

Real, or apparent, or both? Three types of evidence for a grammaticalization change in progress in Brazilian Portuguese.

One of the basic techniques for the study of linguistic change in progress is the use of apparent time data. This approach uses the age distribution of a variable in a synchronic sample as a window on the past, assuming that older speakers provide evidence about how the language was used at an earlier time. This is a powerful tool for the study of change, but the method needs confirmation, wherever possible, by real-time evidence, drawn from different points in time. This paper compares apparent time evidence (collected in the 1990s) of an ongoing change in Brazilian Portuguese (the grammaticalization of the NP *a gente* 'the people' as a new pronoun meaning 'we' replacing earlier *nós*) with real time evidence drawn from a corpus of recorded materials collected 20 years earlier. The real time data are of two forms: a panel study which tracks one set of 15 individuals across the 20 year period, and a trend study, comparing matched individuals in the two time periods.

The apparent time data show a significant age-grading in the population examined in the 1990s, such that younger speakers use *a gente* at a significantly higher rate than older speakers (78% versus 56%; factor weights: .66 and .42). The results of the real time study strongly confirm the conclusion of ongoing change. The rates of use in the real time data (trend study) collected in the 1970s are significantly lower than the usage in the 1990s (respectively 56% and 72%; weights: .31 and .67), and other social parameters (as age and gender) are also suggestive of change in progress.

A crucial assumption of the apparent time method is that individuals remain relatively stable in their usage during their adult life. This assumption is partly supported in the present data, in that the autocorrelations of the panel study speakers for the two different points in time are quite high ($r=.63$). However, doing separate analyses of the data according to generic versus specific reference of the pronoun, there is a significant increase in usage for specific reference, while speakers are stable in their usage with generic reference. This suggests that speakers are accompanying to some degree the change going on around them.

The results from the trend study support the distinct treatment of specific and generic reference tokens: comparing separate analyses of the two types, there is a larger difference in input values in the 70s as compared to the 90s (specific reference lags generic reference by .29 in the 70s, but by only .16 in the 90s.) This finding suggests the hypothesis that there may be two parallel semantic changes going on, the generic reference change being more advanced than the specific reference change. This hypothesis is consistent with the concept of grammaticalization as a set of inter-related changes. This kind of result is not obtainable by apparent time studies alone, illustrating the importance of the convergent use of real and apparent time data, wherever possible.

Key words: real time, apparent time, grammaticalization