

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PHONEMES IN THE COLLECTION OF GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

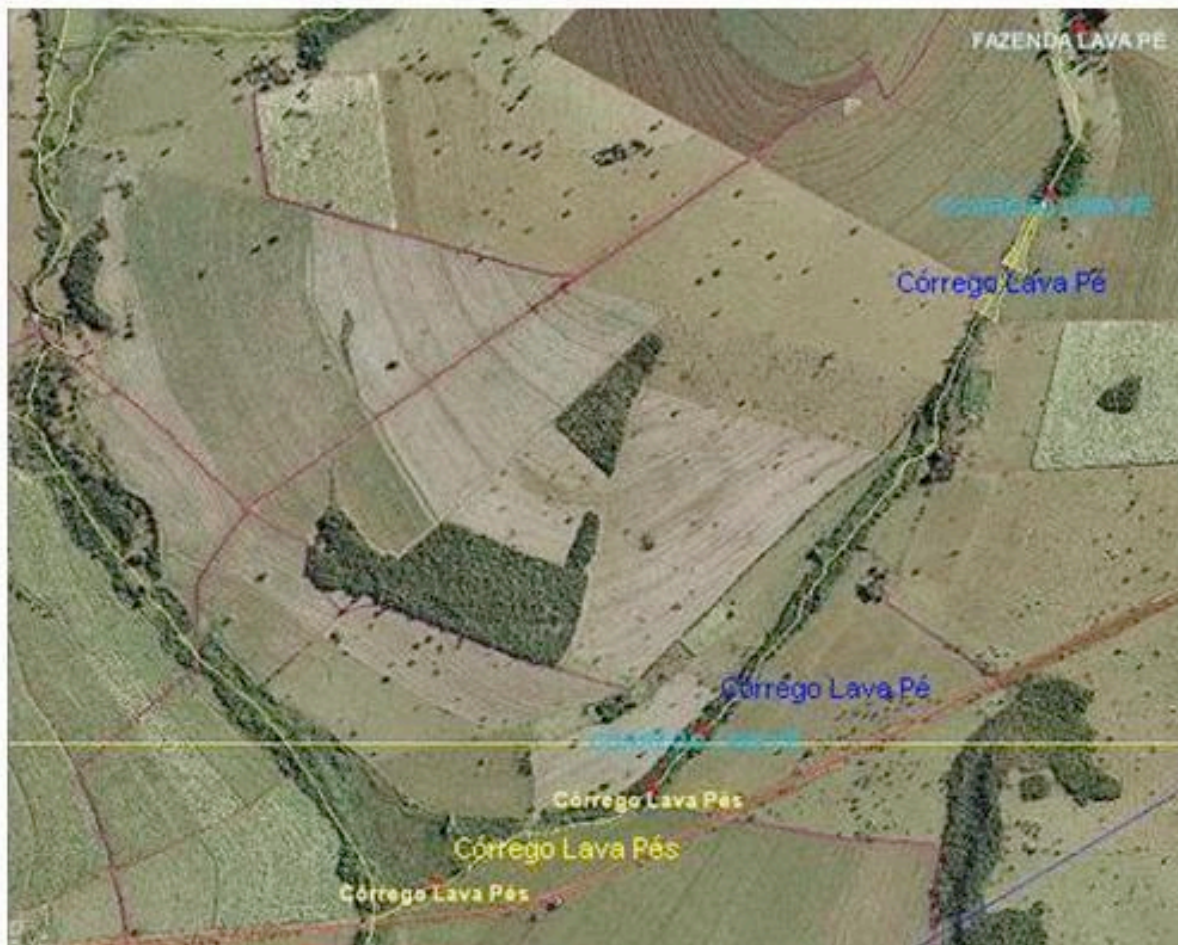
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Maps are composed not only by graphic (geometry) representations of geographic features but also by the names these features receive. The toponyms need special treatment so that they can be written accordingly to the spelling rules of Portuguese and traditions of the collective use. The Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE follows these basic principles, according to the recommendations of the United Nations.

The present work focuses on a linguistic aspect of geographic names, the phonetics and on the importance of the phonetic identification in the collection of toponymy. It aims at highlighting the need for special attention and training of the surveyors in the collection of the names of features and localities, avoiding possible doubts and/or the adoption of wrong names in the edition of the cartographic documents in the office.

Due to phonetic similarities in a significant number of names, these are often surveyed in the field with different spellings which actually change their meanings, but which are consistent with the Portuguese spelling rules. This often causes doubts on which of the forms is correct. This is the case of *Córrego Lava-pé* or *Córrego Lava-pés*. These names were collected in the field by different surveyors for the same feature, represented in different sheets of chart (fig.1). As the two forms have different meanings, respectively a bush and a religious ceremony, and are spelled correctly, deeper research regarding toponymic motivation (DICK, 1990), peculiar to the mapped area so as to establish which name would be in the map was needed. This impacted the cartographic production.



Quadrículas referentes às Folhas SE-22-Z-D-VI-4 / SF-22-X-B-III-2

Figure 1

It is worth noticing that geographic features known by only one name by the informers are being dealt with here. However, due to phonetic similarities another form is collected, whose spelling and meaning differ from the ones of the original name. What is being described is actually a mistake in the survey of names, and not the collection of a variant name, as often happens in Brazil with watercourses, as is the case of *Córrego da Roça* ou *Boqueirão*, when we're dealing with two strikingly different words, both graphically and semantically, accepted as denominations for one single feature.

The lack of standardization of geographic names in cartographic documents or other which are used to subsidize public policies, or for reference on how to get to a place, especially an area demanding emergency actions, may hamper this kind of action and even bring harmful consequences to society.

In Brazil, IBGE has long been working towards the standardization of geographic names, taking actions such as the participation in the international efforts for toponymic standardization, the implementation of the Brazilian Geographic Names Database and the implementation of courses on the collection and standardization of geographic names.

In these courses, the phonetic issues are highlighted, in order to prepare surveyors of geographic names and office personnel to deal with these aspects of the work of standardization, when often one phoneme is the distinctive trait between two words with different meanings. That is, only one phoneme may be the cause of the misidentification of a feature.

As examples, we mention the cities *Paranaíba*, in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul and *Parnaíba*, in the State of Piauí (Fig.2). Only one "a" following the "r" is the difference in spelling and pronunciation between them. The disregard of this subtle difference may have consequences in the accuracy of the mapping, and lead to the dispatch of help to the wrong city in case one of them is struck by a catastrophe, for example.

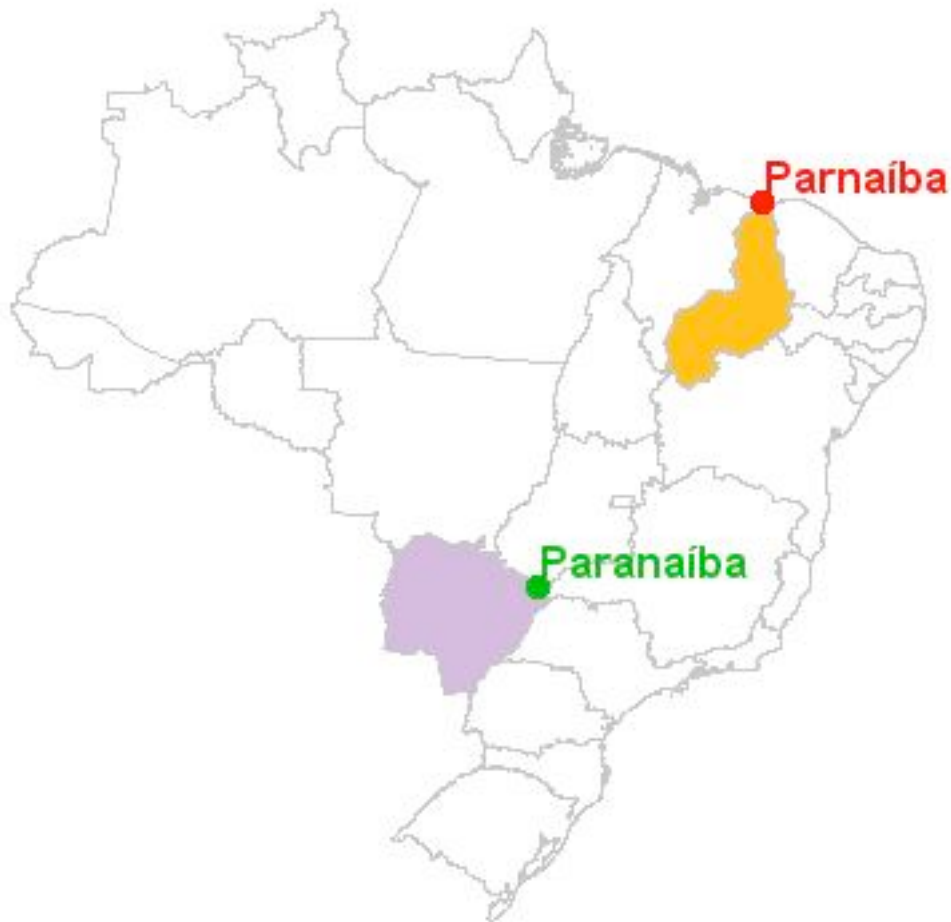


Figure 2

Below are some examples of letters that constitute the sole distinction between names of features

Rio da <u>B</u> ata / Rio da <u>P</u> ata
Córrego Craca / Córrego Crac <u>r</u> a
Córrego Lava- <u>p</u> é / Córrego Lava- <u>p</u> és
Redenção da <u>G</u> urguéia / Redenção <u>d</u> o Gurguéia
Castel <u>h</u> ana / Castel <u>i</u> ana

A strategy which may help avoid this problem is to ask the informant to repeat and even spell the names which may present difficulty of understanding regarding the pronunciation. Also, it is advisable to collect information from at least three informers.

In the future it is intended to provide office personnel and surveyors with information on speech impediments and the dynamics of the articulation of sounds, so as to improve their skills in the identification of the different pronunciations of the Portuguese language across the country. The quality in the task of standardization of geographic names is the key for the achievement of high standards in statistical and cartographic information. The attention given to the treatment of toponyms surveyed in the field contributes to the quality of the information made available to the Brazilian society in product form.

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