

Some questions on secondary prominence in European Portuguese

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Our investigation aims at describing the distribution of the (rhythmic) secondary prominence in European Portuguese (EP), inside the prosodic word domain. It is based on the patterns perceived by five female subjects, aged between 21 and 25, native speakers of the Lisbon variety of Portuguese, who heard the corpus produced by another native speaker of the same variety, aged 21. The corpus heard includes 500 prosodic words and four variables were considered in its constitution/creation: the prosodic context; the type of prosodic word; the vowel quality; and the number of pre-tonic syllables and “syllabic groups”. After describing the regularities found in the patterns perceived by the subjects, the quantitative results are observed.

The results of this investigation lead us to the conclusion that there are two independent processes of secondary stress association: an initial secondary prominence and a special stress.

The initial prominence is optional and presents a highly variable distribution. It is bound by the prosodic word domain and occurs at the left edge of that domain: it can be assigned to the prosodic word adjunct (whenever there is one), or to one of the three initial pre-tonic “syllabic groups” in the (minimal) prosodic word. The distribution of this sort of prominence basically depends on the prosodic word initial position and on the vowels perceptual salience; besides it is additionally influenced by eurhythmic principles and by the prosodic context of the word.

The special stress, which is also optional, occurs on the second syllable leftwards from the primary stress, more precisely on one of two specific combinations of morphemes: *-iza-ção* or *-ifica-ção*. The secondary stress seems to have two functions in European Portuguese phonology. The special stress and the initial prominence contribute to create a rhythm presenting prominences at preferably regular intervals. The initial prominence contributes to cue the prosodic structure, by highlighting the initial limits of the prosodic word and the intonational phrase.

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