

Dental stops palatalization in Brazilian Portuguese and social network

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Dental stops palatalization is a variable rule which distinguishes Brazilian Portuguese varieties due to distinct frequency rates of rule application (Hora, 1990; Bisol, 1991; Almeida, 2000; Pagotto, 2001). In Antônio Prado, a small southern Brazilian city founded by Italian immigrants in the end of the 19th century, the frequency rate of palatalization is 29%. The variable rule analysis (Labov 1972, 1994, 2001) of 26.598 tokens collected from interviews of 48 BDSer (Banco de Dados de Fala da Serra Gaúcha, UCS) informants showed that the use of the innovative palatalized variant is favored by young people who live in the city's urban area and by phonological /i/ (vowel reduction of unstressed /e/ to [i] is low in Antônio Prado). Because the incremental increase in the use of palatalized variants from older to younger groups tails off in the youngest age groups, palatalization shows signs of being stabilized in the community at moderate rates. This tendency is possibly due to structural restrictions and social motives, among which are vowel status, as phonological or phonetic, and stress placement, by one side; and the tension between local identity versus the educational and economical need of keeping daily contact with neighboring communities where palatalization applies more frequently, by the other.

The informants social network (Milroy, 1980; Milroy and Milroy, 1992) was analyzed in its density and plexity, the last one measured considering the strength or intimacy of the interpersonal connection (Blake and Josey, 2003). In both rural and urban areas the network is dense, the difference lies in the strength of the interpersonal ties: the ones living in the urban area are connected by less intimate ties, giving room to innovative palatalized forms, while rural informants connect to each other by more intimate ties, which reinforce the more conservative non-palatalized alternants. The correlation between individual palatalization rates with the average (weighted by the strength of the tie) frequency of application of each informant's ties in the network is positive (0,342) and significant (0,017). There's also a negative correlation (-0,449, significance of 0,001) between the average frequency of application of each informant's ties and age, i.e., the older the informant, the lower is frequency of application of each

informant's ties. It's interesting to note, however, that the correlation between the average frequency of application and age is more intense (-0,607) e significant (0,002) in the rural group of informants than it is in the urban group (-0,370, significance of (0,068). The results of both variable rule and social network analysis indicate that palatalization of dental stops is not change in progress in Antônio Prado, but tends to be stabilized in the system at moderate rates.

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