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HIATUS IN ROMANIAN. AN OT ACCOUNT

(Abstract)

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This doctoral thesis, which aims to analyse hiatus sequences in Romanian from an OT perspective, is developed within the PHILOLOGY-LITERATURE domain. The starting point of our PhD is represented, on the one hand, by the only study of hiatus in an optimalistic framework with application to Romanian, namely Ioana Chitoran, *The Phonology of Romanian: A Constraint – Base Approach*, and, on the other hand, by personal research.

The objectives of the thesis are the following: (1) highlighting the main aspects of Romanian as opposed to other romance languages in respect to maintaining or avoiding hiatus sequences; (2) providing a theoretical and terminological account of hiatus in Romanian; (3) setting forth a statistics based on DOOM², in order to realise a hierarchy of internal hiatus from a normative perspective; (4) analysing the context in which native speakers avoid or maintain hiatus in spoken language; (5) acoustic analysis in PRAAT; (6) interpreting the results from an OT perspective.

The novelty of our project resides, in the first place, in the acoustic analysis carried out in PRAAT, as well as theorising the results in an optimalistic framework. The phonostatistics, where I establish a frequency hierarchy of hiatus from a normative perspective, plus the recordings used in the third chapter will form a useful database, and help develop a corpus of Romanian spontaneous speech.

The thesis is organised in 4 chapters.

Chapter 1 (*Current Status of Research*) is an introduction to our research, setting forth (a) a description of the Romanian vowel system, (b) a theoretical and terminological account of adjacent vowel pairs, (c) a comparative analysis of hiatus in Romance languages. I classified hiatus according to place of occurrence, whether within the word (internal hiatus) or across word boundaries (external hiatus), position in the word, and vowel height. For the last criteria, I propose 4 classes: rising hiatus (the height of the first vowel is inferior to that of the second vowel in the pair), falling hiatus (the height of the first vowel is superior to that of the second vowel), constant hiatus (both vowels share the same height), and identical hiatus (the vowel pair is identical in height and form).

In Chapter 2 (*Phonostatistics*) I establish an inventory of internal hiatus occurrences based on DOOM². Hiatus was listed according to the first, respectively to the second vowel of the pair, and proximity to stress. A statistical analysis was conducted for each V-V sequence.

Chapter 3 (*Linguistic Inquiry*) contains the acoustic analysis in PRAAT. A detailed description of the program is offered at the beginning. Afterwards, the procedure for data collection is presented. The recordings took place between December 2014 and March 2015. A stand-mounted microphone (Behringer B1) was used, and the experiment was carried out in a quiet room. Each of the 9 participants received a task of talking about their last summer. The mean duration for a recording was 45 minutes. Every time, the interview started with the same question “What do you think of the structure of this interview?” All recordings were manually transcribed and annotated in PRAAT (for the research thesis, only 6 candidates were chosen). For instance, the first speaker’s interview lasted for 42 minutes, and a total of 5717 words were transcribed, consisting of 977 hiatus sequences (219 for internal hiatus, and 758 for external hiatus). All words containing hiatus were marked for stress. The analysis was twofold. First, all vocalic pairs were labelled in PRAAT, using a Textgrid. This way, information regarding duration or formant trajectory can be extracted. Second, for a limited number of recordings, a phonetic transcription took place (segment by segment, syllable segmentation, and word segmentation), so that new cases for hiatus could be highlighted. The aim of the analysis is to provide an overview of the main hiatus repair mechanisms employed by native speakers.

In Chapter 4 (*The Optimistic Account*) I analyze the data from an OT perspective. The main objectives are the following: (1) identifying and accounting for the strategies employed by native speakers when avoiding hiatus in spontaneous speech; (2) reinterpreting the constraints governing hiatus; (3) continuing the analysis of Chitoran 2002a. In the end, the goal of the thesis is to provide an OT model that will unify the research on internal and external hiatus.

Concluding, the quality of my research thesis has improved considerably during the period of this POSDRU scholarship.