

# DEFINITE ARTICLES IN POSSESSIVE PHRASES IN SÃO TOMÉ PORTUGUESE: SUBSIDIES FOR THE DESCRIPTION OF A VARIABLE RULE

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### FIRST WORDS

The use of articles in possessive phrases is a variable rule among the varieties of Brazilian Portuguese, as can be seen in the following data, from a sociolinguistic interview conducted in the city of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>1</sup>

(1) *é difícil porque eu tenho que estudar várias coisas que não são o meu foco né... (COP A 3 M)*

*it is difficult because I have to study several things that are not my focus*

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<sup>1</sup> The examples shown from (1) to (4) were extracted from a randomly chosen survey in the *corpus* concerning the city of Rio de Janeiro, as part of the Corporaport project (Corpora do Português em análise). The corpora are available at <http://corporaport.letas.ufrj.br/>. The data were produced by a woman, with higher education level, in the age range between 18 and 35 years old.

(2) é porque *meu namorado* por exemplo morava na Glória e se mudou para Copacabana entendeu? (COP A 3 M)

*because my boyfriend, for example, used to live in Glória and moved to Copacabana, you know?*

(3) só conclui *o seu raciocínio* (COP A 3 M)

*I just concluded your reasoning*

(4) então acho que realmente os pais... tão mais ausentes botando mais empregada creche passando menos filh/ menos tempo *com seus filhos* (COP A 3 M)

*so I think that really the parents... are more absent, employing more daycare workers and spending less time with their children*

In European Portuguese, research shows that the rule in focus is not variable: the European variety is defined by the categorical use of the determiner in possessive phrases. The absence of the article in this context is only possible in constructions like formulas (for example, *Nossa Senhora, Vossa Senhoria*) and in structures with a vocative function (like *Não, minha senhora*).

In order to understand how other varieties of Portuguese outside the Luso-Brazilian axis behave, we propose in this chapter to describe the variable rule of the definite article in possessive phrases in the urban standard of São Tomé's Portuguese (henceforth STP)

The option to describe the urban norm of the STP is not by chance: the sociolinguistic reality of the community – marked by the coexistence of Portuguese and Creoles with a Portuguese lexical base (specifically Forro) – points to important subsidies for the description of the variable rule in the community and also in the interpretation of the dynamics of variation in other linguistic realities.

Thus, this paper seeks to contribute to the description of a linguistic rule that demarcates differences between varieties of Portuguese and also aims to broaden the scope of analyses of linguistic processes in realities marked by multilingualism, in order to verify to what extent contact between languages acts in shaping the grammar of the speech community.

## VARIATION IN THE USE OF THE ARTICLE IN POSSESSIVE PHRASES: A PORTRAIT OF PORTUGUESE VARIETIES

In Brazilian Portuguese, many variationist researches investigate the variation in the use of the article in possessive phrases (SILVA, 1982; CALLOU; SILVA, 1997; BAXTER; LOPES, 2009; SCHEI, 2009; MAGALHÃES, 2011; MENON,

2016). In this sense, despite percentage differences, the studies are unanimous in demonstrating the correlation between linguistic and social factors in the variation of the use of the definite article in this context. In European Portuguese (INVERNO; SWOLKIEN, 2003; SCHEI, 2009; MAGALHÃES, 2011), research shows that, unlike Brazilian Portuguese, the use of articles in possessive phrases is a categorical rule. Finally, studies on the use of articles in possessive phrases in African varieties of Portuguese (data from Portuguese spoken in Almojarife, and Portuguese of the Tongas), reveal an increasing use of articles in possessive phrases. However, studies on this topic in African varieties concentrate on isolated communities (BAXTER; LOPES, 2005, 2006; FIGUEIREDO, 2019). This research has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon in African varieties of Portuguese by investigating it in an urban community.

## THE SPEECH COMMUNITY

With respect to the STP, the works dedicated to verify the variation in the use of the article in possessive phrases focus on varieties of Portuguese spoken in isolated communities, which in itself brings particular elements in the dynamics of the variable rule. In this paper, we describe the process in the urban speech community of São Tomé, marked by an intense process of linguistic contact with creole languages which coexist with Portuguese in the insular area.

Thus, it is of interest to investigate, in the case of the São Tomense community, whether multilingualism may have some influence on the use of determiners in possessive phrases. Lucchesi (1993) points out that it does not have a definite article in Forro, a creole with a Portuguese lexical base that coexists with Portuguese in the data collection area. It is expected that the rates of determiner usage in possessive phrases will be lower in data produced by speakers who switch between Portuguese and Forro.

## THEORY AND METHODS

The analysis undertaken in this paper is based on the theoretical and methodological support of the Theory of Variation and Change (WEINREICH; LABOV; HERZOG, 2006 [1968]). For the research, 517 data were collected from 17 interviews, stratified according to the social variables gender, level of education and age group. The surveys are part of the *Variedades do Português* (VAPOR) corpus, from the Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa. The recordings were made in the capital of the Archipelago of São Tomé and Príncipe, in 2009.

Eleven variables were postulated, seven linguistic constraints and four social variables. Among the linguistic variables, the role of syntagma type, possessive pronoun type, verb type to which the syntagma is linked, possession type and the presence of elements between the possessive pronoun and the name are investigated. As for the social variables, in addition to the constraints used in the stratification of the *corpus*, the variable frequency of use of Forro was postulated, as contact between Portuguese and Forro could model the variable rule in the sense of restricting the use of determiners in possessive phrases.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The following examples (5) and (6) illustrate the variable behavior of the definite article in possessive phrases in the São Toméan standard. Table 1, in sequence, expresses the general rates for each variant in the data set.

(5) *Meu pai sempre foi comerciante e ainda é.* (ST-A-3-m)

*My father was always a merchant and still is*

(6) *a língua crioulo, ela existe, porque existem os seus falantes.* (ST-A-3-h)

*the creole language, it exists because its speakers exist*

**Table 1** – Indexes of definite article employment in possessive phrases in STP

Variant	Apl/T	%
article absence	235/517	45%
article presence	282/517	54%

Source: The authors.

In the STP, results presented in the table above reveal a behavior closer to the trends observed in Brazilian Portuguese, where the variable realization of the definite article is quite prominent among the country's regions (CALLOU; SILVA, 1997).

Figure 1 shows the constraints selected by the statistical analysis program as significant for the absence of an article in possessive phrases.

**Figure 1** – Statistically relevant variables for the absence of definite article in possessive phrases

Level of education			
Possessive phrase type			
Syntactic function of the possessive phrase			
Possessive type			
Apl/T	Inicial Input	Input from the selected round	Significance of selected round
235/517 = 45%	.455	.437	.000

Source: The authors.

Of the 11 independent variables investigated, only four - three linguistic variables and one social factor - are statistically relevant.

In summary, the statistical results reveal that:

- (a) the higher the education, the more likely the use of definite article in the possessive syntagma;
- (b) the absence of determiners is likely in nominal phrases, and blocked-in prepositional phrases;
- (c) possessive phrases in oblique and predicative functions are the syntactic contexts that are most conducive to the absence of the definite article;
- (d) the semantic contexts that most favor the absence of definite articles are those in which possessive pronouns indicate body parts, personal relationships, kinship relationships, and alienable possession.

## FINAL REMARKS

In this paper, we observed that the use of the definite article in possessive phrases is a variable rule in the urban variety of São Tomé's Portuguese. However, the process is different from that observed in European Portuguese, which is characterized as its reference standard. In the European variety, the presence of the article in possessive phrases is a categorical rule, with violation only in very specific contexts.

In what concerns the variation analysis, from the 11 independent variables postulated for the investigation only 04 proved to be statistically relevant for the non-occurrence of definite articles in possessive phrases. The variables *informant's level education*, *type of possessive phrase*, *syntactic function of the possessive phrase* and *type of possession* were selected in the probabilistic analysis.

With regard to the variable that checks the role of language contact in the dynamics of the variable rule, the frequency of use of Forro was not a relevant condition for the absence of the article in the São Tomé data. This result frustrated initial expectations, since it was assumed the absence of the definite article in possessive phrases could be both a reflection of the reference standard and a consequence of contact between Portuguese and Forro. In Forro, according to Lucchesi (1993), there are no definite articles.

The analysis of the informant's behavior revealed much more an influence of level of education than of the coexistence of Portuguese with Forro creole for the absence of the definite article in possessives phrases. Thus, this paper provides an important contribution to the description of a variable phenomenon widely described in other varieties of Portuguese and reveals the need for new approaches, either in the reformulation of hypotheses or in the organization of *corpora* that consistently map the relationship between Portuguese and the Creole languages of the community.

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