

Introduction

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The term "metaphony" is traditionally used in Romance Linguistics to refer to the assimilation of non-adjacent vowels, especially the raising of the stressed vowel by a final high vowel. This can be seen, for instance, in the diachronic change from Latin *fēcī* to Spanish *hice*, where the stressed vowel is raised from mid to high in the context of a following high vowel. Metaphony has been considered one of the most general phonological features of the Romance languages (Lloyd, 1987: 131, 308).

In a large number of Italian varieties, a word-final high vowel (sometimes only *-i*) has affected the quality of the stressed vowel, most commonly causing the raising of the high-mid vowels to high and the diphthongization or raising to high-mid of the low-mid vowels. This has resulted in numerous alternations, as in the examples *verde/viridi* 'green sg/pl', *pède/pédi* or *péde/pjédi* 'foot/feet', where the plural form shows metaphonic effects. Less commonly, a stressed low vowel may also be affected by metaphonic raising and other changes may take place as well (cf. Maiden, 1991). Metaphonic phenomena of these types are widespread in local dialects throughout most of Italy, although they are not found in the area of Tuscany which was the cradle of standard Italian and, thus, they are absent in the standard language. The conditioning factor in the metaphonic alternations has been obscured in certain dialects by the neutralization or deletion of final vowels. This has produced vowel alternations in nominal and verbal paradigms for which there is no overt trigger. Given the variety of alternations found in different dialects and the different degrees of opacity, the metaphony facts in Italian dialects raise a number of important questions for their synchronic analysis: should all the vowel alternations found in a given dialect be treated as a unified phenomenon? for a given dialect, should metaphony be treated as fundamentally a morphological or a phonological process?

In this volume, we include two contributions on Italian metaphony. In his chapter, Andrea Calabrese presents a unified account of metaphony in southern Italian dialects based on theoretical ideas that he has been developing over the years, addressing also the criticisms that earlier presentations of his view on metaphony have received from other authors.

Jennifer Cole offers a rather different perspective on Italian metaphony. In her analysis, metaphony involves two phenomena: the assimilatory raising of stressed high-mid vowels triggered by final high vowels, and the upward shift of other vowels to fill the gap thus created in the vowel space in stressed position. This second process would be non-assimilatory in nature and would follow the general principles of vowel shift.

In several varieties spoken in Asturias and Cantabria, in north-central Spain, one finds metaphonic processes which bear a certain resemblance to the Italian ones. In fact, it has been suggested that the existence of metaphony in these co-dialects of Castilian Spanish reveals a direct southern Italian influence (cf. Menéndez Pidal, 1954; Alonso, 1958). The main characteristics and possible historical evolution of Asturian and Cantabrian metaphony are considered in my own brief contribution.

Metaphony induced by a final vowel is also found in Portuguese (and Galician), but in this language metaphonic alternations are highly restricted and lexicalized and seem to have had a complex historical development (Williams 1962, Blaylock 1965). Thus, for instance, in *n[ólvo/n[ólva]* 'new, masc sg/fem sg' the stressed vowel appears to have been raised in the masculine singular under the influence of the final -o [u], since the vowel was originally low-mid (cf. Sp. *nuevo/nueva*). On the other hand, in *form[ólso/form[ólsa]* 'beautiful masc sg/fem sg', from a historical point of view, it is the feminine form that has undergone metaphonic lowering (cf. Sp. *hermoso/hermosa*).

All the metaphonic processes mentioned so far show similar properties and could be historically connected. On the other hand, in Eastern Andalusian we find another harmony process with rather different properties (although a possible historical link with the Asturian phenomena has been discussed in Hualde & Sanders 1995). In this area of southern Spain, final -s has been lost via aspiration *s* > *h* > $\emptyset$. Some authors have noted that the singular/plural contrast is nevertheless maintained in this dialect by means of vowel quality. Thus, for instance, plural *pinos* 'pine trees' is realized with a final open or lax vowel [pínɔ], whereas its singular counterpart [píno] has a close or tense vowel. This lax/tense distinction affects the low and mid vowels in final position and also propagates to a stressed low or mid vowel and perhaps also other vowels in the word, as in *conejo* [koného] 'rabbit' vs. *conejos* [koného] 'rabbits'. Since the pioneering work of Navarro Tomás (1939) and Alonso et al. (1950) revealed these vowel alternations in Eastern Andalusian, these facts have been

repeatedly described by Spanish dialectologists. However, more recent instrumental studies found only very limited evidence for the postulated vocalic contrasts. This situation led Sanders to conduct an acoustic analysis for his (1994) doctoral dissertation. In his contribution to the present volume Sanders summarizes the results of this previously-unpublished study, which tend to support the traditional description of the facts.

In Valencian Catalan we find a vowel assimilation process in the opposite direction. In these Catalan varieties a stressed low-mid vowel /e/, /ɔ/ triggers the assimilation of final /a/, as in *téla* [téle] 'cloth', *cosa* [kóza] 'thing'. In a small area of this domain there is more extensive bidirectional harmony triggered by these same stressed vowels: *afecta* [efékte] 'it affects'. In other areas, on the other hand, the process is more restricted and only /e/ or only /ɔ/ triggers assimilation. In his article, Jesús Jiménez offers a comprehensive treatment of these vocalic phenomena in Valencian Catalan and develops an analysis of the facts within Optimality Theory, accounting for the variation to be found in the area.

The word *metaphony* was first used in French (*metaphonie*) as a translation for the German word *Umlaut* (Blaylock, 1965). Romance metaphony and Germanic umlaut clearly have much in common. In the process known as umlaut in Germanic, a final high vowel has a raising influence on a preceding mid or low vowel. As in Romance metaphony, there is the issue of the phonological or morphological nature of the process. But how far does this similarity extend? Richard Janda's paper in this volume offers a consideration of a number of important points related to Germanic umlaut and provides the reader with a point of comparison.

Within the Germanic family, in Scandinavian dialects we find certain phenomena of vowel interaction that in my opinion can be fruitfully discussed in the context of the present volume. Tomas Riad provides a description and analysis of two processes of vowel alternation – vowel balance and vowel harmony – pointing out differences and similarities both with Germanic umlaut and Romance metaphony.

The primary goal of this special issue is thus to bring together contemporary research on the phenomenon known as metaphony and on other types of vowel assimilation found in Romance varieties, especially those spoken in Italy and the Iberian Peninsula, including also a discussion of umlaut and other processes in Germanic as a point of comparison intended to provide a wider perspective.

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