The influence of prosodic units in non-standard spelling forms present in Portuguese and English chat sessions

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The aim of this paper is to check if the non-standard spelling forms present in Portuguese and English online synchronous communication are infuenced by the speakers' phonological knowledge as far as the syllable and the prosodic word are concerned.

Regarding the theoretical background, this study is based on the phonological descriptions of Mateus (1975; 2003), Mateus & Andrade (2000), Mateus *et al.* (2003) and Vigário (2003), for Portuguese, as well as Nespor & Vogel (1986), Hammond (1999), Cohn (2001) and Hall (2004), for English. Concerning the characterization of the synchronous communication context and non-standard spelling forms, we followed the descriptions of Mann & Stewart (2000), Crystal (2001) and Benedito (2002), amongst others.

A corpora study was conducted with a total of 16000 words belonging to chat sessions from the Portuguese "Bláblá", and the English "Chaterbox". After deleting the information describing participants and their actions, each word was classified according to a proposed set of categories of deviations from standard writing. The categories relevant for this paper are the ones related to the representation of the syllable structure, such as deletion of the representation of the onset or the coda, and the representation of the word and sequences of words, such as truncation, adding or deleting a word, or acronyms.

These are main conclusions for Portuguese:

i) at the syllable level, it is essential to preserve the representation of the stressed syllable, as well as the syllable onset;

ii) at the word level, a 'word effect' was found, since there are deviations that systematically affect or do not affect the word initial, non-initial or final position:

a) the representation of the onset in initial position is never suppressed;

b) the representation of the coda in final position is rarely deleted;

c) the syllables which are the subject of deletion are placed at the initial or final word boundaries;

d) the final position of the word seems to favour the lengthening of consonants and vowels by adding graphemes.

As far as English is concerned, the following conclusions were drawn:

i) changes at the syllable level occur in infrequent cases, generally below 0.3%;

ii) the word is the preferrable unit for the occurrence of neographies, seeing that:

a) coda deletions or simplifications always operate at the (final) word boundary;

b) simple onset deletions always affect the (initial) word boundary;

c) complex nucleus simplifications occur at the (final) word boundary;

e) the representation of the velar nasal at the end of the word tends to be changed;

f) cases of truncation always form a minimal prosodic word;

g) acronyms, based on keeping the first letter(s) of words, are productive in English.

To sum up, it may be concluded that these prosodic units can structure the appearance of neographies. The syllable seems more relevant in structuring the changes in Portuguese whereas the word seems more important for the English language.

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