

Individual differences in phonetic flexibility

Recent work in laboratory phonology has suggested that individual differences in perceptual flexibility might facilitate or inhibit the spread of sound changes (Yu 2013, Kingston et al. 2015). Productive flexibility, in the form of phonetic imitation, has also been proposed to be an ingredient in the spread of sound change (Auer & Hinskens 2005, Nguyen & Delvaux 2015). In this talk I report on two experiments investigating the relationship between perceptual and productive flexibility at the level of the individual. Experiment 1 is a test-retest study investigating whether the degree to which an individual exhibits perceptual learning is a stable property of that individual. Experiment 2 replicates Experiment 1 and adds a phonetic imitation task to investigate whether there is a correlation between high-perceptual-flexibility individuals and high-productive-flexibility individuals. The results from Experiment 1 show that perceptual learning effects can be longer-lasting than previously attested, and that individuals differ not just in the degree of the effect but also its temporal properties. Experiment 2 finds large and stable individual differences in imitation behavior, with some evidence for a *negative* relationship between perceptual learning and imitation. I discuss potential implications for models of sound change.