

# INTERDISCIPLINARY LECTURE SERIES IN LINGUISTICS

## **The peer pressure that sounds succumb to: The effect of cumulative frequency in contexts that favor reduction**



### **Earl K. Brown, Associate Professor of Linguistics Brigham Young University**

Earl K. Brown works as an Associate Professor of Linguistics at Brigham Young University (Utah, USA). He received a PhD in Hispanic Linguistics at the University of New Mexico in 2008, and his doctoral thesis was published in the LINCOS Studies in Romance Linguistics series in 2009. His research agenda centers on the quantification of language variation, especially in Spanish.

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DANE SMITH HALL 227**

Concerning phonetically conditioned sound changes, Bybee (2002:261) posits that "words that occur more often in the context for change change more rapidly than those that occur less often in that context." This presentation highlights several studies that lend support to this idea, and also make mention other studies in progress that seek further support for the idea.

Study 1 (Brown & Alba 2017) analyzes the acoustic energy of 996 tokens of word-initial /f/ in the speech of 38 speakers of Mexican Spanish living in Salinas, California. The results suggest that the frequency with which words occur in phonological contexts favorable to reduction conditions the reduction of /f/, even after taking into account the immediate phonological context. Despite this, it is also found that the conditioning effect of cumulative frequency is less robust than the influence of the immediate phonological context.

Study 2 (Brown 2018) measures word-final /s/ in the speech of ten speakers in the same corpus. The 1,028 tokens are subjected to mixed effects linear regression, with speaker and lexical item entered as random effects. The results suggest that cumulative frequency is a better predictor of word-boundary sound reduction than lexical frequency, and support the idea that words that occur frequently in phonological contexts conducive to reduction are reduced more often because words are represented mentally as malleable cognitive entities that respond to usage-based factors.