

Troncamento and the phonological phrase in Florentine Italian

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Abstract

Standard Italian has a phonological rule that deletes word-final midvowels preceded by a sonorant in contexts where another word follows. This phenomenon is traditionally referred to as *troncamento*, and it is often considered an optional rule. Using a corpus of spoken Florentine Italian (Cresti & Moneglia, eds., 2005) and data from two informants, this study aims to give a fuller account of the underlying grammar of *troncamento* in Standard Italian as spoken in Florence. Since previous studies have shown that deletion of word-final /e/ is more productive than /o/-deletion (Nespor 1990), the investigation is restricted to deletion of the final /e/ of words of the major lexical categories. Because work in prosodic phonology predicts that prosodic constituents can be derived from syntactic constituents, the contexts investigated in this study were defined primarily with regard to syntactic structure. The salient finding is that *troncamento* is a phrasal rule, with restricted productivity and subject to lexical exceptions, which is bound by the domain of the phonological phrase. Across phonological phrase boundaries it is optional, but it is subject to both syntactic and prosodic constraints. It is further argued that the key to understanding optional *troncamento* lies in the concept of prosodic restructuring, which is possible only in certain syntactic contexts and is subject to a constraint on the length of constituents. Optional *troncamento* can thus be described without invoking optional phonological rules; instead, the optionality results from well-understood principles of prosodic restructuring.

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