

## Is Italian a true-voice language with aspiration and inactive voice?

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The synchronic laryngeal phonology of Italian and of its dialects cannot easily be reconciled with the claims of laryngeal realism (cf. Iverson & Salmons 1995, Honeybone 2005, Cyran 2014, etc.). In fact, Italian is usually considered a true-voice language, as Romance languages, but the voiceless set of stops is reported as aspirated cross-regionally (Stevens & Hajek 2010; Nodari in press).

This paper seeks to verify the laryngeal properties of Italian stops on the basis of new data collection, through various regional accents of Standard Italian. 16 Italian informants were recorded in a soundproof studio, who read out 19 Italian sample texts five times, containing different loanwords provided with laryngeal variables (targeting VOT patterns, regressive voice assimilation, s-voicing and final devoicing). The loanword test is motivated by the fact that in the native vocabulary of Italian there are no obstruent clusters apart from /sC/, and final obstruents either.

The results show that the voiced set of obstruents behave in Italian as in true-voice languages, i.e. with prevoicing, even word-initially. On the other hand, voiceless stops are mostly aspirated, i.e. pronounced with a long-lag VOT. This fact contradicts the general assumptions of laryngeal realism, where typically short-long or prevoiced-short VOT patterns are contrasted (cf. Schwartz 2015).

Furthermore, it seems that [voice] is inactive in Italian, since obstruents do not undergo regressive voice assimilation (apart from /sC/ clusters, word-initially). Differently voiced adjacent obstruents may appear without any repair strategy in the Italian pronunciation of loanwords, e.g. *a*[fg]ano ‘Afghan’, *M*[ekd]donald’s, *vo*[dk]a, *foo*[tb]all, *iceberg* [‘a:jsbergə], etc. These and similar examples lead us to another contradiction facing laryngeal realism, that is, true-voice cannot be passive. However, at the beginning of words /s/ regularly undergoes voicing in loanwords, before any voiced consonant (even sonorants and glides), e.g. [z]lide, [z]nack, [z]wimming, etc., which is broadly in compliance with the diachronic patterns of Italian s-voicing (cf. Krämer 2009).

A possible explanation of the data is that [voice] is the marked feature in the laryngeal phonology of Italian, and aspiration does not have any phonological relevance (perceptual tests confirm this hypothesis, according to which Italian informants generally do not perceive the aspiration in voiceless stops). The typical s-voicing in initial clusters is probably due to analogy after the diachronic model. While the lack of regressive voice assimilation in non-/sC/ clusters may belong to the conservative tendencies of Italian phonology in synchrony, which consist in the preservation of the input consonants, whereby speakers tend to avoid deletion or assimilation.

At the same time, this paper raises several theoretical questions as well; for instance, whether prevoiced stops may phonologically contrast voiceless aspirated stops; whether distinctive [voice] must imply regressive voice assimilation or it must not (cf. also Ringen & Helgason 2004); or more generally, whether the laryngeal properties of the “prototypical” true-voice language may be determined?

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