

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of *The Sound Pattern of English*: ‘Lisbon’ and the exception

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Abstract

The graphemic form <Lisbon> in the title refers to an underlying /'lɪzbən/ with a voiced heterosyllabic /zb/ cluster. Chomsky & Halle (1968: 150, n. 105) indicate the example ‘Lisbon’, alongside with not only other instances of hetero- and tautosyllabic voiced obstruent clusters (‘**rugby**’, ‘**abdomen**’, ‘**asbestos**’, ‘**husband**’, ‘**Presbyterian**’, ‘**tidbit**’, ‘**adze**’ and ‘**smaragd**’), but also obstruent clusters which disagree in voicing (‘**afghan**’, ‘**anecdote**’ and ‘**lobster**’) and even a geminate voiced obstruent (‘**Passamaquoddy**’), as an exception to the devoicing of obstruent clusters in English. Along these lines, Raffelsiefen (1999: 280, n. 86) presents ‘le[zb]ian’ as an example of English heterosyllabic voiced obstruent cluster. Word-initial obstruent clusters are always voiceless in English, as in ‘spat’, ‘stop’ or ‘skit’, and suppression of the devoicing process only occurs medially and finally, as in ‘Mazda’ /mæzdə/ or ‘used’ /ju:zd/.

It is important to remind that it is within the syllable that the constraint according to which all obstruent clusters are voiceless applies, although exceptions not split by morpheme boundary do exist, like monomorphemic ‘adze’ or ‘ides’, different from word-ending clusters split by morpheme boundary, such as, for example, /ksθs/ in ‘sixths’. It is also worth to add that English allows the resyllabification of s#g (coda+onset) sequences into #sg (onset), with a concurrent devoicing: ‘let’s go’ devoiced into /letskəʊ/.

In English, it is possible for voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ to be palatalized in circumstances such as (1) when it precedes the palatal glide /j/; (2) when followed by prepalatal /f/; (3) when the word has a /r/ environment. Moreover, only /s/ and /ʃ/ allow the occurrence of a phoneme other than the approximants /l, r, j, w/ as second consonant in onset position. To these elements it is also important to add the recent occurrence in English of previously unattested word-initial clusters such as /ʃm-, ʃl-, [-voice/+voice] clusters that differ from the long-standing stable [+voice/+voice] and [-voice/ -voice] Portuguese clusters.

This state of affairs is compared to that of standard European Portuguese, where a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ does not occur in coda position, instead it either becomes prepalatal fricative, remaining voiceless both word-finally (e.g., *lápiz* /'lɐ.piʃ/ ‘pencil’) and before voiceless consonant (e.g., *galispo* /gɐ.'liʃ.pu/ ‘the northern lapwing, peewit’) or becoming voiced before voiced consonant (e.g., *Lisboa* /liʒ.'boɐ/ ‘Lisbon), or – a sandhi phenomenon similar to that of the English linking /r/ – a linking /z/ occurs, when a word-final /s/ is followed by word-initial vowel, becoming voiced alveolar fricative /z/ and resyllabified as an onset (e.g., *lápiz azul* /,lɐ.piʃ.v.'zu/ → /,lɐ.pi.zɐ.'zu/ ‘blue pencil’). Since /s/ realization is – alongside with the underspecified segments /R/ and /L/ - sensitive to the phonetic context, /s/ is represented as an archiphoneme /S/.

This paper will therefore deal with Portuguese words that have a pattern graphemically similar to that of the English words *asbestos*, *husband*, and *Presbyterian*, but also including voiceless consonants /p, t, k/ as second element of the cluster. A corpus was created, with tokens of spontaneous speech produced by native speakers of English

learners of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL), in order to study patterns corresponding to the ones indicated by Chomsky & Halle (1968: 150, n. 105) for English word-medial clusters. Therefore, the corpus does not include word-initial esC, exC and (h)isC forms with graphemic <e> and <(h)i> in unstressed position (*estado* /'ʃtadu/ 'state', *extracto* /'ʃtratu/ also /ɐjʃ'ratu/ 'extract, [bank] statement', *história* /'ʃtɔɾjɐ/ also /iʃ'tɔɾjɐ/ 'story, history'), due to expected non-realizations of word-initial vowel that would create word-initial clusters, instead of word-medial clusters. The aim is to detect European Portuguese native-like patterns among English speakers of PFL in words such as *o mesmo* /u'mezmu/ 'the same', *questão* /kiʃ'tɛ̃ũ/ 'question, issue', *Lisboa* /liʒ'boɐ/ 'Lisbon' or *existe* /i'ziʃti/ 'to exist' (3sg-simp.pres), considering two processes: palatalization and voicing assimilation.

Key words: English, foreign language acquisition, palatalization, phonetics, phonology, European Portuguese, transfer, voicing assimilation.

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