

ARTÍCULO

A sociolinguistic analysis of the elision of /d/ in Toluca Spanish

Análisis sociolingüístico de la elisión de /d/ en el español de Toluca

Edgar Emmanuell García-Ponce

Departamento de Lenguas

Universidad de Guanajuato

ee.garcia@ugto.mx

Irasema Mora-Pablo

Departamento de Lenguas

Universidad de Guanajuato

imora@ugto.mx

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Abstract

It is widely known that there are Spanish speakers in the Mexican community who tend to omit the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words, for example, /verdad/, /universidad/, /salud/, etc. Despite the increasingly high amount of research which has investigated social variation in Hispanic groups, and the social stigma that this phenomenon carries, there is still no research discourse of the sociolinguistic variables that condition the elision of this phoneme. With the aim of filling this research gap, the present paper reports on a study that set out to explore the elision of the phoneme

/d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the Spanish spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico. This exploration involved examining its behaviour in relation to sociolinguistic variables, namely, gender, education level, and style shifting. The results indicate that the phoneme /d/ tends to be elided 1) by speakers with low educational levels; 2) by men rather than women; and 3) in speech involving informal styles. Taken together, these findings suggest that this phenomenon is multifactorial and multidimensional.

Key words: elision, language variation, phoneme /d/, Spanish.

Resumen

En la comunidad mexicana comúnmente se percibe que los hablantes del español tienden a omitir el fonema /d/ en posición post-vocálica al final de palabras, tales como /verdad/, /universidad/, etc. A pesar de la creciente cantidad de investigaciones que han centrado su atención en la variación lingüística de grupos hispanohablantes, aún no hay evidencia científica sobre las variables sociolingüísticas que determinan la elisión de este fonema. Con la intención de contribuir a este tipo de investigaciones, el presente estudio explora la elisión del fonema /d/ en posición post-vocálica al final de palabras en el español hablado en la ciudad de Toluca, México. Este estudio involucró el análisis de la elisión de este fonema en relación con variables sociolingüísticas, es decir, género, nivel educativo y cambio de estilo (*style-shifting*). Los resultados indican que el fonema /d/ tiende a ser elidido por hablantes con niveles educativos bajos; por hombres en vez de mujeres; y durante habla casual. En general, los resultados sugieren que este fenómeno es multifactorial y multidimensional.

Palabras clave: elisión, español, fonema /d/, variación lingüística.

1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (*Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas*, INALI¹) has claimed that Spanish and 68 indigenous languages are, at present, recognised as national languages which can be used to communicate across the different states that belong to the Mexican Republic. Despite this rich linguistic diversity, the Spanish spoken in Mexico is known to be a dialect that still preserves a number of old linguistic forms (Zamora 2002), and has not easily incorporated linguistic innovations that have occurred in regional dialects of other Hispanic linguistic communities (Penny 2000). Nevertheless, Mexican Spanish (MexSp), like any other dialect, varies internally, depending on sociolinguistic factors and context in which speakers find themselves immersed and interacting. One example of this social variation is the so-called phenomenon of *elision*, i.e., the omission or loss of one or more phonemes in a word or phrase during oral discourse (Knowles 1987; Roach 2009). This omission or deletion may occur for both vowels and consonants, although it is much more common for consonants as in the case of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in Spanish which is the linguistic variable of this study. In technical language, we say that the phoneme is deleted, or is realised as zero and represented as [∅]. Speakers of other languages have experienced this phenomenon which can, in some cases, result in language

¹ The INALI is in charge of strengthening, preserving, and developing the indigenous languages that are spoken in the Mexican territory.

change after a period of time (Labov 2003). Such was the case of modal verbs in English whose contracted negative forms were initially used in sociolects², and are currently standard linguistic forms. For example, the words /cannot/ and /would not/ which now can acceptably be used as /can't/ and /wouldn't/, respectively.

In Spanish, the phoneme /d/ has been a linguistic variable that has attracted considerable attention from scholars. This is because the phoneme /d/, whose acoustic properties are voiced, dental and occlusive (Michnowicz 2012), has been found to have other acoustic realisations in intervocalic positions (i.e., fricative /ð/, soft and elided [ø]). In post-vocalic position at the end of words, the phoneme /d/ presents acoustic properties of voiced, dental and occlusive in its standard form. Moreover, in the same position, this phoneme also has voiceless properties (for example, [θju'daθ] or [θju'dat]) in some areas of Spain and in the Peruvian Spanish (Hualde 2005), and an elided variant (Bedinghaus & Sedó 2014), for example:

- (1) [fakul'taø] for [fakul'tad] (faculty)
 [kurjosi'ðaø] for [kurjosi'ðad] (curiosity)
 [uniβersi'ðaø] for [uniβersi'ðad] (university)

² In sociolinguistics, the term sociolect can interchangeably be used with social dialect and, according to Trudgill (2003), is defined as “a variety or lect which is thought of as being related to its speakers’ social background rather geographical background” (p. 122). In other words, it is a form of language used by a particular social group, class or culture, whose speakers share social characteristics such as gender, age, occupation, among others.

This phenomenon can also be considered as *phonic variation* which is defined as “the use of more than one alternative for the same reference unit without this necessarily implying any kind of consequences neither on the phonic system nor at the semantic level” (Moreno Fernández 2015: 55). In order to investigate phonic variation, sociolinguistic theory has set out to determine the extent to which external factors to the language (e.g., age, academic level, profession, status, etc.) influence the behaviour of phonic variation. The focus of this theory has been extended to include internal factors (phonic, context, prosody, and semantics) as a way of explaining variation processes (Moreno Fernández 2015). In this study, our focus will be the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp in relation to external factors, including gender, educational levels and style-shifting.

The elision of the phoneme /d/ in MexSp is a variationist phenomenon which is negatively perceived by its speakers because it is commonly associated with low education levels and social classes, and thus carries social stigma. Despite the fact that some scholars have carried out research regarding the phoneme /d/ in Hispanic communities and its different acoustic realisations and variants in postvocalic position (see Lope Blanch 1990; Martín Butragueño 2002; Moreno Fernández 2009; Moreno de Alba 1994), there is still no research discourse which informs us of the sociolinguistic variables that condition the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp. We have been only informed that the phoneme /d/ presents voiced, dental and occlusive properties in the Mexican Plateau, whereas in the lower areas of the country the phoneme /d/ is softened or elided (Quilis 1999). Howev-

er, speakers from the city of Toluca, a city part of the Mexican Plateau, tend to omit the phoneme /d/ at the end of words, as in lower areas of the country. Blas Arroyo (2005), however, contends that phonic variation correlates with sociolinguistic variables. For the purpose of this study, we define a *sociolinguistic variable* as a linguistic element that co-varies not only with other linguistic elements, but also with a number of extralinguistic independent variables like social class, age, sex, ethnic group or contextual style (Schiffrin 2001). In line with this, it is likely that the phoneme /d/ and its elided variant [∅] are conditioned by sociolinguistic variables, such as gender, education level and style shifting.

This paper attempts to fill the above research gap by exploring some sociolinguistic factors and their correlation with the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the Spanish spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico, particularly in a group of male and female speakers whose age ranged between 35—45 years old. The study is guided by two research questions:

1. What is the correlation, if any, between sociolinguistic variables —such as gender, education level and style shifting— and the elided variant of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the Spanish language spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico?
2. What patterns of elision of the phoneme /d/ can be found in the Spanish language spoken by the male and female participant speakers?

As suggested in these two research questions, we attempt to understand the behaviour of the elided variant of the phoneme /d/ in relation to some

sociolinguistic variables (i.e., gender, education level and style shifting). It is beyond the scope of this study to encompass the entire social and linguistic variables that influence the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp. Rather, this study is a starting point to understand this phenomenon from exploratory lenses.

2. LANGUAGE VARIATION AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

Through language, we are able to become members of a community or social group, and bring into existence and interpret the world in which we live (Spender 1985). Holmes (2013: 138) states that “a language can be thought of as a collection of dialects that are usually linguistically similar, used by different social groups who choose to say that they are speakers of one language which functions to unite and represent them to other groups”. Depending on a number of (sociolinguistic) factors, languages vary in many ways. This is particularly true in view of the fact that speakers of a particular language can speak different dialects of that same language (Coupland 2007; Holmquist 1985; Milroy 1982; Wardhaugh 2010). In Wardhaugh’s (2010: 138) words, “languages differentiate internally as speakers distance themselves from one another over time and space”. This language variation has long been of interest to sociolinguistic studies (Wardhaugh 2010), which derived from the pioneering work of William Labov (see his seminal study in Labov 1966). In these studies, language variation has been widely associated with the region or social class and groups of speakers (Wardhaugh 2010). The former

variation is defined as *regional variation* which marks off the speakers of a region from those of other regions (Wardhaugh 2010). The latter variation is known as *social variation* which marks off speakers from a class or group from other speakers of other classes or groups (Meyerhoff 2011).

In research literature, several sociolinguistic factors have been explored in order to investigate what conditions language variation. According to Romaine (2000), language variation in the 1950s was mainly explored in relation to the social class of speakers. From the 1960s, the attention was then centred on the language of the cities, involving explorations of how other sociolinguistic factors, for example, style, gender, age, social network, etc., condition language variation (Romaine 2000). The process of urbanization that large cities, like the city of Toluca, have gone through is claimed to be connected with a high increase in social stratification which is in turn reflected in linguistic variations (Romaine 2000). This is explained by the complex sociolinguistic consequences of urbanization which tends to promote linguistic diversity (i.e., sociolects) (Labov 2003) as well as uniformity (Romaine, 2000). It is thus possible that the rapid urbanization of the City of Toluca has carried not only the linguistic diversity of people who have been recently moving from other regions of Mexico, but also their social stratification.

The dimension that is commonly associated with social stratification is social class, also known as class stratification. Social class has long attracted the attention of sociolinguistic studies as a dimension which conditions language variation. Holmes (2013), for example, mentions how in Norwich some patterns of [h]-dropping and [ing] versus [in∅] pronunciation can divide the middle-class groups from the lower-class

groups. Sociolinguistic studies in exploring language variation on the basis of social class have frequently grouped individuals by means of education levels, occupation and economic income. In general, it has been found that high social class or status of individuals correlates with the use of more prestigious or standard linguistic forms. In particular, high education levels have been claimed to correlate with a higher use of standard linguistic forms (Romaine 2000). However, as Romaine (2000) puts it, it is not always possible to assume that “every instance of language variation will correlate with social structure” (p. 70). In order to ensure correlation between the linguistic variable and social structure (Lepper 2000), Wardhaugh (2010) suggests that researchers need to identify and distinguish the independent variables that influence the linguistic variable. Below, we discuss other sociolinguistic variables that research literature has reported to condition language variation with a view to describing other independent variables considered in this study.

Besides social class, gender has been found to be a factor that correlates with language use. In societies where men and women fill distinctly different roles, there are also distinct uses of linguistic variants because gender is a key component of social and linguistic identity (Coupland & Jaworski 1997; Lastra 1992; Wardhaugh 2010). Gender differences in language are often just one aspect of more pervasive linguistic differences in the society reflecting social status or power differences (Holmes 2013). That is, gender plays a role in determining the language use of speakers. In research literature, women have been found to considerably use a greater number of higher-status variants than men (Labov 1990; Lastra 1992; Romaine 2000). Wardhaugh (2010; see also Coupland &

Jaworski 1997) argues that women are more sensitive to standard linguistic forms than men. Holmes (2013: 167) suggests that “standard speech forms are generally associated with high social status, and [...] women use more standard speech forms as a way of claiming such status”. In situations of perceived social inferiority, women opt for more prestigious variants in order to protect themselves in dealing socially with “the more powerful” (Wardhaugh 2010: 346), men. In contrast, men are believed to have power, and are less influenced linguistically by others (Coates 2015). In lower working classes, nonstandard linguistic varieties tend to be used by men with a view towards seeking solidarity and/or membership to a group or network (Milroy 1992; Trudgill 1986; Wardhaugh 2010), or showing connotations of masculinity (Romaine, 2000).

Research discourse has suggested that men are members of a greater number of social networks than women (Spolsky 1998), as illustrated in Figure 1.

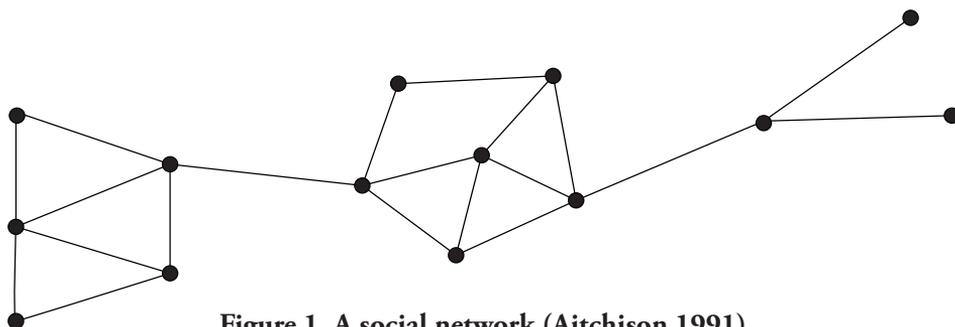


Figure 1. A social network (Aitchison 1991)

As shown in Figure 1, societies are comprised of social networks, e.g., networks involving working, educational, and entertainment

relationships. The social networks of which speakers are members are believed to condition language use and thus variants (Aitchison 1991; Milroy 1992), since language use in social networks is a key factor that enables them to seek and maintain membership. In particular, the interaction of members in different social networks is claimed to accelerate the use of non-standard varieties (Romaine 2000). Since there are members in social networks who are a powerful influence on speech, they will become the innovators in such social network. This linguistic influence is confirmed by a study reported by Romaine (2000), who found that speakers with memberships to strongly well-defined social networks showed a greater use of nonstandard linguistic variants. Speakers whose social networks were reported to be more open showed adherence to more standard variants.

According to Romaine (2000), the age of speakers is also a factor that correlates with language variation. She explains that in some societies individuals develop an understanding of sociolinguistic patterns and the social significance of variants in early life stages, suggesting that young speakers are able to distinguish linguistic forms and their variants. According to D'Aquino (2008), sociolinguistic patterns tend to be 'stabilised' in adult years. This is in line with Downes' (1998) model of the relationship between use of vernacular forms and age. In this model, he suggests that as people get older their speech becomes more standard, and then it becomes less standard and is once again characterised by vernacular forms.

Besides the social context, network, class, gender, etc., language variation is also claimed to be at the heart of linguistic style (Chambers &

Schilling 2013), involving stylistic differences in vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation (Eckert 2008; Labov 2003). Style can range from formal to casual, and standard language use shifts in the same direction of the formal style (Romaine 2000). Labov (2003) explains that formal styles are associated with mental processes in which greater attention is paid to speech and, in the case of casual style, a minimum attention is claimed to be given to speech processes. Speakers make linguistic adjustments depending on 1) context (Labov 2003), 2) topic (Eckert & Rickford 2001; Labov 2003), 3) interlocutors (D'Aquino 2008; Labov 2003), and 4) participants' social status (Labov 2003; Romaine 2000). That is, speakers assess not only the degree of formality of the context (Holmes 2013; Labov 2003), but also to whom the speech is directed (Romaine 2000), i.e., speech accommodation (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams 2011).

As we have seen, research literature suggests that language varies in relation to a number of sociolinguistic variables (Penny 2000). Based upon this, it is thus likely that the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp is dependent on sociolinguistic variables which relate to the speakers. The aim of this paper is, as previously stated, to explore the behaviour of the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the Spanish spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico in relation to sociolinguistic variables involving gender, education levels, and style.

3. THE STUDY

The present study resides in an exploratory inquiry which seeks to develop an understanding of the behaviour of the phoneme /d/ in relation to multiple sociolinguistic factors. This aim follows the principles that 1) a social dimension denotes differences between the speech of different speakers, and 2) the stylistic denotes differences within the speech of a single speaker (Bell 1984: 145). The study was initially motivated by the social stigma that we have perceived towards its elision in postvocalic position at the end of words in the MexSp spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico. Our perceptions in turn enabled us to consider this phoneme as the linguistic variable³ which, according to Wardhaugh (2010), is the first step to explore language variation. As described previously, the linguistic variable /d/, in its standard form, presents voiced, dental and occlusive properties, and an elided variant [∅]. Having identified the linguistic variable, the “basic working tool” (Wardhaugh 2010: 148), and its variant, the next step was to determine the sociolinguistic variables that were going to be considered in this study in order to explore the behaviour of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words (see Wardhaugh 2010):

- Gender. Based upon the research evidence that gender is an important factor that influences language use and variation (Lastra 1992; Wardhaugh 2010), the study involved both men and women.

³ For Wardhaugh (2010), a *linguistic variable* refers to “a linguistic feature which has identifiable variants” (p. 145).

- Educational level. The male and female participants were grouped according to their completed educational level: primary school, high school, and university studies (see Wardhaugh 2010, for a detailed discussion regarding categories for speakers' educational levels).
- Style shifting. Speech style is considered to be a social feature of language use, and involves formal and informal uses. In formal use, we pay more careful attention to how we are speaking, whereas in informal use we pay less attention (Yule 2010). A change from one to the other by a speaker is called *style-shifting*. In this study, we used three methods to examine style-shifting: a wordlist (formal style), a gap-filling technique (semi-formal style) and a conversation (casual style). In the following section, we provide further details regarding these three methods.

The study was conducted in the city of Toluca, Mexico. Due to the fact that this city has seen a rapid industrial development, it has recently attracted people from other regions across the Mexican territory, and thus, linguistic variety. Therefore, it was necessary that the participants were originally from this city. The participants' age ranged from 35 to 45 years old. The rationale behind this decision is that language use and features are 'stabilised' in adulthood (D'Aquino 2008). The following table summarises the information of the participants:

Table 1. Participants' information summary

| | MEN | WOMEN |
|----------------|-------------------|-------|
| | (35—45 years old) | |
| PRIMARY SCHOOL | 4 | 4 |
| HIGH SCHOOL | 4 | 4 |
| UNIVERSITY | 4 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 12 | 12 |

As can be seen from Table 1, 24 participants were part of the study; 12 males and 12 females, four from each educational level. This representative number is in line with Wardhaugh's (2010) argument that it is possible to use a small sample from a large city or area and yet "get good results" (p. 159). The 24 participants were randomly selected in the street, asked some preliminary questions to see if they met the above criteria, and invited to participate in the study. Their consent was provided in a consent form. They were also informed of their right to be protected from identification, and withdraw their participation in the study at any time.

3.1 Interviews

The interviews were conducted by one researcher in a private office at the Faculty of Languages of the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. These oral interactions involved three style categories suggested by Wardhaugh (2010):

1. Wordlist (formal style). In the first part of the interviews, the participants were asked to read aloud a list of words ending in /d/ (please refer to Appendix A). This part of the interview followed the claim that reading wordlists allow speakers to place greater attention and consciousness to speech, and thus adhere to more standard linguistic forms (Labov, 2003).
2. Gap-filling technique (semi-formal style). The second part of the interviews required the participants to fill gaps with words ending in /d/ (see sentences in Appendix B). The researcher read some sentences and the participants were encouraged to complete the sentences orally with the missing words. The sentences were strategically structured so as to increase the chances of speakers uttering words ending in /d/.
3. Conversation (casual style). The final part of the interviews involved a casual conversation between the researcher and each participant. During these conversations, questions were strategically structured so that the participants utter words ending in /d/ (see questions in Appendix C). Labov (2003) argues that the fact that researchers ask questions and receive answers, informants will tend to be careful with their speech. Therefore, it was important to establish a good and relaxed rapport between the researcher and participants so that they focus on the content of their message, not the form of their speech.

The rationale behind the combination of the above three methods was that their characteristics allow comparisons in terms of the participants' speech styles and thus shifts accordingly. Specifically, the wordlists were expected to allow the participants to raise their self-consciousness

and levels of formality, resulting in a more carefully constructed speech in line with a formal style (see Labov 1972, 2003). In the case of the gap-filling technique, we expected that this technique would promote a semi-formal style because it involved some kind of interaction with the interviewer, that is, by listening to the interviewer's incomplete sentences and then completing the missing word. The conversation was expected to promote a casual speech because of the kind of questions used during this stage of the interview (see Appendix C). Due to its conversational characteristics and questions used, the casual conversation was expected to enable the participants to be focused on their messages, encouraging them to 1) direct their attention to the ongoing communication, 2) construct a less careful speech, and thus 3) omit a higher number of phonemes /d/ at the end of words (Labov 2003). Each interview took no more than 20 minutes in order not to eat into the participants' time, and were recorded for analysis purposes.

3.2 Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews consisted of identifying the instances of elision of the phoneme /d/ and their behaviour in relation to the sociolinguistic variables: gender, education level and speech style. Identifying the instances of the elision of the phoneme /d/ mostly relied on the researchers' perceptions and intuition. The objectivity of this method was firstly increased by having corroborated the recorded data a second time. Secondly, the researchers' immersion in the region avoided risks of misinterpreting instances of elided phonemes when they were actually

pronounced or vice versa (see Chambers 2003). For the quantitative analysis, the results are presented in tables and figures showing simple occurrences and percentages. The percentages were obtained by counting the total amount of elision of phonemes /d/ found in each style category, and dividing the result by the total number of words ending in phoneme /d/, present or elided. The argument behind the decision of using simple occurrences and percentages is that explorations of language variation are claimed not to require complex statistics since the nature of these explorations do not involve effects which may have been caused by chance (Labov 1966). As stated previously, a full analysis and discussion of the entire social and linguistic variables that shape the behaviour of the elision of the phoneme /d/ lie beyond the scope of this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings into the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp. The discussions revolve around the two research questions (i.e., what is the correlation, if any, between sociolinguistic variables such as gender, education level and style shifting, and the elided variant of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the Spanish language spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico? And what patterns of elision of the phoneme /d/ can be found in the Spanish spoken by the (male and female) participant speakers in the city of Toluca?), and begin by exploring the total incidence of elision of the phoneme by men and women across the

three educational levels. The discussion then centres on the behaviour of the elision of the phoneme in relation to style, gender, and educational level. Overall, the results summarised in Table 2 indicate that there was a steep increase of elided phonemes /d/ by men and women with primary school studies.

Table 2. Elision of the phoneme /d/ by gender and educational level

| | MEN | WOMEN |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| PRIMARY SCHOOL | 42.2% (64) | 23.6% (30) |
| HIGH SCHOOL | 3.5% (6) | 2.7% (9) |
| UNIVERSITY | 4.1% (6) | 0% (0) |

It is also apparent from the data that men tended to elide more frequently the phoneme /d/ than women (for example, 42.2% of elided phonemes /d/ by men compared to 23.6% by women with primary school studies). It is interesting that women with university studies did not elide any phoneme /d/. This evidence corroborates the empirical idea that gender is an important factor that conditions language use (see, for example, Coupland & Jaworski 1997; Lastra 1992; Romaine 2000; Wardhaugh 2010), in this case, the presence or elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp. Besides the gender characteristics of the participants, it can also be seen from Table 2 that the elision phenomenon moves towards lower educational levels with a great frequency in the participants, both men and women, with an educational level of primary school.

So far, we have seen that the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in MexSp is a phenomenon which behaves in relation to the gender and educational background of the participants. With the aim of closely observing its behavioural patterns and provide more evidence of its multifactorial nature, the following figures illustrate the elision of the phoneme⁴ in relation to educational levels, gender and style shifting, involving formal, semiformal and casual styles:

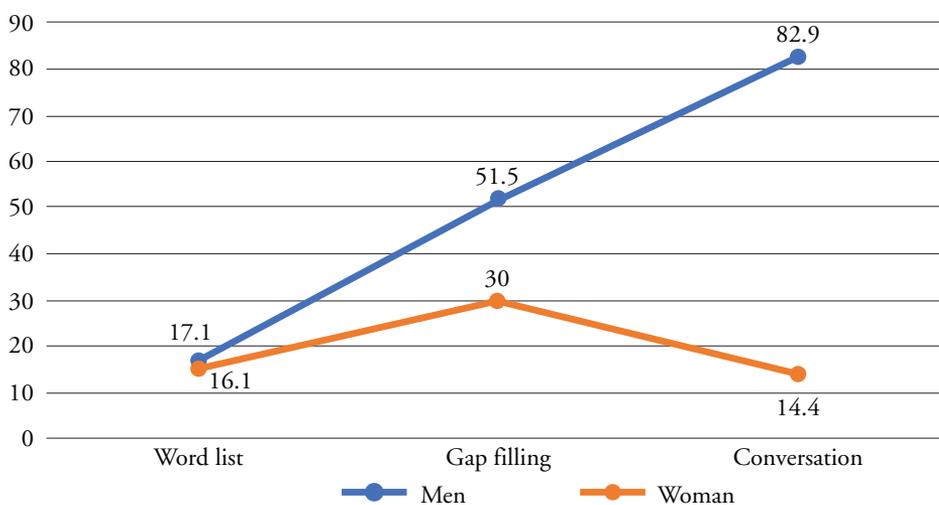


Figure 2. Elision of phoneme /d/ by men and women with primary school studies

As we might expect, Figure 2 shows that it was the male participants with primary school education who tended to elide more the phoneme

⁴ The figures show the total percentages of elision of the phoneme /d/ by gender, education level, and style.

/d/ than the female participants. This evidence links back to previous arguments that women adhere less to linguistic variants than men (Coupland & Jaworski 1997; Lastra 1992; Romaine 2000; Wardhaugh 2010). The correlation between elision of the phoneme /d/ and style shifting is interesting because, as shown in Figure 2, there was a trend of greater incidence of elision towards the casual style (i.e., the conversation) than the formal style (i.e., wordlists). These results thus suggest that the elision of the phoneme /d/ is conditioned not only by the gender and educational levels of speakers, but also by the style which appears to encourage them to adjust their language use according to the context in which they perceive themselves. A similar pattern can be found in the following figure which shows the pattern of the elision of the phoneme by men and women with high school studies:

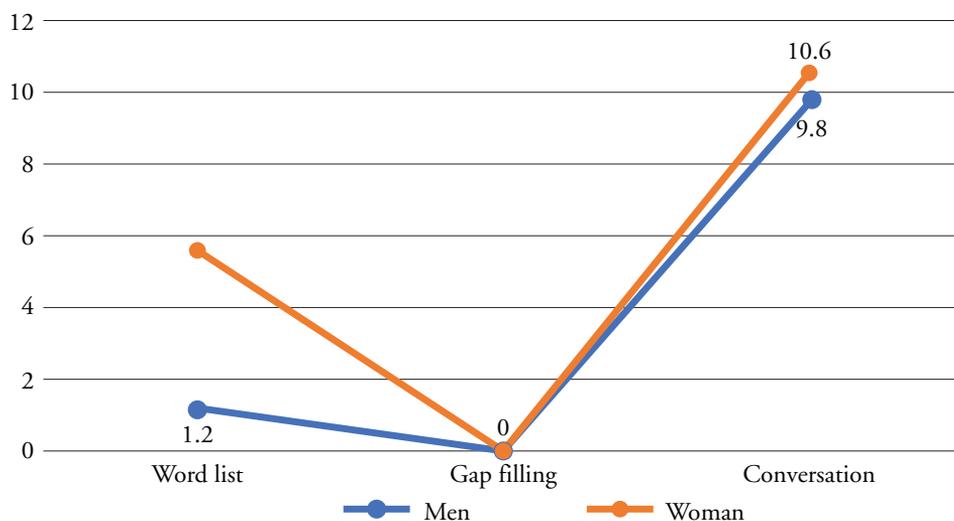


Figure 3. Elision of phoneme /d/ by men and women with high school studies

In contrast to men and women with primary school studies, Figure 3 shows that women with high school studies elided more the phoneme /d/ than men. However, as shown in Table 3, we would like to point out that the instances of elided phonemes by both men and women were considerably low.

Table 3. Elision of phoneme /d/ by men and women with high school studies

| STYLE | MEN | WOMEN |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|
| WORDLIST | 1.2% (1) | 5.6% (4) |
| GAP FILLING TECHNIQUE | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| CONVERSATION | 9.8% (5) | 10.6% (5) |
| TOTAL | 3.5% (6) | 2.7% (9) |

In general, it is apparent from Figure 3 and Table 3 that the omission of phonemes /d/ in less formal styles are part of phonological processes that tend to vary. In comparing the incidence of elision of the phoneme /d/ by men and women with primary and high school studies, the results show that men and women with primary school studies tended to elide more the phoneme /d/ than men and women with high school studies. In contrast to the previous patterns of elision discussed above, the following figure shows distinct patterns of elision between men and women with university education:

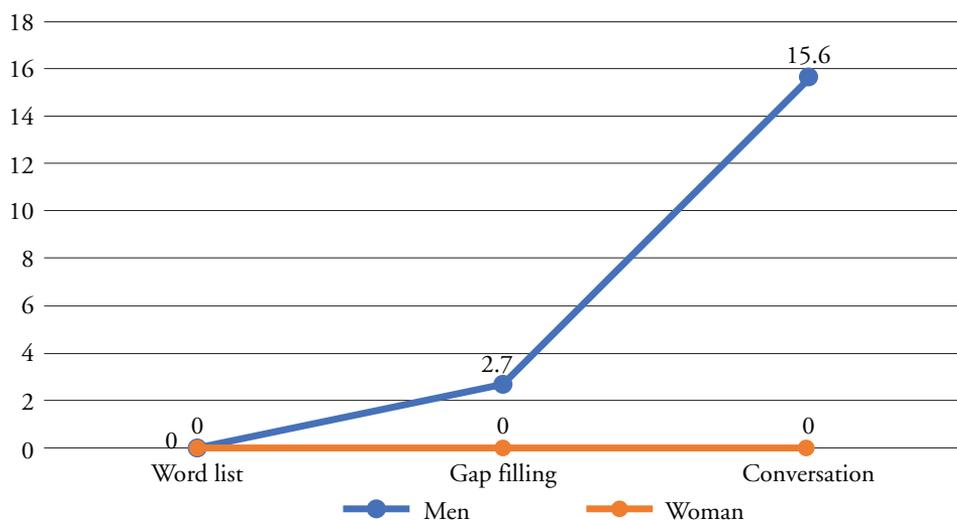


Figure 4. Elision of phoneme /d/ by men and women with university studies

As illustrated in Figure 4, it is again men with university studies who tended to elide more the phoneme /d/ than women. Interestingly, women who reported to have university studies did not elide any phoneme /d/ in any style. Higher educational levels thus seem to enable women to be more conscious of their language use and thus adhere to standard linguistic features and structures. In contrast, the behaviour of the elision of the phoneme /d/ by men with university education follows the same patterns, as men with primary and high school studies. That is, the elision of the phoneme tended to occur more in males with low educational levels and in casual styles.

In sum and in addressing the research question: What is the correlation, if any, between sociolinguistic variables such as gender, education

level and style shifting, and the elided variant of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the Spanish language spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico? The above findings indicate that the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position correlated significantly with the sociolinguistic variables studied. This evidence contradicts Quilis' (1999) argument that the elision of the /d/ in postvocalic position is determined by regional factors. Rather, the above evidence suggests that the elision of the phoneme is dependent on a number of sociolinguistic dimensions, involving not only speakers' region, but also their gender, education, and speech style.

In addressing: What patterns of elision of the phoneme /d/ can be found in the Spanish spoken by the (male and female) participant speakers in the city of Toluca? The findings firstly showed that the phoneme /d/ tended to be elided by the participants whose educational levels were low. This evidence suggests that the educational levels of speakers significantly correlate with the degree of speech consciousness and language use. Secondly, the phoneme /d/ tended to be elided by the male rather than female participants. These findings support previous research (see Coupland & Jaworski 1997; Lastra 1992; Wardhaugh 2010, to name just a few), which found that women adhere more to standard linguistic forms than men. According to Coupland & Jaworski (1997), this can be explained by the fact that women tend to be more conscious of their speech, and aware of the social implication of adhering to standard forms than men. Thirdly, the phoneme tended to be elided more in casual than in formal styles, as also found by other empirical studies (see, for example, Labov 2003; Romaine 2000) which claim that formal

styles encourage speakers to centre their attention on their speech and how they think it is perceived by interlocutors. As shown by the above patterns, the behaviour of the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of Spanish words was responsive to a number of factors which relate to the speakers' gender, education, and style. Taken together, this evidence suggests that this phenomenon is multidimensional and sensitive to diverse, yet interrelated, social and sociolinguistic variables.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study set out to explore the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position at the end of words in the MexSp spoken in the city of Toluca, Mexico. This involved investigating its behaviour in relation to sociolinguistic variables, including gender, education (i.e., primary school, high school and university levels) and speech styles (i.e., formal, semi-formal and casual).

Overall, the findings indicated that the elision of the phoneme /d/ at the end of words in the Spanish spoken in the city of Toluca is significantly influenced by sociolinguistic variables, involving not only the speakers' region, but also their gender, education, and speech style. The findings firstly showed that the male participants omitted the phoneme /d/ more often than the female participants, corroborating the idea that women tend to adhere more to standard linguistic forms than men. Secondly, the participants' education was also a factor that played a signifi-

cant role in producing the standard or elided properties of the phoneme, suggesting that lower educational levels correlate with greater elision of the phoneme /d/. Thirdly, the variant of the phoneme (i.e., elided form) tended to shift in the direction of the casual style, i.e., the casual conversations, implying that the style determines the degree of speakers' consciousness towards their speech and thus producing the standard or variant properties of the phoneme.

The primary aim of the study was thus fulfilled by having determined the sociolinguistic factors that condition this phenomenon, and explored the extent to which they influence its behaviour. We would like to acknowledge that the elision of the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position may also be conditioned by other factors. Further research is thus needed in order to determine its behaviour with greater accuracy. This future research should investigate the elision of the phoneme in relation to other social, linguistic and cognitive factors, e.g., other regions, social networks, idiolects, and speakers' perceptions.

However, we hope that this small-scale study contributes to the study of language variation in the MexSp, and paves the way for future research into the phoneme /d/ in postvocalic position. In exploring the sociolinguistic variables that condition this variationist phenomenon, the present paper responds to Romaine's (2000) call for studies which replicate explorations of social variation in non-western societies, like the city of Toluca, Mexico.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. WORDLIST

| LISTA DE PALABRAS | ELISIÓN | | |
|-------------------|---------|----|----|
| AMPLITUD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| BREVEDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| CESPED | /d/ | SI | NO |
| MAJESTAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| DISPARIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| ACTITUD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| HERMANDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| AMPLITUD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| NATALIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| APTITUD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| PERSONALIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| COMODIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| GENEROSIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |

| LISTA DE PALABRAS | ELISIÓN | | |
|-------------------|---------|----|----|
| PARED | /d/ | SI | NO |
| GRATITUD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| CALIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| MITAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| UNIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |
| USTED | /d/ | SI | NO |
| DIVERSIDAD | /d/ | SI | NO |

APPENDIX B. GAP FILLING TECHNIQUE

Nombre _____

Edad _____

Ocupación _____

Grado de estudios _____

1. El 24 de diciembre, usted festeja la (On December 24, you celebrate)

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

2. Cuando usted brinda, usted dice a sus familiares (When you make a toast, you say to your relatives) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

3. Si parto una naranja en dos y le doy un pedazo, le estoy dando una (If I cut an orange in two halves and I give you one, I am giving you)

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

4. Cuando hablo con sinceridad y no digo mentiras, estoy hablando con la (When I speak honestly and do not tell lies, I am speaking with) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

5. Si tengo una casa, se dice que es de mi (If I have a house, we can say that it is of) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

6. Cuando uno está enfermo, se dice que uno tiene una (When someone is sick, that person is) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

7. Cuando usted quiere saber cuántos años tiene una persona, usted le pregunta la (When you want to know how old a person is, you ask about his or her) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

8. Cuando uno se quiere dirigir de manera formal a una persona, le tiene que hablar de (When you want to address a person politely, you have to use) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

9. El 14 de febrero se celebra el día del amor y de la (On February 14, we celebrate the day of love and) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

10. Cuando necesita beber agua, usted tiene (When you have to drink water, you are) _____

Elisión del fonema /d/ sí no

APPENDIX C. CONVERSATION

1. Cuénteme ¿cómo celebra usted la navidad?
(Tell me, how do you celebrate Christmas?)

2. ¿Qué significa para usted la amistad?
(What does a friendship mean to you?)

3. ¿Qué hace el día del amor y la amistad?
(What do you do on the day of Love and Friendship, i.e., Valentine's Day)

4. ¿Cómo encuentra usted la felicidad?
(How do you find happiness?)

5. ¿Cómo ve ahora la sexualidad entre los jóvenes?
(How do you perceive the sexuality among young people nowadays?)