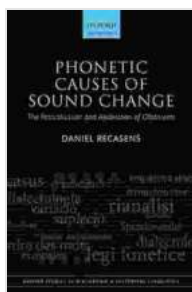


Phonetic Causes of Sound Change: Exploring the Mechanisms of Linguistic Evolution

Sound change is a natural and inevitable process in the evolution of languages. It occurs when the sounds of a language change over time, resulting in new pronunciations and even new words. This article explores the phonetic causes of sound change, discussing the various factors that drive these changes and the mechanisms through which they occur.



Phonetic Causes of Sound Change: The Palatalization and Assibilation of Obstruents (Oxford Studies in Diachronic and Historical Linguistics Book 42)

by Megan Carr

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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Assimilation

Assimilation is a process in which sounds become more similar to neighboring sounds. This can occur in a variety of ways, including:

- **Progressive assimilation:** When a sound is influenced by a following sound, causing it to become more like that sound.

- **Regressive assimilation:** When a sound is influenced by a preceding sound, causing it to become more like that sound.
- **Contact assimilation:** When two sounds that are next to each other become identical.

For example, in the English word "sink", the "n" sound is assimilated to the preceding "g" sound, resulting in the pronunciation "singk".

Dissimilation

Dissimilation is the opposite of assimilation. It occurs when sounds become less similar to neighboring sounds. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Phonological contrast:** When two sounds are too similar, they may be dissimilated in order to make them more distinct.
- **Ease of articulation:** It is easier to pronounce sounds that are different from each other, so sounds may be dissimilated in order to make them more pronounceable.

For example, in the Spanish word "morir" (to die), the "r" sounds are dissimilated to become "r" and "l", resulting in the pronunciation "molir".

Metathesis

Metathesis is a process in which the order of sounds is changed. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Ease of articulation:** It is easier to pronounce some sequences of sounds than others, so metathesis may occur to make a sequence

more pronounceable.

- **Phonological constraints:** Certain sound sequences may not be allowed in a language, so metathesis may occur to avoid these constraints.

For example, in the English word "bird", the "r" and "d" sounds were metathesized to create the pronunciation "brid".

Epenthesis

Epenthesis is a process in which a new sound is added to a word. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Phonological gaps:** When two sounds are too close together, an epenthetic sound may be added to create a gap between them.
- **Ease of articulation:** It is easier to pronounce some sequences of sounds with an epenthetic sound than without.

For example, in the English word "button", an epenthetic "t" sound was added between the "n" and "o" sounds to make it easier to pronounce.

Deletion

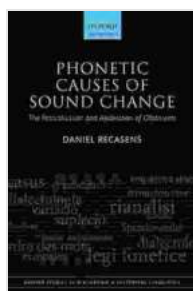
Deletion is a process in which a sound is lost from a word. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Phonological constraints:** Certain sound sequences may not be allowed in a language, so a sound may be deleted to avoid these constraints.

- **Ease of articulation:** It is easier to pronounce some sequences of sounds without a deleted sound.

For example, in the English word "knight", the "k" sound was deleted to make it easier to pronounce.

Phonetic causes of sound change are the driving force behind the evolution of languages. These changes occur through a variety of mechanisms, including assimilation, dissimilation, metathesis, epenthesis, and deletion. By understanding these mechanisms, we can better understand the historical development of languages and the



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