

First approach to Phonological Phrase in Spanish Prosodic Hierarchy

Abstract

Although Prosodic Hierarchy was well established in phonological theory for several years now (Nespor and Vogel 1986), very little work was done about Spanish. Specifically, authors have been doing a lot of research on the Phonological Phrase constituent in other languages (Truckenbrodt 1999, Selkirk 2011, among others), but in Spanish there is no recent work that pays attention to this constituent. It is true that in traditional literature about Spanish Phonology Navarro Tomás recognized the existence of the ‘grupo de intensidad’ or ‘grupo tónico’ and Gili Gaya proposed the concept of ‘sirrema’, but they are not fully equivalents to Phonological Phrase. Moreover, recent authors are not even sure about its existence in Spanish (Prieto, 2006). Therefore, the aim of this study is to research on the Phonological Phrase in Spanish and to find proofs of its existence.

To do so, an acoustical study on the Phonological Phrase has been proposed as an objective way to procure such evidence: To examine two well-known segmental processes in Spanish (voiced-stop spirantization, Hualde et al. 2011, and alveolar fricative voicing in coda position, Campos-Astorkiza, to appear) as empirically accurate parameters in the delimitation of Phonological Phrases. Steady prosodic boundaries that could be detected from the effects of these two segmental processes have been looked for in order to find out the boundaries of the Phonological Phrase constituent. That is, when spirantization or voicing assimilation is not taken place, this fact is assumed as a proof of the existence of a boundary. For this purpose, 334 stimuli have been made up with /b/, /d/, /g/ and /s/ utterances, which were analyzed from one of the each four Centropeninsular Spanish speakers recorded. After data recordings, Praat software was used for the acoustical analysis and data were subject to a series of subsequent statistical analyses.

Preliminary results indicate that the structure [subject+verb] does not constitute a single Phonological Phrase, instead of two, since a steady prosodic boundary was found between its formatives. Furthermore, other structures could be prosodically licensed by smaller or bigger prosodic constituents: [deter+noun] and [clitic+verb] could be attached at Prosodic Word level since no prosodic boundary has been found between them; and bigger structures could be prosodified as Intonational Phrases. Further work is needed to determine whether or not structures such as [noun+adjective] and [verb+object] form a single Phonological Phrase since the results found here are not enough clear.

To conclude, the analysis carried out supports the idea that prosodic structure and syntax structure are not isomorphic. It seems that Phonological Phrase is also a constituent in Spanish Prosodic Hierarchy, but future research is needed to confirm these preliminary findings.

Key words: Prosodic Hierarchy, Phonological Phrase, voiced-stop spirantization, voicing assimilation, Spanish

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