To voice or not to voice: An examination of L1 Greek interference to L2 English voicing

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Introduction

The same way an atom is the smallest chemical component of matter, **a "feature" is the smallest segment of a linguistic element** (Clements & Hume, 1995). In phonology, the "voiced" and "voiceless" qualities of a sound can be represented as a type of feature:

voiced features	voiceless features
vibration of the vocal folds during sound production (e.g. /z/, /v/, all vowels)	no vibration of the vocal folds during sound production (e.g. /s/, /f/)

As English is a Lingua Franca (ELF), a global means of communication, there are **differences between the accents of native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs)** (Jenkins, 2007; Llurda, 2009).

However, there is a **gap in literature** when it comes to **the relation of ELF/accent studies and voicing**.

Theoretical Background

Previously, Rice and Avery (1990) have stipulated two primary features that dominate obstruents and sonorants during voicing:

1. **SV**: spontaneous voicing: allows for assimilation, spreading, and delinking of sonorants
2. **Lar/LV**: laryngeal node/laryngeal voicing (in obstruents)

voiceless	voiced	sonorant
Root | Lar	Root (Lar) SV	Root | SV | nasal

Both English and Greek feature strong laryngeal assimilation (Baltazani, 2007; Davidson, 2015). Where Greek differs from English is in the extent of **orthography's influence on pronunciation**.

The "orthography-to-phonology" conversion in Greek is straightforward: while English morphemes can correspond to more than one sound, Greek morphemes are generally manifested as one (Protopapas & Skaloumbakas, 2007, p. 16).

Methodology

This study is based on recordings of ***n*=15 Greek speakers of English** engaging with two reading tasks and one translating task. The tasks were meant to elicit syllable-final voicing and devoicing of the /f, v, s, z/ phonemes.

Task A: *n*=22 English sentences (*n*=10 were trial sentences meant to familiarize the participants with the process; only the remaining *n*=12 were used for the analysis)

Task B: mix of real (*n*=3) and made-up Greek words (*n*=13) in aims to investigate orthography and sound possibility in Greek in comparison to English

Task C: *n*=16 Greek sentences were read to the participants, who were asked to translate them into English

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed the following main findings:

1. voicing and devoicing occurred significantly less during the reading task (Task A)
2. participants closely followed the Greek orthography of each phrase
3. the voicing of /s, z/ was more common than the voicing of /f, v/ across all tasks

I propose **two new features for Rice & Avery's (1990) geometry to account for voicing interference**:

Prevalent Voice (PV) node: precedes the LV & determines whether voicing can occur

Partial LV (ParLV) node: enables partial voicing of obstruents

General Form	(a) the dollhouse is /ðɛ ˈdɔlhauz iz/	(b) off is /ɔf ˈiz/	(c) the dollhouse is /ðɛ ˈdɔlhauʂ iz/
Root | Lar | (PV) (LV) (ParLV)	Root | Lar | ~~(PV)~~ | LV	Root | Lar | PV | ~~(LV)~~	Root | Lar | PV | ParLV

Limitations

While this thesis is limited by its small sample, the focus on *n*=15 participants permitted a close examination of the data. With respect to future studies, I suggest a reemployment of the experiment with a bigger sample, across different languages.

References

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