

The Listener as a Source of Sound Change: An Update

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My presentation will be an update with some revisions on the paper “The listener as a source of sound change” published in 1981 as well as related papers published subsequently. First, arguments will be presented to reinforce the claim that sound change is free of teleology, i.e., purposeful change – neither on the part of the speaker nor the listener. Related to this is that the product of sound change does not yield a better or optimal means of vocal communication. Second, I will link the original claims to the mechanism of sound change and its manifestation in languages’ segment inventories exhibiting ‘maximal utilization of available features’ (MUAF). Third, I will revisit and revise my claims about the features eligible for dissimilation vs. those not eligible. A novel aspect of this will be a discussion of the feature “Advanced Tongue Root (ATR)” – where it comes from and how it figures in languages’ phonologies. Fourth, I will revisit and re-emphasize my claims that sound change can be regarded as ‘nature’s speech perception experiment’. Finally, I will update my claim that the mechanisms of sound change can be studied empirically, i.e., in the laboratory – as foreseen by von Raumer, Brücke, Rosapelly, Rousselot, and others more than a century ago.