

**Where does dissimilation come from?  
Investigating ‘gradient dissimilation’**

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Dissimilation is a process whereby one of two identical features in a given domain is deleted; e.g. Ancient Greek \**threp<sup>h</sup>ɔː* > *trep<sup>h</sup>ɔː* ‘cause to grow’. ‘Gradient dissimilation’, in contrast, is the process whereby one of two identical features is not deleted, but *reduced* in duration. It has been first pointed out in Mongolian (Svantesson et al. 2005, Svantesson & Karlsson 2012), where the post-aspiration feature of the first /t<sup>h</sup>/ in [t<sup>h</sup>a<sup>h</sup>t] ‘to pull’ is shorter than the post-aspiration feature of /t<sup>h</sup>/ in [t<sup>h</sup>a<sup>h</sup>k] ‘steppe’.

This recently discovered process may shed light on the challenges posed by dissimilation. In particular, dissimilation has been traditionally classified as ‘minor’ sound change, lexically irregular and phonetically abrupt (Hoenigswald 1964). The discovery of ‘gradient dissimilation’ opens a new diachronic hypothesis: could lexically regular cases of dissimilation arise through the progressive reduction of one of the two features?

To assess this question, I will present joint work with Michaela Hejná (Aarhus University) on two languages showing gradient dissimilation: Aberystwyth English (Jatteau & Hejná 2016) and Mongolian (Jatteau & Hejná submitted). In both languages, the aspiration feature is realised as pre- and post-aspiration. Our work globally suggests that gradient dissimilation could be the phonetic precursor of classical dissimilation, but also gives new insights on the behaviour of /s/ as an aspirated consonant.

**References**

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