

REFLEXIONS ON NUMBER CONCORDANCE IN COMPLEX NOMINAL SYNTAGMS (SNs) IN ANGOLAN PORTUGUESE (PA)

REFLEXÕES SOBRE A CONCORDÂNCIA DE NÚMERO EM SINTAGMAS NOMINAIS (SNs) COMPLEXOS NO PORTUGUÊS DE ANGOLA (PA)

REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA CONCORDANCIA DE NÚMEROS EN SINTAGMAS NOMINALES COMPLEJOS (SNs) EN ANGOLA PORTUGUESA (PA)

Hermenegildo Kâmbua da Costa PINTO¹
Jeremias Dandula PESSELA²

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to describe the phenomenon of number agreement in complex DPs that perform the syntactic function of the direct object of the sentence, in Angolan students, bilingual with Portuguese L1 and Bantu L2, or vice versa. We also intend to evaluate the treatment given to the phenomenon of concordance in the DPs, from the point of view of teaching and learning. The study is based on linguistic variation and language learning teaching theories, as they offer explanations for the occurrence of deviations in the acquisition of non-native languages. The search type is mixed. The published data indicate that Angolan students use a mixed agreement mechanism in DPs that have to their left core words of categories defined as definite articles, numerals and quantifiers. In these cases, the plural is marked as elements and not in the noun. Furthermore, the fact that in the normative documents of the process of teaching and learning of Portuguese does not consider aspects of the contact of Portuguese with the Bantu languages spoken in Angola, difficulty in correctly appropriating agreement mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: Grammatical number. Nominal agreement in AP. Teaching Portuguese.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho, procuramos descrever o fenômeno da concordância de número em sintagmas nominais (SNs) complexos que desempenham a função sintática de objeto direto da frase, em estudantes angolanos, bilíngues com L1 português e L2 bantu, ou vice-versa. Pretendemos avaliar também o tratamento dado ao fenômeno da concordância no SN, do ponto de vista do ensino e aprendizagem. O estudo baseia-se nas teorias de variação linguística e de ensino aprendizagem de línguas, por oferecerem explicações para a ocorrência de desvios na aquisição de línguas não-maternas. O tipo de pesquisa é misto. Os dados analisados indicam que os estudantes angolanos utilizam um mecanismo de concordância misto em SNs que têm a sua esquerda palavras nucleares de categorias funcionais como artigos definido, numerais e quantificadores. Nestes casos, o plural é

¹ Higher Pedagogical School of Bié (ESP-Bié), Cuito – Angola. Portuguese Language Teacher at the Department of Education Sciences. PhD in Linguistics (UEVORA) – Portugal. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9936-4482>. E-mail: hermenetina@gmail.com

² Higher Pedagogical School of Bié (ESP-Bié), Cuito – Angola. Professor of English and Portuguese at the Department of Education Sciences. Master in General and Portuguese Linguistics (UP-PORTUGAL) – Portugal and Doctoral Student in Language Sciences (UP-PORTUGAL) – Portugal. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0027-0946>. E-mail: jeremiaspessela@yahoo.com.br

marcado nesses elementos e não no nome. Ademais, o fato de nos documentos normativos do processo de ensino e aprendizagem do Português não considerarem aspectos do contato do Português com as línguas bantu faladas em Angola dificulta a apropriação correta dos mecanismos de concordância.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Número gramatical. Concordância nominal no PA. Ensino do português.*

RESUMEN: *En este trabajo se pretende describir el fenómeno de la concordancia numérica en frases nominales complejas (SNs) que tienen la función sintáctica de objeto directo de la oración, en estudiantes angoleños, bilingües con L1 portugués y L2 bantú, o viceversa. También pretendemos evaluar el tratamiento dado al fenómeno de la concordancia en el SN, desde el punto de vista de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. El estudio se basa en las teorías de la variación lingüística y de la enseñanza del aprendizaje de lenguas, ya que ofrecen explicaciones sobre la aparición de desviaciones en la adquisición de lenguas no nativas. El tipo de investigación es mixto. Los datos analizados indican que los alumnos angoleños utilizan un mecanismo de concordancia mixto en los SN que tienen a su izquierda palabras centrales de categorías funcionales como artículos definidos, numerales y cuantificadores. En estos casos, el plural se marca en estos elementos y no en el sustantivo. Además, el hecho de que los documentos normativos sobre el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje del portugués no consideren aspectos del contacto del portugués con las lenguas bantúes habladas en Angola dificulta la correcta apropiación de los mecanismos de acuerdo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Número gramatical. Acuerdo nominal en BP. Enseñanza del portugués.*

Introduction

In the process of teaching and learning Portuguese in Angola, one of the crucial points is the teaching of number agreement in the Nominal Syntagms (SN). Although Portuguese is the official language of the country (cf. art. 19 of the CR³) other languages are present, with emphasis on languages of Bantu origin. The difficulties in establishing number agreement in the NS are exacerbated when it is made up of elements that are the nuclei of functional categories, such as determinants, numerals and quantifiers. Assuming that Bantu languages are languages without articles, and many speakers are exposed to less robust inputs from the European Portuguese (EP) norm (ZAU, 2011), the difficulties in maintaining all agreement mechanisms in constituted SNs by determinants, numerals and quantifiers tend to be more difficult, which, from the start, poses a great challenge, both for students and for teachers. In the AP, a variable strategy in the marking of the grammatical number predominates. Several authors such as Inverno (2009), Adriano (2014), Marques (1983) consider that in the plural

³Constitution of the Republic.

forms of SN, for AP speakers, the absence of plural marks for nouns (N) is common, as an influence of Bantu language, by what, according to Pessela (2020, p. 39, our translation):

The absence of the plural marking in N is justified by the contact between Portuguese and the Bantu languages spoken in Angola. Everything indicates that AP speakers when acquiring Portuguese, interpret the nouns as invariable, and consider the determiners (articles) as equivalent to the nominal prefixes of the Bantu languages.

In this work, we seek to describe the phenomenon of number agreement in complex SNs consisting of (i) Art. def. [+ pl] + N [- pl]: (Definite Article [+ plural] + Noun [- plural]); (ii) Art. def. [- pl] + Poss. [+ pl] + N [- pl]: (Definite article [- plural] + Possessive [+ plural] + Noun [- plural]); (iii) Num. + N [- pl]: Numeral + Noun [- plural]; (iv) Quantity+ N [- pl]: Quantifier + Noun [- pl]. Thus, we aimed to evaluate the most common trends in number agreement marking in complex SNs, which perform the syntactic function of the direct object of the sentence, in Angolan bilingual students with L1 Portuguese and L2 Bantu, or vice versa. We also intend to evaluate the treatment given to the phenomenon of variable agreement in the SN in the PA from the point of view of teaching and learning. For that purpose, we analyzed the main guiding documents of this process, namely the programs and manuals of Portuguese for the 6th and 10th grades, as well as for the 1st and 2nd year of higher education for teacher training. The work consists of an introduction, literature review, data presentation and discussion, final considerations, and bibliographic references.

Literature review

The number agreement in the SN is the relationship established between the Noun and its specifiers and modifiers (determinants, quantifiers, and adjectives) that constitute the SN, it is made in number (plural or singular). The grammatical number is considered one of the linguistic universals in Greenberg's (1963) list. All the languages of the world dial the number. However, languages have different mechanisms of the grammatical number marking, which may be through the use of endings, nominal prefixes, among others, as shown in the following examples.

- (1)
 - a. Os gatos brancos são lindos. (PE)
 - b. Os aluno são inteligente. (PA)
 - c. The books are green. (ING)

d. Olongato vykusuka vyafina⁴. (umbundo)

Having presented the previous examples, we note that there is a probable relationship in the number agreement mechanism in the SN of sentences (b) and (d), as there are authors who argue that AP speakers make a transfer of grammatical substrate from Bantu languages. Concordance in these languages is done by attaching prefixes to the Noun that are switched to the other constituents of the SN. In some cases, there is a form for nouns and adjectives, and a second form for possessives and demonstratives, usually, object markers and other minor categories (KATAMBA, 2003, p. 103). However, unlike the EP, which has a multiple agreement mechanism (cf. ex. a) in the PA there is a tendency to mark only the leftmost element of the SN, usually, an article, a *numeral* or any element from a quantifiers and determiners category, in the plural, being defined by many authors as a result of the contact between Portuguese and local Bantu languages.

Presentation and discussion of data

The data of the present research were obtained through the application of a semi-open interview and the documental analysis of Portuguese programs and manuals for the 6th, 10th and 11th grades and for the 1st and 2nd year of university education. The choice of the interview was due to what Gonçalves (2013) defended. According to the author:

Currently available studies on the AP present brief lists of some salient features of its grammar or refer to a particular subvariety. On the other hand, in cases where more general descriptions of the AP are presented, the empirical basis is constituted by literary texts, which can hardly be considered representative of the grammar of the oral language, as established by the community of speakers of this language (GONÇALVEZ, 2013, p. 162, our translation).

Ninety-five (95) informants participated in the interview, forty-eight from primary education, thirty-two from secondary education, and fifteen from higher education. All informants are residents of the municipality of Cuito, province of Bié. The informants vary in age between ten and twelve years old for those in primary education, thirteen to sixteen years for those in secondary education, and seventeen to thirty-six years for those in higher

⁴ White cats are beautiful.

education. All informants are bilingual and have Portuguese as L1 for a minority and L2 for the majority. For better understanding, the data are detailed in the table (1) that follows.

Figure 1 – Informant data table

Variáveis	Descrição	Frequência relativa	%
Idade	10 – 12 anos	48	50,5 %
	13 – 16 anos	31	32,6 %
	17 – 35 anos	16	16,8 %
	total	95	100 %
Língua materna	luimbi	1	1,0%
	kikongo	1	1,0 %
	tchókwe	2	2,0 %
	luvale	1	1,0 %
	nganguela	4	4,2 %
	português	49	51,5 %
	umbundu	37	38,9 %
	total	95	100 %
Zona de residência	urbana	23	24,2 %
	periurbana	72	75,7 %
Total		95	100 %

Source: Pessela (2020, p. 63)

For the quantification and organization of the data, we used the SPSS1 software. The program enabled us to calculate and cross-reference the linguistic variables (syntactic function, SN structure, presence of the plural mark, and absence of the plural mark) with the social variables *age, mother tongue, education level, and area of residence* of informants. To understand whether the direct object function has any influence on the lack of marking of number agreement in the SNs, we collected several examples produced in the interviews. We found four types of SNs with plural marking problems in this syntactic function:

- a) Art. def. [+ pl] + N [- pl]
- b) Art. def. [- pl] + Poss. [+ pl] + N [- pl]
- c) Num. + N [- pl]
- d) Quant.+ N [- pl]

In (2) we illustrate some of the occurrences found.

(2) (examples taken from PESSELA, 2021, p. 54)

1. a) ... lavar os prato.
2. b) Depois... terminar os meus estudo.
3. c) Tenho nove disciplina.
4. d) Tenho muitos livro.

The total results are summarized in the following table:

Figure 2 – Table of results of the SNs with the agreement of a divergent number of the EP norm with the syntactic function of direct object

Função Sintática	Variáveis sociais											Total	
	Idade			Língua materna					Zona de residência				
Objeto direto	10 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 35	kimbundu	luvale	nganguela	tchókwe	português	umbundu	Urbana	periurbana	Total	%
Art. defin. [+ pl] + N [- pl]	9	8	1	0	0	0	0	11	7	4	14	18	10,5 %
Art. def.[+ pl] + Poss. [+ pl]+ N[- pl]	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1,0%
Num. + N [- pl]	109	24	12	0	0	0	3	88	57	17	128	145	85%
Quant.+ N [- pl]	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	4	1	2	3	5	3,0%
Total												170	100

Source: Pessela (2020, p. 84)

As Table 2 shows, the SNs with the agreement of a divergent number of the EP norm with the syntactic function of a direct object had a total occurrence of 170 SNs, in 287, corresponding to 59.2%. Regarding its structure, we highlight:

a) Definite article [+ pl] + Noun [- pl]

In SNs consisting of the definite article [+ pl] + Noun [- pl], with the syntactic function of the direct object, as in the example in (2a), we found 18 occurrences (10.5%) out of a total of 170.

Relating the occurrence with the sociolinguistic variable age, we found 50% for informants aged between ten and twelve years, 44.4% for informants aged between thirteen and sixteen years, and 5.5% for informants aged between seventeen and thirty-five years old.

As for the mother tongue variable, we found 38.8% for informants who have Umbundu as their mother tongue, and 61.1% for informants who have Portuguese as their mother tongue.

Regarding the variable area of residence, we found 22% for informants residing in the urban area and 77.7% for informants residing in the peri-urban area.

b) Definite article [+ pl] + Possessive [+ pl] + N [- pl]

Regarding the SNs consisting of the definite article [+ pl] + Possessive [+ pl] + Noun [- pl], with the syntactic function of the direct object, as in the example in (2b), we found 2 occurrences (1.2 %), out of a total of 170 (100%).

Relating the occurrence with the sociolinguistic variable age, we found 0% for informants aged between ten and twelve years, 50% for informants aged between thirteen and sixteen years and 50% for informants aged between seventeen and thirty-five years.

As for the mother tongue variable, we found 50.0% for informants who have Umbundu as their mother tongue and 50.0% for informants who have Portuguese as their mother tongue.

Regarding the variable area of residence, we found 50.0% for informants residing in the urban area and 50.0% for informants residing in the peri-urban area.

c) Numeral + Noun [-pl]

In SNs consisting of Numeral + Noun [- pl], with the syntactic function of direct object, as in the example in (2c), we found 145 occurrences (85%), out of a total of 170.

Relating the occurrence with the sociolinguistic variable age, we have 75.0% for informants aged between ten and twelve years old, 16% for informants aged between thirteen and sixteen years, and 8.2% for informants aged between seventeen and thirty-five years.

As for the mother tongue variable, we found 2.0% for informants who have Tchókwe as their mother tongue, 36.3% for informants who have Umbundu as their mother tongue, and 60.6% for informants who have Portuguese as their mother tongue.

Regarding the variable area of residence, we have 11.7% for informants residing in the urban area and 88.2% for informants residing in the peri-urban area.

d) Quantifier + Noun [- pl]

In the SNs consisting of Quantifier + Noun [- pl], with the syntactic function of the direct object, as in the example in (2d), we found 5 occurrences (3.0%) out of a total of 165 (100%).

Relating the occurrence with the sociolinguistic variable age, we found 0.0% for informants aged between ten and twelve years old, 60% for informants aged between thirteen and sixteen years, and 40.0% for informants aged between seventeen and thirty-five years.

As for the mother tongue variable, we found 20.0% for informants who have Umbundu as their mother tongue and 80.0% for informants who have Portuguese as their mother tongue.

As for the variable area of residence, we found 40% for informants residing in the urban area and 60% for informants residing in the peri-urban area.

We noticed that younger speakers (10-13 years old) and (12-16 years old) who have L1 Portuguese and who come from the peri-urban area tend to mark the plural only in the article. If there is a numeral, this element being very clear as to the meaning of plurality, then it is in this context that there is a significant number of “deviations” and a greater tendency not to mark the noun with the plural. With possessives, there is a tendency to mark the plural both in the article and in the possessive, and the tendency presented by Costa and Figueiredo Silva (2010) for BP does not seem to be justified.

In general, from the analysis carried out on the programs, we found that they are analytical, not offering details about the treatment to be agreed upon. The 6th Grade Portuguese Language Program, for example, presents a section on the general objectives of primary education, among which the following stand out: “Use the Portuguese language correctly to communicate properly and structure logical thinking, through compliance with grammatical rules or language functioning” (SILVA, 2010, p. 8, our translation). In the same scope of the 6th Class, mention is specifically made of the following objectives: “Correctly apply the grammatical contents appropriate to the class and level, as well as the knowledge acquired in previous classes” (SILVA, 2010, p. 8, our translation).

Since there is no reference in the program about what is grammatically correct, it is expected that this aspect will be addressed in the manuals designed for the teaching of the Portuguese language. However, in them, there is also not a great development of this aspect. The 10th-grade manual deals with the subject of grammatical classes only lightly, not referring to number agreement, this aspect being only implicit in the examples presented, whose norm used is that of the EP, as in the example in (3):

(3)

Ele comprou estas revistas (p. 216).

The same manual addresses the aspect of cohesion, defining it as the connection of textual elements through a series of mechanisms, fundamentally linguistic (MAGALHÃES; COSTA; SILVA, 2005, p. 237, our translation).

Using Prada (2006 [Web], our translation) the Portuguese language teaching support manual for Grade 11 has the following definition:

Cohesion is understood to be a set of processes that, using certain groups of words, or classes of words, make it possible to make a text from a “puzzle” of single sentences (or even a sentence from single words).

According to the manual, the mechanisms that guarantee sentence cohesion are word order and agreement in gender and number. It appears, therefore, that the non-existence of agreement in the Noun, configures the non-existence of cohesion, therefore an error. This treatment completely excludes the possibility of considering the language variant, the product of the contact between the Portuguese and the Bantu languages.

By pointing out the characteristics of the Portuguese spoken by university students in the city of Cuito, Pinto (2021) found the existence of agreement deviations concerning the EP, in which the values of gender and number of the noun determine the agreement with the elements of the same SN. In the same vein, Pessela (2020) when analyzing aspects of number agreement in the SN in Portuguese spoken by bilingual students in the 6th Grade, 11th Grade, 1st and 2nd years of the university, found the existence of a mixed number agreement marking strategy in complex SNs.

This phenomenon of variable marking of number agreement, with the tendency to mark the plural only in the leftmost element of the SN, is not an isolated case of speakers from this region of Angola. There are studies from other regions of Angola that point to the same trend, such as the Winter studies (2009) that analyzes the Portuguese spoken in Lunda-Norte, Adriano (2014), who analyzes the Portuguese spoken in Huíla, Hagemeyer (2009),

who analyzes the Portuguese spoken in the North and South of Angola, where Portuguese coexists with Kimbundu and Umbundu, respectively. All these authors evidence the existence not only of the variation in the mechanisms of agreement between the SN elements, but also the generalized tendency of marking the plural in the elements most to the left of the SN. This fact, still from the point of view of the mentioned authors, is because the number agreement in the Bantu languages spoken in Angola is marked by prefixation (cf. ex. 1d). Given this, given the fact that Portuguese is learned as L2 for many Angolan speakers, we decided to analyze the treatment given to this grammatical tendency in Portuguese teaching manuals and programs.

The 11th-grade manual addresses the issue of language records, linked to several factors, highlighting, however, the standard language, also known as the norm or current record, preserved by the school, the media, and literature. The manual that we are quoting defends: “The norm must, therefore, be acquired during school life, since its mastery is essential as a form of social and professional ascension” (MAGALHÃES; COSTA; SILVA, 2005, p. 157, our translation). He further states: “According to the norm (or current register), each of the other registers constitutes a deviation, a variation”.

The 1st and 2nd year higher education teacher training programs address aspects about the varieties of Portuguese, but almost nothing about the variation of agreement, in addition, they coincide with the conception that the variation is a deviation from the pattern norm.

Faced with reality, we witness a disparity between everyday linguistic practices and linguistic practices in the classroom. Despite insisting on Portuguese teaching that privileges the norm of European Portuguese PE, teaching closer to the linguistic characteristics found through the data presented should be adopted. Deviations from the norm show that they are a visible reality at all levels, as it was found that these deviations are present both in low-level speakers and in high-level speakers.

In the opinion of the authors of this work, the persistence in teaching Portuguese based on the EP norm, without considering the linguistic reality of Angola, perpetuates the errors of agreement. For this purpose, to counteract this reality, Angolan Portuguese (PA) should be standardized, capable of predicting and encompassing all the characteristics attached to this variant, including the number agreement, which has already been verified by several authors (PINTO, 2021; ADRIANO, 2015; NZAU, 2011). In the same way, given the linguistic profile of Angolan students, we consider it urgent to include typical aspects of AP in programs, manuals, and other teaching means, to reduce the gap between everyday linguistic practices and the norm taught in the academic environment.

Final considerations

After presenting some fundamentals about the variation of number agreement in SN in Angolan Portuguese, based on the analyzed data, we conclude.

Speakers of Angolan Portuguese show a mixed marking of number agreement regardless of education level.

The divergences in the agreement mechanism concerning the EP derive mainly from aspects that result from the linguistic contact between Portuguese and the Bantu languages spoken in Angola.

In the process of teaching and learning Portuguese, the typical characteristics of the AP have not been considered, thus hindering the appropriation and construction of a grammar that reflects the Angolan reality.

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