PHONETIC EUPHEMISMS AND PHONOLOGICAL DISTANCE

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In the study of phonology, a number of models have arisen to
depict the operation and internal structure of the phonological
component, each model based on a differing set of fundamental
postulates and bearing differing relations to the realm of empir-
ical evidence.   In particular, one may start either from a pure-
ly axiomatic basis or from an uncorrelated set of empirical data,
with the majority of studies coming from intermediate points on
this methodological continuum.   Once values for particular dis-
tinctive features have been determined, it is possible to estab-
lish matrices of phonological 'distance' based on feature values.
In this study, an additional method is suggested by means of which
one may hope to gain insight into the workings of distinctive
feature systems.   The phenomenon in question is the phonetic modi-
fication of socially proscribed words to form acceptable euphemisms.
Obviously,constraints exist which allow some types of modification
and disallow others.   One particular case, from Spanish, is analyzed
in detail, and after examining purely phonetic modifications (as
opposed to lexical replacement by already existing forms), it is
concluded that such constraints may indeed be discovered by further
study of existing and potential euphemistic deformations.   An on-
going research project is revealing both anticipated and unexpected
specifications of phonological distance, suggesting the need to
reexamine the notions of distance and the irrelevance of individual
phonological specifications in determination of phonological
systems.