

# ACCOMODATION PROCESSES IN THE SPEECH OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE STUDENTS:

## A REAL-TIME SOCIOPHONETIC APPROACH

Nicholas Nese

*University of Pavia*

The purpose of this research is to identify and quantify language variation in real time in a community of students in the university college “Giasone del Maino” in Pavia (Italy). We chose this sociolinguistic setting firstly for the heterogeneity of the student population: as students come from different regions of Italy, the college setting provides an optimal situation of language contact between different Italian regional varieties. Moreover, the peculiarity of collegial life allows us to consider the student body as one *community of practice* (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet:1992; Wenger:1998), which, in our hypothesis, would accelerate the processes of diachronic variation. Eckert also notes that language change in students is related in particular to the practices associated with their own group and not to the socio-economic class of their family. This study, in parallel with the work of Nodari (2017), is one of the first research that focus on the Italian language and based on the Eckert-like model.

Data were collected through interviews aimed at eliciting three distinctive speech styles at different level of control over the speech production: spontaneous speech, through a short self-presentation of the speaker and some general questions; semi-spontaneous speech, through different linguistic tasks; and controlled speech, through the reading of a word list. The whole corpus has been designed to investigate different phonemes related to both vocalism and consonantism of Italian. The word list reading task includes 49 tokens of real words. To study diachronic variation, the data were collected at different points throughout the academic year.

For this poster-presentation, a case-study of 6 speakers (3 male and 3 female) of two different linguistic areas (3 from northern Italy and 3 from southern Italy) have been analyzed. Data were collected at the freshmen’s arrival in college (Freshmen T1) and at 11 months after arrival (Freshmen T2). A first analysis was performed on dental affricates in the word list reading (144 tokens). As demonstrated by previous analysis (see Meluzzi 2016), these phonemes present three sonority degrees (voiced, voiceless and mixed) with a high degree of variation across the Italian regional varieties. A comparison of the data relating to the sonority degree of Freshmen T1 shows a prevalence of voiced outcomes within southern students (32.4% voiceless, 17.6% mixed and 50% voiced) with respect to the northern students (52.8% voiceless, 30.6% mixed and 16.7% voiced) [ $p=.012$ ]. After only 11 months, it is possible to see in Freshmen T2 an important reduction of the voiced dental affricates of the students of the south (50% voiceless, 13.9% mixed and 36.1% voiced) which are close to the outcomes of the students of the north (58.3% voiceless, 19.4% mixed, and 22.2% voiced) [ $p>.05$ ]. In the Freshmen T2 data, the difference of north-south origin is no longer statistically significant (Pearson's chi-squared test).

These first results, although partial, suggest the presence of a process of accommodation towards the northern Italian regional variety by southern speakers. This phenomenon can be justified both by the perception of a greater prestige of the northern Italian regional variety and by the influence of the peculiarity of the community of practice.

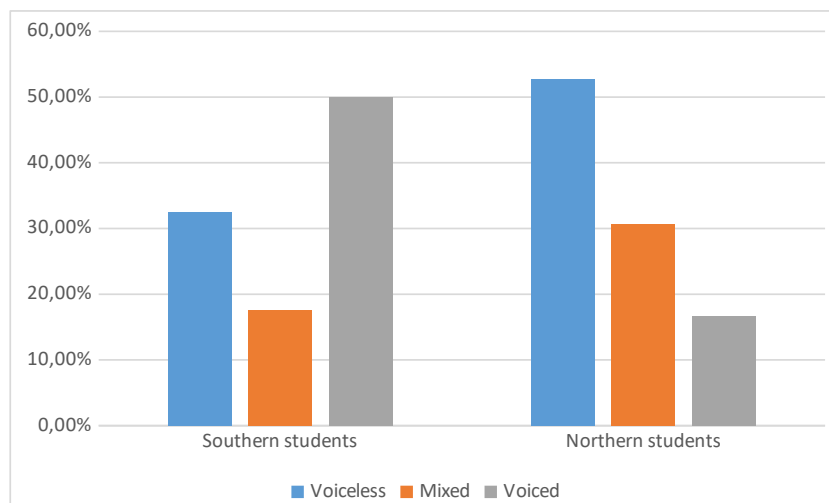


Figure 1. Freshmen T1 dental affricates [ $p=.012$ ]

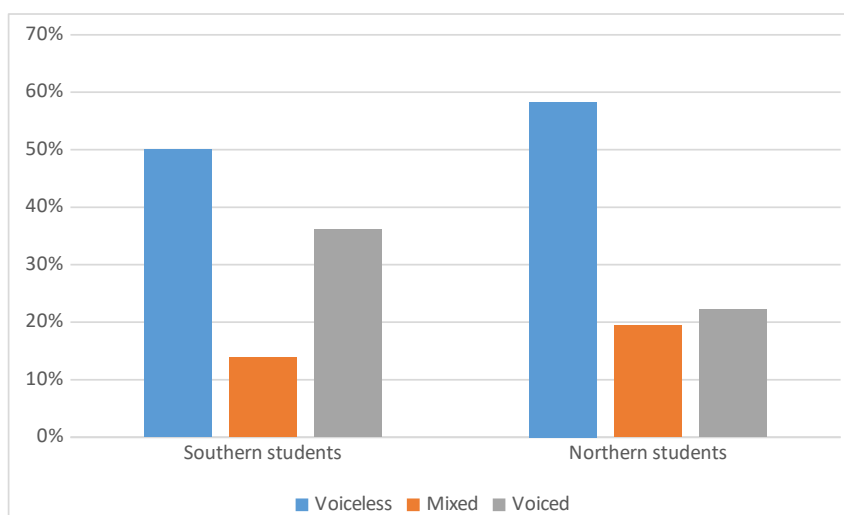


Figure 2. Freshmen T2 dental affricates [ $p>.05$ ]

[1] Eckert, P. & McConnell-Ginet S. 1992. *Communities of practice: Where language, gender and power all live*. In Kira Hall, Mary Bucholtz and Birch Moonwomon eds. *Locating Power*, 89-99.

[2] Meluzzi, C. 2016 *A new sonority degree in the realization of the dental affricates /ts dz/ in Italian*, in M.J. Ball & N. Muller (eds.) *Challenging Sonority: Cross-Linguistic Evidence from Normal and Disordered Language*, London: Equinox, pp. 252- 275.

[3] Nodari, R. 2017 *L'italiano degli adolescenti: aspirazione delle occlusive sorde in Calabria e percezione della varietà locale*, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Tesi di dottorato in Linguistica.

[4] Van der Harst S. 2011 *Vowel Space Paradox. A Sociophonetic Study on Dutch*, Utrecht LOT

[5] Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identify*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.