Introduction

- Constraints argued to be available and active in every language [1,2,4]
- Predicted to surface as soft constraints when they don’t surface categorically [2,4]
- Final-obstruent devoicing
  - Voiced obstruents → voiceless in codas [3]
  - Well-documented, functionally motivated [3]
- Soft final devoicing: voiced obstruents are expected to be dispreferred word-finally [1,2,3]
- Use the Cross-linguistic Phonological Frequency (XPF) Corpus to examine final-obstruent devoicing as a soft constraint

Motivations

- Validate constraints [1,2,4]
- Study universal effects of phonological generalizations [3]

Methods

Study 1: Regression

- Compare word-initial and word-final contexts
- Asks: Does voicing influence whether a segment will appear word-finally?

Study 2: Sampling

- Compare observed and expected values of final voiced obstruents
- Expected values based on assumption that voicing has no effect on word final positions

Results

Study 1: Regression approach

- 40 out of 49 languages (81.1%) had negative effect for voice – 15 had significant effect
- A lot of variance attributed to intercepts
  - differences in obstruent pairs at segment level

Study 2: Sampling approach

- 43 out of 45 languages (95.5%) underrepresented final voiced obstruents

Discussion

- Both studies demonstrate that final voiced obstruents are dispreferred
- Suggests final-obstruent devoicing is present as a cross-linguistic soft constraint
- Sampling approach more robust than regression approach
- Validates final-obstruent devoicing as a universal constraint
- Functional pressures motivating final-obstruent devoicing may be relevant to all language
- Proof of concept for using XPF Corpus
- Future work:
  - Use methods on weaker and less well-known constraints

References