Variation of Verbal Agreement in Speech from North Paraná People

Jacqueline Ortelan Maia **BOTASSINI**[1]
Laura Bellanda **GALUCH**[2]

[1] Doctoral Degree in Language Studies from the Universidade Estadual de Londrina - UEL (2013). Adjunct Professor D at the Universidade Estadual de Maringá - UEM. Contact: jombotassini@uem.br

[2] Master in Letters from the Universidade Estadual de Maringá - UEM (2022). Master Teacher at the Colégio Axia. Contact: lauragaluch@gmail.com

Abstract:

Normative grammars, almost invariably, state that verb agreement occurs once the verb inflects and conforms to the number and person of the subject. In speech, however, it happens that this linguistic phenomenon does not occur homogeneously and only in accordance with the rules prescribed by these grammars (according to CASTILHO, 2016; SCHERRE; NARO, 1998; VIEIRA, 2013). The marking or not of verbal agreement can occur motivated by factors that go beyond the linguistic. The present work, based on the Variationist Sociolinguistics methodology, examined the variation of verb agreement in speech from North Paraná people. For the analysis, the extralinguistic factors: gender, age group and education level. And the linguistic factors degree of phonic salience and position of the subject in relation to the verb were observed as possible conditioners of the phenomenon under study. The research *corpus* consists of sixteen interviews with informants from North Paraná belonging to the database of interviews recorded and transcribed by Botassini (2013). After the analysis, it was found that the linguistic factor position of the subject in relation to the verb and the extralinguistic factors gender and education level were the most determinant for the marking or not of verbal agreement.

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INTRODUCTION

Languages can use different strategies to indicate plurality. Concerning verb agreement, English, for example, maintains the plural inflection only in the noun phrase; Portuguese, on the other hand, performs it redundantly, with markings in the noun phrase and in the verb.

The Portuguese language normative grammars argue that verbal agreement occurs once the verb agrees with the subject (cf. BECHARA, 2009; CEGALLA, 2008; CUNHA; CINTRA, 2017, among others).

Several studious, such as Scherre and Naro (1998), Vieira (2013) and Castilho (2016), however, have pointed out that the marking or not of verbal agreement can occur for reasons other than those prescribed by traditional grammars, which treat the phenomena linguistics as homogeneous and static. In fact, these rules achieve greater importance in the written language; however, in the spoken language, there are other factors that affect the variation of verbal agreement performed by Brazilian Portuguese speakers.

This article, based on the Variationist Sociolinguistics methodology, presents the results of a research that examined the variation of verbal agreement in the speech of inhabitants from the North Region of the state of Paraná, Brazil, the northern Paraná, investigating how the linguistic factors degree of phonic salience and the position of the subject in relation to the verb and the extralinguistic factors sex, age group and education level act in the conditioning of the realization or not of this linguistic phenomenon. Therefore, we used a *corpus* consisting of sixteen interviews with informants from the North of Paraná and belonging to the database of recorded and transcribed interviews by Botassini (2013).

The option to study this topic with informants from the North of Paraná is due to the fact that stereotyped representations were created for these speakers, usually labeled as simple, rude, incorrect, careless people, in short, "rednecks". In this regard, Botassini's (2013) thesis analyzes, among other topics, the beliefs and attitudes of informants from Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul and North Paraná concerning the dialect of Northern Paraná. And one of the beliefs revealed by these informants is that the lack of agreement would be a dialectal mark produced, more frequently, by people from the North of Paraná than by people from other regions.

1. THE VARIATION IN VERB AGREEMENT

Azeredo (2013) and Cunha and Cintra (2017) state that verb agreement occurs once the verb is inflected and conforms to the number and person of the subject, as in *i study*, *we study*, *they study* (in Portuguese: *eu estudo*, *nós estudamos*, *eles estudam*). About this, Castilho (2016, p. 411) considers that "this conformity implies [...] redundancy of forms, that is, if there is a plural marking in the subject, there will be a plural marking in the verb".

This prescription, however, does not occur effectively in speech. According to Camacho (1993), verb agreement in Brazilian Portuguese is a grammatical phenomenon that is subject to variation, that is, it is not a categorical rule and its application is not invariable. For him, both linguistic and extralinguistic factors influence whether or not verbal agreement is performed; he also highlights that factors of an extralinguistic nature govern the non-standard nature, that is, variables such as education, age, sex, sociocultural and geographic origin, among others, are the main responsible for the variants that are not prescribed in normative grammars.

According to the author, verbal agreement is not frequently performed by the lower classes, but it is something that also occurs in the cultivated varieties, since this phenomenon is affected by external factors, which derive from sociocultural diversity.

Camacho (1993) also points out the necessity to verify whether, in the marking of plurality, the preservation of the plural mark in the 3rd person of the verb is affected by strictly structural causes. The author compares the variation in verbal agreement between 1st and 3rd persons and considers that, "since the speaker himself is the universal point of reference, it is obvious that the greatest variation in terms of the categories resides precisely in the 3rd person" (CAMACHO, 1993, p. 103). There is a difference in the degree of stigmatization between 1st and 3rd person agreement; in the latter, the absence of agreement is higher in comparison to the former. It can be seen, therefore, that the 1st person is the most preserved even in the popular variety, which tends to simplify, in a more accentuated way, the system of verb conjugation.

Scherre and Naro (1998, p. 509) state that "[...] Brazilian vernacular Portuguese presents systematic variation in number agreement processes, exhibiting explicit variants and zero (**0**) plural variants in verbal and nominal elements", italics by the authors). Cases such as "They EAT too much" (in Portuguese: Eles COME**M** demais) and "They TALK a lot" (in Portuguese: Elas FALA**M** muito) illustrate the explicit variants, while "They EAT too much" (in Portuguese: Eles COME**0** demais) and "They SPEAK a lot" (in Portuguese: Elas FALA**0** muito) present the zero variant. The authors also assert that "[...] the variable processes of number agreement in Brazilian vernacular Portuguese evidence a perfect system, correlated with linguistic and social variables" (SCHERRE; NARO, 1998, p. 509-510).

For Vieira (2013), no variety of Brazilian Portuguese categorically presents the number mark in the verbal form; therefore, it is important to understand which factors influence the speaker in the application or not of the agreement rule. The author highlights the particularities presented by normative grammars when classifying the rules of verb agreement, demonstrating the inconsistency in the traditional treatment, which sometimes uses syntactic or morphological criteria, sometimes semantic and which admits that the verb agrees with other terms of the sentence than the subject. In this way, even if implicitly, normative grammars legitimize the variability of verb agreement.

2. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

The *corpus* of this research consists of data collected from the bank of interviews recorded and transcribed by Botassini (2013). Of the 48 interviews that contribute to this database, 16 were used; more specifically, interviews conducted with informants from the North of Paraná were used.

These 16 informants are equally divided by sex (8 men and 8 women), by age group – EG (8 informants from the 1st EG and 8 informants from the 2nd EG: in the 1st EG are individuals with ages between 20 and 35 years old; in the 2nd EG, people between 50 and 65 years old) and by education level (8 informants with higher education and 8 with secondary education).

In order to analyze the variability of verbal agreement and the influence of linguistic and extralinguistic factors in this process, this research was supported by the Variationist Sociolinguistics methodology, which understands language as a heterogeneous system, which is related to social variables (sex, age group, education level, etc.) and that evolves (cf. ALKMIM, 2007; CAMACHO, 2007; MOLLICA, 2008; among others).

According to Mollica (2008), the object of study of Sociolinguistics is variation, understood "as a general and universal principle, capable of being scientifically described and analyzed"; thus, it starts from the "assumption that the alternations of use are influenced by structural and social factors" (MOLLICA, 2008, p. 10).

For the analysis of the selected interviews, we chose to work with the extralinguistic factors gender, education level and age group because, in addition to being used by Botassini (2013), to select the informants for his interviews, they are factors used by important studious on the subject of verb agreement (eg, SCHERRE; NARO, 1998).

Scherre and Naro (1998), using recordings from the Census *corpus* database of the Program of Studies on the Use of Language (PSUL), in Portuguese: Censo do Programa de Estudos sobre o Uso da Língua (PEUL), analyzed the extralinguistic factors education level, sex and age group; of these, the education level and sex were the most significant. Regarding the education level, this result seems to demonstrate that people with more years of schooling and who, consequently, were exposed to grammatical correction for a longer time, perform more plural markings. In relation to sex, the authors emphasize that women respect, more evidently, the established social rules, since they tend to be more sensitive to socially prestigious variants.

As for the selection of linguistic factors, this research was based on works already published on the subject, choosing those that were most often mentioned as conditioning factors. Scherre and Naro (1998), Duarte (2008) and Vieira (2013) pointed to phonic salience as one of the most conditioning linguistic factors for marking or not agreement. Likewise, there are several studies that highlight the position of the subject in relation to the verb as a linguistic variable that highly favors the retention or not of the plural mark in the verb (CAMACHO, 1993; SCHERRE; NARO, 1998; VIEIRA, 2013).

In the research by Scherre and Naro (1998), the two mentioned linguistic variables were analyzed – phonic salience and subject position. Considering the phonic salience variable, the authors present two criteria that establish the salience hierarchy: (i) presence or absence of accent in the ending and (ii) amount of phonic material that differentiates the singular from the plural. From the first criterion, "two levels of salience are established and, within each level, three categories are distinguished that reflect the phonic material differentiation of the singular/plural relationship, resulting in a six-level scale" (SCHERRE; NARO, 1998, p. 511).

Level 1 (unaccented opposition) contains the pairs that, in singular/plural opposition, do not present accentuation of the phonetic segments in both limbs. This level is subdivided into 3 categories: "1a: does not involve a change in the quality of the vowel in the plural form; 1b: involves change in vowel quality in the plural form; 3a: involves adding segments in the plural form" (SCHERE; NARO, 1998, p. 511). Level 2 (accentuated opposition) is formed by pairs that, in singular/plural opposition, present accentuation of the phonetic segments in at least one member of the opposition. It is subdivided as follows:

> 2a: involves only change in vowel quality in the plural form; 2b: involves the addition of segments without vowel changes in the plural form; 2c: involves additions of segments and various changes in the plural form; vowel changes in the ending, changes in the root, and even complete changes (SCHERRE; NARO, 1998, p. 512).

The results obtained through this classification demonstrate that the lowest salience levels disfavor the agreement with explicit plural marks, while the higher levels favor it. Thus, in general, it can be said that unaccented forms disfavor agreement, while accented ones provide it.

As for the second linguistic factor, the subject position variable, Scherre and Naro (1998, p. 516) point out that the presence of the subject and its position in relation to the verb interfere with verbal agreement. Four factors of this variable are focused: "1) Subject immediately preceded; 2) Prefixed subject separated from the verb by 1 to 4 syllables; 3) Prepended subject separated from the verb by 5 or more syllables; 4) Subject postponed to the verb". Data analysis indicated that the prefixed subject or the subject closest to the verb favors the explicit marking of verb agreement, which is disfavored by the postponed subject and by the prefixed subject distant from the verb. It can be said that, regardless of the education of the speakers, "the position on the left [...] favors more explicit marks of plural than the position on the right" (SCHERRE; NARO, 1998, p. 518).

In the present work, after establishing the linguistic and extralinguistic variables, the data were selected, identified and counted, and the results were placed in tables for further analysis.

Subsequently, these data are presented and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

3. Data Analysis

In the data analysis, only subjects in the plural were considered, whether simple, compound or hidden[3]. 299 express subjects and 55 hidden subjects were counted, totaling 354 occurrences. Among these occurrences, number marking was performed in 253 verbs and non-marking in 101, as displayed in Graph 1 and Table 1:

Graph 1 - Marking of verbal agreement.
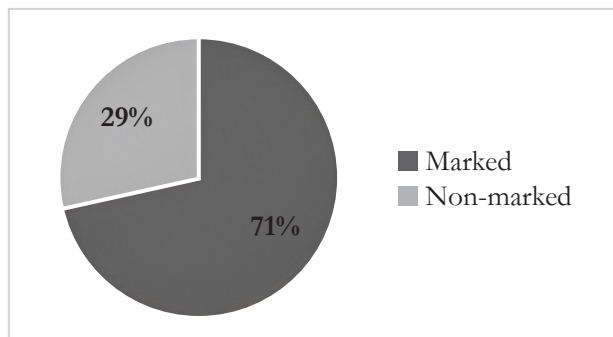
Source: Research data.

Table 1 - Marking of verbal agreement.

Verbs	Occurrences	Percentage
Marked	253	71%
Non-marked	101	29%
Total	**354**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

Graph 1 and Table 1 display a significant difference between marking (71%) and non-marking (29%) cases of agreement, revealing that, in general, the explicit marking of verbal agreement predominates among North Paraná speakers.

Such predominance may be related, among other reasons, to the way in which the data were collected: as it is an interview situation, the speaker tends to monitor his speech to avoid grammatical deviations, especially when dealing with answers to a questionnaire.

In addition, another reason that may justify the preference for marking is the education level of the informants, since the sixteen interviewees have at least completed high school: eight informants with high school and eight with higher education. Access to schooling for a longer period allows contact with the prestige norm for a longer period of time, which can influence the maintenance of some linguistic phenomena, according to grammatical prescriptions.

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[3] During data collection, there were cases of hidden subject, which were identified in two ways: by the ending of the verb and by the context, as shown in the following examples:

a) hidden subject identified through the ending:

INF.- No, as far as I can remember, I've always been with someone else, let's never pass. (In Portuguese: *Não, que eu alembre, sempre fui de acompanhá com uma outra pessoa, que alembre nunca PASSEMOS não.*) (03 M IN 2FE).

b) hidden subject identified through the context:

INQ.- How do you think people from the North of Paraná speak?

INF.- The people from the North of Paraná say (laughs) PULL the érre (=R) right [...] (In Portuguese: *Os norte-paranaenses falam (risos) PUXAM o érre (=R) né [...]*) (09 F IN 1FE).

INF.- I think the gauchos are kind of, kind of arrogant, kind of bossy, kind of... WANTS TO IMPOSE what he has, as if he had [...] (In Portuguese: *Os gaúcho eu acho que são meio, meio tipo arrogante meio mandão, meio... QUER IMPOR o que ele, como se ele tivesse [...]*) (04 NP M IN 2FE).

It is also necessary to consider that the age group of these informants corresponds to the stage in which they are either entering the job market (individuals in the first age group) or already working professionally (informants in the second age group), a factor that can influence the preference for agreement, since the lack of plural marking in verbs is often associated with a lack of intelligence, of capacity, which can bring professional losses.

It is important to highlight that the 29% of occurrences of unmarked verbs show that, despite the fact that the informants of the research perform the marking frequently, they do not do it in a systematic, regular, constant manner; therefore, this result is also relevant and indicates the variability of this linguistic phenomenon, which can change depending on the situational context.

Next, the linguistic factors degree of phonic salience and position of the subject in relation to the verb and the extralinguistic factors gender, education level and age group are analyzed.

3.1. Linguistic factors

The linguistic factors, degree of phonic salience and position of the subject in relation to the verb, were analyzed, once it has been examined more frequently in several studies that work with the same theme (CAMACHO, 1993; SCHERRE; NARO, 1998; DUARTE, 2008; VIEIRA, 2013) and have been presented as conditioning variables of the marking or not of verbal agreement.

3.1.1. Degree of phonic salience

Graph 2 and Table 2 present the group of verbs identified in the *corpus* according to phonic salience (from the most salient to the least salient forms), following the classification proposed by Vieira (2013), as well as the marking or not of agreement in each of them.

Before analyzing the results, however, it is important to note that, in the number of occurrences in Table 2, the 17 cases of verbs in the first person plural are not counted, because, for the analysis of the variable "degree of phonic salience" in the verbs, works in the field only examine the third person. Therefore, there is a difference between the number of occurrences in Table 2 and the absolute number presented in Table 1.

Graph 2 - Degree of phonic salience.
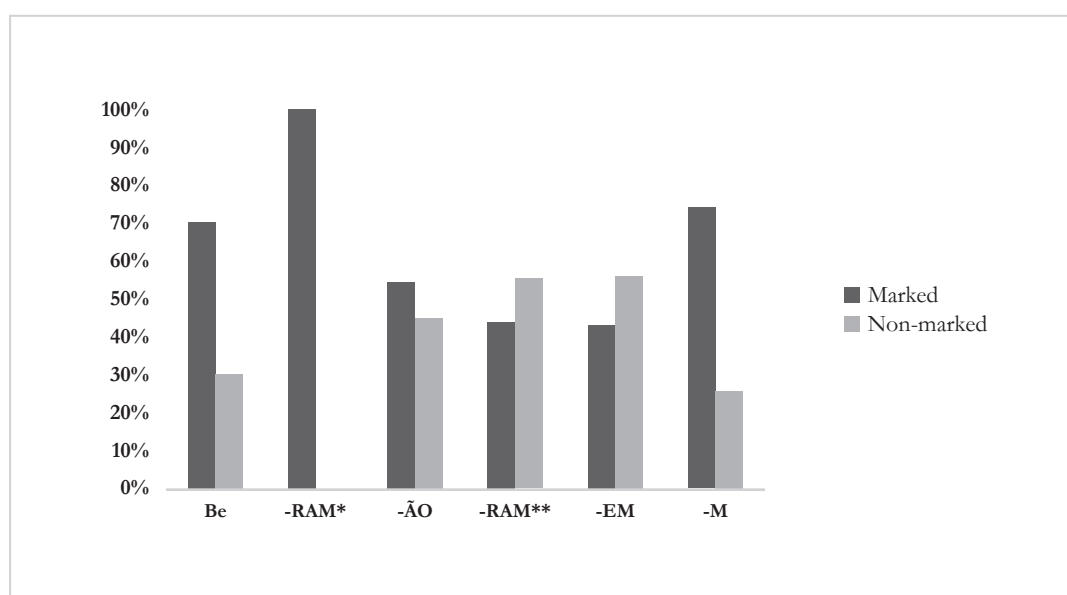
Source: Research data.
*RAM ending in irregular verbs.
**RAM ending in regular verbs.

Table 2 - Degree of phonic salience.

	N° total of occurrences	Marked		Non-marked	
		Quantity	**Percentage**	**Quantity**	**Percentage**
Be (in Portuguese: é/são)	47	33	70%	14	30%
-RAM* (in Portuguese: veio/vieram)	2	2	100%	-	-
-ÃO (in Portuguese: está/estão)	11	6	55%	5	45%
-RAM** (in Portuguese: passou/passaram)	9	4	44%	5	56%
-EM (in Portuguese: faz/fazem)	23	10	43%	13	57%
-M (Regular plural)	245	181	74%	64	26%

Source: Research data grouped according to Vieira (2013).
*RAM ending in irregular verbs.
**RAM ending in regular verbs.

The degree of phonic salience of the verbs corresponds to the singular/plural opposition referring to the [3rd] person. It is the principle that states that the more phonically salient forms are the most perceptible to the speaker and, for that reason, are more marked than the less salient forms.

Different from what Scherre and Naro (1998), Duarte (2008) and Vieira (2013) point out, in this work, apparently, the degree of phonic salience is not conditioning the marking or not of verbal agreement. The regular plural, determined by adding the ending -M, is normally the least marked, precisely because it is less salient; in this case, however, there was a plural marking in 74% of the occurrences, the second most significant marking percentage. However, if the most marked case (100%) is disregarded – which presented only two occurrences (irregular verbs ending in -RAM), therefore, numerically little significant –, the regular forms move to the first position in terms of marking, that is, they pass to be the most marked form.

It is important to emphasize that, due to the type of questions asked in the questionnaire, most of the answers were in the present tense, as shown in the following example, which allowed a high occurrence of verbs in this group.

INQ.- Ready. And how do you think cariocas speak?

INF.- Ah, they say... ah... how can I explain... (In Portuguese: Ah, eles falam... ah...como que eu posso explicá...) (01 M IN 1FE).

It is also important to highlight that, perhaps, the interviewer's speech contributed to the informants marking the verb agreement even in the verb forms whose degree of salience is lower (regular verb forms). The previous example shows this well. The inquirer asks "And how do you think the Cariocas speak?" (in Portuguese: E como você acha que falam os cariocas?), to which the informant replies "Oh, they speak..." (in Portuguese: Ah, eles falam...).

The third most marked case corresponds to the verb "be" in the present tense (is/are): 70% agreement between the verb and the subject. This result is compatible with what was expected, considering that it is an anomalous verb, whose difference between the singular and the plural is very salient. This is not just an inessential change; what you have, in this case, is a total change in the verb form, in which there is not even a correspondence in the stem.

The fourth most marked case (55%) refers to verbs who's ending also ends in -ÃO, however the verb stem (or part of it) remains, which is consistent with an irregular, not anomalous, verb. The maintenance of the stem possibly contributes to the fact that verbs such as "be" (is/are) (in Portuguese: "estar" (está/estão) are

phonetically less salient than the verb "be" (is/are) (in Portuguese: "ser" (é/são) and, perhaps because of this, the percentage of marking is lower for this verbal form.

Finally, in two cases, the marking did not prevail: regular verbs with ending -RAM and verbs with ending -EM. In relation to that case, normally, in other researches in the area, these verbs tend to be marked; in the studies by Scherre and Naro (1998), there was marking in 82% of the occurrences; among the interviewees in this research, marking was found in only 44% of the cases. It is interesting to note that the verb "come" [in Portuguese: "vir" (veio/vieram)], whose ending is also -RAM, was marked in 100% of the cases. This result, however, may have been altered by the low number of occurrences: only two; thus, although it is a result that corroborates that of other researches, one must be cautious when making any considerations. Irregular verbs whose ending is -RAM, such as "come" (in Portuguese: "vir"), tend to be more marked than regular verbs with the same ending, such as "pass" (in Portuguese: "passar"), because the change in the stem of the first verb makes the difference between singular and plural phonetically more salient than in the case of regular verbs, which do not undergo a change in the stem.

As for the group of verbs with the ending -EM, Scherre and Naro (1998) point out that 70% are marked; in this study, however, only 43% of the verbs had a plural mark. Probably, the non-marking index prevailed because the 3rd person plural pronoun – they – occupies the position of subject of the sentence, as in "[...] I think it gives an understanding like that, you know, they can't finish speech, [...]" (in Portuguese: "[...] acho que dá um entendimento assim, sabe, eles não consegue termina a fala, [...]") (02 M EM 1FE), corroborating the study by Galves (1993), who states that, when a pronoun assumes the position of subject, the possibility of non-agreement is greater, since the mark of plural in the verb would be a redundancy.

In addition to the singular/plural opposition of 3rd person verbs, 1st person plural verbs such as "we noticed" (in Portuguese: "notamos") were observed. 17 occurrences were identified, all of which were marked, that is, there was, with these verbs, 100% agreement. In this way, Camacho's speech (1993) is highlighted, which states that the 1st person has the most conserved endings, which was detected among the North of Paraná.

That said, it appears that the results of the analysis of data from the *corpus* of this work are partially at odds with the results of other research in the area, which indicate that the degree of phonic salience is a highly conditioning variable for the marking or not of verbal agreement, which is not was verified precisely in the speech of the North Paraná.

3.1.2. Position of the subject in relation to the verb

In this subsection, obviously, only the expressed subjects were considered, which totaled 299 occurrences. Table 3 presents the data referring to the position of the subject in relation to the verb.

Table 3 - Position of the subject in relation to the verb.

Position of the subject	Occurrences	%
Prefixed subject	287	96%
Postponed subject	12	4%
Total	**299**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

The data in Table 3 display that, of the 299 occurrences of the subject expressed in the sentence, 287 (96%) are prefixed to the verb and 12 (4%) are postponed to it. This result reveals the preference of the North Paraná speaker for the construction of the speech in direct order (SV).

Analyzing, specifically, the cases of subject in front of the verb, the following data were found:

Table 4 - Agreement with subjects in front of the verb.

Verb	Occurrences	%
Marked	220	77%
Non-marked	67	23%
Total	**287**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

Table 4 displays that the marking of agreement stands out in relation to the non-marking: of the 287 occurrences of the subject in front of the verb, in 220 there was agreement between the verb and the subject, which corresponds to 77% of the cases.

Marked verbs predominated in these cases because the clauses are in direct order; as the subject is topicalized, the speaker recognizes it as such, which favors agreement.

As for unmarked verbs, which correspond to 23% of the cases, in most occurrences, it comes immediately after the 3rd person subject pronoun, as in "[...] you cannot finish the subject they begins." (in Portuguese: "[...] cê não consegue terminá o assunto que eles começa.") (02 M IN 1FE). In these cases, the tendency is not to mark the plural in the verb because this would be a redundancy to the marking of number and person already expressed in the pronoun.

On the other hand, the data for subjects postponed to the verb are as follows:

Table 5 - Agreement with subjects postponed to the verb.

Verb	Occurrences	%
Marked	4	33%
Non-marked	8	67%
Total	**12**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

From the data displayed in Table 5, it can be noted that there is a predominance of non-marking of agreement when the subject is postponed to the verb. This probably happens because the speaker does not recognize the element postponed to the verb as a subject, but as a complement.

Table 3 displays the massive preference (96%) of phrasal constructions in the direct order (SV). The reverse order (VS) occurs most commonly in cases of existential/presentational verbs such as "exist", "have", "happen", etc. Camacho (1993) states that one of the characteristics of these verbs is the tendency "to remove the logical subject from the control of grammatical agreement [...], neutralizing it completely [...] or to change the control, attributing it to a locative" (CAMACHO, 1993, p. 108).

The tendency to make verbal agreement with the prefixed element is so common that, frequently, agreement is made with the topicalized element, whether or not it is the subject of the sentence, for example: "This dress appears the legs"; "Cellphones ran out of battery" (in Portuguese: "Esse vestido aparece as pernas"; "Os celulares acabaram a bateria").

In addition, in speech situations, people find it more difficult to resume their sentence construction, which contributes to the lack of agreement, as explained by Bechara (2009, p. 544):

> In oral language, in which the flow of thought runs faster than the formulation and structuring of the sentence, it is very common to enunciate the verb first [...] and then follow the other sentence terms. In these circumstances, the speaker usually enunciates the verb in the singular, because he

has not yet thought about the subject to whom he will attribute the predicative function contained in the verb; if the subject, at this moment, was thought of as a plurality, cases of disagreement will be frequent there.

It is possible to notice a case of a postponed subject in the following response from informant 14 F ES 1FE:

> INF.- *Huhum, I think it's the... south here Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Curitiba, we see a lot, until these days' interviews with children were broadcast on television so... it doesn't matter the class or the issue of the culture then it is already appropriate in speech, to speak correctly as well* (in Portuguese: *Huhum, eu acho que é o... sul aqui Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Curitiba, a gente vê muito, até esses dias passou na televisão <u>entrevistas com crianças</u> então... não importa a classe nem a questão da cultura então já tem isso já apropriado na fala, de falar corretamente também*).

In the above case, it is clear that the speaker did not consider "interviews with children" as the subject, but as a complement to the verb "broadcast" (in Portuguese: "passou"); it is even possible that the verb was in the singular in agreement with the locative "on television" which, although postponed to the verb, is very close to it.

These data show that the subject's position is conditioning the marking or not of agreement, ratifying what Vieira (2013, p. 90) exposes: "the cases of postponed subject strongly favor the cancellation of the number mark of the verbs", already in the prefixed subject structures, the explicit marks of agreement are more recurrent.

3.2. Extralinguistic factors

The extralinguistic factors gender, age group and education level were analyzed. The results obtained are presented below.

3.2.1. Gender

Table 6 presents the verbal agreement marking data of North Paraná speakers in relation to gender.

Table 6 - Verbal agreement marking according to the gender.

Variants	Gender			
	Masculine		Feminine	
	Occurrences	%	Occurrences	%
Marked	115	64%	138	79%
Non-marked	65	36%	36	21%
Total	**180**	**100%**	**174**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

According to Coulthard (1991, p. 8), "men and women do not speak exactly the same way"; the data presented in Table 6 corroborate this statement. Despite the marked agreement prevailing in both sexes, it appears that, proportionally, females score more than males: 64% of cases are marked against 36% of unmarked cases in males, as opposed to 79% of cases marked versus 21% of cases unmarked in females.

These data are in line with the research by Scherre and Naro (1998), which indicates that females tend to score more. This preference can be justified by the fact that women are more sensitive to the "social prestige

attributed by the community to linguistic variants" (PAIVA, 2003, p. 37), that is, females tend to prefer variants that are more socially prestigious, as is the case with the explicit marking of verb agreement.

Furthermore, when implementing the non-marking of verb agreement, a socially discredited form is chosen over another prestigious one, marking. In this sense, "women assume a conservative attitude and men take the lead in the process" (PAIVA, 2003, p. 36). This feminine conservatism is evident, as only 21% of the occurrences did not receive explicit plural marks, while the masculine sex failed to mark in 36% of the verbs.

Therefore, it is noted that the extralinguistic factor gender may be acting as a conditioner in the marking of verbal agreement among North Paraná speakers.

It is noteworthy, however, that this female behavior refers to the social group analyzed here and to the local rules of symbolic attribution of value to linguistic forms. Local social conditions must impose on these women the need to seek the prestigious way. Finally, according to Paiva (2003), "It is necessary to consider, however, that the effect of the gender/sex variable alone camouflages other aspects and complex interactions that must [sic] be examined in the study of variation and change" (p. 37).

3.2.2. Education level

Table 7 presents the data regarding the marking of verbal agreement according to the education level.

Table 7 - Verbal agreement marking according to the education level.

| Variants | Education level | | | |
| | High school | | Superior education | |
	Occurrences	%	Occurrences	%
Marked	104	62%	149	80%
Non-marked	64	38%	37	20%
Total	**168**	**100%**	**186**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

First, it is important to point out that the mark of agreement predominates both among speakers with high school and among speakers with higher education. Marking is likely to prevail because, as stated by Votre (2003), people who attend school benches are influenced both in speaking and in writing, since the school "acts as a preserver of forms of prestige, in the face of tendencies of ongoing change" (VOTRE, 2003, p. 51), especially in relation to those more stigmatized forms, such as verbal agreement.

The data reveal that the marking of verbal agreement is found more frequently in speakers with higher education: in 80% of the occurrences, there was the marking of agreement; on the other hand, when the occurrences of speakers with high school education were analyzed, the marking was identified in 62% of the cases. These data reveal that those who attended school for longer tend to follow prestige rules and avoid stigmatized forms, which are often controlled, avoided and even punished during training. The school context favors exposure to situations that privilege the norm and this is reflected in the discourse of more educated informants.

It appears, therefore, that the education level still seems to be acting as a conditioning factor for the marking of agreement.

3.2.3. Age group

Table 8 indicates the results according to the age group of the speakers.

Table 8 - Verbal agreement marking according to the age group.

Variants	Age group			
	First		Second	
	Occurrences	%	Occurrences	%
Marked	140	73%	113	70%
Non-marked	52	27%	49	30%
Total	**192**	**100%**	**162**	**100%**

Source: Research data.

Through the age group factor, we seek to determine whether the variants observed in the study are in a situation of stable variation or of ongoing linguistic change. Tarallo (2002) informs that there will be stable variation if there are no changes between age groups; however, if the use of the most innovative variant occurs more frequently in the younger age group, decreasing in relation to the age of the older informants, then we have a situation of change in progress.

The data presented in Table 8 display that agreement marking predominates both in the first age group, with 73% of marked verbs, and in the second, with 70% of marking. The percentage results are very close and, although the non-marking rate occurs minimally more in the second AG, it is not possible to say, as Vieira (2013), that non-marking increases as the age of the speaker's increases.

Therefore, what the results reveal is that there is a situation of stable variation, since the age range variable did not prove to be a conditioning factor for the phenomenon under study, in the case of this *corpus*, with informants from the North of Paraná.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research allowed us to verify that the explicit marking of verbal agreement, as prescribed by normative grammars, prevails among North Paraná speakers, despite the belief that these informants would perform, more frequently, the non-marking of verbal agreement.

As already pointed out, this may be due to the situation of monitoring in the interview, the level of education of the informants and the fact that they are active in the labor market, factors that influence the maintenance of agreement.

Regarding the linguistic variables degree of phonic salience and position of the subject in relation to the verb, it could be seen that the first was partially opposed to the results of research by other authors, such as Scherre and Naro (1998), Duarte (2008) and Vieira (2013). The data presented by the informants from North Paraná indicate that the phonic salience did not act as expected, since there is no regularity in the marking or not of the agreement that is justified by the phonic salience of the verbs. As for the subject position in relation to the verb variable, the results corroborate the research by Camacho (1993), Scherre and Naro (1998) and Vieira (2013), indicating that speakers prefer the subject in front of the verb, which, in turn, tends to condition the marking of agreement. On the other hand, non-marking is evident when the subject is postponed to the verb, because the speaker is normally inclined to recognize it as the complement of the verb and not as its subject.

As for the extralinguistic factors, it was found that the variables gender and education level proved to be conditioning factors for the phenomenon of verbal agreement. Regarding gender, women performed the marking of agreement more frequently, confirming the results of other studies that report that females tend to maintain the variation in prestige, proving to be more conservative in relation to non-marking. Regarding the level of education, the data showed that informants with higher education performed more cases of marking, indicating that access to schooling for a longer period of time interferes with the maintenance or not of the plural mark.

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