

Sound change and functionalism: The role of laryngeal height

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In some dialects of English, /æ/ is raised before /g/ but not /k/. The raising may be a functional attempt to reduce conflict between producing /æ/ before /g/ (speaker oriented account), or due to misapprehension (listener-oriented account). Among unaffected speakers, both /g/ and /k/ exert a coarticulatory (i.e. raising) effect on /æ/, but acoustic evidence for raising is seen only before /g/, which suggests the stimulus precipitating /æ/- raising was listener-oriented, not speaker-oriented. At issue is why /æ/ isn't acoustically raised before /k/. This paper shows the laryngeal positions for voicing explains why listeners might interpret /æ/ as raised only before /g/.