
Reviewed by Rajiv Rao
(University of Wisconsin – Madison)

Coarticulation and sound change in Romance is an innovative and unique contribution to the field of historical Romance phonetics/phonology, a result of the tireless efforts of one of the most prolific scholars in Romance linguistics, Daniel Recasens. Across the monograph’s six chapters, Recasens employs the degree of articulatory constraint (DAC) model to provide phonetically-driven explanations for specific types of sound changes (i.e., elision, insertion, assimilation, dissimilation) involving consonants, glides and vowels. While experimental work in phonetics is the primary basis for his proposals, Recasens also discusses cognitive, lexical and prosodic conditions. The book is divided into the following chapters: Chapter 1 (“Introduction”), Chapter 2 (“Consonant-dependent processes involving target vocalic segments”), Chapter 3 (“Vowel-dependent processes”), Chapter 4 (“Consonant-dependent processes involving target consonants”), Chapter 5 (“General discussion”) and Chapter 6 (“Conclusions and outlook”). Following Chapter 6, there is a list of references, an index of languages and dialects and an index of subjects and terms. In the remainder of this review, I summarize the key points covered in each chapter before ultimately commenting on the book’s merits and contributions to the field at large.

In Chapter 1, Recasens sets the stage for his discussion of sound change processes in subsequent chapters by defining and describing key concepts and by providing relevant background on Romance languages in general. He begins by straightforwardly stating the objective of the book: arguing for coarticulation as a trigger for historical sound alterations dealing with segments that are adjacent to or near one another. He then details the DAC model, whose main objectives are to explain lingual coarticulation, to quantifiably detail cases of consonants and vowels in which coarticulation is avoided and to address the ways in which consonants and vowels enforce their articulatory needs on nearby phonetic material. After providing a brief historical overview of the DAC model’s origin, Recasens then moves on to discuss the advantages of this model when put up against other views.
on coarticulation. Next, he explains constriction in vowels, based on features such as frontness/backness and roundness, as well as that of consonants, according to point and manner of articulation. Afterwards, he comments on the importance of considering segmental resistance to and aggressive tendencies toward coarticulation, in addition to effects related to the direction in which coarticulation takes place. Recasens then touches upon elision and insertion in terms of the gestural properties of both the elided/inserted segments and their neighboring segments involved in the processes. Following this, he presents how, within the DAC model, the imposition of coarticulation can result in assimilation or dissimilation, depending on whether a trigger segment leads to the adoption or loss of features in the target segment. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to providing a roadmap to the rest of the book, summarizing the various dialects of the Romance languages and tracing general changes to consonants and vowels between Latin and Romance.

After laying the groundwork for the remainder of the book, in Chapter 2 (the longest one), Recasens details the insertion, elision, assimilation and dissimilation of vowels, as initiated by consonants. He first outlines the articulatory classifications of groups of trigger consonants that contribute to the typologies and directions of vowel alterations discussed in the chapter: 1. the dark [l], the alveolar trill [r] and the bilabiovelar [w]; 2. (alveo)palatal, palatalized consonants and velars; 3. dentals and clear alveolars; 4. labials and 5. nasals. Each of these groups is then explored in depth with respect to relevant allophones, descriptions of articulatory movements and constraints associated with coarticulation.

Having established the consonant-based background described up to this point, Recasens goes on to provide an in-depth exploration of consonant-triggered glide and vowel insertion and elision across Romance. In this part of the chapter, he first addresses glides and vowels separately with regard to factors to consider when looking at insertion and elision of each of these sound types, and then moves on to detail, through copious amounts of concrete examples, insertion and elision trends in both glides and vowels based on the previously outlined consonant classes. When looking at each consonant group, Recasens particularly emphasizes the acoustic characteristics of the segments gained or lost and the directionality of the process. In order to facilitate the navigation of the material, he organizes the discussion of each consonant group into subsections based on features such as sound change process (i.e., insertion, elision), sequence type (for glides, e.g., vowel-consonant, consonant-vowel) and word position (for vowels, e.g., initial, medial, final). It is worth noting that in the section on glides, Recasens teases apart velars and (alveo)palatal/palatalized consonants and looks at nasals in terms of nasalized vowels, with subsections dedicated to vowel height and frontness/backness. He concludes the portion on insertion and elision with a useful summary in
which he highlights the importance of listeners’ perceptions, the phonetic quality of the segments involved, directionality effects and prosody, while also summarizing key findings for glides and vowels separately and putting forth new proposals regarding the diphthongization of vowels in Romance.

Following his closing remarks on insertion and elision, Recasens directs our attention to assimilation and dissimilation in terms of the articulatory characteristics of triggering consonants and target vowels, influences of coarticulation, typologies and directionality of the processes. The discussion of progressive and regressive examples of these two processes is based not only on data from Romance languages, but also on an impressive corpus of examples from Catalan that he constructed himself. When specifically focusing on assimilation, he groups consonantal subsections a bit differently than in the parts on insertion and elision. Here, he explores assimilations induced by: 1. [l] and [r]; 2. alveopalatals; 3. dentals and alveolars; 4. velars; 5. labials and 6. nasals. Once again, his analysis and arguments, supported with many examples within the text and in tables, in addition to statistics (when relevant), read smoothly because each consonantal section is broken down by type of vocalic change (e.g., lowering, raising, backing/rounding, fronting). With regard to dissimilation, which is the less frequent of the two processes, Recasens presents comments on back consonants and labials, followed by (alveo)palatals. Similar to the part on assimilation, dissimilations caused by each of these consonant groups are divided by type of vocalic change. Finally, Recasens closes out this portion of Chapter 2 by summarizing the trends observed in terms of direction, word position and contextual effects. These concluding remarks are particularly effective because they are supported by a vast array of graphics.

In Chapter 3, Recasens turns his attention to sound change processes driven by vowels (or glides, in some cases) and resulting in consonantal modifications. As before, he places particular emphasis on Catalan examples derived from his database. In order to contextualize his discussion, he opens the chapter by providing an overview of the characteristics of vowels with respect to degree/place of constriction and lip rounding, in addition to how these articulatory features translate to formant structure effects. Next, he introduces the insertion and elision of consonants by sharing details on pan-Romance examples of the vocalic environments in which these processes occur, which show variation in word position, as well as types of consonants that are manifested or eliminated based on vocalic influence and the directionality of processes. After these general comments, Recasens dedicates subsections to insertions and deletions of specific consonant types and contextual factors that dictate their alterations. He begins with the alveolar lateral and then moves through (alveo)palatals, velars, labials and, finally, nasals. Throughout this section, the prose on each consonant type is supplemented by a series of tables listing examples from many Romance languages, and cataloguing each example
by consonant type, phonological process (e.g., insertion/elision), direction of the process and appropriate references.

Chapter 3 continues with a discussion of vowel-to-consonant assimilation and dissimilation. Once again, he follows a clear and organized route, using point of articulation-based subsections and tables to guide readers through each of these vowel-triggered processes and their directionality. He begins with cases of labialization and continues with dentalization, alveolarization and palatalization, before finally considering manner of articulation. It should be noted that palatalization is treated the most elaborately, as it is further divided into subsections on labials, dentals/alveolars and velars. The final key topic of this chapter is vowel-to-vowel assimilation and dissimilation. This relatively short subsection examines cases of regressive and progressive assimilation in terms of the raising of mid and low vowels, the lowering of front vowels, backing/fronting and rounding/unrounding. Finally, dissimilation is looked at with respect to vowel raising/lowering and the fronting/unrounding of back rounded vowels. Recasens then concludes his remarks on vowel-triggered processes with an effective summary section, highlighted by a series of histograms illustrating frequencies of vowel assimilation/dissimilation based on context and directionality.

Chapter 4 also deals with changes to consonants; however, it differs from Chapter 3 in that now the discussion centers on alterations initiated by other consonants. Recasens first looks at situations in which insertion takes place word-finally, before switching gears to sequences of vowels and consonants organized in both possible orders. Next, his coverage of epenthesis in consonant clusters is arranged according to whether the first consonant is a nasal, as well as voicing effects. The section on elision starts off with cases that occur in tautosyllabic clusters in initial syllable position. Naturally, heterosyllabic clusters come next, which are divided based on the oral or nasal quality of the first of the two consonants. Finally, clusters in word-final position, as well as those containing three consonants, are detailed.

In the second chunk of Chapter 4, Recasens sheds light on processes in which consonants in clusters affect one another, yielding modifications to point and/or manner of articulation. Regarding adaptations involving point of articulation, he divides the discussion based on degree of stricture and whether the processes outlined (i.e., assimilation and blending) are driven by the two consonants’ articulators behaving independently of one another or being the same or adjacent to one another. Recasens’s comments on manner of articulation changes in consonant-to-consonant modifications are a bit more extensive, as a series of adaptations are documented and discussed: voicing, nasality, laterality, rhoticity, lenition and, finally, cases of assimilation of both point and manner of articulation. Following the model of Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 4 closes with a summary of key points
related to the gestural properties involved in consonant-driven consonant insertions, elisions and adaptations.

In Chapter 5, Recasens begins wrapping up the intense analyses detailed in Chapters 2–4 through a general summary of his pan-Romance findings on how segments in close proximity articulatorily influence one another to produce sound change, as well as what factors are important to consider when tackling such segmental interactions. He first gives an overview of the acoustic- and production-based details of the sound changes in question and then recaps his results in relation to directionality. Both of these points are covered with respect to cases triggered by consonants as well as vowels. Recasens winds down this chapter with brief notes about stress and word position, situations in which the coarticulation of consonants and vowels occurs to similar degrees, and the application of the core principles of his study to other language groups beyond Romance.

Chapter 6 concisely concludes the monograph by emphasizing the importance of including phonetic detail in any discussion of the hows and whys of sound change. Recasens explains how his study has extended upon previous work on sound change in Romance in unique ways and, finally, raises some issues for the reader to consider as research on sound change continues to evolve.

This book is impressively written in terms of both content and organization. It is a thoroughly enjoyable and compelling read from beginning to end. In my mind, it has already achieved the status of ‘seminal work’ in the field of Romance linguistics in general, and (historical) Romance phonetics/phonology in particular. I highly recommend it to both researchers and graduate students focusing on Romance languages through the lenses of phonetics and phonology, and variation and change. In fact, anyone studying the sound system of any language, especially from a variation and change perspective, would benefit from taking a close look at this book because the theoretical principles and analytical methods on which it is based are certainly applicable to languages beyond Romance. I look forward to sharing its contents with colleagues and graduate students both within and beyond my university.

Recasens’s effort makes a tremendous contribution to the field because even though countless articles and books have been written on coarticulation in Romance and sound change in Romance as separate topics, before this book, no one had married the two areas of study in the natural, logical and convincing way that Recasens does. After going through the entire book, I realize that I am able to use these three adjectives due to the amount of data he provides, coming from a diverse range of Romance languages and dialects and from an extensive list of references. One could easily argue that the compilation of examples and references are the most valuable resources emerging from the book. Not only will they inform and advance future related work, but they also provide all linguists with a
A model example of finding value in combining theoretical and experimental practices. The Catalan database on which much of Recasens’s analysis is based seems expansive. If anyone were to take on such a large-scale project, Recasens would be the ideal person, given his numerous publications on Romance phonetics. Within this book, the database clearly strengthened the arguments presented across the processes examined. The data provided in the tables on pages 37, 50–51, 56–57, 62–63, 74–75, 86 and 90 in Chapter 2, those on pages 111–112, 114–115, 118–119 and 129 in Chapter 3 and those on pages 148–149, 152–153 and 159–160 in Chapter 4 are particularly informative. The last major point I would like to make concerning content is that I really enjoyed the manner in which Recasens’s expertise in a variety of areas of phonetic analysis is transparent throughout the book: his descriptions of the acoustic and articulatory properties of consonants and vowels are detailed yet easy to follow, his implementation of statistics (when necessary to strengthen his claims) is accurate and justifiable and his coverage of various sound change processes in many varieties of Romance is second to none.

With respect to organization, Recasens’s division of chapters, sections and subsections is extremely effective and reader-friendly. The topics analyzed in the book demonstrate a high degree of complexity, and without a solid organizational system, they might have been frustrating to navigate. I did not experience such feelings when working my way through the book, which allowed me to better absorb the processes and examples discussed. In particular, Chapter 1 clearly lays out all the background needed to receive the information presented in Chapters 2–4. In these three ‘main body’ chapters, which are logically divided based on trigger/target segments, the reader is guided through each one similarly: introductory comments on the processes to be covered, the sounds involved and the goals of the chapter; main sections dedicated to the particular processes of interest (i.e., insertion, elision, assimilation, dissimilation, with the first two and the last two typically grouped together) with subsections addressing topics such as directionality, sequence type and manner of articulation, among others; and finally, a summary section in which key points are given, in some cases through visual representations (the graphs in the summary section of Chapters 2 and 3, on pages 96–103 and 143–144, respectively, were particularly useful). Having this type of organizational template helped me understand the intricacies of each process individually while also drawing connections between the findings of different sections. Finally, I also applaud the use of the final two chapters as a way to discuss the main take-home messages of the analyses in Chapters 2–4, the overarching implications of the study with regard to Romance and beyond and suggestions for future research. These two succinct chapters give a solid sense of closure, highlighting a set of core messages from the work as a whole.
Overall, Recasens has done anyone researching phonetics/phonology and/or historical linguistics a great service by authoring this book. I envision many individuals and universities benefiting from it and I look forward to seeing what types of further work it inspires.

**Reviewer’s address**

Rajiv Rao  
Department of Spanish & Portuguese  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
1220 Linden Drive  
Van Hise Hall 1018  
Madison, WI 53706  
United States  
rgrao@wisc.edu