

Final Devoicing before it happens: A large-scale study of word-final obstruents in French

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This paper investigates the phonetic precursors of Final Devoicing in a large corpus of natural French speech. We argue that this evaluation should consider the magnitude of the [voice] contrast, rather than the behaviour of [+voice] obstruents alone, and include durational cues beyond phonation. The [voice] contrast is quantified by examining two acoustic cues: the voicing ratio and the V/VC duration ratio, in three contexts that are expected to host the early stages of the change: 1) utterance-final versus utterance-internal position, 2) in fricatives versus stops, and 3) in posterior versus anterior obstruents. The marginal effects estimated using multivariate Bayesian modelling suggest a degree of trade-off between the two cues: where the v-ratio contrast is reduced, the V/VC ratio contrast tends to increase. The [voice] contrast of fricatives is as large as that of stops in word-final, prepausal position, and stronger than that of stops in word-final, presonorant position. This finding sheds light on why Final Devoicing patterns do not preferentially target fricative contrasts in the typology. Finally, the expected effect of the place of articulation is observed in fricatives, but not in stops.