LINGUISTIC ATTRIBUTES OF RETROFLEX r IN PIGNASCO

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The nature of retroflex r and its interaction with non-retroflex resonants is examined in Pignasco (a Gallo-Italian dialect spoken in western Liguria). It is shown that retroflex r manifests a number of phonological characteristics that differentiate it from its non-retroflex congener (e.g. its' resistance to contiguous palatal sounds; its restriction to weak syllable position; its correlation with the velar [ŋ] in certain morphological paradigms - cf. [bo:rə]-[boŋ] 'good', fem. sing. and masc. sing., respectively). It is argued that the retroflex r in Pignasco cannot be considered as merely a variant of non-retroflex r (as a superficial analysis would lead one to maintain); rather, it must be defined in terms of the complexities of its phonetic properties along with universal notions of occurrence. (An adequate analysis of a dialect requires the dialectologist to take these factors into consideration.) Recent research on the behavior of retroflex consonants in other languages (cf. Bhat 1974; Stevens and Blumstein 1977) together with studies on the acquisition of r in children (cf. Wode 1977) support the argument.

References