

# Perceiving fine-phonetic detail: The case of word-final /s/ in English

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In this talk, I situate a case study on the perception of word-final /s/ (Schmitz, 2022, Chapter 6) within broader research on subphonemic detail, highlighting how fine-grained phonetic differences can shape linguistic processing (e.g. Baer-Henney & Schmitz, 2025; Schmitz et al., 2021; Schmitz & Baer-Henney, 2024). The empirical focus is a same-different task in which New Zealand English listeners heard fricatives whose durations were manipulated in steps between 10 and 75 ms. The results show that sensitivity increases only for differences of 35 ms and above, a pattern confirmed by beta-GAMM modelling of A' values. Although listeners vary considerably in how strongly they respond to durational differences, the results nevertheless show that word-final /s/ can carry subphonemic cues that listeners perceive under suitable conditions, which is difficult to reconcile with strictly abstractionist accounts of speech perception (e.g. McClelland & Elman, 1986; Norris & McQueen, 2008).

## References

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