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Explaining the Distribution of Hiatus in Spanish and Romanian

In this paper we argue that it is possible to explain in part the distribution of exceptional hiatus in Spanish, as well as similar but not categorical facts in Romanian, from more general patterns of duration. Although Spanish sequences of the type iV are generally realized as diphthongs when the high vocoid is not stressed, there are a number of exceptions. These exceptions, however, have a very restricted distribution. They are found in word-initial position and in words stressed on the sequence itself or on the next syllable, but not further to the right. Regarding the stress condition, we show that in Spanish and Romanian immediately pretonic syllables tend to have greater duration than other unstressed syllables further to the left. This increased duration, due to a general rhythmic pattern, is what appears to have prevented the recategorization of iV sequences as diphthongs in the relevant positions. The motivation of the initiality effect remains to be investigated.