Non-binary gender expression in Brazilian Portuguese: embedded changes in noun phrases

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The gender-inclusive claims of identitarian movements have led to changes in languages. In Brazilian Portuguese (BP), these changes can be observed in the emergence of non-binary third-person pronouns and in the emergence of non-binary (or gender-neutral) gender morphemes (Pessotto 2019, Schwindt 2020, Pinheiro, Pinheiro 2021). These forms are innovations in the system that are still in the incipient stages of regularization. Other changes, on the other hand, refer to the reorganization of previously existing language structures in order to express non-binary gender. This paper focuses on noun embedding changes in BP as a result of gender-inclusive strategies, taking into account agreement issues and the loss of determiners in [human] noun phrases. In BP, a nominal phrase (NP) is preceded by a determiner, commonly a definite article, that agrees in gender with the NP nucleus; the standard gender agreement in the NP level is [DET-MASC N-MASC] or [DET-FEM N-FEM]:

(1) *o* DET-MASC *menino* N-MASC 'the boy').
(2) *a* DET-FEM *menina* N-FEM 'the girl').

Typically, given names in BP are sex-specific, and the use of definite articles must follow this specification: masculine personal names are preceded by the masculine definite article (*o Marcos*), while feminine names are preceded by the feminine definite article (*a Carla*). However, the demand for given names for those who do not identify with the binary gender in the LGBTQA+ community has led to a process of loss of symmetrical and redundant agreement in NP, in which the determiner carries the gender agreement morpheme, not the noun:

(3) *a* DET-FEM *Pabllo* N).
(4) *o* DET-MASC *Pablo* N).

The feminine article is used before commonly masculine given names, as in *a*-det *Pabllo Vittar*-n (the Pabllo Vittar), to indicate the person belonging to the community (Pereira 2020). Another piece of evidence for a non-binary or gender-inclusive usage in language is the lack of the definite article in NP, in which the nucleus is a given name, as in *o*-det *João*-n and *João*-n. The presence or absence of determiners before given names is a dialectal marker in BP (Siqueira, Freitag 2022), and this change has been driven by social rules for non-binary gender expression.

This paper will explore the embedding changes in the expression of gender in names in BP in two apparently contradictory directions. On the one hand, the transition in gender marking on given names from the morpheme to the determiner causes embedding changes in the other levels of grammar: the symmetric agreement in NP gender-related to given names in BP has become asymmetric, and the determiner has become crucial for gender marking in personal names, especially for those names that are sex-specific. Gender neutral constraints, on the other hand, have led a lack of the determiner in the dialectal variation of the presence or absence of a determiner before given names in NP. This result can contribute to a more comprehensive approach to gender-inclusive activism by showing that a non-sexist usage of language is possible without having to borrow new creations in a certain language.

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