

Variable Rhotacism in São Paulo Brazilian Portuguese

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This work analyses the variable *rhotacism* in the variety of Brazilian Portuguese (BP) spoken in the countryside of São Paulo State (Bugai, 2024, under our supervision). Rhotacism consists of the replacement of a lateral liquid /l/ to a rhotic liquid /r/, e.g. [dʒi.'prõ.mø] ('degree') and [dʒi.fi.kuɫ.'da.dʒɪ] ('difficulty') (Silva, 2011).

Previous studies about other varieties of BP (Costa, 2007, for São José do Norte, Tem Tem, 2010, for Rio de Janeiro, Palhano, 2016, for Quedas do Iguaçu) have demonstrated that rhotacism is generally favoured by the complex onset context, e.g. ['bru.zø] ('shirt') and ['fraw.tø] ('flute'), and it decreases according to the higher level of education of the speaker.

Following the Theory of Linguistic Variation and Change (Labov, 2008 [1972]), 16 interviews with spontaneous speech samples taken from the Iboruna database (Gonçalves, 2025 [2007]) were utilised. The informants were stratified according to two genders (female; male), four age groups (16-25 years old; 26-35 years old; 36-55 years old; +55 years old) and two levels of education (first cycle of elementary school; University education). The quantitative analysis was conducted with the utilisation of Goldvarb X.

The analysis of 1,915 data demonstrated that 10.2% of the occurrences presented rhotacism in São Paulo State speech. The position in the syllable was highlighted, showing that the process is favoured in the contexts of complex onset – generally preceded by a stop consonant – and medial coda, e.g.: [bi.si.'krɛ.tø] ('bicycle') and [aɫ.gu.'dõw] ('cotton'). Contrarily, the final coda context disfavors rhotacism, and the lateral liquid consonant is subject to the vocalization process instead, e.g. [ko.ro.'nɐw] ('colonel') and [os.pi.'taw] ('hospital').

For the extralinguistic variables, the age group, sex/gender and level of education were highlighted, since they evinced that rhotacism is a socially stigmatized process, occurring predominantly in the speech of elderly male informants with the lowest level of education. Therefore, these results (i) approximate the countryside of São Paulo State to other varieties of BP; and (ii) contribute to its sociolinguistic mapping (This work was conducted with the support of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES).

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