

THE ARTICULATORY FUNCTION OF THE VELUM

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The function of the velum in the production of speech has been investigated since the XVIIIth century. The main aspects recently investigated are the anatomy of the region, the muscular action, the oral-nasal feature in languages, the acoustics of nasality and the interaction of the velic action with other parameters in the production of speech (Cagliari, 1977).

In the description of phonetic segments in languages, it is common to incorporate only two velic positions: the elevated velum in the production of oral segments, and the lowered velum in the production of nasalized segments. However, instrumental investigations have shown that velum assumes different positions as a function of different phonetic segments. The reason for this is the inherent susceptibility of these segments to nasalization and perhaps neuromuscular constraints associated with the functioning of other articulators. For this reason, it seemed interesting to suggest an articulatory model of the velum based on a neutral velic scale. Acoustic and EMG investigations, as well as perceptual tests, have corroborated this hypothesis. The suggested model of velic action gives a better understanding of the nature of nasality and denasality as two types of voice quality, of the relation between the segmental features of nasality and orality linguistically. Finally, it shows more precisely how different degrees of nasality and denasality are performed.

Reference

Cagliari, L.C. (1977) An Experimental Study of Nasality with Particular Reference to Brazilian Portuguese, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh.