

*Weight, thickness and size of sociophonetic indexes.  
Production data and perception evidence from some Italian varieties*

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With reference to our empirical work recently done on the phonetic variability of Tuscan varieties of Italian, we will illustrate some basic parameters of the sociophonetic indexes with reference to the metaphor of solid bodies. A sociophonetic variation can indeed be viewed as a solid body, an entity which occupies a specific space in the domain of language and occurring in a delimited time.

Sociophonetic indexes may have different nature and different social status. Their status is variable with respect to the perception of the feature by the speakers; for some features, there can be no awareness at all, whereas for others the perception can be very fine-grained.

The capacity of speakers to respond to the phonetic properties is also variable; in particular, not all speakers are sensitive to the so-called *Fine Phonetic Details*. Perceptual experiments carried out on manipulation of duration and F0 in prominent syllables show that some subjects are more adept than others at identifying relevant features of a given speech sample; this phonetic capacity seems to be related with other cognitive competence.

In parallel, sociophonetic features can be more or less central in the phonological system of a language; a marginal position occupied by the variation connected with a specific feature has different effects on the frequency of occurrence as well as in the language structure.