

Variations in the Nominal Agreement in the Language Spoken in the Capital of Alagoas

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Abstract:

Based on the theoretical-methodological assumptions of variationist sociolinguistics, the correlation between the usage of nominal agreement in Maceio and the linguistics of linear position, grammatical word class and the relation of grammatical word class with the nucleus is analyzed and the extralinguistic variables level of education, age range and gender. For this, speech samples from 48 citizens of Maceio, stratified by the criteria of gender, level of education (low, basic, secondary and higher education), age range (from 16 to 35, 36 to 55 and from 56 to 80 years-old) were analyzed. It was verified by this survey that the first position, articles, demonstrative and possessive prepositions favor the nominal agreement, as well as that female more educated speaker, belonging to the lowest age group are more likely to use the agreement. By comparing there results with those of Pinheiro (2012), Silva (2014) and Brandão (2011), though, it can be observed that both in Brandão (2011) and Silva (2014), the intermediate group stands out in the usage of plural morpheme, while in this survey it is the youngest group that stands out on its usage.

Keywords:

Nominal agreement. Linguistics variation. Maceió.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most discussed topics in the scope of the Portuguese language, especially regarding its Brazilian variety, the nominal agreement, even now raises interest due to the fact that it reflects sociocultural and linguistic implications that characterize the variation in Brazilian Portuguese (BP), that is, the correlation of linguistic variables, such as the linear position of the constituent of the nominal syntagma and also with social variables, such as level of education.

The first variationist sociolinguistic studies about nominal agreement in BP were performed by Braga and Scherre (1976), Braga (1977) and Scherre (1978). These female authors were able to verify that, although the Portuguese language displays mechanisms for inflection of number, gender and person and that the standard taught in scholar institutions prescribes the inflectional adequation of the determinant terms to the determined terms, there is often the erasure of the plural morpheme in some elements of the nominal syntagma, which provides for the agreement of number in the nominal syntagma to behave as synchronously variable and present itself in different ways.

In Maceió (city of the state of Alagoas), Salgado et al. (2006) analyzes the nominal agreement focusing on the number agreement on the predicatives and the passive participles, thus contributing to the broader understanding of this linguistic phenomenon in the capital of Alagoas. As in Salgado et al. (2006), this work intends to contribute to the study of nominal agreement in the language spoken in Maceió, through the analysis of plural morphemes usage in nominal syntagmata having the noun as their core.

In order to build this survey, speech samples from citizens of Maceió were taken for analysis, aiming to verify the correlation of nominal agreement and the extralinguistic variables education level, age group and gender, as well as the linguistic variables linear position, grammatical class and the relation of grammatical word class to the core, which will be further explained throughout the text.

The aim is also to perform a comparison of the results of this survey with those found in other studies carried out in some Brazilian municipalities, in order to observe how nominal agreement is performed in BP, thus contributing to the expansion of knowledge about the phenomenon and in order to continue investigations related to the subject-matter.

NOMINAL AGREEMENT FROM A VARIATIONIST PERSPECTIVE

In variationist sociolinguistic approach, language is conceived as a heterogeneous system, whose variation is an inherent characteristic. When considering nominal agreement, it is observed that it presents itself in different ways: plural marking in all elements, plural marking in some elements and plural marking only in the first element of the nominal syntagma (NS). The usage of one or the other variant is conditioned by groups of linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

The analysis of this type of language dynamism, using synchronous data, took shape with the studies developed by Labov (2008) who, when conceiving linguistic variation as a systematic phenomenon and conditioned to linguistic and extralinguistic factors, postulates that the variation synchronously observed at a particular point in the grammar of a speech community can reflect a process of change taking place in linguistic system, at diachronic level. Thus, we seek to apprehend *real time*, when the diachronic dynamism of the language takes place, in the so-called *apparent time*, that is, in a projection of sort.

Some surveys analyze the linguistic system considering data collected in the same community at two different times, that is, considering real time. This survey, however, focuses on data collected, in 2014, in Maceió, and assumes that the linguistic differences of different generations of speakers at a given time can reflect different stages of the historical development of a linguistic system.

In the study of nominal agreement in BP, the combination of the social variables age group, level of education, social class and gender have been taken into consideration in order to identify whether this linguistic variable is in an ongoing process of change or in a stable variation. Regarding the age group, the ongoing change is considered to be characterized by an steep distribution, with younger speakers presenting a greater usage of innovative forms, while in the stable variation there is a curvilinear pattern, with the intermediate age groups displaying a greater usage of the most prestigious linguistic forms (cf. CHAMBERS; TRUDGILL, 1980, p. 91).

Regarding level of education and social class, it has been stated that a curvilinear pattern, that is, with a greater presentation of innovative forms in groups located at the center of the hierarchy, configures an ongoing change, at the same time that in the stable variation there is a directly proportional relation between social class or level of education and the usage of prestigious variants. (cf. LABOV, 2008, p. 115-135)

As for the gender factor,¹ Labov (2008) states that women display a sensitivity to the prestigious linguistic forms and have a decisive participation in the change

¹ Although gender is understood as a social construction, as signaled by Freitag and Severo (2015), this work addresses the gender factor, due to the methodological aspects used in the collection of data that do not focus on the social nuances that guide the different genders.

phenomena. However, he points out that it cannot be taken, as a general principle, that women always lead the linguistic change. In this regard, Paiva (1992, p. 71) states that:

When it comes to implementing into the language a way of speaking considered prestigious, women tend to lead the process of change. When, on the contrary, it comes to the implementation of a non-prestigious form, women take a conservative attitude and men take the lead in the process of change.

Scherre (1988) points out, however, that the role of the factor of gender is not very clear in distinguishing between the process of change and the stable variation, since both in changes towards the prestigious form and in the stable variation women display more often prestigious forms than the opposite gender (Cf. LABOV, 2008, p. 115-127). Therefore, it is safer, according to the author, to consider that there is a general tendency for females to approach the most prestigious norm and for men to distance themselves from it.

Considering the relevance of addressing these extralinguistic variables for understanding the dynamism of the language, this survey seeks to analyze the correlation between number agreement in nominal syntagma and gender (female and male), age group (from 16 to 35, 36 to 55 and 56 to 80 years-old) and level of education (low, basic, secondary and higher education) of the speaker, observing, also, how system internal variables, such as the linear position of the NS constituent, grammatical class and grammatical class relation to the core are related to the investigated linguistic variants.

The first sociolinguistic researches focused on the study of nominal agreement, such as those carried out by Braga and Scherre (1976), Braga (1977) and Scherre (1978), signal a strong correlation between the linguistic factor linear position and plural mark, when verifying that the first position of the NS favors the usage of the explicit plural mark, while the other positions disfavor it.

When resuming the analysis of nominal agreement in his doctoral thesis, Scherre (1988) proposes that in the study of this variable, in addition to the linear position, the grammatical class of the NS elements should be taken into account. With the analysis of the grammatical class variable, the author finds that articles, demonstratives, undefined and possessive items are more marked with the plural morpheme and present percentages above 90%, while nouns, substantives, personal pronouns, adjectives and quantifiers present lower percentages.

According to Scherre (1988, p. 153), the adjectives have plural mark more often than nouns. The author also crosses the variables linear position and grammatical class and observes that the grammatical classes are not fixed to the positions, for example, nouns can occur in all the positions in the syntagma;² she also verifies that, regardless of grammatical class, any element in the first position tends to be marked more often.

² We understand, in this research, in line with Scherre (1988, p. 159), that the position in the phrase refers to the order in which the elements appear in the phrase and not the function they play inside.

With that, she proposes the analysis of the position/class/relation variable triad arising from the crossing between the variables linear position, nuclear and non-nuclear class, and the relation between the nuclear and non-nuclear classes. And she finds that the non-nuclear grammatical classes placed before the syntagma core are marked more often than the nuclear grammatical classes, regardless of the positions they occupy in syntagma and the non-nuclear grammatical classes placed after the core, that is, the information to the left of the nucleus tends to retain plurality information.

In order to observe the relevance of the factors that comprise this variable, this work considers linear position, grammatical class and the relation between grammatical class and core as independent factors. Thus, this work seeks to analyze how such linguistic factors correlate with number agreement in NS, as well as to observe how this variable correlates with the speaker's gender, age group and level of education, which will enable a better understanding of this linguistic phenomenon in the capital of Alagoas.

METHODOLOGY

The speech data that comprise the *corpus* of analysis of this survey come from 48 native speakers of Maceió and were taken from the database *Descrição e Análise de Aspectos Gramaticais e Variacionais de Línguas Brasileiras* (Description and Analysis of Grammatical and Variational Aspects of Brazilian Languages). They present a total of 1594 noun phrases that have two or three positions and 3432 elements that can receive plural morpheme.

In the collection of these data, two research instruments were used: the structured interview and free interview developed on everyday topics, such as politics and profession. Through the first instrument, information was collected on the social aspects of the informants, such as age, gender and level of education; and through the second (which lasted on average 30 minutes with each interviewee) samples of their statements were recorded.

The individuals selected for the interviews were stratified by the following criteria: gender (female and male), level of education (low (up to the 5th year of elementary school), basic (elementary school, from the 6th to the 9th year), secondary (high school, complete or not) and higher education (complete or not)) and age (from 16 to 35, from 36 to 55 and from 56 to 80 years old).

After transcribing the audios, the nominal phrases were selected for analysis and the GoldVarb X software, which accommodates the variation data and statistically points out the significant factors for analysis, was used. Therefore, this work seeks to understand which linguistic and extralinguistic factors are related to nominal agreement usage in Maceió.

DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned in the previous topics, this work takes the number agreement in the NS in the language spoken in Maceió as a dependent variable. For this purpose, each flexible element of the nominal syntagma that has two or three positions is considered as analysis data, and it is considered that there is agreement when the element presents a formal plural mark, otherwise being understood as lack of agreement, according to Scherre (1988, p. 61).

Starting from the sociolinguistic perspective that there is the possibility of systematizing the existing and specific variation of the spoken language and that this variation is correlated both to linguistic system internal and external factors, the software GoldVarb X that accommodates the variation data is used, which statistically points out the significant factors for analysis.

With the accounting of the data, it was found that out of the 3432 speech data analyzed, 2596 presented number agreement, and 836 did not present it, that is, 76% of the data presented plural mark while 24% were not marked. It was also observed after quantitative analysis that the linguistic variable of grammatical class is not significant for plural marking in NS. The other factors addressed, on their turn, present themselves as correlated with this marking, as shown in the table below.

As can be seen in Table 1, extralinguistic variables level of education, age group and gender and linguistic variables linear position and grammatical class relation with the nucleus present relative weights that point toward their correlation with the usage of plural morpheme in NS, being that, among the the extralinguistic ones, level of education is more related to the usage of marking, while among linguistic variables, linear position stands out in this aspect. Statistical results for each variable are treated in the following sections.

Table 1 – Statistical results of social and linguistic factors in relation to plural mark usage in NS

Variable	Factors	Total cases	Presence of plural marking	%	RP
Level of education	low	792	491	62	0,20
	basic	741	543	73	0,44
	secondary	922	686	74	0,46
	higher	977	876	90	0,80
Gender	female	1772	1340	76	0,53
	male	1660	1256	76	0,46
Age range	16 to 35 years-old	1433	1190	83	0,67
	36 to 55 years-old	1040	747	72	0,40
	56 to 80 years-old	959	659	69	0,34
Linear position	first position	1594	1582	99	0,84
	second position	1594	900	56	0,20
	third position	244	114	47	0,14
Relation of grammatical class with the nucleus	prefixed undefined and quantifier	292	285	98	0,56
	prefixed article and demonstrative	1196	1190	99	0,84
	prefixed possessive	147	140	95	0,84
	prefixed adjective	30	27	90	0,35
	postponed possessive, adjective and quantifier	176	103	59	0,27

Source: The authors.

Level of Education

One of the goals assumed by the school is the teaching of the standard described in the grammatical compendiums and worked as if they were the only correct one in

most textbooks. This teaching might be linked to the linguistic usage by the speaker, who is encouraged during his schooling to replace the usage of stigmatized variants, such as the usage of the variant of the nominal agreement, which presents the plural mark in only an element, such as in *As menina bonita*, with the standard considered “correct”, of greater social prestige, that requires the flexional adaptation of the determinant terms to the determined terms, as in *As meninas bonitas*.

In order to verify the correlation between years of exposure to school and linguistic usage, some surveys on nominal agreement in BP have adopted the level of education factor in their analyzes, including those developed by Brandão (2011), Pinheiro (2012) and Silva (2014). These surveys found that the higher the level of education, the more the speaker tends to present the plural mark in the NS in their speech.

When considering these results, the hypothesis is raised that in Maceió speakers with a higher education level use the plurality marking in NS more often than those with low education. The following table shows the results for this extra-linguistic factor.

Table 2 – Effect of the level of education variable in the presence of a plural mark in NS elements

Factors	Frequency	%	P. R.
Low education	491/792	62	0,20
Basic education	543/741	73	0,44
Secondary education	686/922	74	0,46
Higher education	876/977	90	0,80

Source: The authors.

As can be seen from these data, there is a directly proportional relationship between the level of education and the usage of plural mark in NS, because with the increase in the level of education, the agreement usage increases, which points out, according with Labov (2008), to the stable variation of the linguistic phenomenon .

It can also be observed, with the relative weights, that low, basic and secondary education are not positively related to the usage of the plural morpheme in NS, with the former presenting a value far below the neutral point, while basic and secondary education behave similarly and have values close to 0.50. Higher education, in turn, presents itself as favoring the plural marking with a relative weight of 0.80, which is why there is a sharp opposition between low education and higher education.

Thus, the hypothesis that in Maceió speakers with a higher level of education use the plurality marking in NS more often than those with low education, that is, the usage of plural morpheme in NS is proportionally related to years of exposure to school

demonstrating that the variation in nominal agreement is linked to the social requirements reflected in school practices is confirmed.

Gender

As already mentioned, sexual differentiation is related to the social prestige of linguistic forms, since, according to Labov (2008) and Paiva (1992), women display a sensitivity for prestigious linguistic forms in societies in which a conservative behavior is expected of them and they have a decisive participation in the phenomena of change towards the prestigious forms.

Labov (2008) and Chambers and Trudgill (1980) also signal for this sensitivity in a situation of variation that does not involve change, that is, in stable variation, being therefore relevant according to Scherre (1988) to consider that there are a general tendency for females to move closer to more prestigious standard than the opposite gender, in societies where females play a more conservative role, regardless of whether the linguistic phenomenon involves change or stable variation.

In Brazil, researches on nominal agreement in BP, such as Silva's (2014), generally points out that women are more likely to use the plural morpheme in all flexible elements of NS than men, that is, they demonstrate greater sensitivity to the variant of more social prestige than the opposite gender does.

Considering this and with Scherre's (1988) statement, this survey has as a hypothesis, in relation to the gender variable, that women tend to use the plural mark more often than the male gender. The results of this survey are presented in the table below in relation to the correlation of the gender variable and the plurality marking in the NS.

Table 3 – Effect of the gender variable in the presence of the plural mark in NS elements

Gender	Frequency	%	P. R.
Female	1340 / 1772	76	0,53
Male	1256 / 1660	76	0,46

Source: The authors.

When looking at the weights shown in the Table 02, it is noticed that men and women are similar in relation to nominal agreement usage, displaying close relative weights. However, it is observed that the female gender tends to use the plural morpheme in the NS more often than the male gender, confirming the hypothesis of this survey.

In order to amplify the understanding of the correlation of this variable and the object of study, the relationship between gender and level of education is analyzed, and

it appears that the effect of the variable gender in the usage of the plural mark in the NS is linked to the informant's level of education, according to the data below.

Table 4 – Crossing of the variables gender and level of education

Gender	Low education			Basic education			Secondary education			Higher Education		
	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.
Female	319/509	63	0,32	304/392	78	0,50	351/464	76	0,47	366/407	90	0,72
Male	172/283	61	0,31	239/349	68	0,38	335/458	73	0,44	510/570	89	0,71

Source: The authors.

As it can be seen, the relative weights indicate that among speakers who have a low level of education, there is almost no difference in the linguistic usage of different genders in relation to nominal agreement. The same occurs among those who have secondary and higher education, not confirming Scherre's (1988) proposition in which there is a tendency for women to get closer to the prestige variant.

The group of informants who have basic education, in turn, behaves differently from the others, with a higher relative weight in women, similarly to the results found by Scherre (1988). The relative weights also indicate that, regardless of gender, as informants schooling increase, the rate of application of the plural morpheme usage rule in SN also increases. Therefore, the relationship between sex and nominal agreement is shown to be related to the schooling factor, with the speaker's level of education being decisive.

Age Group

As already mentioned in this paper, sociolinguistic researches that take into account the nominal agreement in BP have observed the correlation of the age group factor and the usage of the plural mark in NS in order to identify whether nominal agreement in BP is in stable variation or ongoing change.

Based on Labov (2008), they consider that in stable variation there is usually full distribution without age group gradation or curvilinear distribution indicating age group grading with the usage of the most prestigious forms in intermediate age groups, while the ongoing change is characterized by the steep distribution, with younger speakers being more likely to use innovative forms.

It is worth mentioning, however, that, in addition to the results obtained with the age group factor, it is considered, from Brandão (2011) and Silva (2014), that the correlation between plural mark usage and speaker's age is not a sufficient condition for

the existence of linguistic change, and there is the need to study the correlation with other variables, such as the speaker's sex and education.

Therefore, this work analyzes the relation between the age group factor and nominal agreement and raises the hypothesis that, in Maceió, the plural mark in NS is more used among speakers of the intermediate range. The table below illustrates the three age groups addressed and their respective results.

Table 5 – Effect of the age group variable in the presence of plural mark in SN elements

Age Group	Frequency	%	P. R.
16 to 35 years-old	1190 / 1433	83	0,67
36 to 55 years-old	747 / 1040	72	0,40
56 to 80 years-old	659 / 959	69	0,34

Source: The authors.

As it can be seen, the relative weights are presented in decreasing order and point to the younger age group as the only one favoring the usage of the plurality mark, contradicting the hypothesis that there would be a curvilinear distribution between the age groups, with the intermediate one standing out on the usage of the mark.

In order to amplify the understanding of the relationship between age and nominal agreement in NS, the results of the groups of factors of age group, level of education and gender are then crossed. By crossing age group variable with level of education, shown in the next table, it is verified with the relative weights that there is a proximity to the usage of plural morpheme, regardless of age, among speakers with low education, as well as with higher education.

When observing, however, the data of speakers who have basic or secondary education, we notice the inversely proportional decrease in the usage of morpheme in relation to the increase in age, that is, young people between 16 to 35 years-old tend to use the plural mark more often than the older age groups.

With the data below, it can also be seen that, regardless of the age group, speakers who have higher education present plural morphemes in their speeches more often than those who have low education, which signals an increase in the agreement rates due to the influence of the school.

Table 6 – Crossing of age group and level of education variables

Age	16 to 35 years-old			35 to 55 years-old			56 to 80 years-old		
	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.
Low education	224/351	64	0,32	124/209	59	0,28	143/232	62	0,30
Basic education	246/294	84	0,58	179/256	70	0,39	118/191	62	0,31
Secondary education	241/378	90	0,71	197/294	67	0,36	148/250	59	0,28
Higher education	379/410	92	0,77	247/281	88	0,66	250/286	87	0,65

Source: The authors.

Regarding the relation between the age group and gender of the speakers, it is observed that men and women, regardless of age, have close relative weights, with the female gender being slightly more sensitive to the usage of nominal agreement than the opposite gender, except among the informants of the last age group. It is also verified that men and women between 16 to 35 years-old favor plural marking, which might be related to entering the labor market (cf. SCHERRE, 1988, p. 522).

Table 7 – Crossing of age group and gender variables

Age	16 to 35 years-old			36 to 55 years-old			56 to 80 years-old		
	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.	Freq.	%	P. R.
Female	612/723	85	0,63	408/560	73	0,45	320/489	65	0,37
Male	578/710	81	0,58	339/480	71	0,43	339/470	72	0,45

Source: The authors.

Therefore, with the analysis of the correlation of the age group factor and the nominal agreement in Portuguese language spoken in Maceió, it appears that younger speakers, of both genders, tend to present plural mark in NS in their speeches more often than those belonging to the older age groups. It is worth mentioning, however, that, regardless of the age group, speakers who have higher education tend to use more plural mark than who have low education, thus revealing that level of education stands out over age group in the conditioning of nominal agreement.

Linear Position

According to Scherre (1988), the variable behavior of nominal agreement in BP is due to the competition of two motivations: the principle of parallel processing that drives the usage of similar forms and the principle of economy that allows the possibility of variation over time by presenting the tendency for the omission of redundant forms.

When considering this principle, it is understood that by marking only the first element of NS, redundant forms are excluded and the sense of plurality in NS is preserved. The first sociolinguistic works that take nominal agreement for analysis have confirmed this exclusion and signal toward the strong correlation between the usage of the formal plural mark and the linguistic factor of linear position.

Some of these works, such as Pontes's (1979), conclude that the first position in NS is the factor favoring plural marking the most, with a sharp decrease in the second position and from this line a decreasing line in terms of favoring the usage of the plural mark. Other works, such as Scherre's (1978), verify, however, that in some groups of speakers there is a slight increase when going from the second to the third position.

In order to observe the relation between the variable of linear position and nominal agreement spoken in Maceió, it is assumed that the elements in the first position of the NS preferentially retain plurality information, there is, therefore, a drop in the usage of express plural marks in the subsequent positions.

Table 8 – Effect of the variable linear position in the presence of the plural mark in NS elements

Positions	Frequency	%	P. R.
1st position	1582 / 1594	99	0,84
2nd position	900 / 1594	57	0,20
3rd position	114 / 244	47	0,14

Source: The authors.

The relative weights shown indicate the first position as the one that favors the usage of plural morpheme the most, with a decrease in it for the second and a slight fall from it to the third position; however, the difference between the second and third positions can be related to the few data quantity of the latter.

It is also verified in the data of this survey that the marking in the first position is not categorical, occurring syntagmata with plural morpheme from the second position, as exemplified below:

(1) pro meus filho (EMFI³)

(2) pra pessoas (EMFA)

This result is qualitatively similar to the one achieved by Scherre (1988), whose analysis observes 129 syntagmata that do not have plural morphemes in the first position. According to the author, in phrases that have an article postponed to a preposition and followed by a possessive and/or a substantive one, such as those exemplified, the speakers analyze the contraction of the type *no* and *po* as a preposition, that is, as a category that does not inflect, so plural marking occurs from the second position.

Therefore, it was observed that, in the language spoken in the Maceió speech community, the linear position is shown to be correlated to the usage of nominal agreement, pointing out the first position as the factor that favors plural marking most and the decline in the usage of the mark from the second position.

Relation Between Grammatical Class and Gender

Scherre (1988), in her doctoral thesis, analyzes the nominal agreement of number in the language spoken in Rio de Janeiro and proposes the analysis of the position/class/relation variable. With this variable, the author verifies that non-nuclear grammatical classes in front of the nucleus of the syntagma are marked more often than the nuclear ones, regardless of the positions they occupy, and than the postponed non-nuclear classes.

In this work, as already mentioned, linear position, grammatical class and the relation of grammatical class with the core are addressed as independent factors. When addressing the factor of the relation of grammatical class with the core, we seek to verify how the behavior of each class in relation to the nucleus correlates with the nominal agreement and have as a hypothesis, based on the principle of economy, that the classes present themselves in the analyzed speech samples just prior to the core, that is, articles and statements, are more likely to present nominal agreement.

We present, as an example, some data from the analyzed corpus, in which plural marking of grammatical classes is prepended to the SN core. Below, relative weights that point to the correlation of the grammatical class relationship with the core and the usage of plural morpheme are also presented.

³ The code refers to education (BE: Low Education, EF: Elementary Education, EM: High School and ES: Higher Education), sex (Male and Female) and age of the informant (J: 16 to 35, A: 36 to 55 and I: 56 to 80 years old).

Prefixed grammatical classes

Undefined

(3)

- A. algumas coisa (BEFA)
- B. as outras pessoas(BEFJ)

Article

(4)

- a. as pernas (BEMJ)
- b. os banco (BEMA

Possessive

(5)

- a. as pernas (BEMJ)
- b. os banco (BEMA

Adjective

(6)

- a. grandes milagre (BEFI)
- b. maus tratos (ESMJ)

Quantifier

(7)

- a. essas coisa toda (BEFI)
- b. essas pessoas toda (ESMJ)

Table 9 – Effect of the relation of grammatical class with the core

Factors	Frequency	%	P. R.
Prefixed indefinite and quantifier	285/292	98	0,56
Prefixed article and demonstrative	1190/1196	99	0,84
Prefixed possessive	140/147	95	0,84
Prefixed adjective	27/30	90	0,35
Postponed possessive, adjective and quantifier	103/176	59	0,27

Source: The authors.

As it can be seen in the table above, the classes that appear after the nucleus tend to present plural morpheme less than pre-placed classes. However, due to the few data of former, this analysis focuses on the classes that are positioned to the left of the nucleus and it turns out that articles, demonstratives and possessives are the ones that favor the usage of plural morpheme the most, which goes against the hypothesis that classes that appear only before the nucleus are more likely to receive the plural morpheme than those that are also postponed.

It can also be observed that among the preceding classes the adjective stands out as the one that least favors plural morpheme usage, which may reflect the canonical order of the Portuguese language that places the adjective after the core, which, according to Scherre (1988), favors plural marking.

In order to amplify the understanding of the correlation of grammatical classes that are positioned before the nucleus and the usage of nominal agreement, the first two positions of the NS and the preceding classes are crossed and the following results are achieved:

Table 10 – Crossing of the first NS positions and preceding classes

Preceding classes	1st position			2nd position		
	Frequency	%	P. R.	Frequency	%	P. R.
Undefined e quantifier	273/277	99	0,82	12/15	80	0,21
Article, demonstrative e possessive	1218/1224	99	0,93	112/119	94	0,52
Adjective	20/21	95	0,57	7/9	78	0,19

Source: The authors.

As seen in the table, regardless of the position they occupy, articles, prefixed demonstratives and possessives stand out as favoring the usage of plural morpheme while the prefixed adjectives have the lowest relative weights, and in the second position, the adjectives do not favor the nominal agreement.

It is also observed that when prefixed classes occupy the first position they tend to be marked more often than when they are in the second position of NS, highlighting the strong correlation between linear position factor and nominal agreement. Therefore, it is found that, in the language spoken in Maceió, the relationship between grammatical class and core correlates with the nominal agreement, indicating that prefixed articles, demonstratives and possessions favors the most in the use of plural morpheme, while classes positioned before the core unfavorable, adjective, for instance, works to disadvantage the process.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Nominal agreement in BP has served as an object of analysis for several studies, among which stood out in the first chapter Brandão (2011), who analyzes the language spoken in Nova Iguaçu, Pinheiro (2012), who takes speech samples from citizens of Belo Horizonte, and Silva (2014), who studies nominal agreement in the speech of citizens of Alagoas and citizens of São Paulo city.

In order to observe if there are particularities in the linguistic usage of Maceió in relation to nominal agreement, in this section the results achieved in this work are compared with those of the mentioned surveys. It is worth mentioning, however, that, since the research developed by Brandão (2011), Pinheiro (2012) and Silva (2014) take as an object of analysis the absence of the plural mark in NS, it is necessary to approach the results inversely proportional, that is, they are equivalent to the usage of the plural mark.

Among the extralinguistic variables analyzed in this survey, the level of education stands out as the one that conditions nominal agreement. With this factor it was found that the higher the level of education of the speaker the more he tends to use formal plural mark. In the table below, this result is compared with those achieved in Nova Iguaçu, Belo Horizonte and São Paulo.

Table 11 – Comparison of data in relation to the level of education variable, found in this survey with those found in the works of Brandão (2011), Pinheiro (2012) and Silva (2014)

Factors	Brandão (2011)		Pinheiro (2012)		Silva (2014)				This survey	
	Citizens of Nova Iguaçu		Residents of Belo Horizonte		Citizens of São Paulo		Citizens of Alagoas		Citizens of Maceió	
	%	P. R.	%	P. R.	%	P. R.	%	P. R.	%	P. R.
Low education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	62	0,20
Basic education	91	0,38	70	0,29	58	0,26	63	0,39	73	0,44
Secondary education	81	0,24	85	0,50	84	0,58	77	0,54	74	0,46
Higher education	97	0,76	99	0,86	—	—	—	—	90	0,80

Source: The authors.

As seen in the table above, the education variable behaves similarly in the different surveys, with greater usage of formal plural mark among the more educated. When observing the relative weights of groups of speakers who have basic education, it appears that Maceió speakers tend to use the surveys.

Among secondary education informants, citizens of São Paulo and citizens of Alagoas living in São Paulo present plural morpheme more often than other informants who have this level of education with relative weights of 0.58 and 0.54 respectively, while among the citizens of Maceió, the secondary education does not present itself as favoring the plural mark, indicating that citizens of Alagoas who have secondary education and live in São Paulo are more likely to make use of nominal agreement than citizens of Alagoas with the same level of education who live in Maceió.

Higher education, on its turn, presents itself as favoring plural marking in all of the surveys that addressed it, with the relative weights reflecting that citizens of Belo Horizonte tend make use of nominal agreement a little more than the residents of Maceió and Iguaçú. With these results, it is understood that the level of education is decisive for the usage of nominal agreement in PB.

In addition to the extralinguistic variable of level of education, this analysis also addressed the gender variable and it was found with the relative weights that men and women behave similarly in relation to the usage of nominal agreement, with female gender presenting itself as a little more sensitive to plural marking in NS than the opposite gender. In the table below, this result is compared with those found by Silva (2014) in the speech samples of citizens of São Paulo and the citizens of Alagoas living in São Paulo.

Table 12 – Comparison of data in relation to the variable of gender, found in this survey with those found in Silva’s work (2014)

Gender	Silva (2014)				This survey	
	Citizens of São Paulo		Citizens of Alagoas		Citizens of Maceió	
	%	P. R.	%	P. R.	%	P. R.
Female	77	0,54	77	0,55	76	0,53
Male	71	0,47	71	0,47	76	0,46

Source: The authors.

As it can be seen in the table above, the results achieved by Silva (2014), both in the speech samples of the citizens of São Paulo and in the speech samples of citizens of Alagoas, are close to that of this research, signaling that men and women living in São Paulo use nominal agreement in a similar way, however there is a slight tendency among women using plural mark more often than the opposite gender.

These results confirm Scherre’s (1988) statement that there is still a general tendency for women to move closer toward the most prestigious standard, while also

indicates that, in Brazilian society, linguistic behavior of men and women heads toward equivalence, which may be linked to the search for the equality of social roles played by different genders.

This study also carried out an analysis of the correlation between extralinguistic variable of age group and usage of nominal agreement; it was found that the informants belonging to the first age group tend to use plural mark often than those belonging to the oldest age groups. In the table below, this result is compared with those achieved in the surveys of Brandão (2011) and Silva (2014).

Table 13 – Comparison of data, in relation to the age group variable, found in this survey, with those achieved by Brandão (2011) and by Silva (2014)⁴

Age group	Brandão (2011)		Silva (2014)				This survey	
	Citizens of Nova Iguaçu		Citizens of São Paulo		Citizens of Alagoas		Citizens of Maceió	
	%	P. R.	%	P. R.	%	P. R.	%	P. R.
16 to 35 years-old	91	0,52	83	0,48	65	0,37	83	0,67
36 to 55 years-old	93	0,59	85	0,61	88	0,70	72	0,40
56 to 80 years-old	87	0,36	62	0,43	64	0,37	69	0,34

Source: The authors.

When observing the relative weights above, it appears that both in the work of Brandão (2011) and in the research developed by Silva (2014) the intermediate age group stands out in the usage of plural mark in NS, presenting a curvilinear distribution and signaling stable variation. Therefore, the results of the speech samples from Maceió show that subjects belonging to the first age group are more likely to use the morpheme; it was verified with the crossing of age group and level of education factors, that, regardless of the age, the informants with higher level of education tend to display the plural marking in their speeches, therefore the level of education is more determinant than the age group in concordance usage.

In addition to the extralinguistic variables already discussed, linguistic variables relation of grammatical class to core and linear position were shown to favor the usage

⁴ The comparison with the studies by Pinheiro (2012) was not maintained in his research, because the age group did not present statistical significance.

of the plural morpheme in Maceió. The variable relation of the grammatical class could not be compared with the results of other researches, because in all other investigated works, this relation is observed within the position/class/relation triad.

In relation to the linear position, it is observed, in this study, that the first position favors plural morpheme usage while the others disfavor it, with a linear decline in plurality mark usage from the second position. In the table below, this result is compared with those achieved in Belo Horizonte by Pinheiro (2012).

Table 14 – Comparison of data in relation to the linear position variable, found in this research with those achieved by Pinheiro (2012)

Positions	Pinheiro (2012)		This survey	
	Residents of Belo Horizonte		Citizens of Maceió	
	%	P. R.	%	P. R.
1st position	100	0,90	99	0,84
2nd position	66	0,14	57	0,20
3rd position	74	0,13	47	0,13

Source: The authors.

As it can be seen, the linguistic factor of linear position correlates with nominal agreement in a similar way in Belo Horizonte and Maceió, with the first position standing out as the one that favors plural morpheme usage the most and the other positions as less favoring its usage; in the speech samples analyzed by Pinheiro (2012), the relative weights referring to the second and third positions are close, signaling the general opposition between the first position and the other positions, while in the samples of this research it was observed a more pronounced decline from the second to the third position, that is, there is a gradual and linear decline in the plural marking in the elements of the NS.

Therefore, with the comparison of the data obtained in this research with those verified in Brandão (2011), Pinheiro (2012) and Silva (2014), it was observed that the factors education, gender and linear position correlate with nominal agreement in a similar way in different Brazilian locations.

The first SN position tends to be the most marked and female informants and those with a higher level of education are more likely to use the plural morpheme. When comparing the age group factor, however, it was observed that both in Brandão (2011) and in Silva (2014) the intermediate age group stands out in plural mark usage while in this research the younger ones stand out in this usage.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this research was to analyze the nominal agreement between the flexible elements of nominal syntagma, based on speech samples from 48 natives of Maceió, following the Theory of Linguistic Variation, that conceives the language as a heterogeneous system that can be affected by social factors – external – and linguistic ones – internal.

In order to verify which variables condition this plural marking, the linguistic variables linear position, grammatical class and grammatical class relationship with core and the extralinguistic variables schooling, sex and age group were investigated. Regarding extralinguistic variables, it was found that the most educated speakers, belonging to the lowest age group and female, are more likely to use nominal agreement than those who have inverse characteristics. In the analysis of linguistic variables, it was observed that grammatical class does not condition plural marks usage and that the first position – articles, demonstrative and possessive prepositions – works as a favorer of plurality marking.

When comparing these results with those achieved in Pinheiro (2012), Silva (2014) and Brandão (2011), it was observed that the variables level of education, gender and linear position correlate with nominal agreement in a similar way in Maceió, Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and Nova Iguaçu. When comparing the variable age group, however, it was observed that both in Brandão (2011) and Silva (2014) the intermediate age group stands out in formal plural mark usage whereas in this research the youngest ones stand out in this usage, signaling that there are particularities in the conditioning of the nominal concordance of the capital of Alagoas.

Therefore, it can be seen that plural morpheme usage in NS in the language spoken in Maceió is conditioned by the linguistic variables linear position and relation of grammatical class with core and the extralinguistic level of education, gender and age group, showing similarities and particularities in relation to the results achieved in other Brazilian municipalities which contributes to a broader understanding of the variation of nominal agreement in BP.

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