

Nominal agreement in the speech of students from urban areas of São Tomé

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Questions concerning the loss of inflectional morphology and rules of agreement are important parameters for defining the status of varieties emerging from the contact between linguistically and culturally distinct populations. In this sense, studies about nominal and verbal agreement have served as the basis for the formulation of different interpretations about the emergence and development of varieties of Portuguese, as well as to characterize the Portuguese-based creoles.

Unlike what occurs in relation to the Portuguese of Brazil, there are few studies carried under variational sociolinguistic perspective that focus the nominal agreement in African countries where Portuguese is the official language. In general, studies have been focusing on the Portuguese-based Creole and on cases classified as restructured Portuguese that are observed in rural areas. Only recently was awarded the speech of individuals who have Portuguese as L1 and live in urban areas, as found in Brandão (2011a, 2011b), who dealt with this variable in the capital of Sao Tome and Principe, national state which has marked multilingualism, since there coexist three native Creole – the Forro (or Santomé) and the Angolar, in Sao Tome, the Lung'ie on the island of Principe, as well as the Creole of Cape Verde, the Portuguese of Tongas and remnants of the Bantu group of languages, the last of which used by a smaller number of inhabitants.

Brandão (2011a) argues that, among educated speakers, the agreement rule is rated semicategorical, approaching what is seen in European Portuguese, while among those with high school and / or fundamental education, it has variable character, conditioned by linguistic and social factors. Based on those results, Brandão (2011b) focuses on the nominal agreement only between individuals of primary and secondary level of education, taking into account 22 informants distributed by sex, three age groups and two levels of instruction and monitoring, in addition to these extralinguistic variables and eight structural variables, the greater or lesser frequency of use by an individual of the creoles spoken in the region.

In the current study, performed according to the theoretical and methodological assumptions of variational sociolinguistics, we take up the question of non-implementation of number agreement mark in Noun Phrase (NP) in the speech of Sao Tome, this time also considering individuals from 10 to 18 years in various stages of schooling, with selected sample based on inquiries conducted by Tjerk Hagemeijer on the island of Sao Tome in 2009. It has been designed to test, in speaking of these individuals, the role of variables that were salient for not applying the number mark in the noun phrase (SN) according to Brandao (2011b). Among such variables, are not only those related to the position of constituents in the Noun Phrase (NP) and to phonic and semantic features of the Nucleus, but especially those of extralinguistic nature. It starts with the hypothesis that non-implementation of the nominal plural mark in the speech of students of Sao Tome will depend, among other factors, on the domain or partial knowledge of another language(s) spoken in the region, more interaction with speakers of these languages and on the lower level of education.

Based on the results of this analysis and on socio-historical-cultural arguments, (i) we seek to show that in the urban variety of Sao Tome, which appears to be similar to other non-European varieties of Portuguese with regard to ways to mark plurality in NP, level of education is a variable of primary importance to the distribution of polarized variant patterns of agreement, and (ii) we discuss the claim of Hagemeijer (2009: 19-20) that, given the linguistic situation of Sao Tome and Principe, which is probably the only country in the Portuguese-speaking Africa

where the majority of the population now has Portuguese as first language, there would be conditions for the emergence of a new variety.

References

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