

Deletion of the Final Unstressed Vowels [I] and [U] in Minas Gerais Locations from the Linguistic Atlas of Brazil - ALiB

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Abstract:

The present study aims to investigate the deletion of the unstressed vowels [i] and [u] in the final syllable of paroxytone words occurring in four localities that are part of the ALiB Project – Pedra Azul, Teófilo Otoni, Diamantina and Montes Claros – as well as to verify the conditions that promote or restrict variation. It is a work developed in the light of Variationist Sociolinguistics and Contemporary Pluridimensional Dialectology. The sample analyzed consists of sixteen inquiries. The occurrences of the final [i] and [u] derive from the answers to forty-two questions extracted from the Phonetic-Phonological Questionnaire, as well as occurrences from reports structured as a semi-directed discourse to which four themes were suggested. For the analysis, two types of variables were considered: the linguistic (the immediately following phonetic context and the type of data collection instrument) and extralinguistic ones (gender, age group and locality). The data indicates the deletion of the final vowels [i] and [u] in the four localities investigated, regulated by linguistic and extralinguistic contexts that act favoring or not the variants.

Keywords:

Diatopy; Vowels deletion; Phonic variation.

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INTRODUCTION

The deletion of vowel sounds in words is an old process in the Portuguese language and has been documented from Latin (*amare* > *amar*) to the modern Portuguese (*povo* ~ [pov]). This phenomenon, when occurring in the final syllable, is a relatively less studied process within the Brazilian variation, although there are studies such as the ones by Corrêa (1998), Oliveira (2006, 2012) and Rolo (2010, 2016). The deletion in focus, in the present study, occurs in the final posttonical unstressed syllable, specifically with the vowel sounds [ɪ] and [ʊ], as in “Cachorro [kaʃox] quente [kēt] com suco [suk] que eles gosta” or pause “Caroço [kaʃos]” and “Perfume [pehʃũm]”, documented by Rolo (2016, p. 216, 287 and 332).

The corpus was compiled with data from the project *Atlas Linguístico do Brasil* (ALiB), in four local communities from the countryside of Minas Gerais: Pedra Azul and Diamantina, located in Vale do Jequitinhonha; Teófilo Otoni, in Vale do Mucuri; and Montes Claros, in the Northern part of the state, aiming at finding evidences that promoted the occurrences.

The existence of the phenomenon of deletion has been documented as happening in great proportion in the locality of Beco, district of Seabra, in Bahia, with 77% of occurrences. This town has been characterized by the speakers “swallowing” the final vowel of words, being therefore linguistically and socially stigmatized, as stated by Rolo (2010). In her research, the author verifies that, in the phonetic field, the incidence of some of the pre-vowel consonants and, from the social point of view, the age group of the speakers (Group 2 – the elderly), are among the most likely motivational causes for the phenomenon.

Although this fact has not attracted much interest among linguists and scholars, as it happened with, for example, tonic and pretonic vowels, in grammars from both Brazil and Portugal (CUNHA; CINTRA, 2013), there have been registers of the deletion of final unstressed vowels, as observed by Perini (2010), in *Gramática do Português Brasileiro*, which includes the omission of vowels [e] and [o], at the end of unstressed syllable, as follows:

The final unstressed [u], written as *o*, is pronounced in a reduced way, in some places. At the end of enunciation, that is, before silence or pause, it is frequently omitted. This way, a sentence such as *Eu vi um gato* is many times pronounced as [ew¹viũ¹gat], without the final vowel (PERINI, 2010, p. 349, the authors' translation).

In respect to the deletion of the vowel [i], the author ponders:

The final unstressed *e*, as it is known, is normally pronounced [i]. However, when the preceding consonant is a fricative or palatal fricative — that is, [tʃ, ʃ, dʒ, ʒ] — the [i] is sometimes not heard, in a way that the word ends, phonetically, as a consonant. For example, *ponte* ['põntʃ], *mexe* ['mɛʃ], *rende* ['rẽd], *hoje* ['õʒ] (PERINI, 2010, p. 348, the author's translation).

When it comes to Portugal, in *Nova Gramática do Português Contemporâneo*, Cunha and Cintra (2013, p. 29) mention the deletion phenomenon in a large area of Beira Baixa, Alto Alentejo and Western Algarve. The authors refer, among other salient features, to the “fall of the final unstressed vowel *o* or its reduction to the sound [ə], for example: *cop*[ə], *cop*[ə]s, for *copo*; *túd*(ə) for *tudo*”.

The above fact is also noticed in the Azores, as registered in the *Atlas Lingüístico-Etnográfico dos Açores* – ALEAç (FERREIRA et al., 2001) and in the continent, predominantly in the center-meridional part of the country, as registered in the *Atlas Lingüístico de la Península Ibérica* – ALPI (NAVARRO et al., 1962), and the *Atlas Lingüístico do Litoral Português* – ALLP (VITORINO, 1987), as well as in other studies (MAIA, 1975; SEGURA DA CRUZ, 1987). Research developed by Bernardo (1991), Ferreira et al., (1996) and Silva (1998) reveal that the dialect from São Miguel presents a considerably different vowel system, as compared to the European standard.

Some examples can be found in the above cited atlases of Portugal, both in the continental and the insular parts: *cavalo* ~ [kaváɫ]; *doze* ~ [dóʒ]; *aço* ~ [ás] (cf. NAVARRO et al., 1962, Cartas 09, 29, 71), *badejo* ~ [bədéz], *salmonete* ~ [səɫmnét]; *choco* ~ [ʃók] (cf. (VITORINO, 1987, Cartas 89, 50, 136); *gado* ~ [g'ãδ]; *mamote* ~ [mɛm'ɔt]; *porco* ~ [p'ork] (FERREIRA et al., 2001, Cartas 02, 24, 85).¹

In Brazil, the deletion of final unstressed vowels has been documented in regional atlases – *Atlas Prévio dos Falares Baianos* – APFB (ROSSI, 1963), *Esboço de um Atlas Lingüístico de Minas Gerais* - EALMG (RIBEIRO et al., 1977), *Atlas Lingüístico de Sergipe* – ALS (FERREIRA et al., 1987), *Atlas Lingüístico Etnográfico da Região Sul* – ALERS (KOCH; KLASSMANN; ALTENHOFEN, 2002) and in *Atlas Lingüístico do Estado do Ceará* – ALECE (BESSA, 2010) – also in studies by Corrêa (1998), Oliveira (2006; 2012) and Rolo (2010, 2016), developed in localities in Bahia and Minas Gerais. Some of the examples are: *cabo verde* ~ ['kabu'verd]; *mabaço* ~ [ma'bas¹] (ROSSI, 1963, Cartas 81, 100); *pique* ~

¹ Original transcriptions are maintained.

[ˈpik] (RIBEIRO et al., 1977, Carta 35); *Caçote* ~ [kaˈsɔt]; *tabaco* ~ [taˈbak] (FERREIRA et al., 1987, Cartas 126, 53); *dezesete* ~ [dizeˈset]; *americano* ~ [ɐmeriˈkã̃] (KOCH; KLASSMANN; ALTENHOFEN, 2002, Cartas 32, 07); *tempestade* ~ [tẽpɛʃˈtad]; *terremoto* ~ [tɛxɛˈmɔt] (BESSA, 2010, Carta 006.F004).

Considering the above, this article aims to verify the presence or the absence of the final unstressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] in the speech of four Minas Gerais locations that integrate the ALiB Project, with the final goal of confronting the results with the deletion documented in the regional atlases and in the contemporary studies, as well as defining the conditions that favors or restrict the variation.

In view of the contributions that dialectal and sociolinguistic studies bring to the knowledge of the language spoken in the country, this work focusses on the variation of the final unstressed vowel in four locations of Minas Gerais – Pedra Azul, Montes Claros, Teófilo Otoni and Diamantina – under the light of Pluridimensional Dialectology (THUN, 2000) and of the Variationist Theory (LABOV, 2008).

The Figure 1 shows the *Carta VIII* of the ALiB Project, which englobes the network for the Southeastern region, highlighting the spots related to the present article: 129 (Pedra Azul), 131 (Montes Claros), 133 (Teófilo Otoni) and 134 (Diamantina).



Source: Cardoso et al. (2014a).

Figure 1 – *Carta VIII* of the ALiB Project for the Southeastern Region

As this relates to areas where some research and the regional linguistic atlases themselves – *Esboço de Atlas Lingüístico de Minas Gerais* (RIBEIRO et al., 1977) and *Atlas Prévios dos Falares Baianos* (ROSSI, 1963) – depicts cases of reduction and deletion of the final vowel, it is expected that the study aids to the comprehension and description of the present tendency to this way of speaking in these localities.

In order to contextualize the discussion, the next sections present the theoretical background which guided the present work, some studies about the theme in Brazil, as well as some registers collected from the regional atlases from Brazil. In sequence, the methodology, the discussion of the results and the conclusions are presented.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The parameters posed by Labov (2008) show that there is no free variation, once this is propelled by conditioning factors. This way, the linguistic context and/or the external factors will always determine which form will occur within a certain speech situation. Therefore, taking into consideration that linguistic variation is not a random affair, there will be a variable conceived as dependent and influenced by other independent variables, which can be of social and structural nature.

Considering that the speech adopted in different regions have their own characteristics, it is important to highlight that Ferreira and Cardoso (1994) define Dialectology as a discipline that aims to discover and to describe such characteristics, trying to identify more or less cohesive areas, as well as to determine the factors that lead to its formation, establishing geographical frontiers to certain linguistic uses, as can be verified, for example, in the occurrences of the deletion of the final vowels in Bahia and Minas Gerais.

From a pluridimensional perspective, Dialectology amplifies its field of investigation, including the systematic control of social variables, such as the diagenetical, diasexual, diastratic, diaphasic dimensions, among others (THUN, 2000).

In reference to the Brazilian vowel related system, Câmara Jr. (2008, p. 47) notices that “the final unstressed syllables are the frailest in words that carry the stress in its penultimate syllable, the so called paroxytones”. Such characteristic of this syllable causes its weakness, reduction and even its fall, as a result of the dialectal variation.

It is valid to highlight that the aspect investigated in the present study refers to the presence or the absence of the final vowels [I] and [U] in the spoken discourse within four localities in Minas Gerais. In this way, it is possible that the usage of one or another variant is influenced by linguistic or social factors that would be independent variants. Defining the conditions that favor or restrict the variation is what this study intends to do.

OVERVIEW OF THE DELETION OF THE FINAL UNSTRESSED VOWELS IN BRAZIL: WHAT THE STUDIES SAY

The process of deletion of the final unstressed vowels is part of the Brazilian Portuguese, and pioneer studies have already registered data of spontaneous speech in some Brazilian regions, such as the work developed by Corrêa (1998), Oliveira (2006, 2012) and Rolo (2010, 2016).

Corrêa (1998), in his Variationist study about third person pronouns in Portuguese, as spoken in the city of Belo Horizonte, investigates the switching between the plain form of the third personal pronouns *ele(s)*, *ela(s)* and the reduced forms corresponding to *el*, *eis*, *éa(s)*, for instance, “*el vai voltar*”. In this analysis, the author notices that the subsequent phonological ambience, constituted by nasal tones and occlusives, favor the reduced forms and the elderly favor the process. Moreover, the use of reduced forms is higher among the male informants, and the distribution of the variants has indicated stable variation.

In Minas Gerais, Oliveira (2006) has documented the deletion of the unstressed vowel in syllables formed by the phoneme /l/ + final vowel, such as in *amarelo* [ama'relʊ] ~ [ama'rɛl] ~ [ama'rɛɫ]; *ele* ['eli] ~ ['el] ~ ['eɫ], in the city of Itaúna. In his analysis, the researcher verifies that the deletion of the final vowel in Itaúna is favored by external and internal factors, predominantly when it comes from male speakers.

In 2012, when amplifying this field of investigation about the deletion of vowels in Minas Gerais, Oliveira observed that the deletion happening before pause (apocope) and consonant are part of one single process of weakening of such vowels, which causes the deletion of the phonetically reduced ones.

In Bahia, Rolo's study (2010) investigates the deletion of final vowels in two countryside localities: the city of Seabra, situated 470 km from Salvador, and the village of Beco (located in the surroundings of Seabra). Adopting the variationist methodology, the author verifies that the deletion is a characteristic of the rural community of Beco and it seems to be closely associated to the age group and gender, with speakers belonging to Group 2, that is, the elderly, significantly favoring the phenomenon. In Seabra, the deletion process is not a significative one and the degree of occurrence is probably the one that characterizes the other Brazilian regions.

Rolo (2016) expands his field of investigation about the deletion of the final unstressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] in spontaneous speech, having as reference data collected in two cities in Bahia (Bom Jesus da Lapa and Macaúbas), and two cities in Minas Gerais (Almenara and Itaobim). In this analysis, the author verifies that fricative and nasal consonants favor the deletion of vowel [ʊ] and the occlusive and lateral ones favor the deletion of vowel [ɪ]. The data shows the deletion as being mostly concentrated in age Group 2 (the elderly), in all localities. The semi-directed discourse is the type of data collection instrument that mostly favors the deletion of vowels.

The overview of the deletion of final unstressed vowels, depicted in regional linguistic atlases, adjusts to studies that document the phenomenon, based on data from spontaneous speech. The descriptions of this phenomenon are still scarce, but already count on research that reveals the deletion as a variant that integrates the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil.

METHODOLOGY

The present research relates to elocutions of native speakers from the studied locations, aligning to the selection criteria defined in the methodology of the ALiB Project. The section used for the analysis is constituted by four localities in Minas Gerais, which integrate the referred project: Pedra Azul, Montes Claros, Teófilo Otoni and Diamantina.

AliB is structured as a pluridimensional atlas, characterized by the enlargement of the observational field, cartographically showing data of social nature, but not neglecting the emphasis on diatopic variation, aiming mainly to offer descriptive data from the Brazilian linguistic reality.

The project counts on 1.100 informants, distributed among the 250 localities that form the network. These informants are classified according to: gender (male and female); age group (Group 1: 18 to 30 years old; and Group 2: 50 to 65 years old), four in each group, in the capitals, and two in the other localities; level of education, which groups them as holders of: i) incomplete fundamental education; ii) higher level education (CARDOSO et al., 2014b).

Three types of questionnaire are part of the AliB: the Phonetic-Phonologic Questionnaire (QFF, as in the original language), the Semantic-Lexical Questionnaire (QSL, as in the original language) and the Morphosyntactic Questionnaire (QMS, as in the original language). Added to these, there are questions referring to pragmatics, as well as suggestions of themes for the documentation of semi-directed discourses (about relevant facts in the participants' lives, their activities at work, favorite television programs or tales reported by other people), questions of meta-linguistic nature and a reading text (COMITÊ NACIONAL DO PROJETO ALiB, 2001).

The occurrences were extracted by listening to sixteen full enquiries, four in each locality. Due to the fact that the AliB data collection tools are very ample, the data collection had as a basis 42 questions, extracted from the QFF, which contained paroxytone items with final unstressed vowels [i] and [u], as well as occurrences of final [i] and [u] deriving from reports about the four themes suggested in the semi-directed discourse tool, with the purpose of analyzing more spontaneous elocutions, as shown in the examples:

(1) QFF, question 42 - CAVALO

INT.²– What do you call that animal that you can ride to transport you somewhere?

INF.³– Cavalo [ka'val]

(2) THEME FOR THE SEMI-DIRECTED DISCOURSE TOOL 04 –
Non-personal report

INT.– Tell a tale / something you know, having happened to an acquaintance or friend

INF.– Ele ['el] nam gostou porque era a folga dele ['del].

It is important to highlight that, in order to have better control, some instances that could affect the conclusions were removed from the interviews, among which, some words that were followed by vowel, when the vowel sequence allowed re-syllabic construction, for example, elision, diphthong related cases and cases of degemination or crasis, as well as cases of haplology.

The data was analyzed under the Variationist Sociolinguistics perspective, considering as dependent variable the binary group: presence *vs* absence of final unstressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ], as in the following examples:

(03) [ɪ] – Dele ['delj] (Montes Claros, male, Group 1)

(04) [∅] – Dele ['del] (Theme 004, Diamantina, female, Group 2)

(05) [ʊ] – Cavalo [ka'valu] (Pedra Azul, male, Group 2)

(06) [∅] – Cavalo [ka'val] (Pedra Azul, male, Group 2)

The data related to the final vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] were analyzed simultaneously.

Aiming to detect the conditioning factors of variants, the following independent variables were considered: i) a linguistic factor: the immediate context; ii) the social variables: age group (Group 1: 18 to 30 years old, and Group 2: 50 to 65 years old) and gender (male and female); the discursive variable of the type of data collection tool; the geo-linguistic variable, for considering the localities in Minas Gerais, which integrate the ALiB Project: Pedra Azul, Montes Claros, Teófilo Otoni and Diamantina.

For the statistical analysis, the program used was the Goldvarb 2001 (ROBINSON; LAWRENCE; TAGLIAMONTE, 2001). For listening to the recordings

² Interviewer.

³ Informant.

and selecting the speech sections, the Audacity 2.2 was used. The acoustic program PRAAT was also used for the acoustic characterization through the presentation of spectrograms, which allow to visualize the presence or the absence of the final vowel segment.

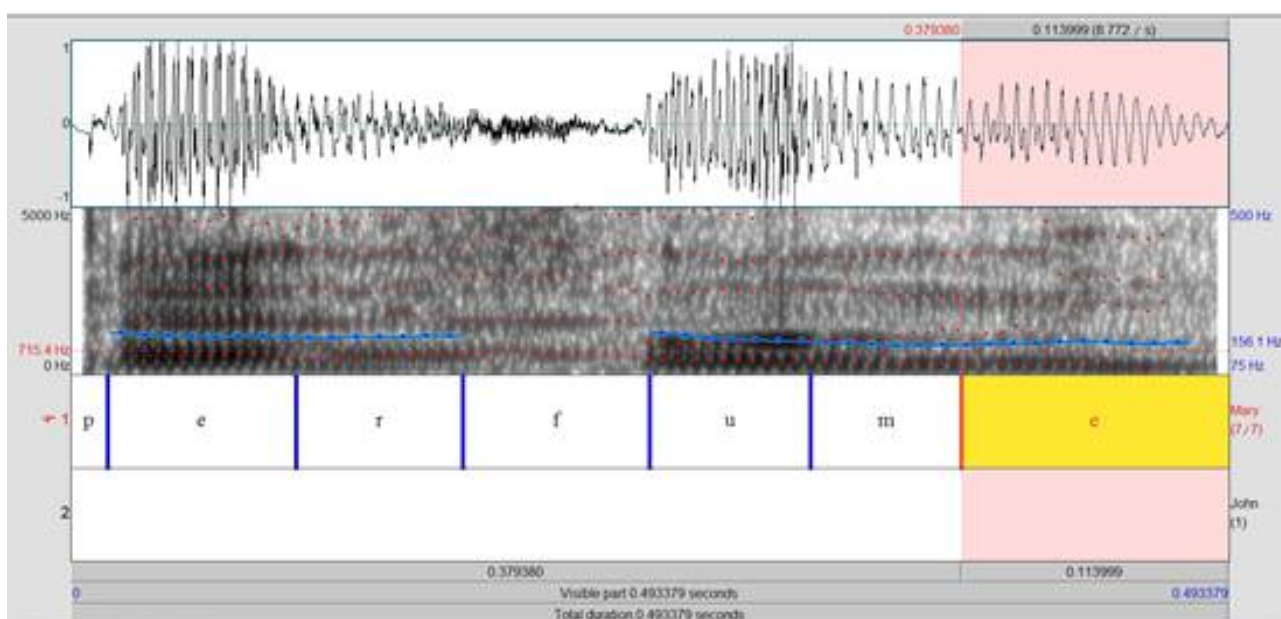
DATA ANALYSIS RELATED TO THE DELETION OF THE FINAL UNSTRESSED VOWELS [I] AND [U]

This section presents the analysis of the results obtained, in order to verify the influence of groups of linguistic and extralinguistic factors, selected by the Goldvarb 2001 in the speech of the communities involved.

However, the quantitative analysis of the deletion of the final vowels [I] and [U] at the end of paroxytone items will be preceded by the acoustic characterization of the variable, through the presentation of four spectrograms which allow to visualize the presence or the absence of the respective final vowel segments.

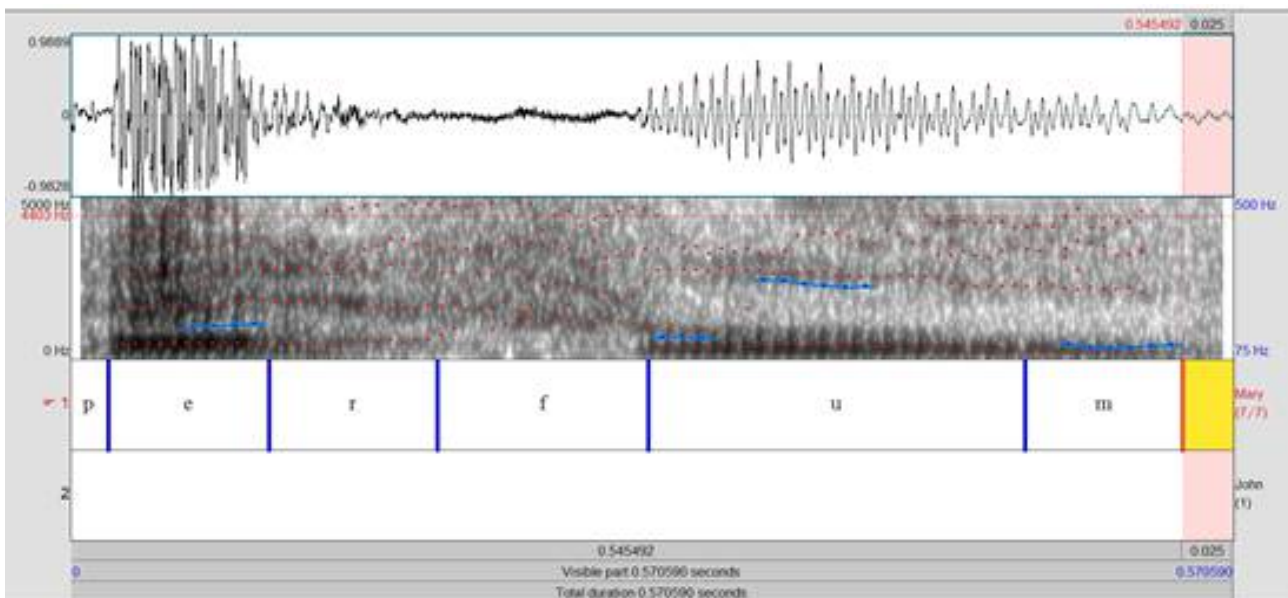
Acoustic Analysis

Figures 2 and 3 represent the spectrograms for the word *perfume*, spoken by an informant from Pedra Azul and another one from Montes Claros, allowing to visualize the presence and the absence of the final vowel [I]. It is possible, then, to acoustically characterize the variable phenomenon under study, in the utterance sequence, in the following way:



Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Figure 2 – Spectrogram for *perfume* [peh¹fũmi] (Pedra Azul, male, Group 2)



Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

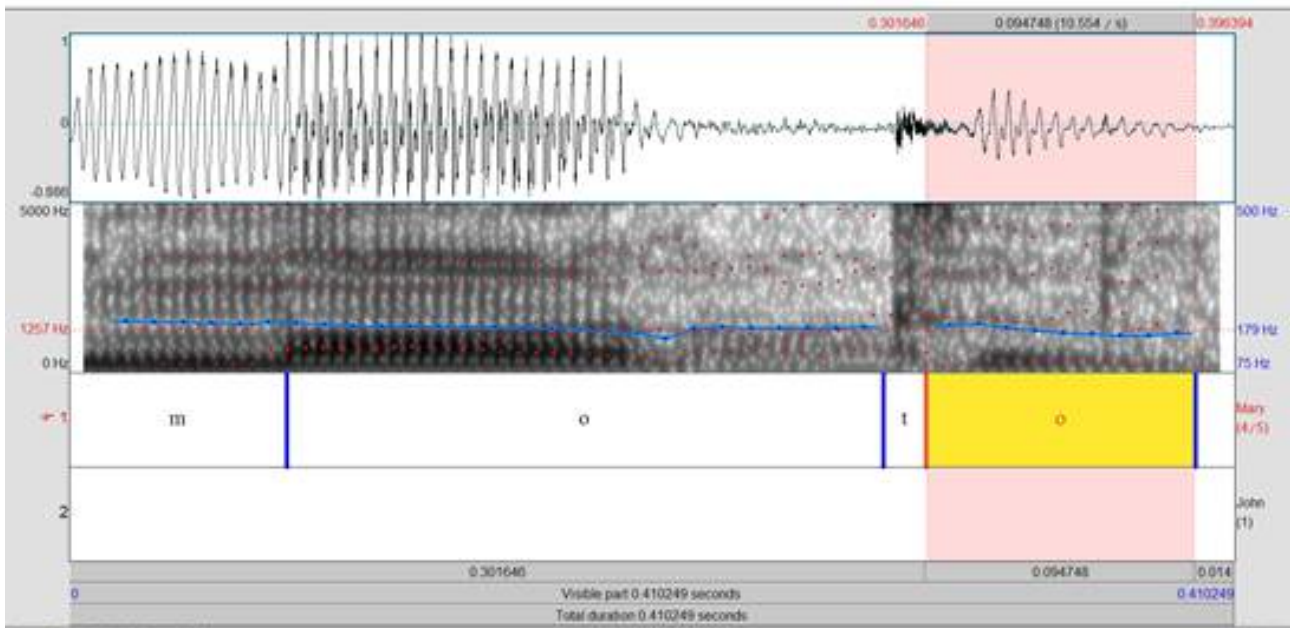
Figure 3 – Spectrogram for perfume [peh'fũm] (Montes Claros, male, Group 2)

The acoustic structure observed in the spectrograms allows to visualize the presence or the absence of the final unstressed vowel [ɪ]. In Figure 2, for the pronunciation of the word *perfume* [peh'fũmɪ], the acoustic representation clearly shows the presence of dark waves indicating the final vowel [ɪ], with frequencies ranging from F1=253.178036 to F2=2159.857468 Hz.

In Figure 3, it is possible to see clearly the absence of the final vowel [ɪ] for the word *perfume* [peh'fũmɪ]. The figure shows the acoustic sign of nasalization, closing the syllable and, after that, nothing is observed. There are no signs that lead to the configuration of the final vowel [ɪ].

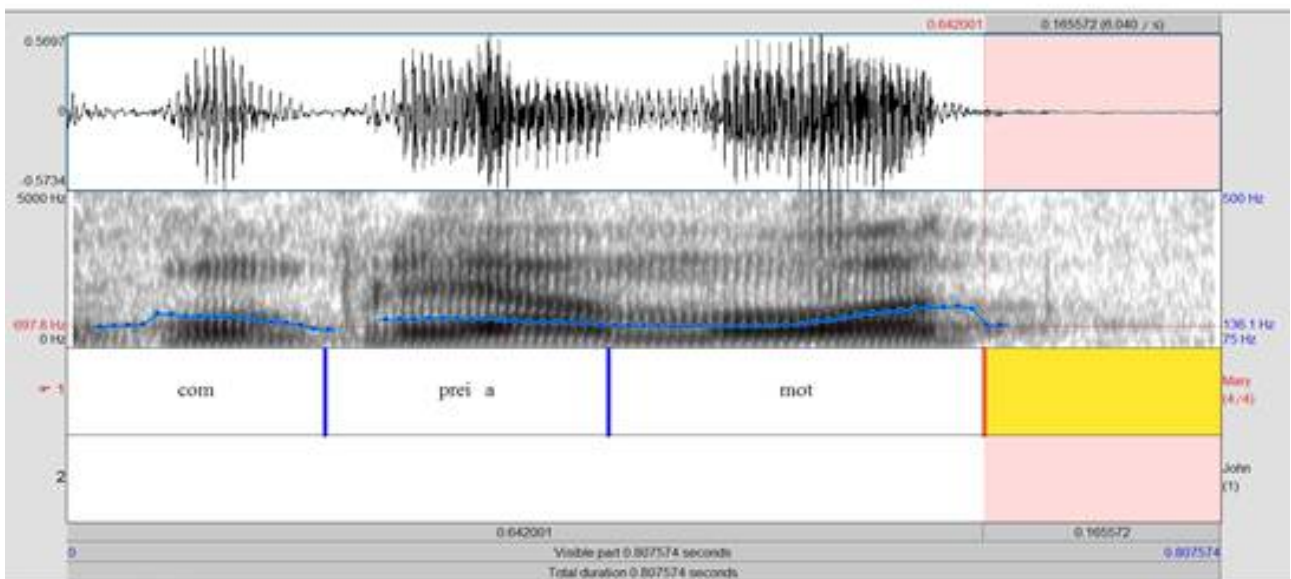
From the visual analysis of the spectrograms represented in figures 4 and 5, it is possible to notice, acoustically, the presence and the absence of the vowel sound [ʊ] respectively. In Figure 4, for the pronunciation of *moto* [ˈmɔtʊ], the acoustic sign clearly shows the presence of the final vowel [ʊ]. The dark bars for this vowel segment present frequencies ranging from F1= 327.893135 to F2= 1653.002762 Hz.

In Figure 5, in the utterance of *moto* [ˈmɔt], the deletion of the final vowel is visible, though the spectrogram. It is possible to notice in the image that there is only an occlusion and there is no acoustic sign that configures a final vowel. It can be said that the deletion is not an auditory impression of the phenomenon, but an acoustically confirmed deletion.



Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Figure 4 – Spectrogram for *moto* [ˈmɔtu] (Teófilo Otoni, female, Group 1)



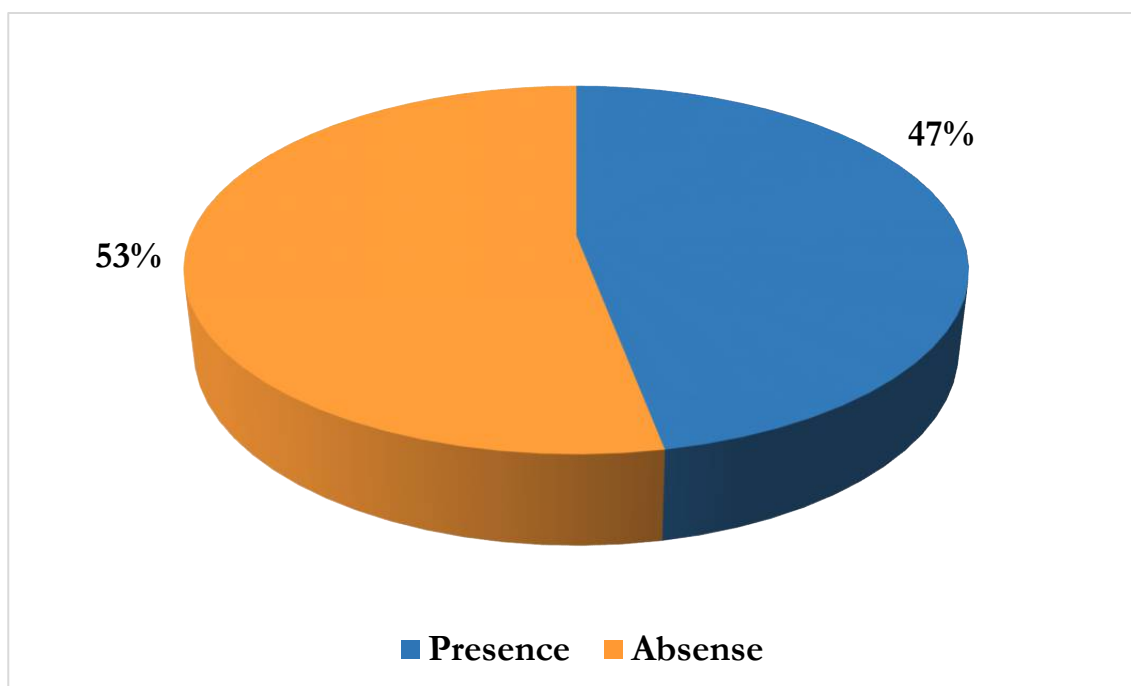
Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Figure 5 – Spectrogram for *moto* [ˈmɔt] (Pedra Azul, male, Group 2)

What do the ALiB data say about the deletion of the final unstressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] in Pedra Azul, Montes Claros, Teófilo Otoni and Diamantina: variationist analysis

Considering the data collection for the observation of the deletion of the final unstressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ], a total of 1.591 items were submitted to quantification.

Among the total occurrences, analyzed simultaneously, 53% conforms to deletion and 47% are produced with the presence of the final vowels, even if reduced, as it can be seen from the variable distribution in the sample (Graphic 1).



Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Graphic 1 – Total occurrences of [ɪ] and [ʊ] in the *corpus*

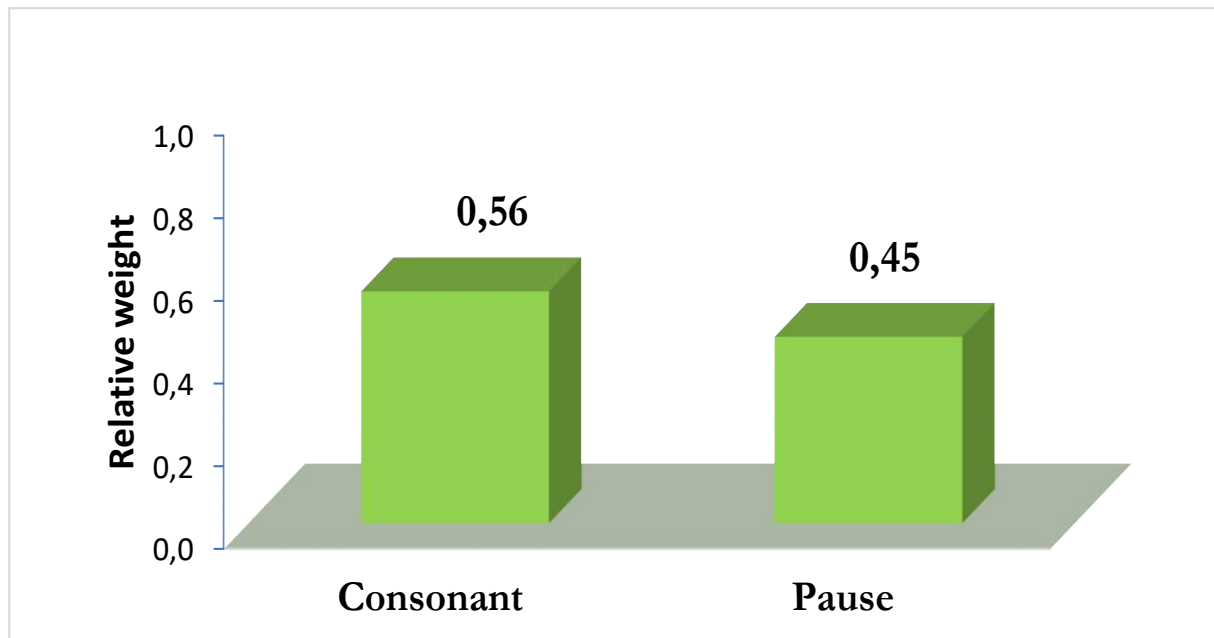
Based on the results represented in Graphic 1, which allow a general overview of the distribution of the variable in the corpus, in the studied communities, it is possible to observe a systematic linguistic variation between the presence and the absence of the final unstressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ].

Linguistic factors

With regard to the linguistic factors, the research aimed to verify if the nature of the phonetic context following the final vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] could exert some influence in the deletion process. This way, the contexts followed by consonant and by pause were analyzed.

Considering that the type of elocution can vary according to the level of tension at the moment of the utterance and that the members of a community have a linguistic repertoire that can vary depending on, among other factors, the context of speech; it was taken into consideration the type of data collection tool (phonetic-phonological and themes for the semi-directed discourse), with the aim to examine which would favor deletions.

Regarding the immediate contextualization, the data analyzed in the sample reveal that the phonetic context followed by consonant mostly favors the deletion of the final vowels, with 0.56 relative weight, such as in “aquele [a'kel] povo ['pov] de viagem ” (Montes Claros, male, Group 2). This data can be visualized in Graphic 2, for a better comprehension of the results.



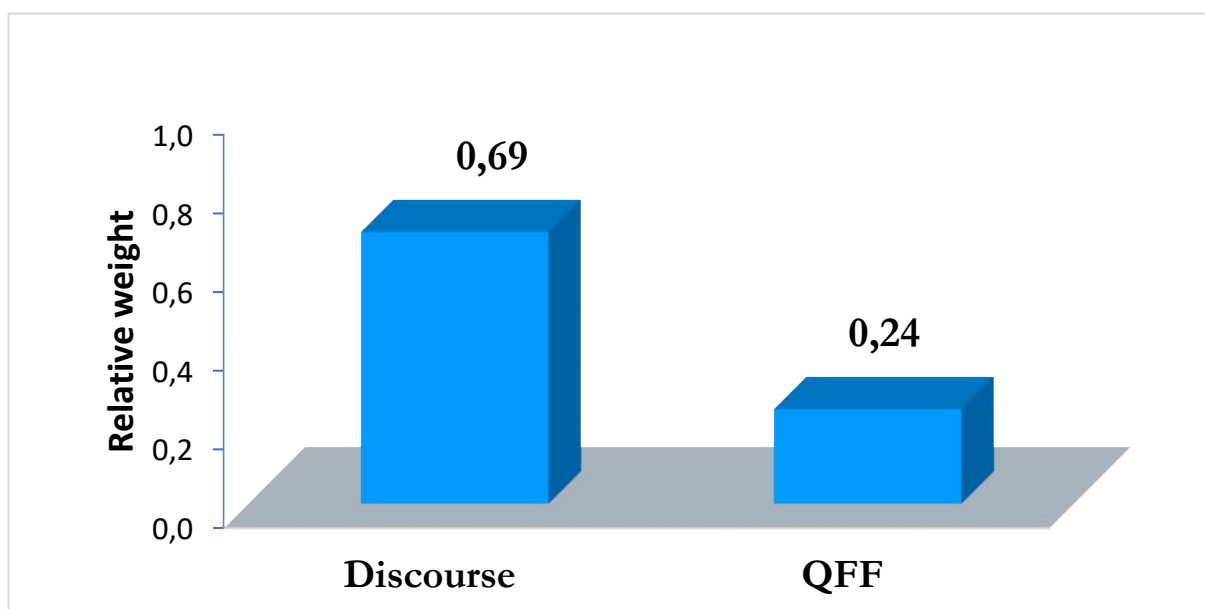
Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Significance: 0,005

Graphic 2 – Deletion of the unstressed final vowels [i] and [u], according to the immediately following phonetic context

It is worth noting that these contexts are followed by different consonants, as in the examples above, which makes them distinguish from haplology contexts, such as in *marido* [ma'rid] *dela* [dɛla]. The context followed by pause does not have a statistically significant effect.

In respect to the type of questionnaire, the data show that this was the factor which mostly had an impact for the application of the norm by the informants, as it can be visualized in Graphic 3:



Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Significance: 0,005

Graphic 3 – Deletion of the unstressed final vowels [I] and [U], according to the type of data collection tool

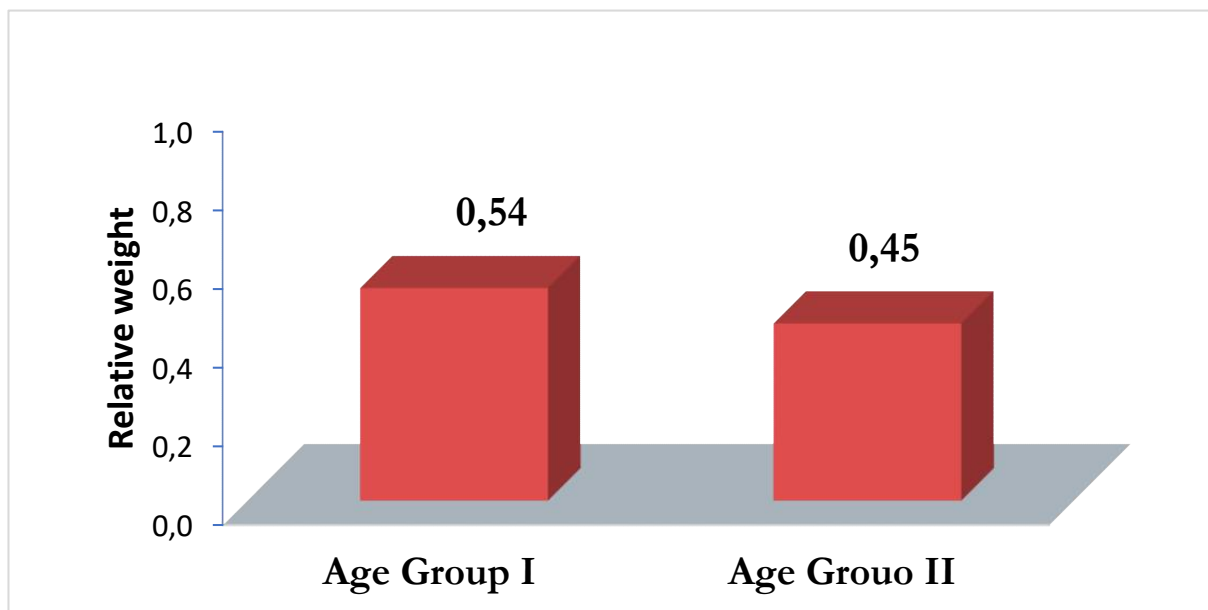
The results represented in Graphic 3 confirm that the semi-directed discourse is the type of data collection tool that mostly favors the deletion of the final unstressed vowels [I] and [U], with a relative weight 0.69. This result reinforces Labov's postulates (2008), which say that in spontaneous speech informants get closer to the vernacular. The opposite can be noticed from the Phonetic-phonological questionnaire, with only 0.24 of relative weight. This could possibly be attributed to a bigger monitoring level that might derive from the fact that the questions were created with the purpose of obtaining pre-determined answers.

Extralinguistic factors

Considering that the variationist perspective analyzes language in a social context, in this analysis the factors of gender, age group and location of the informants were taken into consideration.

The data showed that there is practically no distinction regarding the use of the norm between male (57%) and female (56%). Actually, because of this, this factor was eliminated by the program in all attempts to run it.

In reference to the age group, the analyzed data from Diamantina, Montes Claros, Pedra Azul and Teófilo Otoni have revealed little difference in regard to the deletion of the final vowels between Age Groups 1 and 2, once the values obtained for Age Group 1 correspond to 0.54 of relative weight, which is of low representativity, while 0.45 relative weight to Age Group 2 does not favor the process (see Graphic 4).



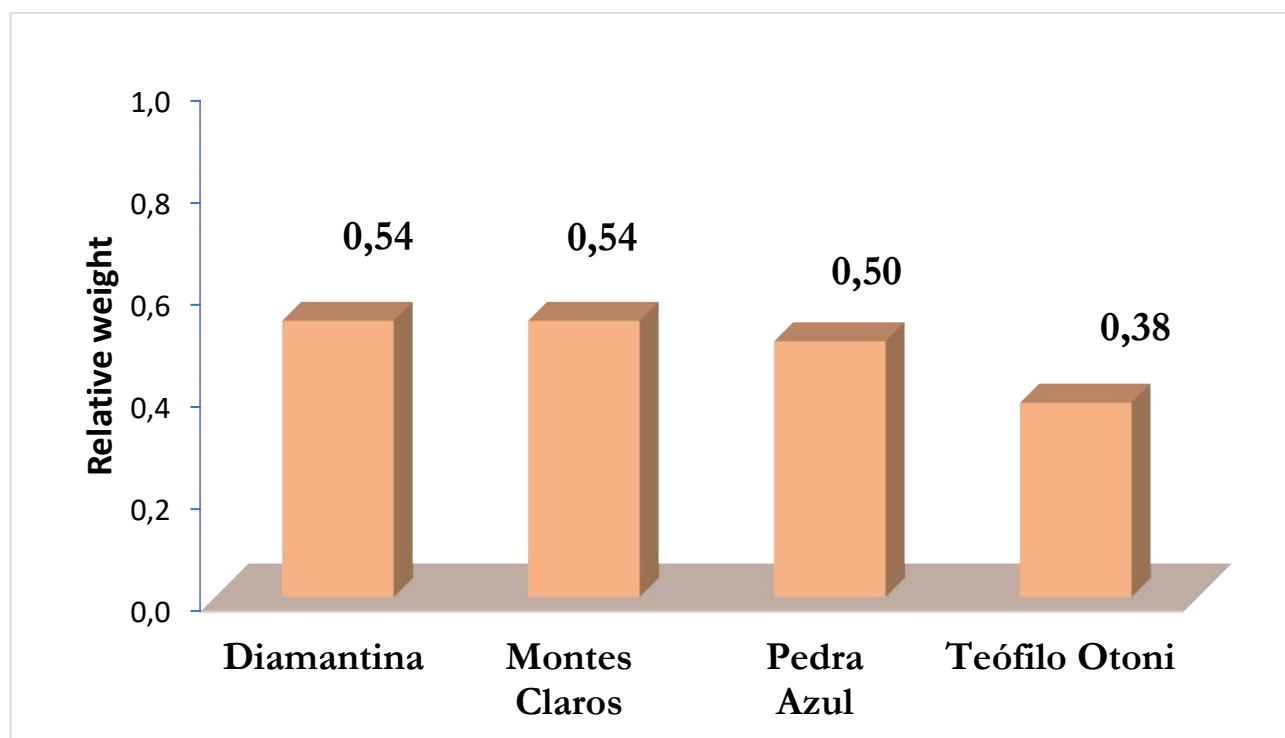
Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Significance: 0,005

Graphic 4 – Deletion of the unstressed final vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ], according to the Age Group

The localities

Among the localities that were object of analysis, the results indicate higher deletion of the final non-stressed vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ] in two of them (see Graphic 5).



Source: The ALiB Project (2009)

Significance: 0,005

Graphic 5 – Deletion of the unstressed final vowels [ɪ] and [ʊ], according to the localities

The results presented in Graphic 5 reveal Diamantina and Montes Claros as the localities where the phenomenon is mostly frequent, even though they only reach 0.54 relative weight. In Pedra Azul, although the phenomenon is present, it is found in neutrality with 0.50. Teófilo Otoni does not favor the process (0.38 of relative weight). Despite the differences in figures, it is possible to consider the hypothesis that, in these localities, it is observed the general deletion noted in the Brazilian Portuguese, as highlighted by Viaro (2005, p. 225, the authors' translation) "This phenomenon seems to affect Brazil as a whole. Syncope and apocopes are much more frequent in Brazilian Portuguese than imagined".

CONCLUSION

Considering, altogether, the results of the deletion of the final unstressed vowels [i] and [u] with data derived from the ALiB Project – Diamantina, Montes Claros, Pedra Azul and Teófilo Otoni –, it is revealed that there is systematic linguistic variation between the presence and the absence of the final unstressed vowels [i] and [u], regulated by linguistic and extralinguistic contexts, which work favoring or not the variants.

In regard to the immediately following context, the data shows that the ones followed by consonants favor the deletion, with 0.56% of relative weight. This result can be linked to Oliveira's (2010) study, in Minas Gerais, which observes that in such contexts the deletion of the vowel is a tendency, as long as the vowel is a high type.

Although gender was important in the researches of Corrêa (1998), Oliveira (2006) and Rolo (2010), who have found higher frequency of deletion in males' speech, the results in the localities of Minas Gerais have not demonstrated significant differences between different genders.

In regard to age groups, the speakers of Group 1 are more prone for the deletion process, with 0.54 of relative weight, which distinguishes from the cases studied by Corrêa (1998) and Rolo (2010, 2016). This is close to neutrality, which can possibly be associated to a higher level of monitoring from part of the informants in those localities. However, a closer analysis with an enlarged corpus can bring better clarification and rule out any possible mistakes in respect to what the data points.

In respect to the discursive variables, the semi-directed discourse is the type of data collection tool that mostly favors the deletion of the vowels [i] and [u] in the studied localities, with 0.69 of relative weight, as already observed by Rolo (2016), in Minas and Bahia. In the study, Itaobim, in Minas Gerais, catches the attention as the locality where the speakers delete more in the semi-directed discourse, with 0.75 of relative weight for the vowel [š] and 0.57 for the vowel [i]. This favoring probably occurs due to the level of spontaneity observed in their speech, as the speaker pays less attention to the way they speak.

Considering the diatopic perspective, in Pedra Azul and Teófilo Otoni, the deletion has been revealed as an actual phenomenon, although not the norm for most speakers. Diamantina and Montes Claros, although having presented values of low significance (0.54 of relative weight), have been revealed as deletion areas, reinforcing the ideas already registered in pre-existing studies in Minas Gerais, such as the work developed by Corrêa (1998), Oliveira (2006, 2012), Rolo (2016) and EALMG (RIBEIRO et al., 1977).

There is no doubt that, based on the analyzed sample, the process of deletion of the final unstressed vowels [I] and [U] are part of the Brazilian linguistic reality, not as a generalized phenomenon, but as a process maintained within specific locations in the country, also in accordance to research developed in Bahia and Minas Gerais, confirmed in linguistic atlases of regional amplitude, as well as in atlases of national amplitude, such as the *Atlas Linguístico do Brasil*.

Bearing in mind that future research, with enlarged samples could permit deeper analysis and inferences, contesting the present work, the researchers acknowledge the possibility of amplifying the number of localities to include other cities in Bahia and Minas Gerais, or even to other different regions in the country, using the AliB data source in a national scale. Furthermore, it would be possible to analyze the degree of acceptance of variables in localities and observe the direction to which the results would point.

Finally, it is interesting to highlight that other contrastive studies, involving data from Brazil and Portugal, have already been developed with the intent to verify similarities and differences among conditioning factors for the deletion of the unstressed final vowels [I] and [U] in these distinct countries, such as Rolo's (2016).

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