

FOREWORD



Sociophonetics

This thematic volume of *Letras de Hoje* Journal gathers studies that explore the potential of the field of Sociophonetics: in speech production and perception, at segmental, subsegmental and suprasegmental levels, and in applied fields such as forensic phonetics.

In the first article, Smith, Foulkes and Sóskuthy describe an experiment to test the ability of a group of friends to identify one another when speaking in whisper. Performance was well above chance, even with samples as short as 4 syllables, but improved with longer samples. The study also found considerable variation in results by both speaker and listener. The experiment thus confirms an essential observation from many forensic studies: that results cannot be over-generalised from experimental conditions to forensic conditions. Instead they must take into consideration the circumstances faced by a witness at the time.

Forensic application of Sociophonetics is also explored by Schivinski Gonçalves in the examination of the appropriateness of speech rate and articulation rate as technical comparative parameters in the forensic speaker comparison task. From a sample of legally authorized telephone intercepts and a sample of recorded semi structured interviews, these temporal measures are related to social dimensions like sex, age and formal education. From the analysis, a picture is drawn of how some questions concerning pause, dysfluency and the length of speech sample may impact the final results.

Arantes and Linhares examine fundamental frequency in English, Estonian, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish, focusing particularly on the effect of sex and speaking style on its global statistical measures. Paralleling the first two articles, they raise relevant questions for the forensic speaker comparison task about style shift and its effect on fundamental frequency.

Peres investigates how well Brazilian Portuguese speakers identify their own regional varieties by listening only to intonational information. Three varieties of Brazilian Portuguese – pelotense (Rio Grande do Sul

State), paulistana (São Paulo, capital) and senadorense (Ceará State) – were tested through experiments that presented (i) delexicalised speech and (ii) flat melodic speech. The results were analysed on the basis of the Detection Theory framework.

Seara and Sosa set out the intonational characteristics of a particular dialect of Brazilian Portuguese: florianopolitano (Santa Catarina State, capital) or the *manezinho* speech. This non-urban dialect is interesting, among other reasons, because of the hypothesis that it conserves archaic forms of Portuguese. From the speech perception point of view, two experiments test the identification of a particular declarative contour as being effectively *florianopolitano* or *manezinho*. Although the final tonal fall reveals the uniqueness of this contour over other dialects, the results raise a discussion about a situation of change in progress, or dialectal levelling, in the community.

Meireles, Gambarini and Scherre examine variation in pre-stressed mid vowel position in Montana, a city located in the north of Espírito Santo State, near the border with Minas Gerais and Bahia State. As expected, since Espírito Santo is configured as a transition zone between the northern and southern varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, three variants were found in pre-stressed position: high vowels, high mid vowels and low mid vowels. A situation of change in progress in the community is suggested as well as the existence of a local pattern of vowel height in pre-stressed position.

Miranda, Yacovenco, Tesch and Meireles assess the influence of style on sentence reading and text reading by examining stressed and pre-stressed vowels. The parameters considered – formant measures, duration and spectral emphasis – underpin the discussion of the relation between style shift and vowel quality, from the Labovian point of view.

Bassi and Seara focus on the production of fricatives in coda position in Brazilian and European Portuguese varieties (Rio de Janeiro-RJ; Florianópolis-SC; Erechim-RS; Lisboa-Portugal; Granjal-Viseu-Portugal; São

Jorge-Azores). The recognition of a third variant through the analysis of the spectral peaks of the fricatives – the apico-alveolar fricative – next to the frequently registered palato-alveolar and alveolar fricatives, is explained by the contact history among the varieties in the Brazilian colonization process.

Combining speech production and perception analysis, Vieira and Corrêa examine the variable order of pronominal clitics in Brazilian Portuguese. The results of two previous studies are considered in order to define

the phonological direction of the unstressed pronouns (pre-verbal or post-verbal) and the acoustic parameters responsible for this direction.

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