

## HOW MANY PROCESSES OF FINAL VOWEL DELETION IN SPOKEN FLORENTINE ITALIAN?

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This study aims to clarify the different final vowel deletion processes which target the unstressed final vowels of determiners and preverbal clitics when they are followed by vowel-initial nouns and verbs. The variety studied is Florentine Italian (spoken in Tuscany). The study is based both on corpus data and on experimental data. All the data have been treated with inferential statistical analysis. The corpus study analyzes the Italian section of the C-Oral-Rom corpus (Cresti & Moneglia 2005), a large corpus of spontaneous formal and informal speech, which is representative for the variety currently spoken in Florence. The experimental study analyzes the speech elicited from 9 Florentine speakers, who were asked to realize 119 sequences of determiners and nouns as well as 137 sequences of preverbal clitics and verbs embedded in 5 to 7 word test sentence (252 stimuli per speaker).

The present study will show that elision in Florentine Italian is not entirely optional (as claimed in previous accounts); rather it is governed to some degree by morphological and phonological factors. Although the driving forces behind elision are the tendencies to resolve heterosyllabic vowel sequences and to build syllables with an onset, two final vowel deletion processes are to be distinguished. On the one hand, elision on determiners is nearly entirely morphologized, is characterized by quite high deletion rates and is less variable. On the other hand, elision on preverbal clitics, is partially morphologized, applies with lower probability and is largely variable. Furthermore, elision is sensitive to the speaking rate in that it applies more frequently in informal speech and less frequently in formal speech. By contrast, the presence vs. absence of word stress on the initial vowel of nouns and verbs does not seem to affect elision. Likewise, the structure (VC or V) of the initial syllable of nouns and verbs does not influence elision. The variable application of elision on Italian determiners and preverbal clitics will be represented in the framework of Stochastic Optimality Theory (Boersma & Hayes 2001). A stochastic grammar incorporates the real frequencies found in quantitative data and implements them into OT. Thus, the stochastic grammar generated by the Gradual learning Algorithm (GLA) can account for the variation found in the application of Italian final elision. Elision in Florentine Italian will be said to be a hybrid process, which shares some properties with lexical rules and others with postlexical rules. Like lexical rule, elision is morphologically driven and has lexical exceptions. Like postlexical rules, instead, elision applies between words and is rate-sensitive. Building on the data found in historical Italian grammars, it seems that both elision on determiners and elision on preverbal clitics is undergoing a morphologization process.