

ON THE DYNAMICS OF /h/, EVIDENCE FROM FINNISH

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Contrary to languages which have dropped the /h/, Finnish has established it as a new phoneme after the early proto Baltic-Finnic stage (cf. hän, iho, pihti, pihvi, inho).

The consonant /h/ is not involved in the quantity opposition (except hihhu and huhho), its participation in the boundary doubling rule is weaker than that of the other consonants (cf. istu+pa = [istup:a], but istu+han = [istuh:an] or more frequently [istuhan], all meaning 'do sit down'), and the stress signalling of h in /-Vh.C-/ structures shows some peculiarities.

Morphophonological alternations (kaksi/kahden, mies/miehen), some lexical relicts (löyhä/löysä 'loose', karkea/karhea 'rough'), diachronic changes, dialectal correspondences, omissions, assimilations, and substitutions in the first language acquisition reveal a number of similarities in the dynamics of /h/. Symptomatic interjections of the type huh-huh (sign for tiredness or fear) seem to show that the origin of /h/ is in an audible breathed sound which is phonemicized in marginal positions. /h/ is used also iconically as indication for frictional types of sound (huohottaa 'to puff', 'to pant'; suhina 'hum').

Diachronically h is the outcome from s, z, ʃ or the palatal tʃ or the velar plosive k. Final occurrences are diachronically avoided by metathesis (mureh > murhe 'sorrow').

Contrastively the syllable final cases of /h/ compared with German [ç] and [x] are interesting, especially the combinations of /h/ with the labial close vowels (Fi. nyhtää/Germ. nüchtern; Fi. puhti/Germ. Bucht) in which the Finnish h is produced with labial coarticulatory constriction (and corresponding "friction").

Phonetically: photo-electric glottograms show that the glottal opening for /h/ is greatest in /-h.C-/ structures (pihti, pihvi) where it is comparable with the first element in consonant clusters like /-k.s-/ or in double plosives (geminate) like /-k.k.-/.

The usual voicing of h in /-h.C-/ structures (C being voiced) does not cause a homophony with /-VV-/ structures (cf. vihdan/viidan) and similar pairs can be distinguished in whispered speech. Whispered initial /h/ is also recognizable (cf. hosua/osua).