

## **Ter + past participle or Estar + gerund? Aspect and Syntactic Variation in Brazilian Portuguese**

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The verbal aspect in Brazilian Portuguese (BP) has been described by a number of authors. Wachowicz 2003, based on Verkuyl 1993 and 1999, has accounted for the iterative and progressive interpretations of *estar* (be) + gerund. Ilari 2000 shows why *ter* (have) + participle is recognized as *the* iterative periphrasis in that language, even though it can possibly express progressive, durative meanings. Castilho 2000 proposes an aspectual typology for the aspect and shows how periphrastic constructions are productive in BP aspectual composition. None of those authors have, however, approached the use of those periphrases from a variationist, quantitative perspective.

In contemporary BP, *estar* + gerund and *ter* + participle actually appear in the same context when the aspectual interpretation is iterative, and are commonly found in the data provided by a same speaker. That is a synchronic evidence of their variable use, as shown below:

- (1) *Eu estou estudando muito ultimamente.*  
I am studying much lately  
"I have been studying a lot lately" (iterative)
  
- (2) *Eu tenho estudado muito ultimamente.*  
I have studied much lately  
"I have been studying a lot lately" (iterative)

Diachronic data show that their uses changed. In the 16th century, neither of the periphrases were used to express iterative - *estar* + gerund could only express durative, progressive meanings, whereas *ter* + participle would convey a resultative, punctual meaning, as in (3) and (4) respectively. In the 17th and 18th centuries, some tokens of *ter* + participle are found to be ambiguous, the iterative and resultative being possible. In the 19th, *ter* + participle wouldn't express resultative but iterative anymore, which is an evidence that it is the older form to express iterative.

- (3) *Agora não posso falar com você, pois estou escrevendo meu trabalho.*  
now not can to-speak with you for am writing my work  
"I can't talk to you now because I am writing my paper"
  
- (4) *Eu já tenho escrito o trabalho.*  
I already have written the work.  
"I have already written the paper"

In this paper, I present a quantitative analysis of synchronic BP. The data on which this study is based are taken from natural language corpora of BP collected in two Brazilian cities (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro). Defining the variable context according to iterative aspect, I examine the

social and linguistic factors conditioning the choice of the two constructions. Multivariate analysis reveals that speaker age and level of education are the most significant extralinguistic factors, and demonstrate that *estar + gerund* has become the more frequent construction among younger speakers. The most significant linguistic factors are the number of the subject and the presence of quantifying adverbials in the sentence. The semantic class of the main verb (Vendler 1967) does not play a significant role in the choice of forms.

These results show that the older *ter + participle* construction is becoming more and more restricted, both socially and linguistically. More generally, this study demonstrates the possibility of incorporating syntactic and semantic analysis into multivariate sociolinguistic analysis.

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