SEGMENT FREQUENCY AND WORD STRUCTURE IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

Eleonora C. Albalto, Agnaldo A. Moreira, Patricia A. Aquino, Adelaide H. P. Silva and Regis K. Kukihonna
Laboratorio de Fonética Acústica & Psicolinguística Experimental
Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campina S. P., Brazil

ABSTRACT

Segment frequencies in two representative corpora of Brazilian Portuguese are interpreted as evidence for a lexically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. The pattern consists in underexploiting the vowel in intervocalic and intervocalically-based phonetic pattern. 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increases the need for efficient encoding of selected distinctions.

The role of the other not so "salient" L segments [d] and [l] is also clarified by comparing the GRAMNURC with the CONTNURC data. Their near complementarity in these graphs suggests that the crowded coronal region of the language's consonant space is sensitive to lexical strata, with grammatical words accounting for most of the [d]'s and content words, in turn, largely accounting for the rather conspicuous auditory contrast between [l] and [l].

It follows from all of the above that the reason why Brazilian Portuguese does not fully exploit the basic vowel triangle in lexical distinctions is that acoustic distinctiveness and articulatory economy divide the spoils within the syllable: onsets tend to be auditorily salient while rhymes tend to be free from any restrictions on coarticulation. Non-high vowels are preferred underlyingly because they coarticulate easily with most R segments including high vowels while leaving enough room for surface raising, which does in fact occur very frequently.

CONCLUSION

A simple conceptual and graphic analysis of segment preferences in Brazilian Portuguese has shown that both an ideal lexicon (DIC) and the lexicon actually used in connected speech (NURC) exhibit trends which are consistent with processes observed in the language's synchronic and diachronic phonology. These trends can be summarized as a preference for loosely coordinated gestures to the right of the vowel, counterbalanced by a preference for auditorily salient gestures to the left of the vowel.

The tension generated by this asymmetry has been responsible for the historical loss of stops in syllable final position and for the emergence of syllable initial approximants in word medial position. It is also currently responsible for a number of phonological processes taking place in various dialects such as rhootimization of laterals in syllable initial clusters and loss of lateral, sibilant and rhotic gestures in some medial and final environments.

However preliminary, the results of this study support experimental approaches to phonology and point to the need for further quantitative studies of Brazilian Portuguese. In addition, they indirectly support theories which translate segments into articulatory gestures, particularly those which allow for the interaction of auditory and motor factors in their selection and distribution [9].

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REFERENCES