## The diachronic view of nasality – from Latin to Brazilian Portuguese

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**Abstract**

This paper, derived from Rodrigues' (2013) Master's Thesis, which investigates vocalic nasality in the Andirá community in Barreirinha, Amazonas, presents a bibliographical survey, covering historical authors of the Portuguese language, such as Melo (1967), Williams (1961), Faria (1970), Nobiling (1907), Bueno (1967), among others. The study shows that nasality, which was absent in Latin (the language from which Portuguese originated), emerged in Old Portuguese as a result of evolutionary transformations. The current research reveals a notable similarity between the nasality produced in Barreirinha and that documented in Lisbon-Coimbra during the Old Portuguese period. The central phenomenon addressed in Barreirinha is the non-nasalization of vowels, or a more oral than nasal production, in phonological contexts that, by the conventions of Brazilian Portuguese, should present some degree of nasalization. This work thus reinforces the undeniable evolution from Latin to Portuguese, with Latin phonological environments giving rise to nasality in Brazilian Portuguese over time.

Key words: Diachronic view. Nasality. Brazilian Portuguese.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is an excerpt from Rodrigues' Master's Dissertation (2013), which studied vowel nasality in the municipality of Barreirinha, Andirá Community, in the countryside of the state of Amazonas.

Through a bibliographic survey, including records by Melo (1967), Williams (1961), Faria (1970), Nobiling (1907), Bueno (1967), and other authors on the history of the Portuguese language, it is clear that nasality did not exist in Latin, the language that gave rise to Portuguese, and that, when it did exist in Archaic Portuguese, it was the result of transformations undergone during its evolution from one language to another.

This research made it possible to identify a similarity between the nasality produced in Lisbon-Coimbra, during archaic Portuguese, and the nasality produced in Barreirinha, today. It even refers to the vowel nasality researched in Martins et.al. (2008), in a study carried out in the north of Portugal, in which the neutralization of oral articulators was recorded in order to reorganize them, being able to associate each nasal vowel with several possible counterparts, that is: nasal vowel [ẽ] refers to [e] and ɛ], [õ] to [o] and [ɔ] e ] can be more open, or produced with a configuration similar to the oral [a].

It is, therefore, the phenomenon of non-nasalization of vowels, at least in production

that is more oral than nasal, in phonological environments that, by usual conventions of the Brazilian Portuese language, must undergo, at least, a slight nasalization.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As Melo (1967) describes, Latin is a language that originates from the Italic sub-branch of Indo-European and became known after 600 BC. Several languages represent historical continuations of Latin and are known as Romance languages, Neo-Latin, New Latin, or simply Latin. Among these languages is Portuguese. It is worth noting, however, that the Latin that gave rise to Portuguese is not the polished and refined Latin taught in universities, but rather the vulgar and colloquial Latin, which, according to Coutinho (1976), was the language spoken by the lower classes of Roman society and which was rapidly disseminated with the expansion of the Roman Empire.

Williams (1961) attributes to Vulgar Latin the role of source of several Romance languages, due to the following causes: the geographical isolation between the groups; the development of separate political units; the cultural variety and educational circumstances; the period of Romanization; the different dialects in the language of the Italic colonists; the original linguistic substrates; and the subsequent linguistic superstrates.

Faria (1970) describes that the phonemes of Indo-European Latin were divided into the categories of vowels, sonorants and consonants, as shown in Table 01:

Table 01- Table of Latin phonemes.

| LATIN | |
| --- | --- |
| Vowels | *e, o, a* |
| Soants | *i,u – l, r – m, n* |
| Consonants | *p, b, f, t, d, s, k, g* |

Font: Faria (1970).

Unlike today's Brazilian Portuguese, Latin, both Classical and Vulgar, did not have nasal vowels. What occurred, as Williams (1961) describes, was a classification of quantitative variation, that is, long or short vowels in Classical Latin, and a classification of qualitative variation, which concerns the opposition of timbre, or vowel openness, according to Silva Neto

(1979). That is, the vowel would be classified as open or closed, also assuming the new classifications of stressed, pre-tonic, and final unstressed in Vulgar Latin. In the representation of Table 02, we see the evolution of vowels from Classical to Vulgar Latin:

Table 02- Evolution table of vowels from classical to vulgar Latin.



Font: Silva Neto (1979).

Regarding sonorants, Faria (1970) describes them as unstable phonemes that sometimes act as vowels, sometimes as consonants, and were subdivided into semivowels (i, u), nasals (m, n), and liquids (l, r).

In Latin, when a vowel was preceded by a nasal sonorant, it was not classified as a nasal vowel, as is the case in Portuguese. It was classified only by its qualities: open or closed, stressed, pre-tonic, or final unstressed, as described by Williams (1961), and exemplifies:

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amat            a Vulgar Latin tonic followed by a nasal

dentemę       (e open) Vulgar Latin tonic followed by a consonant group beginning with m or n.

bonum         ǫ  ( o open) Vulgar Latin tonic followed by a nasal consonant.

mendĩcum      ę (e closed) pre-tonic of Vulgar Latin followed by a consonant group beginning with m or n.

compŭtāre     ǫ (o closed) pre-tonic of Vulgar Latin followed by a consonant cluster beginning with m or n.

amant         a Vulgar Latin ending followed by nasal.

Let's now cover the Archaic Portuguese. As Melo (1967) describes, the Iberian Peninsula became a Roman province after successive Punic Wars. As a consequence of Roman domination, Latin established itself on the Peninsula. Coutinho (1976), however, points out that there was one people who rejected Latin as their language and continued to speak their own: Basque. But, for the most part, it can be said that the process of Romanization of the Iberian Peninsula was perfect, since it was clear that the natives had easily adopted Roman customs and were already beginning to forget their own language, as Coutinho (1976) emphasizes.

Regarding the advance of Vulgar Latin on the western coast of the Iberian Peninsula, Williams (1961) states that: "(...) Vulgar Latin, freer from the influence of the Germanic accent of intensity than anywhere else, freer, especially, than in the rest of the peninsula, developed into the Portuguese language." In other words, a language was born as a historical continuation of Latin: Portuguese.

Melo (1967), in turn, states that during this period of Romanization, Iberian Latin was alive, everyday, and sub-dialectalized, influenced by peculiarities from southern Italy. The author highlights the invasions the Iberian Peninsula suffered during this period, around the 5th century. These were the barbarian hordes, the Alans, and the Vandals, who managed to expand into Africa, forming the kingdoms of the Suevi and Visigoths. The latter later inhabited the territory where the Galician-Portuguese Romance language was formed. The strong divergences and notable evolution between the Vulgar Latin that established itself in the Iberian Peninsula during Romanization and Archaic Portuguese, which emerged from the 12th century onward, the period following the invasions, thus become understandable.

Williams (1961) states that Archaic Portuguese ended at the end of the 16th century, when all its distinctive features had disappeared, giving rise to what is known as Modern Portuguese.

One of the first studies on nasality in Portuguese was conducted by Nobiling (1907). In his work, Nobiling concluded that nasality in the period of Portuguese songbooks, the Archaic

Portuguese period, was primarily recorded with the use of the tilde, or an m or n placed after the vowel.

The rule regarding the use of the tilde applied when a nasal vowel was followed by another vowel, in which case m was never used, and n was rarely used.

The scholar also concluded that, after i, nh was frequently found, along with ĩ, as in minha and mĩa. The same occurred with u.

Bueno (1967) concluded, based on Nobiling's (1907) descriptions, that nasality in archaic Portuguese was much more pronounced than in modern Portuguese.

He stated that the rule was nasalization of the vowel followed by m or n, as in the words cã-ma and sã-to. Bueno (1967) points out, however, that in Lisbon-Coimbra this nasality was not official, as the words cited sounded to the ears like cá-ma and sá-nto, identifying a variation in nasality in this location.

The author explains that as Portugal defined itself as a nation in the 15th century, its language took on a more defined form, and nasality was lost, especially in verbs.

Silva Neto (1979), in addition to Bueno's (1967) description, concluded, when analyzing vowel systems in accented position, that it could not be affirmed that there is a phonetic distinction between the open and closed vowel a, when followed by a nasal in archaic Portuguese.

He also concluded that Portuguese nasal vowels and diphthongs result from vowels followed by nasal consonants in Latin, and exemplified this as shown in Table 3:

Table 03- Evolution table of nasality from Vulgar Latin to Archaic Portuguese.

| Consonant | Vulgar Laton | Archaic Portuguese |
|---|---|---|
| in implosive position | *Dente* | dente |
| in intervocalic position | *Lana* | lã |
| in final implosive position | *Amant* | amam |
| in contiguity | *Annu* | ano |

Font: Silva Neto (1979).

Let us now examine in more detail the changes that occurred in nasal phonemes in initial, medial, and final positions, in geminated nasal phonemes, and in phonemes in consonant clusters during the evolution from Latin to Portuguese.

The consonants m and n in initial position remained with the same phonemes and

position in Portuguese, as Williams (1961) explains:

*mĕtum* > medo

*monētam* > moeda

nātāre > nadar

nŏuum > novo

Williams (1961) highlights that the consonants m and n in initial position sometimes nasalized the following vowel, a common phenomenon in dialectal and popular Portuguese, as we see in the words:

*matrem* > mãe

*mĕam* > *mĩa* > minha

*mensem* > mês

*nec* > *ne* > nem

*nīdum* > *nĩo* > ninho

The medial m remained in this position in Portuguese, but it was the medial n that underwent the greatest transformations. Let's first look at the examples with medial m:

*fūmāre* > fumar

*sŭmus* > somos

Williams (1961) indicates that nasalization in the environment of the medial m occurred sometimes in the preceding vowel, a phenomenon that tended to disappear in archaic Portuguese, except in dialects, and sometimes in the following vowel, just as the initial m did.

Regarding the medial n, Williams (1961) and Coutinho (1976) point to its decline after nasalizing the preceding vowel:

*bŏnum* > *bõo* > bom

*lanam* > *lãa* > lã

Williams (1961) describes several changes to the n in this position. If the first vowel

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was stressed, for example, the nasal resonance remained and the vowel combinations became nasal diphthongs:

> *germānum* > irmão
>
> *manum* > mão
>
> *lectiōnes* > lições

If the first vowel were a stressed i and the second a or o, a palatal nasal would appear between them and the nasal resonance would disappear. The same occurred when the first vowel was pre-tonic and the second a stressed i in hiatus with a following a or o.

> *gallīnam* > *gallĩa* > galinha
>
> *uicīnam* > *vizĩa* > vizinha
>
> *uīum* > *uĩo* > vinho
>
> *litanīam* > *lidaĩa* > ladainha

If the pre-tonic vowel and the vowel that followed were similar, and the second was followed by a velar consonant, a velar n [ŋ] developed:

> *enecāre* > *engar*
>
> *benedicāmus* > *bẽeigamos* > *bengamos*

If a final contracted nasal vowel, a nasal diphthong, or a nasal consonant of any kind did not develop, the nasal resonance would disappear, as occurred throughout the 15th century:

> *arēnam* > *arẽa* > *area* > areia
>
> *bǒnam* > *boa* > boa
>
> *corōnam* > *coroa* > coroa

In final position, Williams (1961) describes how m fell in Vulgar Latin and final n fell in Primitive Portuguese. Faria (1970) adds that m in final position was weakly pronounced, with a tendency to become silent in Latin. Proclisis caused both m and final n to remain in monosyllables in Vulgar Latin. In Portuguese, the preceding vowel was nasalized:

> *cum* > com

*in* > em

*nōn* > *nom* > não

Let us now move on to the geminate nasal phonemes. Williams (1961) states that, in the context of mm, the nasality of the preceding vowel has disappeared, remaining only in some dialects. Examples include:

*commūnem* > comum

*flammam*> chama

In the context of nn, when words in Portuguese originated from this Latin formation, nh was borrowed from Spanish:

*pĭnnam* > peña (esp.) > penha (port.)

*stannum* > estaño (esp.) > estanho (port.)

Finally, let us look at consonant groups beginning with nasals. Regarding these, Williams (1961) describes a tendency in this context to nasalize the preceding vowel, which survived in modern Portuguese. However, n ended up losing its consonant value before l, r, s, ç, c [s], j, g [ʒ], f, or v. However, before d or t, n maintained its consonant value, and before c [k] or g [g], its velar value. In these groups, m and n did not lose their consonant value before p and b. Let us look at some examples with some consonant groups beginning with nasals:

mn    *autumnum* > outono

mpt    *exemptum* > isento

mpl    *implēre* > encher

**CONCLUSION**

The evolution of the Latin language throughout its historical continuity toward becoming the Portuguese language is undeniable. Although no nasal or nasalized vowels were recorded in Latin, over time, and during its transformation into the new language, we realize that the phonological environments that would later give rise to nasality in Brazilian Portuguese originated from Latin.

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