A study on oral diphthongs in Brazilian Portuguese.

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**Abstract**

This is a phonological study on the Brazilian Portuguese oral diphthong [uw], represented orthographically by "ul", which is in variation in the spoken language. We have investigated the phenomenon experimentally and acoustically. And we have modelled the results within Optimality Theory by means of the MaxEnt Grammar Tool program. It is, therefore, a study in language that uses experimental and computational methodologies in interaction.

**Key words:**

Oral diphthong, reduction, positional faithfulness.

**Introduction**

We can notice, as native speakers, that the diphthong [uw] can be reduced to a simple vowel, [u] (e.g. consul/consu). The objective of this research is to verify what phonetic and phonological reasons of the phenomenon are.

The phenomenon was investigated on the basis of an experiment on a corpus composed of existing words of Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and pseudo words that are compatible with the BP lexicon, having the diphthong in initial, medial and final positions, and in stressed and unstressed syllables. After recording the word list by two speakers of the dialectal variety of Campinas / SP, an acoustic analysis was performed in the Praat program.

**Results and Discussion**

The results show that 74.3% of the diphthongs were preserved in stressed syllables and were reduced in 96.5% in unstressed syllables. Moreover, 54.3% of the diphthongs were preserved in initial syllables and 51.7% of the reductions occurred in non-initial syllables. The monosyllables, which are initial and tonic syllables, had 100% preservation of the diphthong. The vowel lengthening, used to compensate the deletion of [w] was also a used resource, obtaining 67.5% occurrence in stressed syllables and 53.5% in initial syllables.

**Chart 1. Stressed syllables.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/kuv.pa/</th>
<th>MAX-s1</th>
<th>MAX-s2</th>
<th>MAX</th>
<th>OCP</th>
<th>IDENT-s1(dur)</th>
<th>IDENT-s2(dur)</th>
<th>IDENT(dur)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. kuv.pa</td>
<td>0.576</td>
<td>4.458</td>
<td>4.542</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>0.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ku:.pa</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. ku.pa</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MaxEnt Grammar Tool program was used to generate the weights of each constraint (represented below the constraints in the tableaux above). The program also generated predictions of optimal candidates whose percent values are very close to those found in our quantitative data analysis.

**Conclusions**

We can conclude from the quantitative results and the values of the predictions given by MaxEnt that the reduction is favored in unstressed and non-initial syllables, arguing in favor of our hypotheses and the literature, since stressed and initial syllables are privileged positions and tend to resist phonological processes (Beckman, 1998).

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