

# Dialect Acquisition and Prestige

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## 1 Introduction

Recent sociolinguistic studies have provided some elucidation on the factors that influence dialect acquisition and language transfer. Chambers (1992) proposes eight principles of dialect acquisition based on research carried out with Canadian youths who had moved to Southern England. Two of his most important findings concern the child's age when the relocation takes place and the difficulty of the linguistic rule being acquired. The role parents play in language transfer is the object of Payne's (1976) study of Philadelphia dialect acquisition by children in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. Her study finds it rare for a child native to and raised in King of Prussia whose parents are not Philadelphia natives to fully acquire the Philadelphia short *a* pattern. Kerswill's (1996) study of fronting of the offset of the diphthong /əʊ/ in southern British English shows that children as young as four years of age can develop a pattern which copies the pronunciation used by either parent or reach a compromise that falls in-between the pronunciation of their parents.

Elsewhere (Surek-Clark 1998) I have reiterated the importance of age of relocation and parents' dialect to mastery of a new dialect during one's teenage years. Designed with this foundational literature in mind, the present study aims to shed further light on dialect acquisition, adding a new influencing factor to the puzzle: relative language prestige. How can prestige influence the acquisition of phonological features in a dialect? Based on data collected from speakers of Brazilian Portuguese, I show that the prestige with which dialects are regarded in a particular community may influence the acquisition of a new dialect and that the relative prestige of one's parents' dialect plays a relevant role in the acquisition of a native dialect.

## 2 Brazilian Portuguese

### 2.1 Raising

The vowel inventory of Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BP) is comprised of the following seven oral vowels: [ i e ε a ɔ o u ] and the nasal vowels: [ ỹ ã

õ ü]. Back and front mid-vowels /e/ and /o/ undergo neutralization<sup>1</sup> in final non-stressed position in many BP dialects that are considered standard and as a result, three vowels surface in that position: [i, u, a]. For example: /leite/→/leitɪ/ 'milk;' /carro/→/carru/ 'car.' In the dialect of BP that is the focus of this study, these vowels do not necessarily undergo raising, even though the final /e/ is not realized as an absolute mid-vowel.

## 2.2 Palatalization

In most dialects of modern BP, a final raised /e/ triggers another phonological process: palatalization of /t/ and /d/ when followed by /i/. Palatalization occurs anywhere in the word in both stressed and unstressed syllables in the presence of an underlying /i/: *tia* [tʃia] 'aunt;' *dia* [dʒia] 'day;' *artigo* [artʃigu] 'article;' *pedir* [pedʒir] 'to ask;' *distrair* [dʒistrair] 'to distract.'

Raising feeds palatalization in cases in which syllables or words end in /e/ but are raised to /i/ (Bisol 1991):

	/'pente/ 'comb'	/me'dida/ 'measurement'
Raising	i	-
Palatalization	tʃ	dʒ
	[pentʃɪ]	[me'dʒida]

The target BP dialect in this study does not strictly follow the current standard BP phonological rule of final /e/ raising and subsequent palatalization of /d/ and /t/.<sup>2</sup> This was historically attested to by the folklorist Roderjan (1969) in an observation to the effect that an attention-worthy feature of the speech of people from this area is their "open final /e/ and /o/ in phonetic pronunciation" (El-Khatib 1969: 153).<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate, a common example of this feature occurs in the folk saying *leite quente dá dor de dente* 'hot milk causes toothache' pronounced [leite

<sup>1</sup>The literature also refers to this phenomenon as "raising," and both terms are used with the same meaning here.

<sup>2</sup>The joint analysis of palatalization and raising as one phenomena in this study is due to the fact that there were no occurrences of non-palatalized /ti/ and /di/ syllables in the sample. It seems that in fact palatalization is automatically triggered by an /e/ which is sufficiently high to be perceived as an underlying /i/ or is an underlying /i/ itself.

<sup>3</sup>My translation from Portuguese.

kente da dor de dēnte] in the target city. In contrast, mainstream dialects pronounce it [leit̃ʃi kent̃ʃi da dor d̃ʒi dend̃ʒi] (Carvalho 1998).

### 3 The Study

Two groups of speakers were interviewed: a target vernacular group comprised of female adolescent speakers from the southern Brazilian city of Curitiba who belong to three distinct social classes. Data from this group enabled the construction of a baseline analysis of phonological features characteristic of the dialect spoken in this target area. Another group from which data was collected included migrant vernacular speakers, formed by female adolescent speakers who moved to Curitiba from three other regions: Rio de Janeiro; what I will call 'Other' raising areas (namely, areas where a dialect with greater prestige than the one spoken in Curitiba but with less prestige than the Rio de Janeiro dialect is spoken); and the 'Interior' group (speakers originally from the West of Paraná State). With the exception of the Curitiba dialect, all other dialects behave similarly in regard to raising and palatalization: they raise final /e/ and palatalize /i/ before /t/ and /d/.

In fact, the non-raising and non-palatalization present in the Curitiba dialect exclude it from being considered part of a Brazilian standard pronunciation (Elia 1979). However, the dialect native to Curitiba is perceived as more prestigious than the Interior dialect spoken in the West of Paraná. This is not surprising, since in Brazil rural dialects carry less relative prestige than urban ones (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985), and the Curitiba dialect is the least remote urban dialect to the Interior people. However, it is less prestigious than the Rio de Janeiro dialect, arguably the most prestigious BP dialect, which is one of the two standard dialects spoken on TV and considered the precursor of a standard variety of Brazilian Portuguese.

#### 3.1 Initial Hypotheses

In regard to the Curitiba dialect acquisition by the various groups, the following hypotheses were established :

- A. Native Curitiba speakers would show 0% raising of final non-stressed /e/ and 0% palatalization of /t/ and /d/;
- B. Due to the high prestige of their native dialect, Rio de Janeiro speakers who relocated to Curitiba would still raise final /e/ and palatalize /t/ and /d/ to a great extent, showing percentages close to a 100% raising and palatalization;

- C. Interior speakers whose less prestigious native dialect raises final /e/ and palatalizes /t/ and /d/ to a great extent would slowly start to replace raising by non-raising in order to more closely approximate the Curitiba dialect. Moreover, as an immigrant's length of residence in Curitiba progresses, the rate at which they raise should gradually converge to the raising rate of native Curitiba speech.
- D. Speakers from Other Raising areas of Brazil would somewhat accommodate to the Curitiba dialect, not maintaining so much of their original raising as the more prestigious Rio de Janeiro speakers but not assimilating as much as the Interior speakers who moved to Curitiba.

	Prestige	Original Raising and Palatalization	Hypothesis for Raising and Palatalization
Native Curitiba	Reference	0%	Remains close to 0%
Rio → Curitiba	Highest	100%	Remains close to 100%
Other → Curitiba	High	50-100%	Lowers but still present
Interior → Curitiba	Lower	<50%	Lowers greatly to follow Curitiba pattern

Table 1: Initial Hypotheses

### 3.2 Methodology

Recorded interviews with a total of 79 informants were conducted, of which 41 were used in this study: 38 as individual interviews and a group interview with 3 girls. The choice to interview only female speakers was made because of solidarity with the interviewer and in order to avoid gender-derived speech variation. The speakers are residents of Curitiba, either natively or having moved to the city at some point during their lives. The distribution for the migrant speakers in the sample is as follows: Rio de Janeiro (with 10 speakers), the Interior of the State of Paraná (11 speakers), or Other areas of Brazil (4 speakers originally from Brasília, Campo Grande, Corumbá and São Luís do Maranhão, respectively). As a control group for the target dialect, a group of 16 girls from Curitiba was utilized.

The speakers' ages ranged from ten to 22 years and they were divided into three social classes: Lower, Middle and Upper Middle. Due to the fact that 40 of the speakers were students and dependent on their parents, I had to rely on information given about the neighborhood in which they lived, the school they attended and the number of cars their family possessed in order to assess their socio-economic status. The accuracy of this classification based on the author's native intuition was verified by three different people who are native to Curitiba.

### 3.3 Interview

The interviews took place in an informal setting either at the informant's or a friend's home or in a separate room in one of the schools that participated in the study. The length of the recordings varied from 15 to 30 minutes, with realization of the phonological features under study ranging from 28 to 238 instances, with an average of 90 tokens per interview. All of the informants were interviewed by the author, a middle-class woman who speaks Portuguese natively with a Curitiba dialect. Each interview followed the same format: a set of Regional Words, in which the girl was asked to identify objects and photographs, in order to elicit either the Curitiba lexical variety or a standard form of the word; a Reading Passage with 36 environments for raising and palatalization;<sup>4</sup> a Semantic Differentiation task in which each informant had to state differences and similarities between two words, with at least one containing the phonological features under study; and a Spontaneous Conversation part in which demographic data was collected.

### 3.4 Data

A total of 3,676 tokens were collected from the interviews, all of which were used for analysis. Statistical analysis was accomplished using GOLDVARB Version 2.0 for Macintosh. The dependent factor is whether or not the final /e/ is raised and surfaces as /i/ and triggers palatalization of preceding /t/ and /d/.

In addition, twelve independent factor groups were tested: eight for extralinguistic variables including informant's home, father's home, mother's home, social class, age, time in Curitiba, age when moved to Curitiba, friend of the author's and four linguistic variables including task, word type, previous token, and following environment. The percentage results presented

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<sup>4</sup>Some of the younger informants who had difficulty reading were asked to stop halfway through the reading passage.

were obtained by a Varbrul Binomial run, and the probabilities derived from a Binomial Step-up/Step-down run.

## 4 Discussion

Only two of the extralinguistic factors will be discussed here: girls' home and their parents' home in regard to raising and palatalization.

### 4.1 Home

According to their home of origin (Curitiba (16 speakers), Rio de Janeiro (10 speakers), Interior (11 speakers), and Other raising and palatalization areas (4 speakers), the rate and relative weight of raising and palatalization can be seen in Table 2 as well as in Figure 1: Raising/Palatalization vs. Home below.

Place of origin	[i] + Palat.	N	% of Total	Prob.
<i>Curitiba</i>	26%	1045	28%	0.29
<i>Rio de Janeiro</i>	87%	976	27%	0.76
<i>Interior</i>	43%	1361	37%	0.40
<i>Other raising</i>	68%	294	8%	0.73
<i>Total</i>	52%	3676	100%	

Table 2: Home × Raising/Palatalization

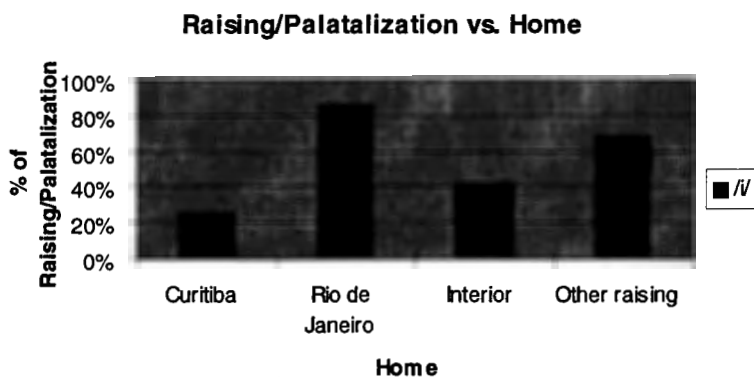


Figure 1: Percent of Raising/Palatalization × Home

While the percentage of raising in Curitiba is higher than expected, these figures reflect a continuum in regard to raising and palatalization in the four groups: Rio de Janeiro > Other raising > Interior > Curitiba, which corresponds to the hypotheses presented in Table 1.

#### 4.2 Parents' Home

Some of the Curitiba speakers show a surprisingly high percentage of raising and palatalization (70%, 78% and 81%), and it became important to assess if the origin of parents has an effect on those features of the girls' speech.

Table 3 summarizes the findings in this respect. Other raising cities include any city in the Interior, in Rio Grande do Sul and in Northern Brazil. Other non-raising cities include two cities in the Interior of Paraná whose dialect is similar to that of Curitiba (Irati and Guarapuava) as well as cities in the Interior of Santa Catarina State.

	Curitiba	Rio de Janeiro	Interior	Other Raising	Other Non-Raising
	% of /i/ and Palat.	% of /i/ and Palat.	% of /i/ and Palat.	% of /i/ and Palat.	% of /i/ and Palat.
Father's origin	26%	83%	34%	54%	35%
N	153/578	693/830	155/458	767/1418	138/392
Mother's origin	25%	83%	51%	64%	24%
N	180/725	735/889	255/499	567/881	149/615

Table 3: Effect of Parents' Dialect on Raising and Palatalization by Native Curitiba Speakers

When parents are from Curitiba, the percentage of raising and palatalization is close to the baseline of 28% for Curitiba speakers. When either parent is from Rio de Janeiro, the percent raising is high. A mother from the Interior or from an other raising area influences raising and palatalization more than a father from either area. The mothers from these regions may already perceive that raising and palatalizing are overall prestigious features in the country and therefore pass those features on. Mothers from Other non-raising areas have the lowest effect of all and appear to be discouraging raising more than fathers who come from those same regions.

The role of parental influence in raising and palatalization exceeded my expectations. Girls whose parents are from Curitiba show a very low prob-

ability of raising and palatalization (0.26 and 0.28, compared to 0.29 overall). On the other hand, parents from Rio whose dialect is more prestigious and who raise and palatalize to a great extent greatly affect the amount of raising and palatalization among all groups of girls, regardless of their place of origin. Parents who, with regard to prestige, speak in-between dialects (Interior, Other raising and Other non-raising) seem to have less of an effect on the amount of raising realized by their daughters. These results seem to indicate that pressure from within a family with regard to accommodating to the most prestigious dialect present within the home has a stronger effect than outside peer pressure.

Relative prestige of raising and palatalizing in the parents' dialect seems to play an important role in influencing the speech of their daughters. The initial hypotheses with regard to the ranking of geographic area with respect to relative prestige is supported by these findings with regard to parents' place of origin and replicate the same prestige scale: Rio de Janeiro > Other raising > Interior > Other non-raising > Curitiba.

## 5 Conclusion

While elsewhere (Surek-Clark 1998) I have applied Chamber's Eight Rules of Dialect Acquisition (1992) to a larger sample who spoke a language other than English, the results reported in this paper focus on the importance of relative dialect prestige in dialect acquisition. My study corroborates Payne's on the acquisition of the Philadelphia short *a* pattern: only native girls with one parent from Curitiba are able to fully acquire the native overall pattern of non-raising and non-palatalization present in Curitiba. This leads to the unexpected indication that prestige also seems to strongly influence native dialect acquisition within the home, as demonstrated by the low usage rate of non-standard and less prestigious phonological features by native Curitiba speakers whose parents come from Rio de Janeiro.

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