

Introduction to the volume

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1. A noble phenomenon

Phonologists have spoken about lenition and fortition for more than a century, in fact, therefore, for as long as phonology has existed. The first scientific terminology that was introduced in the 19th century in order to talk about manner distinctions is based on the intuition that sounds naturally range on a scale which expresses strength (Fortis and Lenis, and to a lesser extent Tenuis and Media).

The esteem that lenition and fortition has enjoyed in phonological quarters certainly stems from the fact that relevant processes are found in language after language: together with assimilations, the other important family of phenomena, they constitute the core of what phonology can do to sound.

Lenition and fortition were central in neogrammarian as much as in structuralist thinking (Martinet's 1955 drag- and push-chains are abstracted from Western Romance and Celtic lenition). It is noticeable, though, that they have been less visible in generative endeavour, at least in the early SPE-dominated days. This may be related to the general neglect that diachronic data suffered from in post-SPE times: even though lenition and fortition are synchronically active in a number of languages, phonologists have met them more frequently in diachronic study.

Be that as it may (see Honeybone's chapter for greater detail), the fact is that we face a significant miscorrelation between the importance that lenition and fortition have for the field on the one hand and their impact over the past couple of decades on the other. This is true on the empirical as much as on the theoretical side. There are books that attempt to document palatalisation, stress, tone, sonority, syllable weight, the special status of coronals and a number of other phenomena, but there is no central source that anyone who wants to find out about lenition and fortition could rely on. In the same way, lenition and fortition are underrepresented in generative theory-building: perhaps with the exception of Foley (1977) and *Natural (Generative) Phonology*, lenition and fortition have contributed little to classical linear and autosegmental theory.

It is true that things have been changing now for some time, on all fronts: diachronic data are not treated as a phonological step-child anymore, and lenition receives more serious attention, in OT and Government Phonology as much as in phonetics. The ambition of the present book is to contribute to this movement, ideally to provide a focus for both past and present concern – and maybe to remain a quote-worthy source of information for developments to come.

2. The structure of the book: what, where and how?

In order to stand up to this ambition, we decided to approach the phenomenon from three sides: what it is (Part 1), in which coat it appears (Part 2), and how it works (Part 3). This is the broad structure of the book.

Part 1 describes the properties of lenition and fortition: what counts as such? What kind of behaviour is observed (Szigetvári)? Which factors bear on it (positional: Ségéral and Scheer, stress: Bye and de Lacy)?¹ Which role has it played in phonology since (and before) the 19th century (Honeybone)?

The authors of Part 1 were asked to produce a text that is as pretheoretical as possible. Of course we know that there is no science without assumptions and preconceptions (and this is all to the good) – but there are degrees of theory-specific writing. We would like the book to be a reference for both empirically and theoretically oriented phonologists, in fact for any audience that wants to know about lenition and fortition, possibly also from neighbouring fields. The everything-you-always-wanted-to-know-about-lenition-and-fortition philosophy that guides the conception of the book supposes a descriptive, generalisation-oriented style of writing that relies on a kind of phonological *lingua franca*, rather than on theory-laden vocabulary. Also, no prior knowledge other than about general phonological categories should be required when reading through Part 1. The goal is to provide a broad picture of what lenition is, how it behaves, which factors it is conditioned by and what generalisations it obeys. This record may then be used as a yardstick for competing theories.

Part 2 presents a number of case studies that show how the animal lenition behaves in this or that language. Needless to say, the coverage is much too

¹ A third factor is Honeybone's (2005) "sharing makes us stronger", i.e. the fact that melody (features) which are linked to more than one syllabic constituent are stronger than their individually associated peers. The prototypical phenomenon of this pattern is geminate integrity, one aspect of which is the resistance of geminates to voicing and spirantisation. This conditioning factor would have deserved a chapter, which unfortunately did not make it into the book.

small, and the choice of the languages presented is largely arbitrary – except perhaps for the fact that we have tried not to miss a number of languages that are emblematic for lenition and fortition: notorious lenition-languages include Celtic (studied by Jaskuła), Western Romance (studied by Carvalho), Germanic (studied by Holsinger) and Finnish (studied by Pöchtrager).

The book takes a vantage point that is deliberately non-cross-linguistic. Over the past decade or so, it has been popular to compile material on hundreds of languages that the analyst knows little or nothing about, where a few examples are arbitrarily chosen without being able to relate them to other facts of the language and where the reliability of sources cannot be evaluated because the field is not mastered. We believe that this is not the right way to go, and that results of this type of work have only a limited significance. It is always good to have an idea of the general picture that natural language produces over the five continents – but statistics do not decide what natural human language looks like, what it is able to invent and what would be a "Martian" pattern. Newmeyer (1998) points out that the understanding of some rare pattern in an improbable language may teach us more about language than a statistically significant generalisation over 300 languages: linguistic relevance is not democratic.

Rather than engaging on the cross-linguistic track which roots in the generative ambition to discover Universal Grammar, we follow the structuralist method where a system is considered as a whole, and in-depth. Nivkh (studied by Shiraishi) produces a lenition pattern (stops trigger spirantization) that is as strange as the language itself, which is spoken by a handful of natives and seems to come from nowhere. We believe that phonologists can learn more from a detailed description of lenition in Nivkh than from a 300 language-compilation.

From our point of view, (at least) two results of Part 2 are noteworthy. For one thing, lenition/fortition appears to be unequally distributed over languages, without this being related to other typological properties, as far as we can see. While lenition phenomena may be found on every street in Romance and Germanic for example, both diachronically and synchronically, speakers of Slavic seem to live on lenition-hostile land. The unwarranted scarcity of lenition phenomena in Slavic is documented by Kristó (to the extent that absence can be documented). This is the more surprising as Slavic appears to be well prepared for lenition and fortition to emerge: it features heavy consonant clusters, a prerequisite for weak and strong positions to arise. We thus record the fact that there appear to be "lenity" and "non-lenity" languages, without however being able to address the issue seriously.

The other empirical issue is the behaviour of *muta cum liquida* in connection with lenition. While the literature is more or less eloquent on the status of

this or that segment in this or that position and produces reliable generalisations, there does not appear to be a specific record for branching Onsets. That is, *muta cum liquida* are not considered a phonological object in its own right: descriptions typically document what happens in Codas, intervocalically, maybe word-initially, but make no specific mention of the fate of the same segments when they occur in a branching Onset. The indications from three languages – Celtic (studied by Jaskuła), Tuscan Italian (studied by Marotta) and French (studied by Ségéral and Scheer, Part 1) – now provide concordant evidence: obstruents that are involved in a branching Onset behave just like if they were by themselves – or, in other words, as if the following liquid were not there. This is at variance with the behaviour of C+j/w clusters, where C typically does not lenite: cf. Germanic (studied by Holsinger) and Western Romance (studied by Carvalho).

Contributions to Part 2 present the pattern of interest in the descriptive and pretheoretical perspective that characterizes Part 1, but authors then provide an analysis that may be theory-specific. The descriptive and the analytic part of language chapters are unequally weighted (a third is enough for the latter), and the reader should be able to take advantage of just the former without having to bother with latter.

Finally, Part 3 is concerned with the analysis of the patterns that have been described in Parts 1 and 2. Before considering its content, a few words are in order regarding those chapters that it does *not* contain. This is the moaning bit of this introduction: chapters lost in translation have cut down the theoretical diversity a good deal. The spectrum that the book was designed to cover when we first pieced together the layout is much larger than the result that went to print. Over the (way too) long period that the volume was in the making, we have approached quite a number of potential authors that we would have liked to convince to write – some declined right away, others accepted but then for various reasons could not complete the project.

We originally intended to include the voice of Dependency Phonology, Evolutionary Phonology and both generative and non-generative orientations of Natural Phonology. Honeybone's historical overview at the outset of the book may help making up for their absence (beyond the subject matter itself, this function of the chapter also explains its length). In the same way, we regret that the phonetic point of view has ended up not being represented. Since neogrammarian times, the subject matter of the book has always had a strong descriptive and analytic tradition in phonetics, and recent work e.g. by Lisa Lavoie, Cécile Fougeron or John Ohala continues this line of attack.

The result is a book that looks much like a Government Phonology enterprise with some OT freckles (which we would have liked to be more numerous). This is indeed what we have to accept, and given our personal commit-

ment to Government Phonology (or to a closely related framework as far as Joaquim Brandão de Carvalho is concerned), the unavoidable perception will be one of a book that exposes the view of Government Phonology on lenition and fortition. Even though we know it is quite hopeless to rebel against this interpretation, we would like to formally state that this has not been our intent, and that the result is not really of that kind.

Given their analytic orientation, Part 3 chapters are theory-specific. They look at the same empirical record, or at a subset thereof, and try to explain what they see. "The point of view creates the object" says Saussure, which means that science, phonology in our case, is a dialogue between conceptualised human thought and its perception of the world. The scientific reality is where both meet.

Even though Part 3 chapters are couched in a specific theoretical environment that most of the time supposes prior conceptual knowledge, authors have been asked to assure theoretical interoperability as much as they could.

This notwithstanding, the reader is asked to make an effort when encountering a chapter that is couched in an unfamiliar conceptual environment. Little would be gained, then, and the challenge would remain rather sterile, if at the end of the day benefits were only theory-specific. This is not what a theory-specific chapter is about in our mind. Rather, fertile theoretical thinking will always create objects and produce insights that transcend conceptual diversity. We are confident that this characterizes Part 3: rather than translating eclectic observations into theoretical vocabulary, all contributions aim at *unifying* various empirical aspects of lenition and fortition. This is much unlike the empiricist literature of our days which appears to hold that progress is made when facts are scattered. The history of natural science is a history of unification, and this is what we believe is the heart of scientific activity: unification seeds explanation. We thus hope that phonologists of whatever confession will be able to take advantage of the unifying issues that shine through all Part 3 chapters.

Unification in Part 3 concerns four aspects of lenition and fortition. One is about the targets: Cyran proposes a unified theory for the lenition of clusters and singleton consonants. Another concerns the contexts of lenition and fortition: Ségéral and Scheer attempt to show that the position in the vicinity of stress, the word-initial and the post-Coda position (in certain cases) are one. A third case in point are the modalities of lenition: Szigetvári offers a unified view on sonority increase and feature loss. Smith is on the same track in OT: she distinguishes contextual (markedness) constraints and positional constraints. Finally, Carvalho's work invites us to consider that the two macro families of phonological processes that were mentioned at the outset of this introduction (positional vs. assimilatory processes) may converge: from his perspective, at least one modality of lenition *is* assimilation.

3. A never-ending editing process: the price to pay for a predefined structure

Something that definitely did not go our way was time management. We started to approach potential authors in February 2004 (shudder), and the audience will probably not have a chance to read the present introduction before the end of 2008 (we are writing in May 2008). Four and a half years of editing work are way beyond a reasonable amount of time for a contribution to appear in print – for professional and intellectual reasons.

The reason for this delay is the structure and the conception of the book: since we first thought of engaging with the venture, two things were always clear to us. We would define the skeleton of the book (the three Parts described above), as well as the pieces of flesh that we would like to be its coat: properties of lenition for Part 1, particular languages for Part 2, this or that theory for Part 3. We would then approach potential authors that we believe have got interesting things to say about this or that aspect of the plot.

This means that there was no general call for papers, and that the book does not follow the proceedings-type philosophy where the core of the authors is pre-specified through a conference presentation. It is true that the book has a remote relationship with the conference on lenition and fortition that was held in Nice in June 1999. It is also true that while we did not want to expand this experience into a book at first, regular and substantial feedback over the following years ("where are the proceedings?"; "it would be nice to have a central source of information on lenition and fortition, there is nothing around" and so on) made us reconsider our position. The project, though, as well as the final result, are only indirectly related to the Nice conference – in terms of the structure as much as the content and the authors.

The design of the book in terms of a fixed skeleton where slots have to be filled in by authors who need to be convinced to write about this or that topic is the reason for the delay. Indeed, all through the editing process we were prisoners of our own conception where deadlines (which God knows existed) do not mean a lot: we could not just move on when they were not met since the slot needed to be filled in anyway. This situation is not like the editing process of proceedings or other co-authored volumes; rather, it follows the logic of encyclopaedias or handbooks where slots are also predefined – and which are notorious for their never-ending editing process.

4. Filled and empty shells

At the bottom line, we hope that the book which we present to the audience today will be a valuable source of information for all those who are interested in lenition and fortition.

It may contribute to the debate among theories, and also to the question of how "phonological" phonology should be. When we started the editing process, cue-based or grounded approaches to sound were leading ideas in the field (Hayes et al. 2004). The grounded project emptied phonology of its substance: phonology ended up as a motel space provider for constraints, whose ranking was the only non-extra-phonological information left in phonology: the content of constraints itself was made non-phonological (phonetic, psycho-linguistic, functional, perceptive and so on).

Today the idea that phonology is made of anything but phonology has lost some velocity (partly thanks to the rise of usage-based approaches which in their purest incarnation deny the existence of grammar altogether). We believe that lenition and fortition provide good reason to think of phonology as a formal system that has truly phonological content. Of course, the amount of phonology that is needed with respect to real-world factors and other cognitive components needs to be negotiated, and we may be confident that future generations spend more time drawing the red line. But there *is* a phonological core that cannot be derived from anything else, as much as there is an autonomous grammatical core (Saussure's *Langue*) which owes nothing to external factors (*Parole*).

Finally, we hope that the reader who has made it until the end of this introduction was not too bored by the making-of style: rather than introducing each contribution individually (chapters are headed by abstracts), we thought that some background information regarding the project would be more informative.

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