

*TER* AND *Haver* IN THE HISTORY OF PORTUGUESE:  
THE APPEARANCE OF *TER* IN EXISTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Languages differ as to the quantity and combinability of items that manifest possessive, stative, and existential relations. European Portuguese, for example, has recourse to distinct forms for each meaning — *haver* for existentials, *ter* for possessives, *ser* for permanent statives and *estar* for transitory statives, while English, in more economical fashion, uses only two forms — *be* for existentials and statives and *have* for possessives. Study of these sentential types in Old Portuguese reveals that before the 13th century the situation was identical to that of English: there was one unique verb *seer* for existence, transitory or permanent, and a different verb *aver* for possessives.

This paper discusses the appearance of *ter* in Brazilian Portuguese in existential environments, based on data from the 16th century up to the present time, comprising a total of about 1500 tokens of *ter/haver*. Contrary to European Portuguese, in which *haver* is the unmarked existential verb, *ter* predominates in existential environments in Brazilian Portuguese. On the basis of variationist sociolinguistics and generativist diachronic theory, we show, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that the environments that favored use of *ter* were those in which the speaker had no indication of sentential type: (i) presence of a [+material] argument preposed to the verb (0.89 in 17th century texts); (ii) third person singular present indicative, the morphologically unmarked form (0.81 in 17th century texts), and (iii) an adjacent locative expression, without a contiguous subject, producing a certain degree of ambiguity. For example, sentences with a locative expression, such as *Ali tem muitas pessoas* ‘there are many people in that place’ or ‘that place has many people’ could, and still can, have either an existential or a possessive interpretation, depending on whether *ali* ‘there’ or ‘that place’ is analyzed as an adjunct or the subject of the verb. Assuming that the speaker, under certain conditions, opts for the less complex interpretation, we show that in ambiguous environments it was more economical to interpret the verb as existential than as possessive. This was the general process that opened the way for the inclusion of the verb among the existentials. In contemporary Brazilian Portuguese, we also argue the gradual elimination of *haver* is also connected to the fact that Brazilian Portuguese is beginning to require explicit filling of subject position, in accord with the results of recent research. Data from the spoken language confirm that the use of “apparently expletive” forms in subject position of existential verbs is becoming increasingly frequent. An example is *Você tem praias belíssimas no Rio de Janeiro* ‘You have very beautiful beaches in Rio de Janeiro’. The loss of *haver* is, therefore, being implemented because this verb does not possess a site for the insertion of a phonetic subject, differently from *ter*, which, as a possessive verb, does have the necessary slot.