Concord without concord: 1st plural pronoun *nós* 'we' in Brazilian Portuguese

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In vernacular Brazilian Portuguese use of 1st plural desinence *–mos* with nós ´we´ is variable, although it nearly is categorical in European Portuguese and very frequent in more highly educated speakers in Brazil. Its absence is highly stigmatized and is considered an indication that the speaker 'does not know how to speak Portuguese'. This phenomenon exhibits vigorous social constraints and is subject to intricate structural conditioning based on tense and paradigmatic relationships, our main point in this paper.

We analyze four samples, with speakers of both genders: (1) Baixada Cuiabana Sample (BC), state of Mato Grosso, Center-Western region: 19 speakers (three age groups, four schooling levels); (2) State of Goiás Sample (GO), Center-Western region: 55 speakers (three age groups, two schooling levels); (3) Vitória Sample (PortVix), urban area of state of Espírito Santo, Southeastern region: 46 speakers (four age groups, three schooling levels); (4) Santa Leopoldina Sample (SL), rural area of state of Espírito Santo: 32 speakers (four age groups, two schooling levels). In our samples, 1st plural *–mos* is realized with the following overall frequencies: BC 51.4% (420 tokens), GO 76.3% (577 tokens), PortVix 90.1% (487 tokens), SL 47.5% (817 tokens). We used GoldVarb X for quantitative analysis.

In the examples below, we show the levels of Tense and Verbal Paradigm we are focusing on.

1a) **Preterit potentially neutralized with present** (*Nós entramos no rio* 'We went in the river'; *Nós entrôØ numas estradas* 'We went on some roads')

1b) **Present potentially neutralized with preterit** (*Hoje nós exportamos* 'Today we export'; *Nós falaØ errado* 'We speak wrong')

2a) **Preterit not potentially neutralized with present** (*Nós fomos com o taxista* 'We went with the taxi driver'; *Nós foiØ na praia* 'We went to the beach')

2b) **Present not potentially neutralized with preterit** (*Nós vamos dá alegria* 'Wherever we go there is happiness'; *Nós vaiØ tem que levar* 'Everywhere we go we have to take it')

3) **Imperfect** (*Eu lembro onde nós morávamos* 'I remember where we lived'; *Nós moravaØ com a minha vó* 'We lived with my granny')

The results obtained in terms of relative weights reveal three general tendencies:

1) Undo ambiguity between preterit and present when there is neutralization by reserving *–mos* preferentially for preterit (.980 vs.199; 666 vs.161; .673 vs. 346; 999 vs.263).

2) Use *-mos* preferentially for preterit (.963; .597; .777; 100%) and present forms (.789; .704; 532; .885) without neutralization, all of which show high phonic salience for singular/plural opposition.

3) Avoid antepenultimate stressed forms, thus disfavoring use of *–mos* in the imperfect (.071; .104; 0.012; .007), in accord with the general preference for penultimate stress in Brazilian Portuguese.

Thus, underlying this stigmatized morphosyntactic phenomenon there are effects on the functional level (tense distinctions), the cognitive level (marking of more easily perceptible forms), and the structural level (maintenance of phonological pattern). We hope these facts will contribute toward greater linguistic consciousness and lessening of prejudice involving this variable phenomenon in Brazilian Portuguese.

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