

## WILL CATALAN *IEISME* BECOME GLOBAL?

Over the last four decades, an increasing tendency to replace all instances of [ʎ] by [j], known as *ieisme*, has been developing in Catalan, particularly as spoken in Catalonia. This variation in pronunciation is rapidly becoming a feature of the speech of young speakers, as Recasens has already pointed out (1991 [<sup>2</sup>1996]: 324), as well as of some adults in diverse social contexts, from politicians to even presenters in the mass media and newsreaders. This development is taking place independently of the origin of the lexical items involved, since historic or traditional *ieisme* (also known as *iodització*) is still firmly established in some Catalan-speaking areas. The words in question include instances such as *all* [aj] ‘garlic’ and *ulleres* [uˈjereʎəs] ‘(a pair of) glasses’ (historic *ieisme*: descending from Latin –L[j]– and –C’L–) of different origin from *ell* [ej] ‘he’ and *lluna* [ˈjunɛʎə] ‘moon’ (non-historic *ieisme*: descending from intervocalic –LL– and initial L-).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the extent of the presence of that pronunciation within four groups of speakers, with age ranges of 5-15 and 20-30 years old, whose speech is representative of the main language varieties spoken in Catalonia: Northwestern Catalan (Segrià variety) and Northeastern Catalan (Pla de l’Estany variety, with historic *ieisme* in recession). The study is based on a large discourse sample and sets out to describe speaker competence and performance in terms of both perception and production. Therefore, perception tests will be used and the recorded data produced by our informants will be analysed spectrographically. It is expected that the results will help establish the evolution of a hypothetical sound change in progress —a shift from traditional *ieisme*, once global but subsequently receding, to an overall *ieisme* once more— in two relevant and quite diverse areas of the Catalan-speaking territory.

Is it possible to draw a parallel between this development in spoken Catalan and similar changes in pronunciation in neighbouring linguistic communities: Spanish, French and Occitan? Whatever the outcome, the analysis may go some way in answering the ‘actuation’ question posed by Wheeler (2005: 35) whereby he invited research into the matter under discussion? Moreover, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the description of Catalan pronunciation during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

RECASENS, Daniel (1991 [<sup>2</sup>1996]): *Fonètica descriptiva del català (Assaig de caracterització de la pronúncia del vocalisme i consonantisme del català al segle XX)*. Barcelona: IEC.  
WHEELER, Max W. (2005): *The Phonology of Catalan*. Oxford: OUP.