What follows is another discussion note contributed to our Book Discussion Forum. We expect these discussions to be informal and interactive; and the author of the book discussed is cordially invited to join in. If you are interested in leading a book discussion, look for books announced on LINGUIST as "available for discussion." (This means that the publisher has sent us a review copy.) Then contact Simin Karimi at simin@linguistlist.org or Terry Langendoen at terry@linguistlist.org.

Directory

1. David J Silva, Review of "The Phonology of Portuguese"

Message 1: Review of "The Phonology of Portuguese"

Date: Sat, 09 Jun 2001 16:49:10 -0500
From: David J Silva <david@ling.uta.edu>
Subject: Review of "The Phonology of Portuguese"


David J. Silva, Program in Linguistics, The University of Texas at Arlington

As noted by its publisher in LINGUIST 12.390, The Phonology of Portuguese (TPP) provides "an accurate description of the phonological system of Portuguese"--referencing both European and Brazilian varieties, and seeks to explain phonological and morphological phenomena "within the light of current phonological theories." With TPP, authors Mateus and d'Andrade have delivered a concise and comprehensive English-language volume on Portuguese phonology, nicely complementing the pre-generative English-language version of J. Mattoso Camara's 1970 work, The Portuguese Language (translated by Anthony Naro).

While the text manifests sporadic inconsistencies in its handling of descriptive and analytical details (see below), it generally presents a style and content that is
clear and coherent. In terms of its global organization, for example, TPP is extremely clear, providing a straightforward outline of the major subfields of Portuguese phonology: segments and features (chapter 2), syllable structure (chapter 3), morphology (chapters 4 and 5), word stress (chapter 6) and phonological processes (chapter 7). Each chapter, in turn, presents a fusion of data and generative theory with an eye toward providing the requisite "explanatory power" (p. 1) useful to understanding the peculiarities of Portuguese. As such, TPP is likely to be of greatest utility to non-Lusophone linguists seeking a theoretically-oriented survey of Portuguese phonology.

From a descriptive perspective, TPP provides the English-reading world with an overview of how Portuguese phonology works. The authors are particularly vigilant in drawing distinctions between the language's two most widely-recognized varieties: European Portuguese (EP) and Brazilian Portuguese (BP); in doing so, they establish the utility and applicability of the work to either side of the Atlantic—a real plus in the world of Portuguese language studies. In subsequent chapters, the authors are conscientious purveyors of language data, providing the reader with relevant facts in appropriate quantities.

That said, there are a number of claims made in the text that might raise questions. At the beginning of the book, for example, Mateus and d'Andrade briefly comment: "The dialects on the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, while they have their own peculiarities, share the general characteristics of the central-southern dialects" (p. 2). This characterization of Azorean Portuguese comes across as a bit too brief, however, particularly in light of the significant discrepancies between the vowels systems of standard EP and the varieties spoken on the islands of [SiG~o Miguel and Santa Maria (e.g. Rogers 1948, 1979). In a discussion of word-initial consonant clusters, the authors write: "... child productions during language acquisition show an inserted vowel between the consonants (e.g. pnew [pni_G~w] instead of [pni_G~w] 'tire' of after [i_G~ftA] instead of [i_G~ftA] 'aphthae'.)" (p. 44). [NOTE: [i] represents a high unrounded central vowel (barred i); [A] represents a mid central unrounded vowel (upside-down a).] While one might believe that a child would utter 'tire', is 'aphthae' attested in the child language literature? Curious, indeed. In discussing stress-assignment generalizations, they claim: "In nouns, the absence of a class marker [i.e. masculine /-o/ and feminine /-a/] restricts stress location to the final syllable" (p. 118). This is a curious claim given the existence of words such as cati_G~strofe 'catastrophe', ci_G~lice 'chalice', ni_G~made 'nomad', ci_G~sis 'oasis', sati_G~lite 'satellite' and zi_G~nite 'zenith'. One hopes that oversights of these sorts can be addressed in a future edition. They should not, however, overshadow the authors' success in providing readers with a wealth of linguistically-oriented Portuguese language data: whether establishing the segment inventory, motivating syllable structure, presenting noteworthy phonological and morphophonemic alternations, or outlining basic inflectional and derivational processes, Mateus and d'Andrade have produced a work of descriptive merit.
In a fashion that parallels the book's descriptive aspects, the theoretical discussions in TPP are generally sound, but with occasional weakness in both content and style. From chapter 2 onward, Mateus and d'Andrade take seriously their self-proclaimed charge to provide generatively-oriented accounts for the phonological phenomena they present, and they succeed. For example, their arguments for a single underlying rhotic /r/ to account for both the tapped and trilled surface representations are particularly convincing. Moreover, their analysis of syllable structure is intriguing, as they account for both Romance-based words as well as those forms in the language that present Greek-derived word-initial clusters such as temese 'tmesis' and cteni\textit{z}e\textit{foro} 'ctenophore'. These (and other) successful, convincing analyses notwithstanding, some of their analyses appear less consistent, leaving them open to debate.

In an analysis of the Portuguese consonants, the authors explicitly lay out claims regarding the featural composition of each segment (table 2.2, p. 29). In this table, they indicate that the voiced oral obstruents /b d g v z dZ/ are underlying marked [-sonorant]. Why? Given that one can distinguish 1) voiced from voiceless segments by virtue of the feature [+/-voice], and 2) oral from nasal segments in terms of [+nasal], assigning the voiced obstruent series [-sonorant] appears to be unnecessary. This decision is all the more perplexing in light of the sentence that immediately precedes the table: "Redundant values ... have not been included in Table 2.2." Several pages later, the authors revise the representations in Table 2.2 in light of a discussion of underspecification theory; surprisingly, the revised table, 2.8 (p. 36), maintains the suspicious [-sonorant] marking for the voiced obstruents. Moreover, there are other features marked that one might argue are themselves redundant. If, for example, /p/ is not assigned a LARYNGEAL node (by virtue of a putative universal of the sort [+cons] \(\rightarrow\) [-voiced]), then it should suffice to represent /b/ as having only a LARYNGEAL node; specifying a dependent feature [+voiced] should be redundant. A similar argument holds for their proposed representation of /k g/, which they describe as DORSAL dominating [+back] (Table 2.8), and their claim that the back rounded vowels are characterized by a LABIAL node dominating the feature [+round] (Table 2.7, p. 35). In each of these situations, are the dependent binary-valued features necessary? One might argue, "no." Were one to espouse a theory of radical underspecification (as Mateus and d'Andrade appear to do on p. 34), one might argue for even further streamlined representations.

Throughout the text, Mateus and d'Andrade make reference to lexical items beginning <es-C> (e.g. espa\textit{i\textsc{h}}o 'space', estar 'to be', es\textit{l}avo 'Slav', es\textit{m}agar 'to crush') as having underlying representations of the form /sC/, that is, with no initial vowel. Indeed, the authors make this claim explicit in their syllable-derivation of estar, assuming an underlying representation of the form /\textit{sta}r/ (p. 61). I find this assumption to be quite radical, particularly in light of: 1) the facts of Brazilian Portuguese, in which all of these forms begin with an initial [i\textsc{-}] (p. 45); and 2) my own experience in the
LINGUIST List 12.1553: Mateus & d'Andrade, Phonology of Portuguese (2)

Lusophone immigrant community of Cambridge/Somerville, Massachusetts, wherein English words of the form /sCI/ are realized as either [IS-C] or [S-C]: store -> [(I)Stoa]; school -> [(I)Skul]; skippy -> [(I)Skipi]. ([S] represents a voiceless alveopalatal fricative (esh).) Given the propensity for vowel deletion in EP (as discussed by Mateus and d'Adrade and quantitatively documented in Silva 1997, 1998), might it not be more expedient to assume that such forms include an underlying word-initial vowel which is subsequently deleted? Alternatively, might there be a voiceless high vowel [I] in this word-initial position? More careful phonetic analysis might prove worthwhile.

When accounting for word-level stress patterns (ch. 6), the authors reject weight-based approaches as too reliant on diacritic marking of exceptions and appeal to a grid-based model that includes a right-left through-first perfect grid for line 1, placing primary stress on the first (rightmost) peak. To account for those forms in the language without penultimate or ultimate stress, Mateus and d'Andrade posit an "Anchoring Principle": "[The rhythmic wave] is anchored to the first position corresponding to its initial tempo; in the absence of such a position, it anchors to the right limit." This "initial tempo" corresponds to "the fact that a vowel of a given lexical entry may have a pre-assigned rhythmic trough" (p. 123). It not immediately apparent, however, that their strategy for assigning stress—which also requires an assumption that so-called "absent class markers" project an empty X slot on line 0—is superior to previous accounts. Further explication would be welcome.

As noted above, the book is generally well written, particularly in terms of its descriptive passages. In presenting those aspects of contemporary generative theory they find most useful to their goals, however, Mateus and d'Andrade occasionally seem to lose sight of their audience.

For the reader who comes to the table with no real knowledge of Portuguese, there are helpful discussions about the basic workings of the language: its Romance history, its use of morphological number and gender in nouns, the organization of verbal paradigms, etc. These same readers, moreover, are likely to have no problem understanding passages that possess a moderate command of phonological theory. Consider, for example, TPP's initial discussion of the underlying rhotic:

"It is generally accepted that codas may not have C-place (see 2.4 and Chapter 3). If this is true, and given that that [sic] flap is an unmarked consonant (see again 2.4), it is preferable to have an underspecified flap in coda and fill it with default rules than to specify it with a new feature, [f] (as Bonet and Mascari (1997) propose, even if this specification is restricted to the contrasting contexts" (p. 16).

One might reasonably assume that a reader with at least one semester's worth of exposure to generative phonology would have access to terms such as "coda," "C-place," "underspecified," and "default rules." These same readers, however, are likely to find minimal use for those sections
of TPP that read a bit too much like a phonology textbook. In section 2.3, for example, the authors begin with a 3 - 4 page explanation of Feature Geometry, complete with a figure illustrating the relationship among the various nodes in the model. In section 5.2, they provide a historically-oriented overview of lexical phonology, before proceeding to implement the theory in their explanation of derivational processes. Not only do these theoretical "tutorials" feel out of place, they appear in sharp contrast to those passages in the text that assume a more in-depth knowledge of phonological theory (e.g. their discussion of cyclic vs. non-cyclic rules on pp. 104-5). This unevenness of exposition is striking.

Rhetorical inconsistencies of this sort give rise to an important question: For whom was this book written? One assumes that the Lusophone community has (at least linguistic) access to the various articles and dissertations cited throughout the text. Moreover, were TPP written for this audience, one might have expected the text to have been written in Portuguese. (Note: I would certainly encourage a Portuguese-language version of the text; such a volume would prove useful as an up-to-date summary of theoretical concerns in the language.) Phonologists without background in Portuguese should find the text a useful source of data and ideas, skipping or skimming the theoretical resumes. Neophyte linguists seeking to learn about Portuguese, however, are likely to find the text daunting in its theoretical scope.

Who, then, might have an interest in this book? Anybody with background in linguistics seeking a comprehensive description of contemporary Portuguese phonology. This audience would include acquisition librarians looking to add a single English-language volume that addresses the issue of Portuguese phonology.

In the end, the weaker aspects of TPP are counter-balanced by its strengths, with the balance tipping in favor of the positive. I suspect that some of the theoretical analyses presented in the book will become the standard accounts for Portuguese. In other cases, I see Mateus and d'Andrade's analyses serving as a springboard for future discussion on this most interesting and (dare I say) underappreciated Romance language.

Bibliography
Silva, David J. (1997) "The Variable Deletion of Unstressed

Bibliographical Sketch
David J. Silva is an Associate Professor at the University of Texas at Arlington, where he serves as the Director of the Program in Linguistics. He received an A.B. in Linguistics from Harvard University in 1986 and a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Cornell University in 1992. His research interests lie in the area of phonology, phonetics, and language variation; the data for this work are drawn primarily from two languages: European (Azorean) Portuguese and Korean. Ongoing projects involve the analysis of vowels in the variety of Portuguese spoken by Azorean immigrants in the United States and a diachronic analysis of post-release aspiration (VOT) in Korean stop consonants. He can be reached by visiting http://ling.uta.edu/~david.