

Sound change...how learning to read and write diminishes the dialectal traits

Words written with the initial graphic sequences “es+C” and “ex+C” are definitely a controversial topic in the phonology of European Portuguese, as in other Latin languages, especially when the syllabic status of the cluster has to be defined since the production of these sequences is changing (Delgado Martins & Harmegnies & Poch-Olivé, 1995). The difficulty arises when the speakers have to identify the syllabic constituents, since the word initial sC clusters cannot be accepted (Veloso, 2002), because they violate the Sonority Principle (Selkirk, 1982). The problem only arises in initial clusters of certain words since the initial vowel tends to disappear and they are also produced differently according to the dialect of the speakers, especially between speakers from the septentrional and central meridional dialect.

Elaborating on the analyses available in the literature for European Portuguese (Freitas, 1997;2000; Andrade e Rodrigues, 1999; Rodrigues, 2000; Rodrigues, 2003; Freitas e Rodrigues, 2003; and for other languages (Bertinetto, 1999), this study has the following aims:

- i) to find evidence that ortographic knowledge interferes with the phonological knowledge (Veloso, 2003) and with the change in the production of these sequences.
- ii) to determine if we can talk about variation in case these structures may be considered tautosyllabic by the speakers.
- iii) to test the influence of the dialect in the two structures.

Having these purposes in mind, we selected some speakers from different age groups and from different dialectal origin. We chose 10 speakers who attended the 5th grade and the 9th grade from Lisbon (central meridional dialect) and Oporto (septentrional dialect). The speakers were asked to produce the words and segment the syllables of those words after some images were shown.

All the interviews were recorded and later on, after listening to them several times, the data were analysed with SPSS16, in order to see what were the statistically significant differences.

Some of the data showed that the dialectal traits may be disappearing due to the influence of learning to read and write. Therefore, one must conclude that some of the dialectal traits may be changing, when the speakers produce and segment these sequences.

We believe that this work can be a contribution to the importance of the oral language and the linguistic awareness of the speakers in the tasks of learning to read and write.