

On the role of the decision stage in the recognition of word-form variation

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In spontaneous conversations, words are often produced in a phonetically reduced manner (e.g., the word “probably” produced as “probly”). Although such reduced pronunciation variants are highly frequent (e.g., Johnson, 2004), studies suggest that reduced variants are recognized less accurately and more slowly compared with canonical (i.e., unreduced) pronunciation variants that occur less frequently (e.g., Ranbom & Connine, 2007; Viebahn & Luce, 2018). Most theoretical accounts assume that this anti-frequency effect is due to perceptual processes during word recognition (e.g., Pitt, 2009; Sumner, 2013). In contrast, the present talk examines the possibility that the effect is not located at an early perceptual processing stage but rather at a relatively late, decisional processing stage. For this purpose, five experiments are reported that investigate the recognition of nasal flapping in American English (e.g., the word “center” produced as “cenner”). Based on lexical-decision, shadowing, and dual-task (PRP) experiments, our results support a late locus of the processing disadvantage for flapped variants, which challenges representational and perceptual accounts of the effect. A mechanism is discussed that describes how decisional factors could cause the apparent disadvantage for reduced variants.

References

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