Phonological Variation in Multi-Dialectal Italy: distinguishing e from ɛ

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Approaches to Variation

- Approaches to Variation
  - postulate an ideal, non-varying speaker-hearer
  - search for yet unknown factors conditioning invariant forms
  - acknowledge as free variation
  - acknowledge as result of dialect mixing or creolization
  - acknowledge that variation is inherent, modeling it directly

- In Italy
  - Standard Italian is commonest model but native language or few or none depending upon definition
  - Dialects continue in vigorous, if waning, use.
  - Regional Italians are the varieties in common use.
  - Italian studies of variation in Italian tend toward dialect-mixing models (Trumper 1993).

- The presence of multiple dialects in many Italian speech communities complicates the analysis of variation within any one.
  - Investigate variation in one variety in one speech community, Regional Italian in L’Aquila, Abruzzo. So far, focus on the vowel system, especially mid vowels. Here, I’ll discuss e versus E
L’Aquila

- Geography
  - Central Italy, Abruzzo
  - In Apennines
  - 1hr east of Rome

- Provincial, regional capital

- 67,000 inhabitants

- Incorporated ~1254 for mutual protection of “99” area landowners.
L’Aquila as Speech Community

- Pre-History: proximity to *transumanza* routes, Rome and frontier town increase contact and lead to long periods of affluence.
- Incorporated from 67 paesi each of which claimed a section and build its own church and fountain
  - intramural rivalry
- Rivalry with surrounding towns and city of Pescara.
- Education and printing within L’Aquila after emergence of vernacular but before standardization of Italian
  - regional variation establishing in written text.

- Does any of this affect today’s Regional Italian of L’Aquila?
Giammarco Aquilano/Abruzzian Dialects
Aquilano retains vowel distinctions (Giammarco 1985).
neva, eta, fredda, vedova
prEta pEkera, IEbbre

Dialects to the east show progressive simplification of the vowel system.
Variation in Dialects of Abruzzo

• Avolio’s Atlante Linguistico ed Etnografico Informatizzato della Conca Aquilana (ALEICA) confirms transitional band between central and southern Italian dialects passing inside the municipal territory of L'Aquila.

• The reinterpretation, previously unattested, of final /★/ as /e/ in Assergi and Bagno in the dialect of older women (Avolio 1995).
Methodology

• Rickford (1979) sets tone
  – “An important principle of the new approaches to variation is accountability to a corpus of empirical data”

• Data from
  – sociolinguistic interviews plus formal elicitation from
  – 81 subjects of which 31 analyzed for this work
  – interviews completely transcribed with time-alignment
  – tokens selected and segmented at word and focus (vowel) level
    » each vowel * each phonetic environment * each situation
  – F1-3 hand measured based on LPC, DFT, spectral slice, F0
  – additional QC for outliers, normal distribution
  – yielding 7016 tokens

  – Independent variables
    » sex, age, SEC, domicile, distance/direction from city center, inside/outside wall, A/F axis, dialect type, dialect frequency, dialect attitude, preceding & following phonetic environment, situation, interviewer
Formant Analysis

Token Selection

Vowel Segmentation

Identification of central tendency of word stressed vowel

Hand checking of formant tracker values for F1 and F2
Height by Sex, SEC

/e/ Height by Sex and SEC

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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>435</td>
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- White area = higher than average e
- Dark gray areas = lower than average e.
E Lowering by Age, Sex, SEC, Style

Formal  542

Informal  563
E Lowering by Local, Interlocutor

- Dark gray area = lower than average E.

NWAV 36, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, October 11-14, 2007
## ANOVA

### Response: NeareyFl of e

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Signif. codes:  0 `***' 0.001 `**' 0.01 `*' 0.05 `.' 0.1 ` ' 1
Overall Effect
Conclusions

• e Height
  - stable sociolinguistic marker, no evidence of change in progress
  - lower SECs, less formal situations produce lower variants of e
  - sex effect limited to WC women who seem to hypercorrect
    » much higher WC males, and even higher than LMC women
  - center of L’Aquila produces higher e than outside city center whose e is higher than the South and East
  - frequent dialect speakers produce lower e
  - correlation of high e with higher SEC, formality, domicile in city center and less frequent dialect speech and hypercorrection of WC women suggest that e Height associated with urbanity and class.

• E Lowering
  - change in progress, younger subjects produce lower E than older
  - women, subjects living in center/SE, lower SECs also tend to produce lower E
    » except WW class women seem to hypercorrect to a higher E
  - lower E appears in less formal situations
  - subjects interviewed by native interviewer generally produced higher E than those interviewed by the author
    » This may be accommodation to Patrizia M. whose E is quite high relative to the subject pool.

• Variationist method seems appropriate if applied carefully.
  - no correlation of vowels to suggest variation results from dialect switching
  - irregularity with WW women probably due to definition of SEC

• Reversal of Near-merger?
  - lack historical description of e versus E in Regional Italian
  - Lack perceptual studies on e versus E among modern speakers
  - Phonological status of e/E distinction is not without controversy