

A trend study revisited: remodeling the age variable in number concord in Brazilian Portuguese

Anthony J. Naro (*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*) and Maria Marta Pereira Schierre (*Universidade de Brasília*)

We analyze real-time language change in Brazilian Portuguese using a trend study based on a random sample of 64 speakers recorded in 1980's in Rio de Janeiro and another random sample of 32 speakers recorded in 1999/2000. We study changes in variable subject/verb (S/VC) and noun phrase (NPC) concord. In this period, overall use of marked forms for S/VC increased from 73% (3399/4660) to 83% (1708/2059); NPC increased from 54% (4375/8096) to 81% (3093/3828). Previous work shows that structural dimensions, such as salience, remain mostly stable over time. The same is true of certain social variables, such as gender and education, since relative order of effect is preserved, although polarization can vary considerably.

Age, however, is very different. As Naro and Scherre (2003) reported at NWAV 31, comparison of same age groups in the community at two points in time does not yield much insight. We reexamine the data with a view toward determining how groups of speakers evolve over time. Comparison of like age groups is not conducive to apprehending patterns of evolution within the community because the strata of the universe sampled are not composed of the same people. For example, since the length of time separating samples is 18 years, the pool of speakers from which the sample of 7-20 year old speakers was drawn in 1980's falls in the 25-38 range in the second sample. Results for age, rearranged so as to be relevant to evolution, are:

	1980		2000	
NPC				
			07-17	787/ 875=90% .73
7-20	1276/2549=50% .42		25-38	782/1045=77% .31
21-36	915/1638=56% .59		39-54	694/ 767=91% .66
>36	2184/3909=56% .49		>54	467/ 656=71% .46
S/VC	1980		2000	
			07-17	404/465=87% .63
7-20	1158/1674=69% .42		25-38	449/583=77% .35
21-36	569/ 816=70% .47		39-54	397/443=90% .55
>36	1672/2170=77% .57	>54	240/305=79% .50	
			18-24	363/ 485=75% .49
			18-24	218/263=83% .59

The youngest age groups in the later sample have no corresponding data for the earlier sample because these speakers had not been born yet, or were too young to sample. Examining the three age cohorts that traversed both points of time, we see that even though each cohort has increased its frequency, the original pattern of usage, in terms of relative weights, is largely preserved for each phenomenon: age-grading for NPC and decrease in concord for S/VC, both involving lowest usage for the youngest group in 80. Speakers of all ages are on the move, but constrained by social patterns in which they are situated. The pattern is broken only by those who were not in it, the unborn in the 80's, who reverse direction dramatically toward increased usage of concord.

Using age cohorts instead of same age groups we can see shifts within the speech community more clearly, confirming both the model of flows and counter flows proposed by Naro & Scherre since 1990, at NWAV19, and the spread of acquisition of concord from the individual to the urban community foreseen as a possible future development by Naro 1981.