The Portuguese Future Tense in Three Corners of the World: Angola, Brazil and Portugal

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The expression of the future tense has been a variable phenomenon throughout the history of the Portuguese language (MALVAR, 2003; OLIVEIRA, 2006). There are three variants: a) the simple future tense (viajarei amanhã ‘I will leave tomorrow’), b) the periphrastic future tense with ir ‘to go’ + infinitive (vou viajar amanhã or irei viajar amanhã ‘I’m going to leave tomorrow’), and c) the present tense (viajo amanhã ‘I leave tomorrow’).

Since this variation is conditioned by linguistic and socio-historical factors, we use the principles of Labovian sociolinguistic theory (Labov, 1972) to investigate the hypothesis of a process of change in which the periphrastic form with ir + infinitive replaces the simple future form. To explain the actuation of the innovative (periphrastic) form, we consider the paradigm of grammaticalization, as proposed by Hopper and Traugott (2003).

This paper presents results of research on data sampled from the written language of contemporary Angolan, Brazilian and Portuguese newspapers. We proceed to survey and quantify use of the future tense with the help of the Goldvarb Program, taking into consideration both linguistic and social factors.

Our aim is to determine the state of change in each of the varieties considered, bearing in mind that the Angolan and Brazilian varieties, unlike European Portuguese, had massive and close contact with languages of diverse structural types during the colonial period.

The results point to predominance of the simple future over the periphrastic future in the written language of the press in all three countries, confirming the hypothesis of partial inversion proposed by Oliveira (2006), according to which the simple form prevails in the written language, while the analytical form prevails in speech. However, the innovative form is currently entering the standard written language of newspapers in specific contexts of spread with some differences among the varieties examined.

Keywords: Variation and change, Portuguese language, Verbal future tense.