

PHONOTACTIC CONSTRAINTS AND WORD DEMARCATION IN ROMANCE¹

João Veloso (jveloso@letras.up.pt)

Pedro Tiago Martins (ptsgmartins@gmail.com)

University of Porto (Portugal)

1. General background and framework

The lack of phonetic and phonological cues to word demarcation is a classical issue in descriptive linguistics. Among other consequences, it motivated the early structuralists' proposal of the morpheme as the basic linguistic unit and a substitute for the word in linguistic description (for a review, see, a.o., Coates 1999: 10; Bauer 2004: 108).

Departing from the linearist, naïve perspective that only units which could have silent pauses as natural boundaries could be fully accepted as linguistically relevant units (see, e.g., Pike 1943: 42), other early approaches accept that different phonetic/phonological facts might behave as cues to such boundary marking (Jones 1931; Anderson 1965). The occurrence or the inhibition of certain segments or phonotactic structures in word boundaries are amid the cues admitted by these studies.

Regardless of what could be accepted as a “word” in any given language, it is generally accepted that such units do play a role as far as several phonological phenomena or processes are concerned (at least in languages where inflection, derivation and compounding are regular, productive processes). Among these “word-sensitive” phonological regularities, the fact that many phonologies allow or disallow certain segments or segment combinations in given lexical positions is very important for the purpose of our work. Examples of this may be found in European Portuguese (EP), which disallows /k/, /ŋ/ and /r/ in word-beginnings (Barbosa 1983: 179-180; Mateus & D'Andrade 2000: 11), Yakima Sahaptin, where CCV is found word-initially only (Hargus & Beavert 2006), and Slovak, which allows long consonant clusters disagreeing with the Sonority Principle at word-beginnings only (Bárkányi 2009).

2. Specific purpose of this paper

In this paper, it is our aim to analyse the role of some phonotactic constraints in word demarcation in certain Romance languages. It is commonly assumed that Romance languages are highly restrictive regarding segmental coda-filling (Mateescu 2003: 1; Glessgen 2007: 142; Veloso 2008). For instance, languages such as EP and Peninsular Spanish are said not to admit complex codas, whilst the consonants admitted in simple codas form a very narrow subset within their consonant inventories (Veloso 2008: 3 ff.). However, these constraints are not strictly observed in all lexical positions. Word-endings admit segments and segment combinations which are disallowed in non-final position. This “prosodic tolerance” (Veloso 2009) could be accepted as a cue for word demarcation, in the classic sense of Jones' (1931) and Anderson's (1965) papers.

In our study, special attention will be paid to the following syllable codas of EP: segmental /n/_{Coda}; segmental /ks/_{Coda} and /ps/_{Coda}; /VGN/_{Coda}; /VGNS/_{Coda}². These codas, which violate the highly restrictive phonotactic constraints of EP ruling segmental coda-filling, can never occur word-medially in this language. Indeed, word-final is the only prosodic context that admits them. We will argue then for their role as cues for word demarcation in EP – showing, thus, the word's relevance for linguistic description. Such role will be described in our paper according to the logic-based formalisms of Declarative Phonology, a theoretical approach which seems adequate for describing

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² V=Wowel; G=Glide; N=Autosegmental Nasality; S=Coronal, Palatal Fricative.

phonological regularities observed at surface forms of phonological representations (see Scobbie et al. 1996; Angoujard 2006) (see examples of data and formal descriptions below).

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Data and examples

“Exceptional” codas admitted in word-final position only in EP

A. EP words ending with /n/, /ks/, /ps/	B. EP words ending with /VGN/	C. EP words ending with /VGNS/
<i>gérmen</i> [ʒɛrmɛn] ‘germ’	<i>pão</i> [pɐ̃w] ‘bread’	Grammatical /S/
<i>abdómen</i> [ɐbˈdɔmɛn] ‘abdomen’	<i>ontem</i> [ˈɔtɛ̃j] ‘yesterday’	<i>mãos</i> [mɐ̃w̃j] ‘hands’
<i>oxímoron</i> [ɔˈksimɔɾɔn] ‘oxymoron’	<i>homem</i> [ˈɔmɛ̃j] ‘man’	<i>irmãos</i> [irˈmɐ̃w̃j] ‘brothers’
<i>plâncton</i> [ˈplɛ̃ktɔn] ‘plankton’	<i>ruim</i> [ˈRũj] ‘bad’	<i>alemães</i> [ɐlɛ̃mɛ̃j] ‘German (plural)’
<i>tórax</i> [ˈtɔɾaks] ‘thorax’		Lexical /S/
<i>telefax</i> [telɛˈfaks] ‘telefax’		<i>Guimarães</i> [gimɐ̃ˈrɛ̃j] (place name)
<i>fórceps</i> [ˈfɔɾsɛps] ‘forceps’		<i>Ruivães</i> [RUjˈvɛ̃j] (place name)
<i>bíceps</i> [ˈbisɛps] ‘biceps’		<i>Coimbrões</i> [kwĩˈbrɔ̃j] (place name)

(Declarative) formalisation of the aforementioned exceptional codas in EP

$$\{ \text{Seq} = [(n.) \vee ((k \vee p)s.) \vee (\text{VGN}.) \vee (\text{VGNS}.)] \} \rightarrow [(\text{Seq} \not\# \#_{\text{WEnd}}) \wedge (. = \#_{\text{WEnd}})]$$