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In this paper we compare use of variable third-person plural subject/verb agreement rules in two random samples of the Rio de Janeiro speech community from approximately 1980 and 2000. One fact is immediately obvious: usage of agreeing forms is higher in the later sample, and this is in accord with our intuitions as linguists and teachers that Brazilian Portuguese has become more standardized, in the grammatical sense, in recent years. The overall rates of verb/subject agreement in these two samples of the same community at successive points in time are:

    1980   3424/4713=73%
    2000   1724/2079=83%

The increase amounts to ten percentage points in twenty years.

Naro & Scherre 2002; 2003 show that Rio speech was undergoing a shift in usage at the points in time represented by our two samples: an older pattern of loss of agreement was being replaced by a newer pattern of standardization consisting of a recuperation in the frequency of use of agreeing forms led by young speakers as well as by speakers with more years of schooling. At that time, the role of gender did not seem unusual: female speakers led males in both samples.

We suggest that the key to understanding the role of gender in the shift is to study subgroups of the population. Specifically, separating levels of education, we find (in terms of relative weights generated by VARBRUL in eight separate runs):

	1980			
	Community as a whole	1-4 yrs of schooling	5-8 yrs of schooling	9-11 yrs of schooling
Male	.43	.44	.44	.34
Female	.56	.55	.57	.57
	2000			
	Community as a whole	1-4 yrs of schooling	5-8 yrs of schooling	9-11 yrs of schooling
Male	.39	.38	(.43)	(.40)
Female	.58	.55	(.57)	(.58)

The results for the community as a whole suggest that the genders have grown further apart with respect to concord since their respective relative weights are slightly more polarized in the later sample. But notice that in 1980 gender was significant in all of

the education groups, whereas in 2000 it remains significant only in the group with least schooling. Thus, in this instance, the leading group (more school) does not show statistical significance for gender, while the trailing group (less school) does.

Studying male and female speakers separately, we find that, for females, level of education was not significant in 1980, but jumped to first variable selected in 2000. Contact with media, on the other hand, was significant for females in 1980, providing an alternative to school for acquisition of prestige forms. In 2000, media is no longer significant for female speakers. For males, the 1980 effects are the exact opposite of females: media is not significant, while education is significant. In 2000, both of these social variables are significant for males. The moral of the story seems to be that women are joining men in terms of extracting linguistic gains from the school system, corresponding to their ascension in the work place, politics, and other areas formerly more difficult for them to conquer.

References
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