

Phonetic and social factors in sound change: Insights from Jin Chinese

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Abstract

The sounds of a language keep changing in various ways over time. Since Weinreich et al. (1968), efforts have been made in trying to explain “why a given linguistic change occurs at the particular time and place”. Misalignments of speech production and perception are commonly considered as triggers for new variants within the phonetic pool. However, the main factors standing at the heart of how sound change spreads involve both internal phonetic mechanisms and external social factors. Therefore, the overarching aim of this project is to investigate the interplay between phonetic underpinnings and social constraints or motivations during the process of sound change. To address this question, the current study will examine tonal variation and change in Jin Chinese, a variety that preserves checked tones but is undergoing change in both segmental and suprasegmental levels. In particular, this study will concentrate on the production-perception link under an apparent-time framework, considering a range of social indices. By investigating the individual differences in production and perception cue weighting patterns, and relating them to social factors, this study aims to clarify how phonetic variants become socially conditioned and potentially lead to sound change.