A survey of phonological transfers from Brazilian Portuguese to English as a second language
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This proposal has as its main concern to survey transfer phenomena that emerge in English as a second language (ESL) spoken by Brazilian-Portuguese (BP) learners. Studies on ESL by BP native speakers are still in a small number and many phenomena are not very well documented, such as prosody acquisition.

We will focus our analysis on word-stress acquisition phenomena and their interaction with the segmental and syllabic levels. This description and analysis is based on a corpus of 7,560 tokens produced by 16 English Major undergraduates from a university in Southern Brazil, from various initial to final semesters. Each informant read 135 English words in isolation and 135 words in carrier sentences. The target words include suffixed (stress neutral, stress-bearing and stress-retracting suffixes) words and non-suffixed words whose primary stress is assigned to one of the syllables in the trisyllabic window.

The results have shown that there is a clear transfer of patterns from the native language to the learners’ productions in ESL. In terms of segmental transfer, vowel category assimilation of vocalic segments that do not exist in BP to their closer correlates in English frequently occurs, such as /æ → ɛ/ and /ɒ → a/, as reported by Rauber et al. (2005). Also, vowel length is not phonemic in BP which seems to be the reason for some word stress errors in ESL. In terms of syllable structure, epenthesis of /i/ is the most frequent transfer, since it obeys a bias in the native language of not producing voiceless obstruents in coda position (except for /ʃ/, Camara-Junior 1975). In such cases, words that contain one or more voiceless consonants in the coda, like grotesque /gro.tes.ki/, CCV.CVCC, were pronounced as /gro.tes.ki/, creating a new light syllable, CCV.CVC.CV, as also reported by Alves (2008). As a new syllable is created, the implications it has for stress is that a trochaic foot is formed on the right border of the word, for instance, kitchenette /ki.tʃiˈnɛ.tʃi/. Even some phonological processes found in BP are also transferred to ESL. Some examples are the palatalization of the alveolar stops /t/ to /ʃ/ and /d/ to /ʒ/ as allophones when preceded by [i], i.e. political /pol.tiˈkəl/ → [polʃikaw], and the vocalization of the lateral liquid /l/ → [w]. Concerning the “negative” transfer of word stress patterns, we could observe that the most assigned was the penultimate stress, in 70% of the cases (Post da Silveira, 2010). A similar percentage of 70% is found in BP. We also found stress assignment to the fourth syllable in BP-English, which happens by the vocalic epenthesis in order to correct a syllable structure that is forbidden in BP, i.e. /tek ˈnik/ → [ˈteː.ki.ni.ki], as happens to BP words, i.e. /tek.ni.co/ → [ˈteː.ki.ni.ku] (Lee, 2007), instead of respecting the length of a vowel beyond the trisyllabic window, as occurs in English, i.e. /ˈtʃæm.pr.ən.ʃi.p/ (Hammond 1999). Still, words with final stress on stress-bearing suffixes were least often correctly produced. The two main motivations for this phenomenon are: i) final stress is exceptional in BP and ii) stress-bearing suffixes in English are mainly characterized by a long vowel, with CVV syllable structure, as in refugee /ˈrefju.dʒi/. Instead, BP speakers tend to produce a light final syllable, CV, since vowel length is poorly distinguished by them.

Finally, we intend to describe and analyze a corpus of spoken English by BP native speakers in order to raise a better understanding of the phonological phenomena emergent from the developing second language system, specially in which concerns word stress.
References:


RAUBER, A; ESCUDERO, P.; BION, R; BAPTISTA, B. O. The interrelation between the perception and production of English vowels by native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese . INTERSPEECH, Lisbon, 2005.