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## The Phonemic Status of Juncture in Italian

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The key distributional unit in this discussion of Italian phonology is the *macrosegment*, which Professor *Charles F. Hockett* defines as the stretch of phonation that occurs between successive pauses<sup>1</sup>. Both vocoid and contoid allophones may be described in terms of their occurrence within or at the borders of the macrosegment. The pauses separating macrosegments are said to be instances of external juncture<sup>2</sup>. The binary opposite of external juncture is internal juncture, or the mode of transition from one sound to the next within the macrosegment. Our supposition is that all human languages have both types of juncture. Furthermore, no language consists wholly of mono-phonemic utterances. If such were the case, there would be no need to speak about juncture at all. It is quite possible, however, for a language to have two types of internal juncture – provided that features observed at locations of the external type are also found to be present within the macrosegment<sup>3</sup>. In such cases we would subdivide internal juncture into ‘close’ and ‘plus’<sup>4</sup>. There are certain phonetic data in Italian which lead us to consider the postulation of a plus-juncture as a preferred alternative to the establishment of three additional phonemes.

The situation involving intervocalic phones [s] and [z] has led *Robert A. Hall* to speak of a “semi-componential transcription”<sup>5</sup>. In

<sup>1</sup> See Lit. 3, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Another term used to describe this type is ‘open juncture’. See Lit. 3, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to English, plus-junctures have been established notably for German (by *William G. Moulton*, Lit. 5) and Spanish (*R. P. Stockwell*, *J. D. Bowen* and *I. Silva-Fuenzalida*, Lit. 6). Both articles are reprinted in *Readings in Linguistics*, Lit. 4).

<sup>4</sup> The appropriateness of this terminology is not under discussion here. We have followed customary usage in the description of this contrast.

<sup>5</sup> See Lit. 1.

our eyes *Hall's* convention of indicating the component of voicing by a dot under /s/ (/ṣ/), as in /risorġiménto/ (contrasted with /risalíre/), amounts to a phonemic statement in spite of its low-yield phonemic contrast.

In regard to semi-vowels, there is a possible contrast at one level of discourse between [al-le-'vja:-mo] 'we raise' and [al-le-vi-'a:-mo] 'we alleviate', or between ['pja:-to] 'lawsuit' and [pi-'a:-to] 'peeped' (from the verb [pi-'a:-re] 'to peep'), in which comparable high front unrounded vocoid phones function as both semi-vowels and full vowels. Similar pairs with [ɥ] and [u] are more difficult to find; but it is clear that in macrosegments like ['kɥan-do], a semi-vocalic [ɥ] occurs whereas either a full vowel or a semi-vowel is found in other cases, e.g., [at-te-'nɥa:-re] or [at-te-nu-'a:-re], [e-'kɥa:-re] or [e-ku-'a:-re].

In view of the phonetic data presented, it would seem necessary to establish phonemic semi-vowels /ị/ and /ụ/ contrasting with /i/ and /u/, together with phonemic /z/ in contrast with /s/. However, the postulation of an internal transition of the 'plus' type allows us to account for all three variations in the same terms. We identify semi-vowels [j̣] and [ɥ̣] as members of the phoneme classes /i/ and /u/, respectively. Their distribution would indicate that they never occur between consonant and plus-juncture. Our phonemic transcription of [al-le-vi-'a:-mo] would be /allevi+'ámo/; [al-le-'vja:-mo] - /alleviámo/; [pi-'a:-to] - /pi+'áto/; ['pja:-to] - /piáto/ and so on. As for [s] and [z], our statement of distribution would read that [z] never occurs following /+/ and preceding vowels. Phonemically [ri-sa-'li:-re] would be retranscribed /ri+'salíre/, [ri-zor-ġi-'men-to] - /risorġiménto/, and so on.

The solution of phonemic plus-juncture is reinforced by consideration of features of consonant distribution. Analysts\* usually state that sequences of [np nb nm] do not occur in Italian. The morphophonemic replacements of such sequences by [mp mb mm], respectively, are said to be automatic. Nevertheless, for many native speakers of Italian [np nb nm] are possible in cases where the preceding vowel has a degree of stress greater than weak, e.g., ['kon-pja-'çe:-re] vs. [kom-pja-'çe:-re]; [in-'baŋġ-ka] vs. [im-'baŋġ-ka]; [san-'mar-ko] vs. [sam-'mar-ko]. In such cases, it would seem more advantageous to state that both the secondary stress and the occurrence of /n/ are conditioned by plus-juncture, rather than

\* See especially *R. A. Hall*, *Lit.* 2, p. 12.

to change our statements of distribution within the macrosegment. We would then retranscribe [kon-pja-'çe:-re] as /kon+pjačére/; [in-'baŋġ-ka] as /in+bánka/; and [san-'mar-ko] as /san+márko/. The form [kom-pja-'çe:-re], however, would have to be phonemized /kompiačére/, because of the phonemic status of /m/.

The status of plus-juncture as a phoneme is further enhanced by an important socio-linguistic factor. The use of standard Italian is expanding rapidly in regions where other Romance dialects are or were recently prevalent. As a result, each new idiolect added to the complex of 'standard' speakers incorporates a slightly different inventory of phones. That is to say, any given speaker of standard Italian may have one or more of the following in his idiolect: (1) [np nb nm] in contrast with [mp mb mm], (2) medial [s] vs. medial [z], (3) [j̣] vs. [i] and [ɥ̣] vs. [u]. The convention of a plus-juncture would account for all three features. The other solution would be to alter the rules of distribution and add three new phonemes to the inventory with an indication that they are not part of the overall pattern. The preferred solution of plus-juncture would clearly obviate the positing of phonemes with marginal status while not obscuring the overall pattern.

#### References

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