

On the instability of the voicing contrast in final position in the Viennese Standard variety

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Final devoicing is a phonological process by which the opposition of homorganic fortis (long closure) and lenis (short closure) obstruents in domain / word or syllable final position (Rad 'wheel' and Rat 'advice') is neutralized. Despite the longstanding debate regarding the completeness of the process (e.g. Port & O'Dell 1985) final devoicing can be considered quite robust in the standard variety spoken in Germany (e.g. Fourakis & Iverson 1984). For the southern dialectal varieties of German, like Bavarian (spoken in Germany and Austria) it has been claimed that the final voicing contrast is maintained in terms of a durational contrast in word final position. The case of the standard variety spoken in Austria is less clear as it shares features both with Standard German and the Bavarian dialect. This raises the question as to whether the variance regarding final devoicing can be attributed to the Bavarian influence on Standard Austrian German which should be greater in older than in younger speakers of this variety or to the general pattern of incomplete neutralization which is also found in Standard German. The current contribution includes data from 19 speakers of the Viennese Standard Variety (VS) and 16 speakers of the Viennese Dialect (VD). The data is automatically segmented with MAUS (Schiel 1999) and the analysis has been carried out with R (R Core Team 2017). Preliminary analyses indicate that the speakers of the Viennese varieties show a tendency to maintain the duration of the word final plosive (normalized to word duration) in word pairs like Rad and Rat. Furthermore, the evidence for younger VS speakers to differentiate the final plosive via the duration is less pronounced than for older VS speakers, suggesting that final devoicing might be on the increase in younger speakers of the Viennese Standard variety. The results will be discussed in light of a potential sound change in progress by which final devoicing becomes more important in southern varieties of German. One focus will be on the question as to whether such a change is fueled by internal vs. external factors.

References: • Fourakis, M. & G. K. Iverson. 1984. On the 'incomplete neutralization' of German final obstruents. *Phonetica* 41, 140–149. • Port, R. F. & M. L. O'Dell. 1985. Neutralization of syllable-final voicing in German. *Journal of Phonetics* 13(4), 455–471. • R Core Team. 2017. R: *A language and environment for statistical computing*. Vienna, Austria. <https://www.R-project.org/>. • Schiel, F. 1999. Automatic phonetic transcription of non-prompted speech. *Proceedings of the XIVth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences; San Francisco, 1–7 August 1999*. 607–610.