

EXTRALINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF VARIATION IN THE POSSESSIVES TEU/SEU IN THE SCHOOL WRITING OF CAXIAS, MARANHÃO

**ASPECTOS EXTRALINGÜÍSTICOS DA VARIAÇÃO DOS POSSESSIVOS
TEU/SEU NA ESCRITA ESCOLAR DE CAXIAS – MA**

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ABSTRACT

Este artigo analisa, à luz da Sociolinguística Variacionista, a variação dos possessivos *teu* e *seu* com referência à segunda pessoa do singular na escrita de estudantes do terceiro ano do ensino médio de uma escola pública de Caxias, considerando as variáveis extralinguísticas sexo e registro. A fundamentação ancora-se em Weinreich, Labov e Herzog (1968) e Labov (1972), articulando-se aos estudos de Arduin (2005), Sbalqueiro (2005), Mendes (2008) e Vargas (2014) sobre a variação dos possessivos de segunda pessoa. Metodologicamente, trata-se de pesquisa quantitativa, descritiva, de campo e estudo de caso, realizada com 52 estudantes. O corpus reuniu 86 diálogos escritos, produzidos em situações formal e informal, dos quais foram extraídas 131 ocorrências de *teu/seu*, analisadas por frequências absolutas e percentuais. Os resultados revelaram amplo predomínio de *seu* em ambos os sexos, com 91,8% entre os participantes masculinos e 92,7% entre os femininos. Quanto ao registro, *seu* alcançou 98% na escrita formal e 87,5% na informal, enquanto *teu* passou de 2% para 12,5%, respectivamente. Conclui-se que o sexo, isoladamente, não apresentou diferenças relevantes, ao passo que o registro evidenciou tendência estilística, com maior presença de *teu* em contextos de menor monitoramento linguístico. Essa tendência foi mais acentuada entre as participantes femininas.

Keywords: Sociolinguística Variacionista; possessivos.*teu/seu*; variação estilística; língua escrita; Caxias – MA.

RESUMO

This article analyzes, within the framework of Variationist Sociolinguistics, the variation between the possessives *teu* and *seu* with second-person singular reference in the writing of third-year high school students from a public school in Caxias, considering the

extralinguistic variables of sex and register. The theoretical framework is grounded in Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968) and Labov (1972) and is further informed by studies by Arduin (2005), Sbalqueiro (2005), Mendes (2008), and Vargas (2014) on variation in second-person possessive forms. Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative and descriptive approach, combining field research and a case-study design, and involved 52 students. The corpus comprised 86 written dialogues produced in formal and informal situations, from which 131 occurrences of *teu/seu* were extracted and analyzed in terms of absolute frequencies and percentages. The results revealed a marked predominance of *seu* among both sexes, accounting for 91.8% of the occurrences among male participants and 92.7% among female participants. With regard to register, *seu* accounted for 98% of the occurrences in formal writing and 87.5% in informal writing, whereas *teu* increased from 2% to 12.5%, respectively. Sex, when considered independently, did not yield substantial differences, whereas register revealed a stylistic tendency, with a higher frequency of *teu* in contexts involving lower levels of linguistic monitoring. This tendency was more pronounced among female participants.

Palavras-chave: Variationist Sociolinguistics. *teu/seu* possessives; stylistic variation; written language; Caxias – MA.

1. INTRODUCTION

Variation is an inherent property of natural languages and, far from representing disorder or a deficiency in the system, displays regularities that can be described in relation to the linguistic and social conditions of use. Variationist Sociolinguistics, formulated on the basis of Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968) and developed by Labov (1972), is grounded in this understanding, according to which

heterogeneity is part of the very organization of language. From this perspective, distinct forms may coexist in the realization of the same variable without the alternation between them being random.

Among the phenomena that exemplify this heterogeneity in Brazilian Portuguese is the alternation between the possessives *teu* and *seu* with second-person singular reference. In the traditional paradigm, *teu* is associated with *tu*, whereas *seu* is originally associated with the third person; however, the incorporation of *você* into the functional domain of the second person prompted a reorganization of pronominal correlations in Brazilian Portuguese, bringing into this domain forms historically linked to the third person, including the possessive *seu* (Oliveira e Silva, 1998). Consequently, *teu* and *seu* may refer to the same interlocutor without actual usage necessarily maintaining a strict correspondence with the personal pronouns *tu* and *você* (Menon, 1995; Bagno, 2011).

Previous sociolinguistic research has also shown that the distribution of these forms is not uniform across communities, modalities, and interactional situations. Studies such as Arduin (2005), Sbalqueiro (2005), Mendes (2008), and Vargas (2014) have described different patterns in the use of *teu* and *seu*, highlighting the relevance of considering social and stylistic factors in the analysis of the phenomenon. Against this background, the present article is an excerpt from the dissertation developed by Sousa (2023) and focuses specifically on variation in the possessive pronouns *teu/seu* in the writing of third-year high school students from a public school in Caxias. To maintain strict correspondence with the analyses conducted here, the present study considers only two extralinguistic dimensions: participants' sex and formal/informal register.

The variable sex has been discussed in variationist studies as a dimension capable of revealing differences in linguistic behavior between groups, although such differences should not be understood as universal or dissociated from the sociocultural configurations of each community (Labov, 1982; Paiva, 2017). Register variation, in turn, makes it possible to observe potential changes in the linguistic repertoire according to the communicative situation and the degree of monitoring. Formality and informality do not correspond to absolutely discrete categories but can be understood along a *continuum* related, among other aspects, to interlocutors, social roles, and the conditions under which discourse is produced (Bortoni-Ricardo, 2004; Camacho, 2004; Görski; Coelho, 2009). This contrast is also relevant in writing, since different production situations may elicit different levels of monitoring without establishing a rigid opposition between spoken and written modalities (Coelho et al., 2020).

In this context, investigating *teu* and *seu* in school writing makes it possible to examine not only the distribution of the two forms among male and female participants but also their occurrence in production situations constructed as formal and informal. Joint consideration of these dimensions makes it possible to determine whether potential register-related differences appear similarly in the two groups or assume distinct configurations. Thus, the problem guiding this study is to understand how sex and register relate to the observed frequencies of the variants, without assigning statistical conditioning or causal value to percentage differences alone. On this basis, the following research questions are formulated: (a) How are the possessive variants *teu* and *seu*, with second-person singular reference, distributed in the writing of third-year high school students according to participants' sex? (b) How do formal

and informal register relate to the distribution of the possessive variants *teu* and *seu* in the writing of the participants investigated? (c) What tendencies emerge from the relationship between sex and register in the distribution of the variants *teu* and *seu* in the students' writing?

In line with these questions, the general objective of this article is to analyze, in light of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of Variationist Sociolinguistics, variation in the possessive pronouns *teu/seu*, with second-person singular reference, in the writing of third-year high school students from a public school in Caxias, considering their distribution according to the extralinguistic variables sex and register. More specifically, the study seeks to: (a) describe the distribution of the possessive variants *teu* and *seu* in participants' writing according to the extralinguistic variable sex; (b) compare the frequencies of *teu* and *seu* in formal and informal registers, identifying tendencies of stylistic variation associated with the two written production situations; and (c) examine the relationship between sex and register in the distribution of the variants *teu* and *seu*, assessing differences in the behavior of the male and female groups in formal and informal contexts.

In addition to this Introduction, the article is organized into four sections: the Theoretical Framework presents the assumptions and studies required to interpret *teu/seu* variation; the Methodology defines the sample and the procedures employed in this study; the Results and Discussion section describes and interprets the observed distributions; and, finally, the Conclusions revisit the study's questions and objectives and synthesize its main implications.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Variationist Sociolinguistics

The analysis of the alternation between *teu* and *seu* developed in this article is situated within the theoretical and methodological framework of Variationist Sociolinguistics, whose formulation, based on Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968) and Labov (1972), recognizes heterogeneity as a constitutive property of the linguistic system. Variationist research therefore seeks to describe the regularities of this alternation and relate them to the linguistic and social configurations in which the forms occur. This conception makes it possible to examine spoken or written usage without reducing variation to “error,” individual fluctuation, or the speaker’s free choice (Weinreich; Labov; Herzog, 1968; Labov, 1972).

Within this model, variants correspond to the different forms that realize the same linguistic variable in a given context, maintaining comparable referential value while potentially acquiring distinct social and stylistic values (Tarallo, 2002; Labov, 1978). In the phenomenon investigated here, *teu* and *seu* are treated as variants of second-person singular possessive reference. The analysis does not assume that they are socially equivalent; rather, it examines how their distribution in writing relates to extralinguistic dimensions. The notion of the variable rule is relevant because it makes it possible to identify regularities associated with the factors characterizing each situation of use, without assuming a categorical opposition between the forms (Hora, 1997).

Among the social dimensions relevant to this study is participants’ sex. Sociolinguistic studies have documented differences in the distribution of variants between men and women, often relating them to the social value assigned to forms and to the sociocultural

configurations of communities. Labov (1982) and Paiva (2017), among other authors cited in the dissertation, discuss the tendency for women to show greater sensitivity to socially prestigious forms; however, this formulation should not be converted into a universal principle. The social roles of men and women vary historically and culturally, and linguistic behavior associated with sex may change according to age, education, community, and communicative situation.

Such caution is even more necessary when sex and register are considered jointly. Stylistic variation, also termed diaphasic or register variation, refers to changes in the linguistic repertoire according to the communicative situation. For Görski and Coelho (2009), Bortoni-Ricardo (2004), and Camacho (2004), formality and informality do not constitute discrete poles but form a *continuum* related to interlocutors, social roles, topic, and degree of monitoring. Situations perceived as more formal tend to involve greater attention to language, whereas contexts of proximity generally allow less monitoring. In writing, different genres and production tasks may occupy different points along this *continuum*. In discussing diamesic variation, Coelho et al. (2020) likewise relativize a rigid opposition between speech and writing: some written texts are minimally monitored, whereas some oral practices are highly monitored. Register and modality are therefore related but not equivalent dimensions.

2.2. Possessive Pronouns From a Grammatical Perspective

The grammatical description of possessives provides a starting point for understanding the alternation under analysis. Almeida (1979) and Bechara (2009) characterize them in terms of the relationship

between the grammatical person of the possessor and the possessed element. In the traditional paradigm, *teu*, *tua*, *teus*, and *tuas* are associated with the second-person singular, corresponding to *tu*, whereas *seu*, *sua*, *seus*, and *suas* are linked to the third person. This organization, however, does not fully represent the pronominal system in use in Brazilian Portuguese, particularly because of the integration of *você* into the functional domain of the second person.

The incorporation of *você* into the system of reference to the interlocutor produced a reorganization of pronominal correlations. Oliveira e Silva (1998) observes that, by assuming a second-person function, *você* brought into this domain forms originally associated with the third person, including the possessive *seu*. For this reason, in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese, *teu* and *seu* may refer to the same interlocutor. Bagno (2011) notes that the possessive forms related to *tu* and *você* may be used without strict correspondence with these personal pronouns. In representing the pronominal system in use, Menon (1995) includes *tu* and *você* in the second person and records forms such as *teu*, *seu*, and *de você* within this domain. This situation creates tension between the traditional paradigm and actual usage: whereas the normative tradition tends to establish the correlation *tu/teu*, Brazilian usage also allows *você/seu* and, in certain communities, combinations such as *você/teu*.

The relationship between personal pronouns and possessive forms also underlies the notion of formal parallelism used in previous studies. In its application to pronominal variation, based on the principle discussed by Scherre and Naro (1993), this notion concerns the recurrence of correspondences such as *tu/teu* and *você/seu*. The association, however, should not be taken as a categorical rule, since

sociolinguistic research reveals both its maintenance and its disruption. Local characteristics of the *tu/você* system therefore provide relevant evidence for interpreting *teu/seu*, but they do not, by themselves, predict the possessive form used.

2.3. Possessive Pronouns From The Perspective Of Sociolinguistic Studies

Variationist studies of *teu/seu* show that the distribution of the variants changes according to community, modality, and social relations. Sbalqueiro (2005), in a study of 204 compositions written by elementary school students from a public school in Curitiba, analyzed second- and third-person possessives from a Labovian perspective. For *teu/seu*, the author found a marked predominance of *seu* and related this pattern, among other aspects, to the categorical use of *você* in the community investigated. The variable sex was also relevant: female participants showed higher frequency and relative weight for *seu* than male participants.

Mendes (2008), in turn, analyzed interviews from the VARSUL database collected in Curitiba, Irati, Londrina, and Pato Branco. Unlike Sbalqueiro (2005), Mendes found a predominance of *teu* in speech, including in contexts in which *você* was overwhelmingly predominant. This result demonstrates the possibility of combinations such as *você/teu* and shows that formal parallelism does not operate uniformly across communities. The stylistic dimension, however, revealed a relevant direction: *teu* occurred more frequently in reference to close persons and in symmetrical relationships, whereas *seu* was associated, in the sample, with contexts of greater social distance. Women also showed a slightly higher proportion of *seu* in this study. Taken together, the findings

indicate that the association of *seu* with formality may coexist with a strong community preference for *teu*, making it inappropriate to equate overall frequency with stylistic value.

A similar association between social distance and the form *seu* appears in Arduin (2005), whose analysis of oral VARSUL data showed a predominance of *teu* in southern communities where *tu* was frequent. The author observed, however, that *seu* was more closely associated with relationships from lower- to higher-status interlocutors and with non-close persons, whereas *teu* occurred more frequently among equals and close persons. The relevance of this study lies in demonstrating that the stylistic value of the variants depends on interpersonal relations and may not coincide with the numerically predominant variant.

Vargas (2014) extends the discussion to written language from another synchronic period. The author analyzed 451 letters to the editor from Brazilian newspapers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 94 of which contained the alternating forms, and identified 214 occurrences, with 84% *seu* and 15% *teu*. With regard to formal parallelism, *seu* did not occur with *tu* in subject function (0/30), whereas it reached categorical use with *você* (49/49). The author also relates the alternation to conditions of formality and informality, understood as expressions of distance or proximity between interlocutors. The association between *você* and *seu* is thus reinforced in written language.

For the interpretation of the pronominal system of Caxias, Miranda (2014) provides a decisive local precedent. In investigating variable uses related to *tu* in São Luís and Caxias, the author found that, in the latter community, *você* was more frequent and had greater

participation among women, whereas *tu* was more frequent among men. Although this concerns a different phenomenon and corpus, these results make it possible to establish an interpretive bridge to possessives, since Sbalqueiro (2005) and Arduin (2005) show that personal and possessive forms may maintain parallel relationships.

Taken together, these studies provide three axes for interpreting the results of this article: the reorganization of the second-person system in Brazilian Portuguese, the variable association between *tu/você* and *teu/seu*, and the sensitivity of possessive forms to the social and stylistic conditions of production. In addition, Coelho et al.'s (2020) discussion of the *continuum* between speech and writing prevents differences across studies from being attributed mechanically to modality.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Characterization

The research from which this article originated was conducted within the framework of Variationist Sociolinguistics, based on the understanding of language as a heterogeneous system in which variation exhibits regularities that can be described and analyzed (Labov, 1972). In the original investigation, the study was characterized as both basic and applied research, according to Gil's (2010) classification, and as descriptive with respect to its analytical procedures. Specifically regarding variation in the possessives *teu/seu* in writing, a quantitative approach was adopted, since occurrences of the variants were identified and counted in order to detect distributional patterns in the sample. The research was also configured as a case study because the investigation of variation in

writing focused on a defined group of students, and it was conducted as field research, with data collected directly in the educational context under investigation.

As an excerpt from a broader investigation, the present article differs from the dissertation in the scope of the variables analyzed. Whereas the dissertation examined other linguistic and social dimensions and also investigated linguistic beliefs and attitudes, this study considers exclusively the extralinguistic variables sex and register, since these are directly related to the results discussed in the subsequent sections.

3.2. Participants And Data Collection

The study involved 52 third-year high school students enrolled in the afternoon shift at a state public school located in the urban area of Caxias. Of these, 27 were male and 25 female, aged between 17 and 23 years. To meet the participation criteria, students were required to have been born in Caxias and to have resided in the municipality for at least 12 consecutive years, without having lived outside Maranhão for more than two years. The research project was submitted to the Ethics Committee of Universidade Estadual do Piauí and approved under Opinion No. 5.361.638, in accordance with the ethical regulations specified in the original research.

To obtain data on *teu/seu* variation, participants were asked to produce written dialogues, a genre selected because it provides a favorable context for the occurrence of second-person singular reference forms (Sbalqueiro, 2005). Before the activity was carried out, the structure of the genre was explained to the participants and two examples were presented to facilitate their understanding of the

task. Data collection was organized so as to create contrasting situations with respect to linguistic register.

In the informal situation, participants were asked to write, within 50 minutes, a dialogue of at least 30 lines between two people who knew each other well or maintained a close relationship. The topic was unrestricted, and the interactional configuration was designed to provide a situation involving less linguistic monitoring. In the formal situation, the students produced another dialogue, also between two people, but characterized as strangers, and were instructed to use formal language. The distinction between the two contexts was therefore based on the relationship established between the interlocutors and the degree of linguistic monitoring elicited by the proposed situations: proximity and intimacy were associated with informal production, whereas lack of intimacy and interaction between strangers characterized formal production.

Because not all participants completed both activities, data collection ultimately yielded 86 written dialogues, of which 52 corresponded to the informal register and 34 to the formal register. In the informal texts, 72 occurrences of second-person singular possessives were identified; in the formal texts, 59 were counted. Thus, the corpus considered in this article comprised 131 occurrences of *teu/seu*.

3.3. Delimitation Of Variables And Analytical Procedures

The dependent variable consisted of the alternation between the possessives *teu* and *seu* when used with second-person singular reference. Initially, all occurrences of these forms were identified in the dialogues produced by the students. Because *seu* may also

establish third-person reference, cases in which this interpretation was identified were excluded from the sample, leaving only occurrences related to the functional domain of the second person.

For the purposes of this study, the data were classified according to two extralinguistic independent variables: sex, with the factors male and female, and register, with the factors formal and informal. Based on this classification, the absolute and percentage frequencies of *teu* and *seu* were calculated, first according to participants' sex and then according to register. The two dimensions were subsequently related by separately examining the distribution of the variants among male and female participants in formal and informal productions.

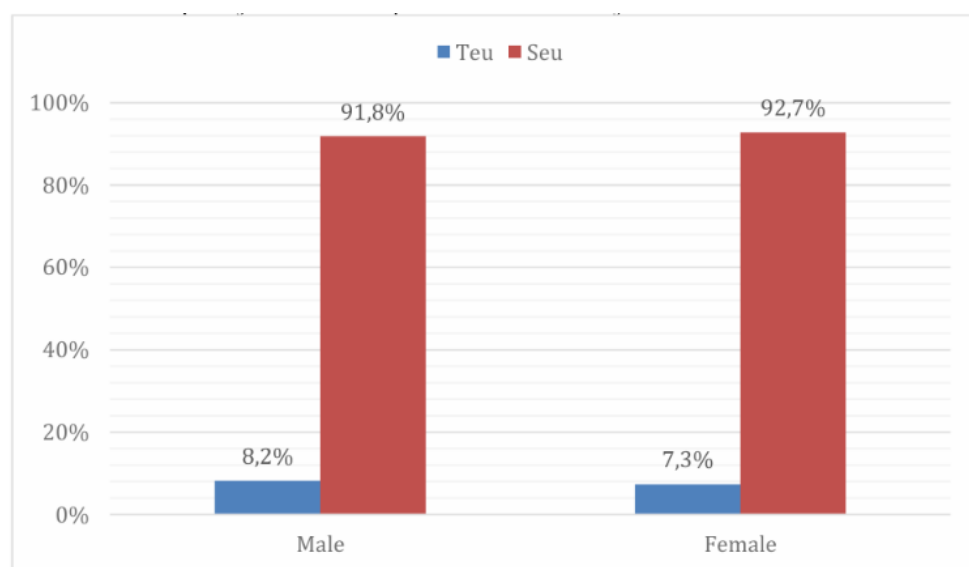
Although the original research envisaged broader statistical treatment, the small number of occurrences of the variant *teu*—only ten among the 131 data points—and the existence of cells with no occurrences of this form could compromise the estimation of relative weights. For this reason, following the procedure adopted in the dissertation, the analysis in this study focused on frequencies and percentages, without attributing statistical significance, favoring effects, or conditioning to the observed differences.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results concerning variation in the possessive pronouns *teu/seu* in the writing of third-year high school students are described below, taking into account the extralinguistic variables defined in this study. It should be reiterated that, of the 131 occurrences identified, only ten correspond to the variant *teu*; therefore, the

percentages presented below describe tendencies in the sample and do not support generalization.

Chart 1. Frequency of use of the possessives *teu/seu* by sex



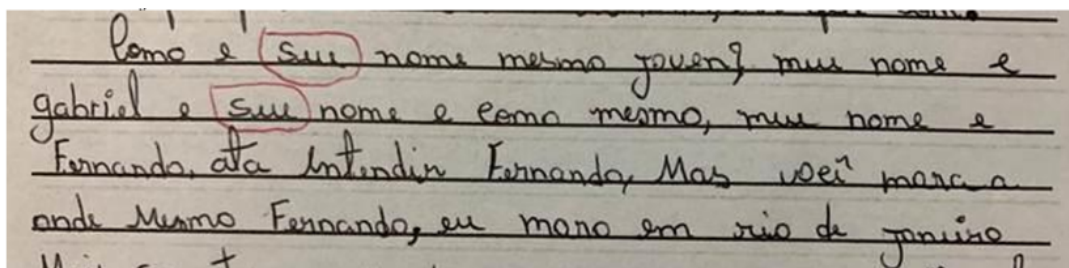
Source: field research.

Chart 1 shows that both sexes use the variant *teu* at low frequency and the variant *seu* at high frequency. Among male participants, of the 49 occurrences of possessives in writing, only 4 were instances of the possessive *teu*, totaling 8.2% of the occurrences, while 45 were instances of the possessive *seu*, totaling 91.8%. Among female participants, there were 6 applications of the variant *teu* out of a total of 82 occurrences, accounting for 7.3% of the sample, and 76 applications of the variant *seu*, totaling 92.7% of the data. Thus, the distribution of the two variants is practically identical in the two groups, and the percentages obtained do not support preferentially associating *teu* or *seu* with either sex.

Considering the composition of the sample, the distribution of the data by sex is not equivalent across the two registers. In formal writing, 12 occurrences were recorded among male participants and 47 among female participants; in informal writing, the

corresponding figures were 37 and 35. Because *seu* is nearly categorical in the formal register, the greater female participation in this condition contributes to the overall percentage of this variant among women. Tables 1 and 2, which cross sex and register, are therefore more analytically informative than Chart 1.

Figure 1. Use of *seu* by a male informant

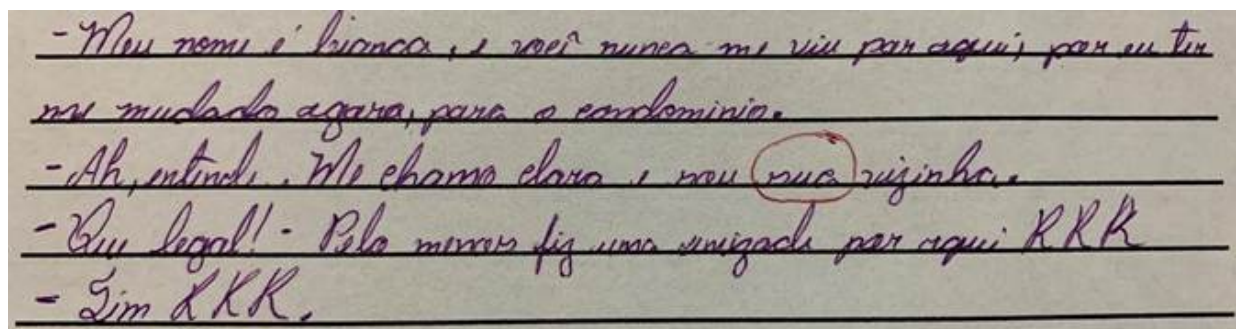


Como é (seu) nome mesmo jovem? meu nome é gabriel e (seu) nome é como mesmo, meu nome é Fernando, até entendia Fernando, Mas usei marca a onde mesmo Fernando, eu moro em rio de janeiro

Source: field research.

Figure 1 presents an example of a dialogue written by a male informant between two male characters (Gabriel and Fernando), in which both use the variant *seu* in the communicative exchange.

Figure 2. Use of *seu* by a female informant



- Meu nome é Bianca, e usei nunca me viu por aqui, por eu ter me mudado agora, para o condomínio.
- Ah, entendi. Me chama clara, e meu (seu) vizinho.
- Que legal! - Pela minha fig uma amizade por aqui RRR
- Sim RRR.

Source: field research.

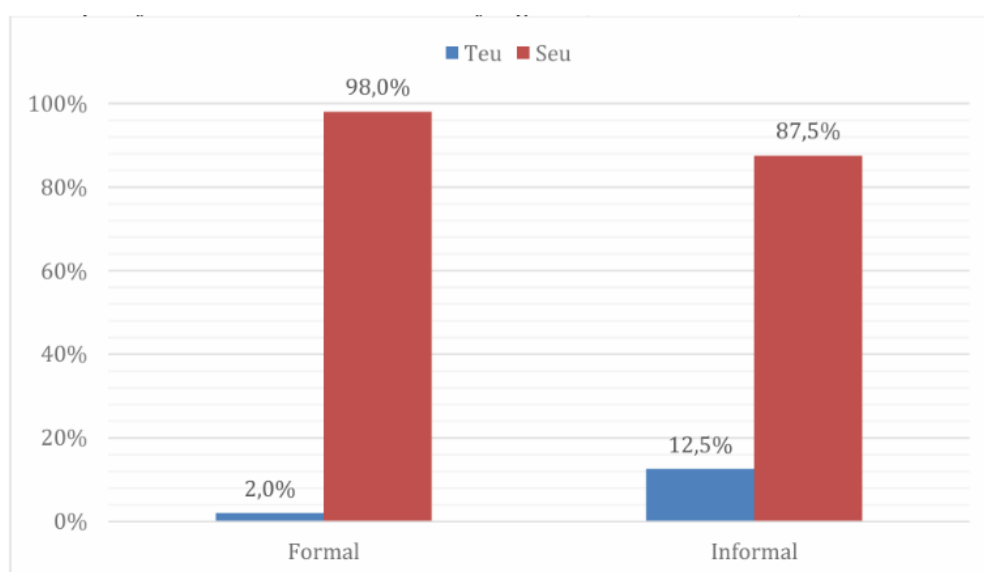
Figure 2 illustrates the use of the possessive *seu* in a dialogue between two female characters (Bianca and Clara). This excerpt was taken from a text produced by a female informant.

The data shown in Chart 1 also point in the same direction as those reported by Sbalqueiro (2005), in which the variant *seu* was used

more frequently in written language by female participants, although the difference between the groups here is minimal (91.8% versus 92.7%), since, according to that author, this form corresponds to the pronoun *você*, which is used categorically in Curitiba – PR and, according to Miranda (2014), occurs more frequently in Caxias – MA.

Chart 2 below presents only the frequency of use, in percentage terms, of the variants under analysis.

Chart 2. Frequency of use of the variants *teu/seu* by register (formal and informal)



Source: field research.

Chart 2 shows more frequent use of the variant *seu* in both contexts of language use (formal and informal); Figures 3 and 4 provide examples of the use of this variant in these contexts.

Figure 3. Use of *seu* in a formal context

Sr. Fernando - Olá, boa tarde. Ericka me informou que a senhora estava me aguardando, por favor acompanhe-me até a minha sala.

Dona Maria - Boa tarde Sr. Fernando, vim falar sobre a conta que abriu recentemente no seu banco.

Sr. Fernando - Ok, a senhora pode me falar qual o problema para que eu possa ajudá-la.

Source: field research.

In Figure 3, in addition to the lexical terms “*senhora*” and “*sr*” and grammatical features such as the use of enclisis in “*acompanhe-me*” and “*ajuda-la*,” the topic of the exchange (opening a bank account) also provides evidence of a dialogue in which the individuals attempt to use more elaborate language.

Figure 4. Use of *seu* in an informal linguistic context

- merma ela está grávida do seu ex namorado

- caramba amiga estou passada kkk

- Poser merma o tanto que ela falava que seu ex não gostava.

- Nera miga tou sem acreditar ainda bicha falsa né.

Source: field research.

By contrast, Figure 4 shows a dialogue between two people who know each other. The use of expressions such as “*merma*”, “*caramba*”, “*estou passada*”, “*kkk*”, “*poser (pois é)*”, “*nera*” (*não era*), “*miga*”, “*tou*”, and “*bicha falsa né*” indicates the use of informal and relaxed language. Nevertheless, the pronoun *seu* was used.

In the formal register, the possessive *seu* accounted for 98% of uses, whereas the possessive *teu* was used in only 2%. In the context of informal language use, the frequency of the variant *seu* decreased from 98% to 87.5%, while the frequency of *teu* increased from 2% to 12.5%. These data indicate a stronger association of the variant *seu* with formality and a higher frequency of *teu* in informal written production, revealing a degree of stylistic monitoring in the use of linguistic forms, as argued by Bortoni-Ricardo (2004).

The results in Chart 2 are similar to those of Sbalqueiro (2005) and Mendes (2008) with regard to the formality of the variant *seu*, since this form reached 98% in the formal situation and declined to 87.5% in the informal situation. The former study concerns written language. Although the variant *teu* predominated in the community investigated in the latter study, the possessive *seu* was also considered formal in spoken language, demonstrating, within this diamesic variation, the non-dichotomous relationship (in contexts of formal language use) between speech and writing, as argued by Coelho et al. (2020). In other words, the formality of the production situation is associated, in the sample, with a higher frequency of *seu*, regardless of the language modality used by the informant.

Tables 1 and 2 below show the distribution of these variants more clearly by also considering informants' sex within this extralinguistic independent variable of formal and informal language use.

Table 1. Frequency of use of the variants *teu/seu* by sex in the formal context

FORMAL WRITING		
	Male	Female

Variants	Occurrences/total	%	Occurrences/total	%
<i>Teu</i>	1/12	8.3	0/47	0
<i>Seu</i>	11/12	91.7	47/47	100

Source: field research.

Comparing the data in Chart 2 with those in Table 1 confirms the low use of the variant *teu* in the formal context relative to the informal context. The data in Table 1 show only one occurrence of this pronoun, produced by a male participant, accounting for 8.3% of the sample. In addition, it is important to note that female participants did not use this variant, which is compatible with the tendency described in the literature for women to use more formal elements of language more frequently, although the absence of occurrences in a cell containing only 47 data points does not permit confirmation of this tendency.

With regard to the variant *seu*, high use is observed among both male and, in particular, female participants, accounting for 91.7% and 100% of the data, respectively. This direction is compatible with the tendency indicated by Labov (1972) and observed in Sbalqueiro (2005), although the small number of occurrences of *teu* in the formal register (one) does not permit assigning conditioning value to this pattern.

In Miranda (2014), male informants are those who use the pronoun *tu* most frequently, whereas female informants are those who use the pronoun *você* most frequently. These results are compatible with the *formal parallelism* hypothesis in the use of these possessives in writing, insofar as *teu* was slightly more frequent

among men and *seu* among women, although the observed differences do not permit corroboration of the hypothesis.

Table 2. Frequency of use of the variants *teu/seu* by sex in the informal context

INFORMAL WRITING				
	Male		Female	
Variants	Occurrences/total	%	Occurrences/total	%
<i>Teu</i>	3/37	8.1	6/35	17.1
<i>Seu</i>	34/37	91.9	29/35	82.9

Source: field research.

Table 2 shows that, in the production of informal texts, male informants maintain practically the same frequency of use of the possessive *teu*, moving from 8.3% in formal text production (see Table 1) to 8.1% in informal text production, a slight decrease. By contrast, in informal writing, there was a marked increase in the percentage distribution of the variant *teu* among female informants, from 0% in formal production to 17.1% in informal production.

With regard to the variant *seu*, a higher frequency of use can be observed among male participants, at 91.9%, alongside a decrease in the use of this pronoun among female participants, for whom it accounted for only 82.9% of the occurrences.

These data may indicate, in the informal linguistic context, greater variability in the possessives *teu/seu* in the language used by female

informants or even greater sociolinguistic awareness among them regarding the use of these variants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This article aimed to analyze, in light of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of Variationist Sociolinguistics, variation in the possessives *teu* and *seu*, with second-person singular reference, in the writing of third-year high school students from a public school in Caxias, considering their distribution according to the extralinguistic variables sex and register. The analysis made it possible to describe the tendencies observed in the sample and, in this way, to answer the three research questions formulated; the proposed general objective is therefore considered to have been achieved.

Regarding the first question, concerning the distribution of the variants according to participants' sex, a marked predominance of *seu* was observed in the writing of both male and female students. When the data are considered globally, the differences between the two groups are small: *teu* occurred at low frequency in both groups, whereas *seu* accounted for almost all occurrences. Thus, although there is a slight percentage difference between the groups, the distribution does not support attributing a conditioning effect to sex alone in the choice of possessive form, particularly given the quantitative characteristics of the corpus.

The second question sought to determine how formal and informal registers related to the distribution of *teu* and *seu*. The results showed that *seu* remained the majority form in both written production situations, but its presence was higher in the formal

register. Conversely, *teu*, although a minority form in the data as a whole, occurred more frequently in the informal register. This relative opposition between the contexts suggests sensitivity of the variants to production conditions and degree of linguistic monitoring: the situation constructed as formal showed a higher concentration of *seu*, whereas the context of proximity and lower monitoring provided more space for *teu*. This is, however, a stylistic tendency in the sample, not a categorical relationship between possessive form and register.

The third question made this interpretation clearer by relating sex and register simultaneously. Among male participants, the frequency of *teu* remained practically stable across the two situations, moving from 8.3% in formal writing to 8.1% in informal writing. In the female group, by contrast, *teu* did not occur in formal productions but reached 17.1% in the informal register. The distribution therefore showed that the shift between the two communicative situations was more pronounced among female participants. This result should not be generalized as a property of the linguistic behavior of men and women but understood as a specific configuration of the data investigated.

Taken together, the three results show that the overall predominance of *seu* does not eliminate relevant internal differences. Considering sex or register separately provides only a partial description; when the two dimensions are crossed, it becomes possible to observe that stylistic variation did not manifest itself in the same way in the two groups. The study thus contributes to the description of possessive variation in Brazilian Portuguese, expands knowledge of the uses of *teu/seu* in school writing, and

provides evidence for the sociolinguistic discussion of the relationships among register, monitoring, and stylistic variation.

The scope of these conclusions must, however, be delimited by the composition of the sample. The existence of only ten occurrences of *teu* among 131 data points, combined with the uneven distribution of the variants and the presence of cells with no occurrences of this form, precluded a more robust multivariate statistical analysis. This limitation does not invalidate the tendencies described, but it does call for caution in generalizing them. Future studies may increase the number of participants and occurrences, seek greater balance between the variants, include other social groups and communicative situations, and, if sufficient data are available, apply multivariate procedures capable of testing the role of the variables involved more precisely.

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