

*On the Application of Velar Palatalization in Italian*, Maria Giavazzi (MIT)

Abstract

This paper analyzes the phenomenon of velar palatalization in the plural formation of Italian masculine nouns and adjectives. Recent literature (among others Celata and Bertinetto, 2005 and Krämer 2006) has emphasized the idea that palatalization in nouns and adjectives is unpredictable. This study shows with a corpus study and a nonce-word test that velar palatalization in contemporary Italian is predictable as a function of main stress: whereas plural nouns and adjectives bearing antepenultimate stress palatalize, nouns and adjectives bearing penultimate stress do not. The acoustic analysis of velar stops in different prosodic conditions reveals an acoustic basis for the link between velar palatalization and stress. The paper proposes that, contrary to other languages, where palatalization before high front vowels occurs across the board, in Italian the distribution of palatalization is determined by the specific acoustic realizations of stops in the different prosodic conditions, which trigger, or block the perceptually driven change.