

Nominal Number Agreement in Portuguese Used in Oiapoque-AP

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Abstract:

This study presents a profile of research on the nominal number agreement in the context of linguistic contact that culminated in a thesis developed from oral data from speakers living in the city of Oiapoque (Amapá); three groups of users of Brazilian Portuguese were considered, Oiapoqueans who speak Portuguese as their mother tongue (L1); French speakers of Portuguese second language (L2) and indigenous speakers of Portuguese L2. However, in this text only the uses related to the first group will be approached. The linguistic phenomenon used was the process of nominal number agreement. The sample is composed of oral data from 18 Oiapoqueans, collected from spontaneous narratives and personal story. The theoretical-methodological assumptions follow the parameters of the variationist theory defended by Labov (1972). The results reveal a context of change in progress, triggered by the incorporation of more urban features into the city, which is reflected, above all, in the younger speakers who tend to make greater use of plural marks, in the constituent elements of the noun phrase, in the variety of the Brazilian Portuguese, used in Oiapoque.

Keywords:

Linguistic variation. Number agreement. Brazilian Portuguese.

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INTRODUCTION

This article features a study about the nominal concordance of number on the variety of Brazilian Portuguese, used in Oiapoque, by the speakers whose native language (L1) is Portuguese. In this city, located at the extreme north of the state of Amapá, border with French Guiana, the residents have intense contact with speakers of other languages like French, the Guyanese Creole, English and the Indigenous Languages of the region such as Parikwaki and Kheuól, besides Guianese dialects. This interaction is accentuated also due to commercial, economics and socio-cultural relations frequently established between the peoples of the place. Therefore, it's notorious that Oiapoque presents a multilingual context, and this one stimulates the development of studies that reflects the linguistics reality of the region, considering the contact of Brazilian Portuguese with other languages in this place. That way, it stands out the scenario of the proposed work.

The phenomenon pointed out justifies in reason of contemplating a process very recurrent on Brazilian linguistics researches, that accomplishes in a variable manner, with tendency sometimes to the erasure, sometimes to the fulfillment of the plural mark, in items that compose the noun phrase, on the different varieties of PB, as shown by Nina (1980); Scherre (1988); Carvalho (1997); Lopes (2001); Pereira (2008); Brandão (2011); Lopes (2014), in addition to other authors. It still emphasizes that the non-marking of plural usually presents remarkable social implications, characterizing what Labov (1972) defines as stereotype. Thereby, it was sought in this study to analyze how this phenomenon tends to be carried out on the variety of Brazilian Portuguese spoken in Oiapoque.

In this way, and knowing the importance of knowledge of the regularities of the plural marking process in the items that structure the noun phrase in Portuguese, which tend to occur through the relation between linguistic variation and social variation, this study aims to analyze the variety of Brazilian Portuguese used by the speakers, Oiapoque residents, considering the variable nominal number agreement. It also aims to observe the acting of social and linguistics variation and in Portuguese L1 of oiapoqueans, in what regards to plural marking in the items of noun phrase, across the evidence of variable patterns. It starts from the hypothesis that the referred phenomenon presents

patterns equivalent to the finds in other studies that contemplates distinct varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, even if the speakers observed experience a situation of frequent linguistic contact on site. This hypothesis is based on the presupposition that the linguistic variation is ordinate and susceptible of systematization, once that the variation is inherent to the linguistic system.

It must be highlighted that this article constitutes a cut out of a thesis defended in 2018, in the Program of Post-Graduation in Linguistics at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (RIBEIRO, 2018), which focused on the linguistic contact and the concordance of number in the nominal syntagma in the Portuguese of Oiapoque. In this thesis three groups of speakers of Brazilian Portuguese at the place were considered, monolinguals (Brazilian Portuguese L1), bilinguals and users of Brazilian Portuguese L2; and in this article only the monolingual oiapoqueans were considered.

For the development of the theme, in section 1 the general aspects are indicated regarding the survey phenomenon; in section 2, the central points that characterize the theory of linguistics variation are presented; section 3 evidences a general panorama about the place in the study; in section 4, methodological procedures adopted in the course of the research is described; in section 5, it elucidates the analysis and the main results obtained in the study; at last, it weaves to the final considerations about the object theme of this investigation.

THE NOMINAL NUMBER AGREEMENT ON BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

The mechanism of agreement is seen, in general, like a process of reiteration of expressed information by categories of gender, number and person in Brazilian Portuguese, wherein a determinant element adapts the categories of the core of the syntagma, like occurs in “os jovens estudantes brasileiros” (‘the young Brazilian students’) in a monitored style of speaking. Thus, the agreement it’s a variable phenomenon in Brazilian Portuguese, where the presence of marks like in “as crianças estudiosas” (‘the studious children’) tends to alternate with the absence of these marks: “as criançaØ estudiosaØ” (‘the studious children’).

It’s noteworthy that this variation process observed in the concordance of number between the elements of the noun phrase has been studied by many researchers, throughout Brazil; Braga e Scherre (1976), Braga (1977), Ponte (1979), Nina (1980), Carvalho (1997), Scherre (1988), Lopes (2001), Pereira (2008), Martins (2010), Brandão (2011), Lopes (2014) among others stand out here. All of these studies reflect how much the theme of this text presents vitality in variationist studies. The majority of works that lean over this theme part from the postulate recommended by Scherre (1988) in which phonic salience stands out as a linguistic variation acting in the conditioning of the plural marks, according to which elements phonetically more prominent tend to

favor more the use of explicit marks of plural, as well as the position of the lexical item in the noun phrase, where the non-nuclear elements to the left of the core of NP favor explicit marks, while the non-nuclear elements to the right of this core disfavor them. The cores, in turn, are usually more marked if they occupy the first position in the syntagmatic chain. Another linguistic variation that tends to show relevance in the marking of plural in the items of noun phrase refers to precedent marks in function of position, pointing that “marks lead to marks and zeros lead to zeros” (SCHERRE, 1988).¹

The social variables also operate significantly and usually demonstrate regularity in this process of marking, revealing that people with more years of schooling are the ones who use the most plural marks, just like the ones of female sex. Literature already certifies that people more exposed to grammatical correction and women, for breaking less with social rules established, tend to be more sensitive to the norms of prestige of a language. In this way, the studies that focus in the number agreement in Brazilian Portuguese ratifies, in a certain way, Scherre (1988), to affirm that number agreement, in Brazilian Portuguese, can be characterized as a case of inherent linguistics variation, since it occurs in similar linguistic and social contexts, proving to be systematic and predictable. The differences verified in some studies are more in quantitative aspects than in qualitative ones, though these variables are applied in oral *corpora* of speaking communities really different.

LINGUISTIC VARIATION

In studies done in the 1960s, Labov (1972) presented a model of analysis and systematization of the linguistics variants applied on the same speakings, an analysis associated to social aspects. Instituted in answer to the previous model, structuralism and generativism, the theory of linguistics variation or Quantitative Sociolinguistics establishes relating language and society as the main focus, considering the heterogeneous character and systematic of the variation in the language. Therefore, in general lines, it's this relationship that characterizes the main object of the sociolinguistic analysis, considering the study of the structure and the linguistic changes inserted in the social context of the speaking community.

Taking Weinreich, Labov e Herzog (2006) e Labov (1972) as a basis, one of the main postulate defended in this model evidences that the heterogeneous system present on the language is ordinated and structured, emphasizing that, besides the categorical rules of the language, there are variable rules conditioned by linguistic and social factors. It is convenient to reinforce that categorical basically refers to the linguistical inviolable uses, such as the placement of the article, in Portuguese Language, in relation

¹ “marcas levam a marcas e zeros levam a zeros”.

to its determinant, which always precedes the latter; for example, we say “o garoto” (the boy) but never *”garoto o” (*”boy the); on the other hand, the variable rules are the ones that make possible for the speaker, depending on linguistic-social context found, to speak in one or in another way, with possibility of alternate two or more variants on the same context, just like occurs in the plural mark in Brazilian Portuguese, where the morpheme –s, used to mark this category, in the items of a noun phrase, may or not be used: “os grandes livros” (the big books); “os grandes livroØ” (the big book); “os grandeØ livros” (the big books); os grandeØ livroØ (the big book).

I still stand out, as central presupposition, the idea that the speaking community is considered as the main source of the study of linguistics variation, given the importance of the social context where the language is used. According to Labov (1972, p. 150), “the speaking community is not defined by any concordance marked by the use of linguistic elements, but by the participation in a set of shared norms”. These norms, according to the author, can be visualized in “explicit evaluative behaviors” and for the “uniformity of abstract patterns of variation”. Romaine (1982) affirms that studying the relation between language and society, from sociolinguistics, favors the study about the linguistic influence on society in a more detailed way, analyzing primarily the social aspect of linguistic diversity. When linguistics variation is considered, consequently the presence of variants on the language is recognized, which, on the other hand, are related to linguistics extralinguistic variation and. So, Labov (1994) defends that the variation of the language is not aleatory nor casual, but regulated by linguistic and social contexts, what makes it possible that language heterogeneity can be associated to the notion of system.

In this manner, this study postulates, from the theory of linguistics variation, the conceptions of inherent variation, of ordered heterogeneity, of variable rules and of participation of the speaker in a group of shared norms, which will be made explicit through evaluative behaviors and abstract patterns of variation.

THE RESEARCHED PLACE

The city of Oiapoque is located in the state of Amapá, more specifically on the northern Brazilian border, about 600 kilometers from the capital city of Macapá. Access is almost exclusively by land, via BR-156 highway; the region comprises an area of approximately 22,625 km² and, according to data from IBGE (2017), its population is estimated at 25,514, with the majority concentrated in the city’s urban area.

This city has its origins linked to the policies of settlement, colonization and defense of the national territory, between the 16th and 18th centuries, a period in which Portugal and France disputed about half of the space where the state of Amapá is located today, because, for two centuries, this region was dominated and exploited by

traders from French Guiana. According to Nascimento e Tostes (2008), the first traces of settlement in the area occurred, in fact, in 19th century, with the arrival of Guyanese and Antillean citizens, but the advance of French, English and Dutch explorers in the area, on the banks of the river Oiapoque, was intense and, therefore, in 1900, the agreement between Brazil and France took place, through the signing of the Swiss Report, which made the region officially Brazilian. In this regard, it is worth saying that this Report established the limit of the nation-state, but failed to stop the dynamics of the different people groups. In the 1960s, there was an intense migratory flow of Brazilians to the French Guiana, in search of work and better living conditions.

Currently, the city offers reasonable living conditions to its inhabitants with varied commerce, the establishment of educational institutions offering higher-education courses to residents and the tourism sector on the rise, driven, above all, by the Guyanese and the French, who cross the border for shopping, going to restaurants, night clubs, bars, among other purposes.

Oiapoque's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography Statistic) data (2017), is equivalent to 11,937.63 BRL, predominantly concentrated in the service sector, as in the entire state of Amapá. But the city also has economic representation in agriculture and fishing, developed more intensively by the indigenous people, residents of the adjacent villages. Oiapoque is known in the Amapá scenario for its ethnic-linguistic-social diversity, in which the indigenous and the French stand out, who, added to the people of Oiapoque, constitute the three main peoples that inhabit this region.

Castro e Hazeu (2013, p. 21) emphasize that Oiapoque, given its isolation and lack of connection with large urban centers and ports, caused mainly by the difficulties of access, with no latifundium or defined properties, "constituted itself as a land for the pioneers, the adventurous, the persecuted", coming from the most diverse and different ethnic groups. Thus, people from Oiapoque was constituted inserted in the dynamics of gold mining and in the trade, generally illegal, of gold. According to Silva (2013, p. 26)

Today, the greatest interest in the frontier geographic space is in the way it is socially constructed, managed and how it impacts the daily practices of each person and in the decision of institutional actors to restrict or to "open". Of all the South American borders, the only one that has a point of confluence between a South American country and a European country is the contact established between the state of Amapá, a federated entity in Brazil, and French Guiana, an overseas department of France in South America.

Due to this geographical position, it is well known that Oiapoque should receive some direct influence on the economic, social, political and cultural behaviors from the neighboring cities of French Guiana, but only future studies may or may not confirm this influence.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This work is based on the theoretical-methodological assumptions of Variationist Sociolinguistics, to observe the linguistic uses referring to the phenomenon of nominal number agreement by the speaker of Brazilian Portuguese L1, born and raised in Oiapoque. Data collection took place in an informal situation, with free dialogues and interactions between interviewer and interviewee; the themes of these interactions initially focused on personal data, the speaker's daily life with a description of his daily routine, his family, his work or study, as well as on life in the city of Oiapoque, the specificities of the local and about the languages used in the community. Oral data were collected from 16 informants equally distributed in gender (male and female), age (18 to 45; over 46 years old) and scholary (elementary and middle).

Four linguistic variables were used to analyze the phenomenon in question: position of the element in relation to the nucleus in the noun phrase; phonic boss; previous marks depending on the position; core animation; and three social variables: sex, age and scholary. The analyzed data were submitted to software *Goldvarb X* (SANKOFF; TAGLIAMONTE; SMITH, 2005), which is the appropriate standard for analyzing variable statistics, for it shows the groups of factors significant for variable analysis, pointing relative weight of each factor referring to the observed variant.

For the selection of the items constituting the sample of this study, NPs cutouts were made of surveys that presented pluralized items. These items characterize any phrase that has at least one plural mark, explicit or semantic, implying another mark(s) in the flexible items of the noun phrase. Cases that could mask the analysis, such as neutralization, invariable nominal core and those with interference from external noise, were excluded. Thus, the following structures were analyzed, whereupon in all examples, S indicates an overt plural marker and Ø indicates a zero-plural marker:

- a) With plural marks in all elements of noun phrase:

Todas as línguas romanas 'All "romans" languages'

- b) With plural marks in some of the elements of the noun phrase:

As mesmaØ problemáticas 'The same problematics'

- c) With a plural mark in just one element of the noun phrase:

Muitas coisaØ difícil 'Many difficult thing'

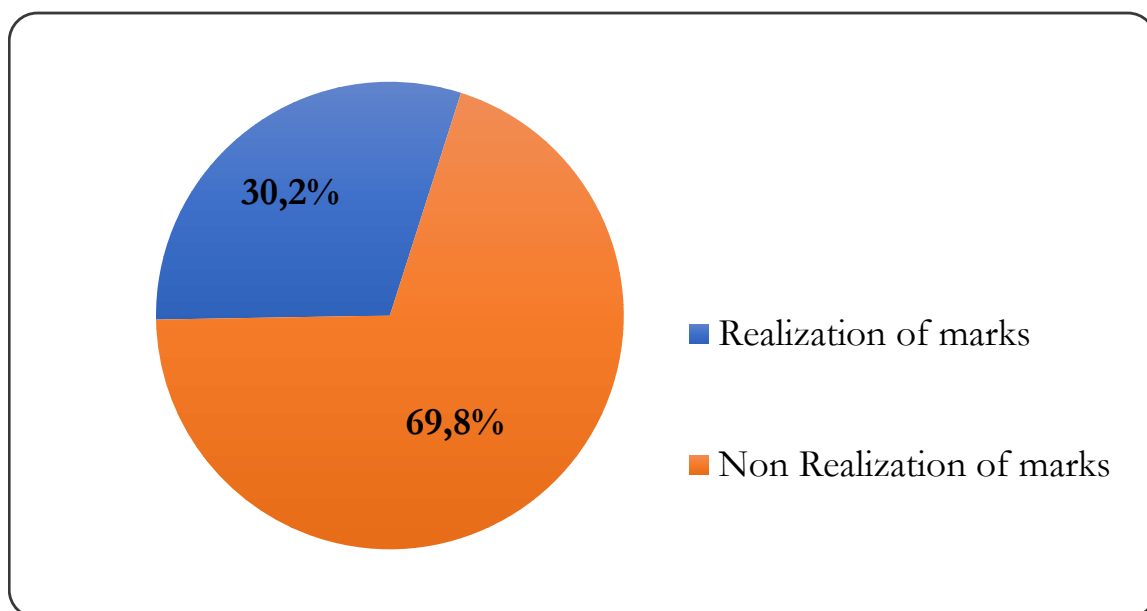
- d) No explicit plural mark in noun phrase's elements (semantic mark):

É quatro vezØ mais caraØ 'It is four time more expensive'

Considering that, in the variationist model, the dependent variable occurs due to the fact that the use of the variants does not occur randomly, but is influenced by groups of internal and external factors, this study starts with the binary dependent variable – presence or absence of the mark plural – in order to observe the performance of these groups in conditioning the variants.

RESULTS

The data found and analyzed in this research totaled 1490 occurrences of nominal syntagmas performed by the 16 informants in Oiapoque. The analysis of the variable under study (nominal number agreement) showed that 1040 lexical items had plural mark, resulting in a percentage of 69.8% of markings, while 450 items were used without the mark, which totaled 30.2% of non-marking. These values can be seen in Graphic 1 below.



Source: Ribeiro (2018).

Graphic 1 – Use of plural marks by speakers in Oiapoque

We consider the percentage of plural marks to be significant, in Oiapoquean speaking, given the context in which these speakers transit to refer to a small border town, with very little infrastructure, with a single high school, without the presence of spaces considered fundamental for the propagation and use of different linguistic forms, mainly of the forms considered prestige by society, such as cinemas, bookstores, libraries and cultural spaces like theaters, galleries, museums and the like. Another important aspect about this significant use refers to the fact that the city is located about 600 km

from the capital, Macapá, indicating, therefore, remoteness and reduced contact with the inhabitants of the main and largest urban center of the state. However, it should be noted that, despite these aspects, the urban area of Oiapoque has a commercial circulation and active intercultural contact. Thus, Oiapoque does not fail to reflect what is observed in all cities with some features of urbanization, that is, the rates of marking tend to be higher than those of non-marking. This scenario can be observed in both small and large cities; we quote, for example, Santa Leopoldina (ES) with an application rate of plural brands equivalent to 61,3% (LOPES, 2014) and Rio de Janeiro with around 70,7% (SCHERRE, 1988).

However, it is clear that the contact of the Brazilian Portuguese L1 speakers in Oiapoque is almost limited to their own residents, French, Guyanese and indigenous people who transit and live in the place, as found in the fieldwork. Another interesting fact is that higher scholarity was not considered among the research subjects, due to their absence at the time of the research, but there is still a significant rate of achievement of plural marks by speakers in Oiapoque.

In the next section, the analysis of the selected variables follows. The statistical program selected, in order of relevance, the following variables: precedent marks according to position, age, position of the nominal element in relation to the nucleus, phonic salience, gender and scholarity. It discarded only one linguistic aspect: animacy of the nuclear term.

Linguistic Variables

Precedent Marks According to Position

This variable is considered based on the proposition by Scherre (1988), which advises that the nominal agreement is taken in its entirety, considering that the variable precedent marks are analyzed according to the position that the element occupies in the noun phrase, and not in isolation. For this variable, the hypothesis follows what Scherre (1988) suggests, that the effect is regular: “marks lead to marks and zeros lead to zeros”.² The effect of factors in this group can be seen in Table 1.

² “marcas levam a marcas e zeros levam a zeros”.

Table 1 – Effect of the variable precedent marks according to position, in the plural marking of the elements of the noun phrase, by speakers in Oiapoque

Types of marks	Position of Analysis	Application /Total	%	Relative Weight (PR)
Absence:				
Meus colegaØ da cidade 'my friends of the city'	1	601/620	97	0.74
Formal zero in the 1st position:				
trabalhoØ gerais 'general works'	2	11/11	100	-
Number in the 1st position:				
dezoito horaØ 'eighteen hour'	2	90/156	57.7	0.51
Formal mark in the 1st position:				
as aulaØ 'the class'	2	285/595	47.9	0.30
Presence of marks before the nucleus which is in positions 3 or 4:				
as outras línguas 'the other languages'	3 e 4	41/41	100	-
Mixture of Marks:				
os povos indígena 'indigenous peoples'	3 e 4	03/36	8.3	0.04
Formal zero from the 1st position:				
dos meuØ cinco anoØ 'of my five year'	3 e 4	09/31	29	0.17
		Total:	988/1438 = 68,78%	
		Range:	.70	
Input: 0.83				
Significance: 0.003				

Source: Ribeiro (2018).

Table 1 shows that the absence of any mark outside the noun phrase is what most favors the application of the marking rule (0.74), which tends to occur due to the position in which the analyzed item is, position 1 in the noun phrase; this is the predominant position in Brazilian Portuguese for the realization of plural marking, because, as the literature has highlighted, the elements that are in the first position of the noun phrase tend to receive the plural mark more than the elements in the other positions, generating, thus, an overlap between the absence of marks preceding the analyzed item and the nominal items in position 1. Another factor that proved to be reasonably relevant was the presence of a numeral preceding the nuclear item, reflecting, in a way, that the

Oiapoqueans seems to consider the semantic plurality expressed by the numerals in the marking of the next item, which allows us to affirm that the element preceded of numeral tends to be more marked (.51) than the element preceded by an explicit formal mark in the first position (.30).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the variable “precedent marks according to position” acts with a strong conditioning in the use of explicit plural marks in the noun phrase by the speaker in Oiapoque, as well as it does not distance itself from the effect observed in studies developed on other varieties in other regions of the country, regarding the plural marking in noun phrase elements, confirming the hypothesis about the variety of Brazilian Portuguese used in Oiapoque.

Position of the Nominal Element in Relation to the Nucleus of the Noun Phrase

According to Scherre (1988), the elements that precede the nucleus of the noun phrase tend to be systematically more marked, whether in the first position or not, while those that follow the nucleus tend to be systematically less marked. This variable is being considered based on what is proposed by this author, when highlighting that “it does not exactly matter the class or the linear position, but the distribution of the non-nuclear class in relation to the center of the noun phrase” (1996, p. 100). Table 2 presents the results for the position variable.

Table 2 – Effect of the variable position of the nominal element in relation to the nucleus of the noun phrase, in the plural marking of noun phrase elements, by speakers in Oiapoque

Factor	Application / Total	%	Relative Weight (PR)
Left of the nucleus position 1	580/596	97,3	0.84
Left of the nucleus position 2	54/63	85,7	0.72
Right of the nucleus position 2	14/20	70,0	0.39
Right of the nucleus other positions	24/45	53,3	0.25
Nucleus in position 1	21/24	87,5	0.53
Nucleus in position 2	298/633	47,1	0.20
Nucleus in other positions	49/109	45,0	0.22
Total:		1040/1490 = 69,8%	
Range:		.64	
Input: 0.83			
Significance: 0.003			

Source: Ribeiro (2018).

The values found highlight the importance of the element's first position in the noun phrase for the purpose of using plural marks. In addition, they confirm the findings of the studies cited above, which postulate greater marking on the elements to the left of the nuclear term in noun phrase, as well as on the nucleus itself in first position, and the elements located to the right of the noun phrase retain fewer marks; therefore, the data focused on Oiapoquean Portuguese point to results similar to what the general literature attests about the performance of this variable in conditioning the plural marking in noun phrase elements, in Brazilian Portuguese.

Phonic Saliency

Regarding the phonic saliency variable, most research shows that the most salient elements favor the use of plural marks. Table 3 shows the results of the performance of this variable in the data analyzed.

Table 3 – Effect of the variable phonic saliency, in the plural marking of noun phrase elements, by Oiapoquean speakers

Factor	Application / Total	%	Relative Weight (PR)
Irregular plural	84/126	66,7	0.70
Regular plural of oxytone base and tonic monosyllable	92/106	86,8	0.77
Regular plural of proparoxytone base	24/36	66,7	0.52
Regular plural paroxytone base and unstressed monosyllable (amalgam)	840/1222	68,7	0.45

Total: 1040/1490 = 69,8%

Range: .32

Input: 0.83

Significance: 0.003

Source: Ribeiro (2018).

The Table shows that the most salient items, considered here those forms that perform the irregular plural, have a percentage of markings similar to the forms that pluralize in a regular manner, such as the tonic oxytones and monosyllables. In general, irregular forms are more marked than the others (SCHERRE, 1988); however, this study signaled that the oxytonic forms and the tonic monosyllables favor the marking

more than the irregular plural forms; the latter, for presenting morphophonemic changes in the passage from singular to plural, and the former, because the stressed syllable is the same that receives the plural mark. Then, with a smaller advantage, proparoxytones appear followed by the paroxytones. In fact, Scherre (1988) points out that regular paroxytonics and unstressed monosyllables behave as detractors of plural marks.

Finally, it should be said that the results presented confirm the importance of the phonic salience variable and ratify the tendency found in other studies pointing out that the most salient forms tend to be more marked than the less salient ones.

Social Variables

Age

Age was the first social variable and second in the general selection, considered significant by the Program, evidencing the importance of the age group in conditioning the plural marking in SN, by Oiapoqueans. The results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 – Effect of the age variable, in the plural marking of noun phrase elements, by oiapoqueans speakers

Factor	Application / Total	%	Relative Weight (PR)
20 - 45 years old	418/506	82,6	.73
Above 46 years old	622/984	63,2	.37
Total:		1040/1490 = 69,8%	
Range:		.36	
Input: 0.83			
Significance: 0.003			

Source: Ribeiro (2018).

The data reveal that younger Oiapoqueans mark the plural more than older speakers, which may be reflecting a possible panorama of change in the community, as Silva and Paiva (1996, p. 350) affirm: “the study of the correlation between age and Linguistic variation points to two basic directions: the relationship of stability between linguistic variants or the existence of changes in the language”.

Sex

This is the second most relevant social variable, and the results can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5 – Effect of the sex variable, in the plural marking of noun phrase elements, by oiapoqueans speakers

Factor	Application / Total	%	Relative Weight (PR)
Feminin	592/798	74	.57
Masculin	448/692	64,7	.41
Total:		1040/1490 = 69,8%	
Range:		.16	
Input: 0.83			
Significance: 0.003			

Source: Ribeiro (2018).

The values obtained reflect the difference in the use of plural marks between men and women, in which marking is slightly favored by women. This panorama is similar to that evidenced by the literature in general, and, according to Scherre (1988), this is common to occur due to the greater feminine sensitivity, regarding the use of rules that favor the employment of socially prestigious forms. In Oiapoque, most likely, this behavior observed in women is due to the adoption of behaviors and values more focused on the urban context, as the research permits to observe that women are more inserted in predominantly urban activities related to studies and work, revealing profile of residents of a growing community. On the other hand, men seem to be less involved in these urban activities, as it is observed that there is still a significant number of these speakers involved in informal activities such as fishing, agriculture and boat transport.

Thus, this panorama may also reflect a little of the social history of the Oiapoque community, in which social and behavioral changes are visualized through these uses. However, in one way or another, it is worth remembering Labov (1990) to emphasize that, in a speech community, the linguistic difference between men and women is always present and this occurs not only due to the feminine sensitivity to the forms of greater social prestige, but also for the differentiation of roles between men and women in society, associated, above all, to the “patterns of social interaction in daily life” (p. 348).

Scholarity

The performance of this variable is found in the values expressed in Table 6.

Table 6 – Effect of the scholarity variable, in the plural marking of noun phrase elements, by oiapoqueans speakers

Factor	Application / Total	%	Relative Weight (PR)
Fundamental	379/575	66	.42
Middle	661/915	72	.54
Total:		1040/1490 = 69,8%	
Range:		.12	
Input: 0.83			
Significance: 0.003			

Source: Ribeiro (2018).

It is observed that the plural marks in the elements of the noun phrase tend to be favored by the group of high school speakers (.54), indicating that the higher the schooling, more the speaker uses plural marks. In general, the literature points to this panorama of greater schooling, more use of rules, with regard to marking the plural in the elements of the noun phrase (SCHERRE, 1988; SANTOS, 2003; SCHERRE; NARO, 2006; LOPES, 2014). This picture evidenced in Oiapoque, for the variable scholarity, is interesting, since the city does not display a diversity of academic formation yet, since higher level, at the time of data collection for this research, had been implemented only four years before and was in the process of maturing. However, it is valid to say that the performance of schooling on the phenomenon in question shows the important of the school in the propagation of the prestige variant, in this case the use of the nominal agreement mark, making explicit that the speakers with more school time reproduce in greater proportion this variant.

DISCUSSION

The observation, description and analysis of the groups of linguistic and non-linguistic factors pointed the systematicity that rules the process of variation in the nominal number agreement in the speech of the residents of Oiapoque who use Brazilian Portuguese L1, confirming, therefore, that the language presents an ordered heterogeneity, in which the variation is inherent to the linguistic system, even though that language is in daily contact with other languages, as is the case of Oiapoquean Portuguese.

The results found make clear the greater use of plural marks by younger speakers, women and those with high school education, which is comparable to what has already been observed for this phenomenon in other varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, since, in general, the marking tends to be superior to non-marking. Oiapoque youths demonstrated

that they are leading a probable process of linguistic change that is beginning to take shape in the community, moving towards a greater use of the marked variants, in this case, more socially prestigious. This picture that presents itself in the community does not fail to reflect the current dynamics of the place, which gradually acquires characteristics of more urban centers, which is also noticeable through the linguistic uses that occur in the city, as recorded previously in Graphic 1, highlighting a high percentage of use for the nominal agreement of number in this variety of Portuguese, spoken in the extreme north of Brazil.

Therefore, this scenario meets the general trend observed in Brazilian Portuguese in urban areas, regardless of socio-political-demographic extension, in which the percentages of achievement of the marks of agreement are higher than those of non-agreement. To illustrate this panorama, we highlight the work of Scherre (1988) with speakers from Rio de Janeiro (RJ); Carvalho (1997), held in Rio Branco (Acre), with speakers from the urban and low-class areas; Lopes (2001), with data from popular and cult speech from Salvador (Bahia); Brandão (2011), with speakers from Nova Iguaçu (Rio de Janeiro); Martins (2013), on the speech of the inhabitants of Alto Solimões (Amazonas); Lopes (2014), with Portuguese spoken in the rural area of Santa Leopoldina (Espírito Santo).

It is worth mentioning that, in all these studies, the presence of formal plural marks in the flexible elements of noun phrase in Brazilian Portuguese is always greater than the absence of these marks, although there are differences among the rates of application. These surveys also reveal the presence of marks strongly correlated to structural and social variables, especially the linguistic variable position of the lexical item in the noun phrase, reflecting a predominant trend of marking in the elements that precede the nuclear term and reduction in those that follow that term (SCHERRE, 1988). It also shows regularity in the effect of the social variable education, reflecting the proportionality between the speaker's level of scholarship and the use of plural marks.

In this way, Brazilian Portuguese spoken in Oiapoque follows this tendency, and, with regard to the linguistic variables considered, the performance presented is not far from what occurs in other varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph. The group of factors precedent marks according to position confirmed that “marks lead to marks and zeros lead to zeros” (SCHERRE, 1988). The variable position of the nominal element in relation to the nucleus of the noun phrase showed that the elements located to the left of this nucleus favor the marking, while those to the right of the nucleus disadvantage it; and the nuclear term tends to be more marked when it is in the first position in the noun phrase. This aspect also confirms Vieira e Brandão (2014, p. 106) when affirming that for nominal agreement in Brazilian Portuguese “there is a dialing rule in noun phrase that determines that the number (singular or plural) is indicated in the leftmost constituent”. Finally, the phonic salience

variable pointed out the most salient items as favoring the use of plural marks, again confirming what the literature records for the performance of this variable, with regard to nominal agreement.

Regarding the effect of groups of social factors, age stood out as the main responsible for the marking, reflecting a possible process of change underway in the Oiapoque community, which shows that it is being triggered by the removal of rural features and the incorporation of more urban ones, which are increasingly intensified, mainly through trade, migratory flow, tourism and the arrival of higher education institutions. The gender variable revealed that women use the plural marks more than men and scholasticity showed that the more scholasticity the speaker has, the more the use of plural marks; the less it, the less use of these marks. Thus, it should be said that the variety of Portuguese spoken in Oiapoque has been showing a variable typological feature (LABOV, 2003) in which the use of plural marks in the noun phrase items, according to Vieira e Brandão (2015, p. 106), would be conditioned to the greater or lower level of “awareness of the speaker about the social evaluation of the rule”, which is evident in the percentages related to the individual’s scholasticity. “This variability, on the other hand, would result from the lack of mastery of the standard rule, sometimes learned in the school environment or in contact with highly educated individuals”.

On this question of the variability observed between the typological rules that characterize certain phenomena in Brazilian Portuguese, such as the nominal number agreement, we can also consider that the process of variation and change in the different varieties of Brazilian Portuguese constitute a *continuum* in the application of marks (LUCCHESI; BAXTER; SILVA, 2009), in which, on the one hand, there are the localities that perform the least number nominal agreement marks and on the opposite side of this *continuum* are the cities with higher percentages of accomplishment of these marks. It is worth mentioning that the extreme that reflects the lower rates of use of the marks tends to be characterized by spaces closer to rural environments, while the values expressed at the opposite end reflect more urbanized spaces. To illustrate this issue, we cite some works that explain these traits regarding the use of plural marks in noun phrase items, in Brazilian Portuguese: 16% in Helvécia (rural community in the countryside of Bahia); 45% in Goiás (city in the countryside of the state of Goiás); 61% in Santa Leopoldina (countryside of Espírito Santo); 67% in Rio Branco (Acre); 91% in Nova Iguaçu, an urban municipality in Rio de Janeiro; 94% in the capital of Rio de Janeiro (RJ); in this panorama Oiapoque is located at the midpoint of this *continuum* with indexes of 69.8%, reflecting what occurs in cities with typically urban characteristics and more intense commercial relations.

This study also registered that Oiapoque, as a frontier city, has a population characterized by miscegenation and ethnic diversity that does not fail to influence its urban, social and, consequently, linguistic development. Therefore, it is a space that

deserves greater attention from public authorities and socio-political-economic projects that can guarantee this development in a full and coherent way for its residents. It is worth mentioning that linguistic studies are still very incipient in the region, mainly considering the Brazilian Portuguese spoken in the city, whether in the condition of L1 or in the condition of L2.

It is necessary to implement projects that contribute to a greater and better knowledge of this variety of Brazilian Portuguese spoken in this place almost isolated from the rest of Brazil, characterized as the only Brazilian space whose border occurs with a country that has French as its official language, in addition to be surrounded by indigenous villages of different ethnicities and languages. Among these projects, linguistic studies stand out, for, as shown in this research, the diversity of people who transit the place is great, reflecting not only the intensity of the migratory flow, but also the accentuated dynamics of contact among native speakers of different mother languages, but a large part of users of Brazilian Portuguese L2, which establishes a relevant context for the investigation of other linguistic phenomena.

CONCLUSION

The language must be considered as a social product, in which originates and remains within the society of which it is part of and, therefore, when observed and analyzed, it must be taken under the influence that the social environment plays on it, since reflects the culture, the interests, habits and trends of a community. These aspects were confirmed in this study, whereas the variations present on the usage of the nominal concordance of number on the speech of oiapoqueans point out the actions and attitudes of each of these speakers over the languages, since sometimes they used plural marks, sometimes they erase them. So on, this research registered that the nominal concordance of number in the use by the oiapoqueans is variable and conditioned by linguistic and social factors.

This study searched, through data analysis, show the referred phenomenon outlining the way the oiapoqueans speakers employ the marks of plural, in the items of the noun phrase. It was showed the linguistic and social variations that act significantly in the conditioning of plural mark, pointing the factors that favor or disfavor it. The findings reveal that the variety of Brazilian Portuguese spoken in Oiapoque reflects patterns of use equivalents to the verified ones in other varieties spoken in Brazil. Thus the investigation made it possible a knowledge more systematized of one of the phenomenon studied in Brazilian Portuguese, contributing for a better vision of the theme on screen, considering that this study parted from a pioneer research at the area (RIBEIRO, 2018). The data revealed that the oiapoquean speaker tends to effectuate the mark of plural, in the elements of noun phrase in a significant way, in ways similar to

those practiced by speakers of average schooling of urban Brazilian areas, seeing that the percentage rate was 69,8%.

As a result, the main hypothesis was confirmed, because, although Brazilian Portuguese spoken in border area was considered, whose contact with other languages, as French and the indigenous language Kheuól is frequent, the results would not differ from what other studies advocate and that lean over the occurrence of this phenomenon across Brazil, ratifying, one more time, the linguistic heterogeneity ordered. It is known that the reflection and argumentation about this theme is much broader and may involve many other questions, both structural and extralinguistic, however it is expected for this moment that this work can contribute somehow not only for the promotion of the phenomenon in one of the varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, but also for the expansion and development of other consistent studies that contemplate the variation in the process of number agreement in the elements that structure the noun phrase, in Brazilian Portuguese.

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