Abstract:
The question of whether or not grammatical factors can condition or block sound change has been discussed from many perspectives for more than a century, without resolution (Melchert 1975). Here we consider studies of sound change in progress which show that words or phrases that are used frequently in the phonetic environment for change undergo the change before those whose use is less frequent in these contexts. Because words of different categories and with different structures also have different distributions, they may occur preferentially in certain phonetic environments. Thus apparent interference by grammatical and lexical factors can be explained by phonetic factors if we expand our notion of ‘phonetic environment’ to include frequency within the environment for change, which includes the segmental environment as well as factors that affect the degree of prominence a word receives in context.