Women in São Paulo: are they “like men”?  
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Based on extensive study of the role of women in language variation and change (e.g. Chambers, 1995; Labov, 2001; Cheshire, 2004; inter alia), sociolinguists generally conclude that women tend to favor linguistic variants that are perceived as prestigious or standard. In large Brazilian cities like São Paulo, the role of women is changing rapidly, due to changes in the economy. If there is noticeable social differentiation among women, in terms of their stances toward gender roles and their lifestyle choices (Ochs, 1992), do we still expect the gender tendency to hold?

To address this question, this paper analyzes variable number agreement in simple NPs (os livros vs. os livro ‘the books’, meus amigos vs. meus amigo ‘my friends’) in a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews with 36 men and 36 women born and raised in São Paulo, stratified by age group and level of education. We extracted 6,000 NP tokens and coded them for a series of linguistic factor groups (including morphological class of the NP left element, and different plural inflections on the right element— -s, -es, -is) and social factors (including area of residence in the city). Non-redundant agreement (NRA - plural -s marked only on the first element of the NP), which is negatively evaluated in Brazilian Portuguese (Naro & Scherre 2003, Scherre 1997), occurs about 15% of the time.

The 36 women were divided into two groups based on whether (a) they provide the main source of income (in the case of adult, married women); (b) they see themselves as “modern”, working women; or (c) they hold work positions that didn’t use to be perceived as women’s jobs (e.g. management positions). Similarly, the 36 men were divided in two groups, according to whether they currently perform the roles traditionally filled by women (e.g. stay-at-home parent) or whether they indicated affiliation to ideas of “essential” masculinity during the interviews.

Results of multivariate analyses with Goldvarb X show that women, in general, do tend to disfavor NRA in relation to men (.47 and .52, respectively – from a run in which sex/gender was coded binomially). However, in the analysis where men and women were each divided in two groups, differentiation among women is correlated with variation in plural-marking: those who feature at least one of the characteristics above show a higher tendency (.61) for NRA than do men (.56) and women who subscribe to more “traditional” views on sex/gender differentiation (.45). On the other hand, the same pattern did not obtain among the men, whose differences in social stances toward masculinity are not reflected in their plural marking.

Therefore, although the general pattern of variation regarding sex/gender agrees with what is extensively observed in other communities, its social embedding is not totally independent of speakers’ stances, especially women’s in this case. In this paper, we discuss possible reasons for women to show sharper stratification than men in the city of São Paulo.