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The variation in the use of the definite article before anthroponyms in the Portuguese spoken in Luanda-Angola¹

Abstract

This research analyses the variation in the use of definite articles before people's names, also called anthroponyms, in the Portuguese spoken in Luanda, the capital of Angola. The aim is to understand what motivates this variation in use. The study was based on the theoretical methodological premises of Labov's *Variationist Sociolinguistics* (1972), and it was developed based on the hypothesis that the occurrence of the phenomenon would be favoured in a more recent colonization context, such as the case of Angola. Ten sociolinguistic interviews were selected for this sample, recorded in the urban area of the capital of Angola between 2008 and 2013. The results allow us to identify the most relevant factors for using the article, as well as comparing Angolan Portuguese aspects to the same aspects of other varieties, especially those which were formed in contact with African languages.

1. Introduction

Brazilian Portuguese (BP) was built under the influence of several different strata, and is the product of great contributions from the different peoples who were in the country in the colonial and imperial period, mainly Africans brought as slaves.

Some researchers (Guy 1981; Lucchesi 1993; Petter 2008; Holm 2011; among others) have demonstrated that certain morphosyntactic features of the Portuguese language, as spoken in Brazil, are the result of many linguistic contacts that occurred during the period of consolidation of the language in Brazil, which distinguishes BP from European Portuguese (EP). Although many researchers understand the importance of linguistic contacts in the formation of linguistic varieties, there are still few sociolinguistic works on the

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Portuguese language in Africa that thoroughly describe the repercussions of these contacts at the linguistic level. Thus, it is necessary to carry out studies on the different ways of speaking Portuguese in regions where the language was and is in constant situations of contact, due to multilingualism. These should consider historical, social and linguistic aspects, aiming to recognize and understand specific linguistic patterns. In this sense, I sought to study the variation in the presence or absence of definite articles before people's names, also called anthroponyms, in the Portuguese spoken in Luanda, the capital of Angola.

In the Portuguese language, the anthroponym, when used referentially to refer to a specific individual in the discursive domain, is considered a semantically complete and defined unit. As a result, the use of a definite article before people's names constitutes a case of grammatical redundancy (Müller & Negrão 1989). However, the variation in the use or non-use of the definite article observed in BP distinguishes it from EP, which categorically marks the article before anthroponyms (Mira Mateus 2003).

BP was in contact with many African languages, especially Bantu languages, during the formation of its popular norm (Bonvini 2008), and many of these languages with which Portuguese had contact, have a high incidence of bare nouns, both in Brazil and Africa, (Lucchesi 2009; Avelar & Galves 2014), i.e., nominals that occur without preceding determiners (Wall 2017). The phenomenon is quite general in creole languages, possibly a trace of morphosyntactic restructuring in the early stages of the history of these languages (Baxter & Lopes 2009), which may explain the possibility of article omission in communities marked by linguistic contact.

The territory now known as Angola was taken over by the Portuguese in the 15th century, a period that coincides with the beginning of Portuguese colonization in Brazil. Since then, the region has suffered from a vast and profitable trade based on human exploitation, through the trafficking of human beings enslaved to America. However, according to Inverno (2009 : 3), unlike in Brazil, the generalization of the Portuguese language in Angola started by the middle of the 20th century, close to the end of the colonisation process, which happened in 1975. Before that, the Portuguese language had been socially and geographically restricted to the Afro-Portuguese elite.

Only from the beginning of the 20th century, more specifically from the middle of the century, Portuguese gradually became the most spoken language in urban areas of Angola. This fact happened essentially due to the increase in

the number of Portuguese settlers, both men and women, the majority of whom referred to settle in coastal urban centers instead of the countryside areas².



Map 1: Luanda located in Africa's map

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola>

Despite the imposition of Portuguese as the nation's official colonizing language³, autochthonous languages persisted and coexist to this day, including Kikongo, Kimbundu and Umbundu, which are Bantu languages.

In this sense, the comparison of morphosyntactic aspects of BP with other varieties of Portuguese, such as Angolan Portuguese (AP), can provide evidence for discussing the importance of contact between Portuguese and Bantu languages in the formation of these varieties. For the research outlined here, I chose to investigate the variation in the use of the definite article in this

² The original: Apenas a partir do início do século XX, mais especificamente a partir de meados do século, o português se tornou gradualmente a língua mais falada nas áreas urbanas de Angola. Este facto ficou a dever-se essencialmente ao aumento do número de colonos portugueses, tanto homens como mulheres, a maioria dos quais preferia fixar-se nos centros urbanos costeiros em detrimento das zonas do interior.

³ There was, in Angola, a political act of establishing Portuguese as the official language. The said act brought social implications, as Portuguese became the only language that should be used in public administration and teaching. Learning Portuguese was mandatory for people who sought to rise socially (Mingas 2000).

context, aiming to understand what motivates these variations, and subsequently compare the results achieved with other studies that have extensively investigated the phenomenon, focusing on the Brazilian variety.

2. Materials

This study was based on the Labovian theoretical-methodological model, also known as the Theory of Variation and Linguistic Change, in the terms of Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) and Labov (1972). This model was adopted because it is theoretically coherent and methodologically effective for describing a speech community from a variation perspective, its main thesis being that language is a heterogeneous and social reality, and this heterogeneity is functional.

According to Tarallo (1997), variationist theory is a theoretical-methodological model that assumes linguistic “chaos” as an object of study. In other words, the approach seeks to visualize the regularity and systematicity in the coexistence of linguistic variants in everyday communication, by correlating existing variations in individuals' speech with factors of a social and linguistic nature. Therefore, for this stage of the present study, ten sociolinguistic interviews of the DID type (dialogue between informant and documenter) were chosen. These were recorded in the urban area of the city of Luanda, capital of Angola, in the years 2008 and 2013, and are part of the project “In search of the roots of Brazilian Portuguese: morphosyntactic studies” (originally, “Em busca das raízes do português brasileiro: estudos morfossintáticos”)⁴.

For the empirical study, I started by collecting data from the sociolinguistic interviews which constitute the *corpus* of this research. The subsequent step involved coding the occurrences of the phenomenon in question. Through the assigned coding, the statistical program provided quantitative results of the correlation between the linguistic variable and the established extralinguistic variables. In this way, the collected data enabled quantitative treatment of the data through the Goldvarb X Program to be given (Sankoff, Tagliamonte & Smith 2005). The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the variable phenomenon in question was guided by the defined linguistic and extralinguistic factors, as they allowed the exploration of explanations for

⁴ The project is coordinated by Professor Dr. Silvana Silva de Farias Araújo from the Center for Portuguese Studies of the State University of Feira de Santana (NELP/UEFS). To carry out the interviews, a submission was made to the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings (CEP/UEFS). The number in favor of its implementation is 140,511.

the difference between the presence and absence of the article investigated in specific contexts.

3. Results and discussion

After carrying out the previously described steps, in a total set of 59 occurrences of people's names, and a global percentage of application of the defined article in the face of an anthroponym above 50% (35 out of the 59 occurrences in total), it is interesting to note that the results are not so conclusive at this initial stage. In terms of distribution, there seems to be a certain balance between the presence (59%, 35 occurrences) and absence (41%, 24 occurrences) of articles. Although the amount of data collected is not significant enough to make more assertive statements, I seek to describe, in the different possible linguistic contexts, the guidelines regarding the use or omission of the article in relation to a proper name.

	Occurrences/ Total	Percentage
Absence of article	24/59	40.7%
Use of article	35/59	59.3%

TABLE 1: General distribution of variation in the use of the definite article before anthroponyms in Portuguese spoken in Luanda

Callou and Silva (1997) observed a significant increase in the use of articles with people's names in both Portugal and Brazil, with non-use being greater in Brazil than in Portugal. Subsequently, the authors drew attention to the low production of the article in the region of oldest colonization, which would reveal a case of linguistic conservatism⁵. According to the authors, "the older the colonization, the lower the percentage of use of the article" (Callou & Silva, 1997:22). Considering the socio-historical context of Angola and its relatively recent liberation from Portuguese colonization (the second half of the 20th century), it is possible to understand the greater use of the definite

⁵ Diachronically, the overview of variation in the use of the article with anthroponyms observed in EP studies presents results that demonstrate a high frequency of use of the article in contemporary times, but they also show a historical change (Castro 2006). Costa (2002) carried out an analysis of the morphosyntactic factors that favored the presence or absence of the definite article before anthroponyms, in which she registered only two instances of occurrence of an article accompanying more than 1,400 anthroponyms in Portuguese texts between the 13th and 16th centuries. These two occurrences have only been identified in texts from the late archaic period. This finding suggests that the combination of the article with anthroponyms was not an integral part of the grammar of Old Portuguese (between 14th and 16th centuries). Magalhães (2011) reinforces that the variation in the use of the article with anthroponyms became increasingly rare over the centuries, until, in the 19th century, the use of the article became practically categorical in EP.

article in relation to the anthroponyms in Luanda, which corroborates Callou and Silva's hypothesis about this variable phenomenon in other former Portuguese colonies. Regarding the aspects of the variable phenomenon in focus in Luanda, I used quantitative data treatment through the Goldvarb X software to identify which factors were most significant for the configuration of the dependent variable presence or absence of a definite article before people's names through the selection of some linguistic variables: *syntactic position of the anthroponym in the sentence* and *presence/absence of preposition before the article*.

3.1 Linguistic Variables

Previous sociolinguistic studies have highlighted the relevance of checking the syntactic position of the anthroponym in the sentence, to better understand the variation studied. Therefore, this syntactic position of the anthroponym was considered to verify the position in the sentence with the highest occurrence of the article. From the 14th century onwards, the use of the definite article became widespread in the Portuguese language, initially in relation to a name that served as a subject. Furthermore, some functions (adjuncts, genitives, and indirect objects) would always be preceded by a preposition, which in turn would favor the presence of the article (Callou & Silva 1997). Regarding the use of the definite article, the anthroponym performing the role of the subject presented the highest percentage of occurrence (84%), inferring greater use of the article in this context. The following examples illustrate what was said. Please note that the defined articles in Portuguese are “a” (feminine/singular), “o” (masculine/singular), “as” (feminine/plural) and “os” (masculine/plural).

- (1) A Rosa disse “então gostaste da minha prima” e ele disse “sim”. (A. E. R., Age group I, A)⁶
- (2) Pela segunda vez aconteceu, é daí onde que o Luiz, graças a Deus, depois do tratamento, ficou bom. (A. O. G., Age group II, B)⁷
- (3) O Geraldo, sim, jogou, jogou, joga no Brasil, mas não é, não é, não é no Flamengo. (A., Age group III, B)⁸

On the other hand, the anthroponym that performs the function of

⁶ Translation: *The Rosa*, then, said: „did you like my cousin?” and he said „yes”.

⁷ Translation: It happened for the second time, that's when *the Luiz*, thank God, after the treatment, got well.

⁸ Translation: *The Geraldo*, yeah, played... played... plays in Brazil, but it's not, it's not in Flamengo.

appositive (22%) or predicative (20%) tends to exhibit less use of the definite article, as per (4) and (5), respectively:

- (4) Agora tava lá aquele outro... o... professor... é... da... da Universidade Católica, Ø *Justino de Andrade*, que depois saiu e veio agora o outro. (A., Age group III, B)⁹
- (5) Eu disse: Sou a neta dele, sou... minha mãe é Ø *Florinda Guerra*. (T. M. N., Age group, B)¹⁰

The explained results align with studies by Silva (1996), who states that the absence of an article in appositives is significant, justified by the high specification nature of this class. Likewise, Braga (2012:47) argues that in structures such as predicates, “the article can be deleted, [...], since they are not arguments but predicates”.

Another closely observed factor is the presence or absence of a preposition accompanying the anthroponym. Callou and Silva (1997) found strong conditioning on the presence of articles in the face of prepositions that contract with them¹¹. For Amaral (2003), the item did not favor any of the dependent variables, whereas Campos Júnior’s (2011) research enabled him to verify that the cases in which articles are preceded by a preposition with which they can be contracted, are not categorical in the studied speech community. Santos (2012) revealed in his research that the preposition favored the presence of the article before an anthroponym. Given this, I sought to verify the conditioning of prepositioned contexts for the use of the article in Luanda. Out of the total number of contexts of anthroponyms preceded by a preposition, 57% were preceded by an article and in 43% of the occurrences, the article was absent. Furthermore, the presence of a preposition with which the article can be contracted (*de*, *a*, *em*) proved to be a considerably active factor, as represented by (9), (10), and (11) respectively. The occurrence of prepositions “*para*” and “*em*” before a proper name was not found in the analyzed *corpus*.

- (9) Tem aí a novela *da Beth* feia, não sei que agora já parou ou não. (D. C., Age group I, A)¹²

⁹ Translation: Now that other one was there.... the professor from the Catholic University, Justino de Andrade, who, then, left, and now the other came.

¹⁰ Translation: I said: I’m his granddaughter, I’m... My mother is Florinda Guerra.

¹¹ In Portuguese, it is possible to contract some prepositions with the articles, due to the articles’ vowel nature. Thus, instead of “*de a*” or “*de o*” the contracted forms are used: “*da*” or “*do*”, respectively.

¹² Translation: There is the soap opera of *the Beth*, *The Ugly*. I don’t know if at this point it’s stopped airing or not.

- (10) Fiquei, assim, a rir. A Ivania falou à tia Teresa, lhe disse... (J. M., Age group I, A)¹³
- (11) Minha mãe me entrega numa senhora, na Dona Maria Júlia. (D. J. T., Age group III, A)¹⁴

Hence, I could observe that in Luanda the occurrence of a preposition seems to favor the presence of an article, as in (09), (10), and (11), as opposed to cases such as (12), which appear in fewer numbers:

- (12) O último capítulo [...] que teve o encontro com \emptyset Victor Manuel, acho que foi isso. (A., Age group III, C)¹⁵

3.2 Social Variables

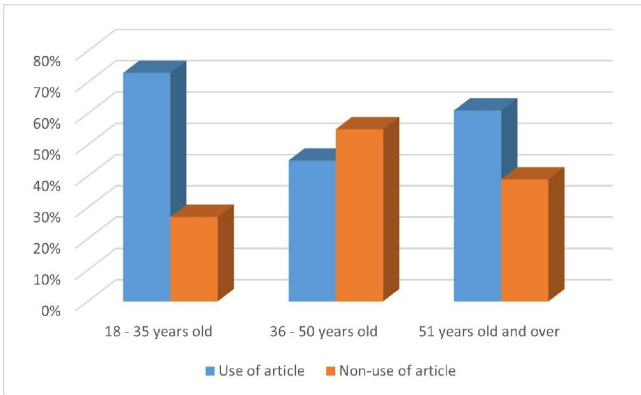
Social, or extralinguistic, factors are external in nature to the linguistic structure, but equally important in linguistic studies. It is necessary to consider that the selection of social factors must be adapted to the objective of the investigation. In this study, among the set of variables external to language, the most comprehensive and recurrent social categories in variationist studies were considered: *age group* and *education*. Furthermore, the variable *mother tongue* (Portuguese or African languages) was considered, as it is relevant for delimiting the realization of the phenomenon and its specific contexts. Although I did not have a more significant amount of data to make more consistent deductions, the behavior of the age group shows signs of a stable variation process, as the graph below indicates:

These results shown in Graph (1) allow for some inferences, for instance, although the intermediate range presented an index close to neutrality, the group of younger speakers uses the article more, compared to the group of older speakers. Despite this, it is not possible to define whether we are, in fact, dealing with a case of regular age-related change (Labov 1994). If this hypothesis is confirmed in subsequent studies, it would be possible to conclude that Luanda is on the way to categorizing the definite article before anthroponyms in the spoken language, especially since a usage rate greater than 50% (precisely 73%) was registered in the speech of younger people.

¹³ Translation: I was like that, laughing. The Ivania said to *the* Tia Teresa and told her...

¹⁴ Translation: My mother delivers me at a lady's, at *the* Dona Maria Júlia.

¹⁵ Translation: The last chapter [...], which showed the encounter with Victor Manuel, I think that's it.



GRAPH 1 – Variation in the use of the definite article before anthroponyms in Luanda – Angola, according to the age group of the speakers

The analysis of the variable related to the level of education was based on studies by Silva (1996), who defended that there was a significant relationship between the level of education and the use of articles along with possessive pronouns (which is also a possibility in Portuguese language), where the higher the level of education, the greater the use of article. Although the phenomenon under study is different, I decided to verify the hypothesis based on the same assumption. The results found that, in Luanda, the frequency of article usage before people's names is higher (62%) in the speech of individuals with low education, contrasting with Silva's (1996) results, where it represented 50% among those with access to higher education.

Since Angola is a multilingual country, where three large distinct linguistic families coexist, it was important to observe the native language variable to analyze the results regarding bilingual speakers of Portuguese and national languages. It was noted that the article was used more frequently among speakers with Portuguese as their native language (69%), although the frequency among native speakers of African languages was well balanced (48%).

4. Conclusion

The results of this research propose a reflection on morphosyntactic aspects of an African variant of the Portuguese language: the Portuguese spoken in Luanda. Based on the theoretical-methodological framework of the Theory of Linguistic Variation and Change (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968), I investigated the variation in the absence and presence of the definite article before anthroponyms in the speech of Luanda residents, Angola. Based on oral

interviews carried out in Luanda, I sought to verify which groups of factors were acting on this variable phenomenon, as this variation can be better understood through the correlation of linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

The objective of observing whether the syntactic function of the noun phrase in which the anthroponym is found in the sentence would be relevant in terms of the use of the article was achieved, with the subject position being the most favorable for its occurrence. Furthermore, the main question of whether the definite article occurs before people's names in Angolan Portuguese and whether it is more often present than absent could be analyzed using statistical data.

In the work of Lima and Moraes (2019), the results of speech data from the capitals of Brazil's Northern Region were compared to Salvador, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre. It was found that, in the context of article usage before a person's own name, the North aligns itself with the speech of the Southeast and South, while distancing itself from the speech of the Northeast. The author's hypothesis is based on Callou and Silva (1997), regarding the leadership in the use of the definite article before people's names in cities of more recent colonization. Our results showed that Luanda is characterized by using the definite article with people's names, with occurrences reaching almost 60%, similar to the North and Southeast regions of Brazil (Lima & Moraes 2019). This fact corroborates the main hypothesis of this work, which is the fact that the phenomenon occurs mainly in places of more recent Portuguese colonization, as postulated by Callou and Silva (1997).

Finally, studying and comparing other varieties of Portuguese language that have been in contact with African languages is essential to better understand the dynamics of variation and change of this phenomenon. Additionally, it presents evidence of the effects of linguistic contact that occurred during the socio-historical formation on the constitution of Portuguese spoken varieties in former Portuguese colonies. By acknowledging the effects of linguistic contact on the formation of Portuguese spoken varieties in former colonies, we gain deeper insights into the pluricentric nature of the language and its evolving identities across different geographical and cultural contexts.

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