appear to have phonological representations with fossilised palatalisation.

I have tried to give an answer (at least in the specific case of ICPs) to what Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) call *the actuation problem* and regard as 'the heart of the matter', i.e. why a change occurs at a particular time. Everything indicates that the particular sound changes listed in this paper are part of a larger linguistic trend whereby spoken English underwent radical changes in the second part of the 20th century. Such changes operated within the overall context of a certain democratisation of society in Britain and America, which went hand in hand with the development of more informal forms of language.

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