

A Trend Study of Number Agreement in Brazilian Portuguese: Social Dimensions

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We continue our study of shifts in variable concord phenomena in Brazilian Portuguese over a 16-19 year interval, presenting a comparative analysis of effect of social dimensions on subject/verb concord (SV) and noun phrase (NP) concord. For this purpose, we use a random sample of 64 speakers recorded in the 1980's and a corresponding Trend sample of 32 further speakers recorded in 1999/2000.

Comparing the samples, we see overall increase for the community as a whole from 73% in the 80's to 84% at the turn of the century in use of subject/verb concord and from 54% to 81% in noun phrase concord, in accord with earlier speculation (Naro 1981) that the community might undergo a reversal in overall direction of change from less to more use of marking. The most striking increases occurred among younger speakers: in the 7-14 year old group, SV increases from 69% to 83% (0.42 to 0.61 in terms of relative weights), while NP increases from 44% to 91% (0.38 to 0.82), as shown below:

Age	frequency	weight	frequency	weight
	SV-1980s		SV-2000	
7-14	590/ 860=69%	0.42	237/285=83%	0.61
15-25	863/1206=72%	0.49	378/448=84%	0.58
26-49	1036/1293=80%	0.56	486/620=78%	0.35
> 49	897/1276=70%	0.49	529/596=89%	0.56
	NP-1980s		NP-2000	
7-14	566/1285=44%	0.38	440/482=91%	0.82
15-25	1061/1913=55%	0.53	799/1078=74%	0.39
26-49	1472/2387=62%	0.59	1001/1224=82%	0.50
> 49	1276/2514=51%	0.43	977/1193=82%	0.49

In the early 80's, the 26-49 year old group holds a narrow lead; at the turn of the century the youngest and the oldest age groups take this position, with a middle group showing less agreement. Overall, there is a shift from the earlier age-grading like pattern to one of acquisition. In this latter stage, younger groups surpass the oldest group, reversing previous trends toward less use of concord.

Greater increases occurred for speakers with more years of schooling, while lower levels of education maintain, or lessen, their relative effect:

Years of schooling	frequency	weight	frequency	weight
	SV-1980s		SV-2000	
1-4	1127/1786=63%	0,41	486/650=75%	0,32
5-8	1370/1760=78%	0,53	732/857=85%	0,57
9-11	889/1089=82%	0,53	413/443=93%	0,78
	NP-1980s		NP-2000	
1-4	1144/2930=63%	0,37	843/1384=61%	0,24
5-8	1675/3028=55%	0,46	1469/1652=89%	0,68
9-11	1556/2141=73%	0,56	905/941=96%	0,88

The relative weights show dramatic increases in polarization, with large increases for the 9-11 year level.

Both genders increase their use of concord. However, males, previously far behind females in use of prestige forms, reduce the gap or even overtake the former leaders, especially for NP concord. The effect of contact with mass media remains more or less stable over the two samples, but speakers without any media contact can no longer be found.

Our results reveal the reversal of the dominant direction of flow of concord in the community, from stability or loss to acquisition, in the space of less than twenty years, or one generation. The leading thrust in this trend toward more prestigious forms is carried by two distinct groups: the youngest speakers in our sample and those with the highest level of education. Thus, our study captures the focal points of ongoing change.

#### References

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