

How individuals in a speech community drive phonological change is a question best answered by combining insights from both quantitative sociolinguistics and generative theory. Taking advantage of the large-scale Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus (PNC) and a recently identified allophonic restructuring of /æ/ in that dialect (Labov et al., 2013), I provide an analysis of phonological change in progress. Using natural speech production from 46 speakers who acquired language during the period of allophonic change, I find that while some speakers adhere only to either the older traditional /æ/ split or the new nasal /æ/ split, there are some individuals who variably produce both systems. Taking social network into account further demonstrates that these variable speakers are in fact the drivers of this change across the Philadelphia speech community. These findings suggest that phonological change occurs not via the more traditionally posited mechanism of phonetic incrementation, but rather via within-speaker probabilistic variation.



# Phonological change via probabilistic variation

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LOCATION  
B-342 Wells Hall

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4:00 – 5:30 PM

MICHIGAN STATE  
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