

THE PLURALIZATION OF *HABER* IN VENEZUELAN SPANISH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHANGE IN REAL TIME*

MANUEL DIAZ-CAMPOS
Indiana University

0. *Introduction*

This paper studies the pluralization of existential *haber* ‘there is/are’ as found at two points in time, 1977 and 1987, and it examines the evolution of this phenomenon in Venezuelan Spanish. Many studies (Bello 1972, Bentivoglio & Sedano 1987, De Mello 1991, Kany 1945, among others) have documented the pluralization of *haber* in several varieties of Spanish at one point in time, but there is no research examining this phenomenon in what sociolinguists have called *real time*. According to Labov (1994:73), real-time studies “observe a speech community at two discrete points in time.”

In (1a) the canonical use of existential *haber* is illustrated, whereas in (1b) an example with its pluralization is shown:

- (1a) *había* problemas... (d3mc)¹
Was-3sg.-there problems
‘There were problems...’
- (1b) *No te digo que no habían* problemas políticos (c1fd)
No you tell-1sg. that no were-3pl.-there problems political
‘I do not tell you that there were not political problems’

The following section is dedicated to a brief review of the viewpoint of descriptive and prescriptive grammar work. Section 2 presents previous quantitative analyses regarding the pluralization of *haber*. Section 3 explains the corpus and methodology. The results are discussed in section 4. Finally, the conclusions are presented in section 5.

* I am very grateful to Dr. Terrell A. Morgan, Dr. Scott Schwenter, and Dr. Javier Gutiérrez-Rexach for their comments on an earlier version of this article. Thanks also to Dr. Julie McGory, and Timothy Face for their aid with the English and for their comments. Any mistakes that may be in this article are, of course, entirely my responsibility.

¹ This code in parentheses can be read as follows: The first letter indicates the speaker’s age (a= from 14 to 29 years old, b= 30 to 45 years old, c= 46 to 60 years old, d = 61 years or older); the second digit indicates the speaker’s social class (1= upper class, 3= middle class, 5= lower class); the following letter indicates the sex (m= male, f= female); the last letter (a,b,c,d) identifies each speaker within his/her own group.

1. *Prescriptive and descriptive grammar perspectives*

This section examines previous explanations proposed by traditional grammars and previous descriptive work such as *Esbozo de una nueva gramática de la lengua española* (1973) (henceforth *Esbozo*), Gili Gaya (1979), Bello (1972), and Kany (1945).

The *Esbozo* (1973) as well as Gili Gaya's grammar, describe that *haber* is a transitive verb that can only be conjugated in third person singular. That is the case in example (2) cited in the *Esbozo* (1973:384).

- (2) Hubo fiestas
 Was-3sg.-there parties
 'There were parties'

In sentence (2), the noun phrase *fiestas* is considered a direct object. According to the proposed analysis, the subject is undetermined in this sentence. Both the *Esbozo* and Gili Gaya's grammar indicate that there is a tendency to personalize *haber* in the Levante region in Spain as well as in South America. It is explained that these speakers tend to parse *haber* as a personal verb, making the verb agree with the direct object.

Bello (1972:225) maintains that clauses with the verb *haber* do not have an explicit subject. According to Bello, impersonal *haber* has its "natural meaning" of *tener* 'to have'. Bello points out that pluralization of *haber* is an extended phenomenon in Chile. He considers that pluralization of *haber* is "un vicio casi universal" (an almost universal vice) in Chile.

Kany (1945), as mentioned, explains that *haber* is an impersonal verb that requires a direct object noun phrase. This author maintains that the pluralization of *haber* is not a recent phenomenon. He reports pluralization of *haber* in several works of literature written in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Pluralization of *haber* has also been attested in several areas of the Spanish-speaking world by scholars such as Lapesa (1980), Bello et al. (1940), Luque Moreno (1978), Montes (1982), and Oroz (1966).

2. *Previous quantitative research*

Previous research has revealed that age, socioeconomic group, and sex are external factors favoring pluralization of *haber*. With regard to internal variables, Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) maintain that the factors [+human] and [+plural]² also favor pluralization. These findings are relevant for comparing the 70's corpora with the 80's corpus in order to observe the development of this phenomenon.

Obediente (1984) did the first study observing this linguistic change in Venezuelan Spanish. He examines speech samples of the linguistic corpus *El habla culta de Caracas* recorded in 1977. His results reveal (1) young people pluralized *haber* more than other age groups; (2) pluralization is more common in male speakers than in female speakers; and (3) pluralization is more likely to happen in casual conversation than in formal situations. There are no results concerning social class since all of the speakers interviewed were from the upper-middle class and upper class.

Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) studied the pluralization of *haber* in two corpora: *Estudio Sociolingüístico de Caracas* (1977) and *El habla culta de Caracas* (1977). They included two linguistic factors in their analysis: the [\pm human] nature of the referent codified by the noun phrase, and the presence vs. absence of a constituent that reinforces the idea of plurality (determiner, adjective, etc.) [\pm plural]. With regard to linguistic variables, they found that a noun phrase such as *muchos norteamericanos* 'many Americans' will favor pluralization of *haber* since the referent codified is [+human]³ and the noun phrase contains a determiner *muchos* 'many' reinforcing the idea of plurality. They also considered sociolinguistic factors such as sex, age, and social class of the speaker. Bentivoglio & Sedano's results reveal that pluralization is favored by the following groups: younger speakers, female speakers, and lower class speakers.

De Mello (1994) investigated the pluralization of *haber* in speech samples from Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, La Habana, La Paz, Lima, Madrid, México, San Juan de Puerto Rico, Santiago de Chile, and Sevilla.

² The factor [+plural] indicates a noun phrase with a determiner, adjective, or both a determiner and adjective, as well as two or more coordinated noun phrases.

³ It is important to clarify that Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) study the influence of this factor only in the tokens of imperfect tense *haber* (*había/habían*) since there were not sufficient cases for other tenses.

City	No of tokens	Corpus size Bytes	Relative frequency
Bogotá	20	147.71	14%
Buenos Aires	3	159.33	2%
Caracas	55	164.66	33%
La Habana	12	103.22	12%
La Paz	50	121.86	41%
Lima	42	80.59	52%
Madrid	0	85.50	0%
México	7	105.68	7%
San Juan	29	101.58	29%
Santiago	51	262.45	19%
Sevilla	0	45.57	0%
Total	269	1378.15	20%

Table 1: Distribution of impersonal *haber* pluralization according to De Mello (1994:78)

De Mello's findings are reported in Table 1 where he shows the relative frequency of *haber* pluralization according to the corpus size in bytes. In the case of Caracas, he found that relative frequency was 33%, confirming this linguistic change within this Spanish dialect. Despite the opinions of traditional grammarians concerning the improper usage of impersonal *haber*, De Mello concludes that, to some degree, the pluralization of *haber* can be considered a feature of the educated norm in Latin America.

3. Corpus and Methodology

For the present study, ninety-six speakers were selected from the corpus *Estudio Sociolingüístico del Habla de Caracas* (1987) with equal representation of socioeconomic level (upper class, middle class, and working class), age (14-29, 30-45, 46-60, and 61 and older), and sex (male and female). This 80's corpus is very similar to the 70's corpora analyzed by Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) making a comparison of pluralization in real time relevant for the following reasons: (1) ten years of distance is enough time for reanalyzing sociolinguistic change; (2) the 80's corpus as well as the 70's corpora overlap in demographic focus; and (3) the 70's corpora as well as the 80's corpus were recorded in a similar fashion⁴.

⁴ For an examination of apparent time and real time constructs see Bailey et al. (1991) and Labov (1994).

All clauses with existential *haber* followed by a plural noun phrase were analyzed from the speech samples of each speaker. Four hundred and fifty one tokens were found in the sample. The tokens in which *haber* had the form *hay* were not considered since there is no alternation between plural and singular in this case.

The coded tokens were analyzed by means of the GoldVarb 2.0 computer program (Rand and Sankoff 1990), which was specifically designed for statistical study of linguistic variation. The analysis includes 7 factor groups. Factor Group 1 is the dependent variable, factor groups 2-4 are the internal independent variables, and factor groups 5-7 are the external independent variables.

Factor group 1: this factor group includes two factors or variants: pluralized *haber* vs. non-pluralized *haber*⁵.

- (3) Pluralized *haber*
Habían *distintas reacciones...* (d3md)
 Were-3pl.-there different reactions
 ‘There were different reactions...’
- (4) Non-pluralized *haber*
Había *problemas en la iglesia...* (a5md)
 Was-3sg.-there problems in the church
 ‘There were problems in the church...’

Factor group 2: This factor group takes into account the nature of the referent codified by the noun phrase and two factors or variants are considered: [+human]; [-human]. Examples of the two variants are presented in (5) and (6).

- (5) [+ human]
Habían profesores... (a1fa)
 Were-3pl.-there professors
 ‘There were professors...’
- (6) [-human]
No había edificios... (d1fd)
 No was-3sg.-there buildings
 ‘There were no buildings...’

⁵ All instances of pluralized and non-pluralized *haber* in all tenses were included.

Factor Group 3: This factor group studies the role played by elements that reinforce the concept of plurality in clauses in which *haber* is the main verb. The factors in this case are as follows: i) noun phrase containing a determiner; ii) noun phrase containing adjectives; iii) noun phrase containing both determiners and adjectives; iv) presence of two or more coordinated noun phrases. Other cases were codified as non-applicable.

- (7) Determiner + noun phrase
*Habían **otros** grupos...* (a5md)
 Were-3pl.-there other groups
 ‘There were other groups...’
- (8) Noun phrase + adjective
*Habían **buenos** proyectos...* (a3ma)
 Were-3pl.-there good projects
 ‘There were good projects...’
- (9) Determiner + noun phrase + adjective
*Habían **unos** árboles **grandes*** (a3ma)
 Were-3pl.-there some trees big
 ‘There were big trees’
- (10) Coordinated noun phrases
*Habían **hornos de cal, alfarería y cuestiones** ...* (d5md)
 Were-3pl.-there ovens of lime, pottery, and things
 ‘There were lime ovens, pottery, and things...’

Factor group 4: This factor group studies the role of verb tense in the pluralization of *haber*. Clauses in which *haber* has the form *hay* were eliminated since there is no variation in these cases. Eight factors were included according to the tenses found in the corpus: preterit, imperfect, present perfect, future, conditional, present subjunctive, past subjunctive, and present perfect subjunctive.

- (11) Preterit
***Hubo** dos muertos* (d3mb)
 Was-3sg-there two dead people
 ‘There were two dead people’

- (12) Imperfect
Habían *también revoltosos...* (d3fc)
 Were-3pl.-there also troublemakers
 ‘There were also troublemakers...’
- (13) Present perfect
Ha habido *los muchachos...* (d3fc)
 Has-3sg. been the boys
 ‘There have been the boys...’
- (14) Future
Habrán *cuatro, cinco diseñadores venezolanos* (a1fb)
 Will be-3pl.-there four, five designers Venezuelan
 ‘There must be four, five Venezuelan designers’
- (15) Conditional
Habría *sectores industriales...* (d3md)
 Would be-3sg.-there industrial sectors
 ‘There would be industrial sectors...’
- (16) Present subjunctive
*No es que no **hayan** los diseñadores...* (a1fb)
 No is that no are-3pl.-there the designers
 ‘It is not that there are not the designers...’
- (17) Past subjunctive
*(...) que no **hubiera** problemas en relación con la...* (d3mc)
 That no would be-3sg.-there problems in relation to the
 ‘That there would not be problems in relation to the...’
- (18) Present perfect subjunctive
*No creo que **haya habido** más* (d3fa)
 No believe-1sg. that has-3sg. been more
 ‘I do not believe that there have been more’

Factor group 5: Speaker’s age. The factors in this case are: i) from 14 to 29 years old; ii) from 30 to 45 years old; iii) from 46 to 60 years old; and iv) 61 years and older.

Factor group 6: Speaker’s social class. The factors in this case are: i) upper class; ii) middle class; and iii) lower class.

Factor group 7: Speaker’s sex: i) male; ii) female.

4. Results

In this section, a discussion of the statistical analysis obtained using GoldVarb is presented. The results of the 80's corpus are also compared with those found in the 70's corpora by Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) in order to observe the development of *haber* pluralization across time in Venezuelan Spanish. Factor group 4 (Verb tense) was collapsed into four subsets- imperfect, preterit, present perfect, and other- before applying the variable rule analysis since there were few cases of future, conditional, present subjunctive, past subjunctive, and present perfect subjunctive. These last five factors were considered in a common category called *other*.

Factor groups 2, 3, 5, and 7 were found not to be significant. The left-hand column in Table 2 shows only the significant factor groups in order of selection. This hierarchy indicates the level of influence of the significant factor groups on the dependent variable from more important to less important. The second column indicates the factors or variants for each factor group selected. For instance, the factors within the factor group VERB TENSE are: imperfect, present perfect, other tenses, preterit. The column identified as "No. of tokens" has two numbers separated by a slash: the first one indicates the number of plural forms of *haber* within the factor considered; the second number indicates the total number of tokens of *haber* within that same factor or variant. The percentage column gives the percentage of plural *haber* cases. The weight column specifies the probabilistic weight of usage of plural *haber* in relation to non-plural *haber*. The range of the weight varies from 0 to 1. A weight greater than .500 favors pluralization of *haber*, whereas a weight less than .500 disfavors it.

Factor groups	Factors/Variants	No. Tokens	%	Weight
(4) Verb tense	Imperfect	224/384	58	.547
	Present Perfect	6/10	60	.514
	Other tenses	7/16	44	.400
	Preterit	8/41	20	.163
(6) Social class	Lower Class	67/102	66	.625
	Middle class	91/168	54	.502
	Upper class	87/181	48	.427
Input .541 Significance .009 No of tokens 451				

Table 2: Factor groups selected by GoldVarb relating to pluralization of *haber*

4.1 *Verb tense. Factor group 4*

The factor group selected as the most significant is Verb tense. The variant with the highest weight is the *imperfect tense*, at .547. Next in order is the factor *present perfect* with a weight of .514, followed by *other tenses* with a weight of .400, and *preterit tense* with a weight of .163. These results show that the factors *imperfect* and *present perfect tense* favor, albeit slightly, pluralization of *haber*, whereas the factors *preterit* and *others* disfavor it. If the pluralization phenomenon were in an advanced stage, the expected prediction would be to find the same pluralization pattern of *haber* extended in all tense paradigms. However, this is not the case since pluralization of *haber* is more common in *imperfect* and *present perfect tenses*, but not for *preterit*, and the category *others* which includes the following tenses: *future*, *conditional*, *present subjunctive*, *past subjunctive*, *present perfect subjunctive*. Apparently, this linguistic change is advancing very slowly. Fontanella de Weinberg (1992:44) has pointed out that syntactic changes of *haber*, including pluralization, contrast with phonological changes in general since sound changes develop in one or two generations.

Bentivoglio & Sedano's analysis of the 70's corpora (1989:72) shows 60 cases out of 114 of *imperfect tense* plural *haber*, 3 cases out of 14 *preterit tense* plural *haber* and 18 cases out of 41 of plural *haber* for *other tenses*. When comparing results, this picture is similar to the one presented above for the 1987 corpus. With the exception of the *present perfect*, pluralization of *haber* has not moved forward from the *imperfect* paradigm to other verb tense paradigms.

Bentivoglio & Sedano (1989) limit their analysis of the linguistic factors [\pm human] and constituents reinforcing the idea of plurality to the clauses in which *haber* is in the *imperfect tense* since they did not find enough tokens for *other tenses*. In their analysis, they maintain that the variants [+human] and [+plural] favor pluralization of *haber*. In order to compare the role of these factors in the 1987 corpus, I decided to run the variable rule analysis considering only the imperfect tense *haber* tokens and factor groups 2 ([\pm human]), and 3 (constituents reinforcing idea of plurality). GoldVarb ruled out both factor groups 2 and 3 since they were not statistically significant.

The hypothesis that factors such as [+human] and [+plural] favor pluralization does not apply to the 80's corpus. With regard to the factor [+human], however, it is important to consider general tendencies found in previous discourse analysis research (Givón 1976, Silva-Corvalán

1983, among others), since that earlier research reveals that the factor [+human] correlates with concepts such as topic, agent, and subject. For instance, Silva-Corvalán (1983:119) maintains that:

definiteness and humanness correlate with topicality; that is to say, they are two of the features characteristic of the kinds of referents that people tend to talk about (...) These referents are usually coded as the subject noun phrase (...).

These correlations between humanness, topic, agent, and subject support the viewpoint according to which the noun phrases in clauses with *haber* are parsed as subjects. The pattern of variation, following this analysis, would be between impersonal-existential *haber* and intransitive-existential *haber*.

Nevertheless, there are examples in my corpus in which plural *haber* appears with accusative pronouns offering counter evidence for the subject hypothesis.

- (19) *Y otras cosas que pa' allá no **las** habían* (d5fa)
 And other things that for there no them were-3pl-there
 'And other things that there were not there'

A possible explanation for this pattern of variation is, following Givón (1976), that the verb *haber* is more likely to be plural when the noun phrase is the topic of discourse. Givón suggests that grammatical agreement can be better understood in terms of topic-verb agreement. This perspective would clarify cases such as (20) where the noun phrase not only codifies a [+human] referent, but it also codifies a definite entity. This description is consistent with the hierarchy of the likelihood of verb agreement presented by Givón (1976:152).

- (20) *No es que no **hayan** los diseñadores...* (a1fb)
 No is that no are-3pl-there the designers
 'It is not that there are not the designers...'

4.2 Social class. Factor group 6

Social class is the second most important factor group according to the GoldVarb results. Lower class speakers tend to pluralize *haber* more frequently than upper class speakers. Middle class speakers neither favor nor disfavor pluralization of *haber*. Bentivoglio & Sedano's findings for the 70's corpora show 80% pluralization for lower class speakers; 44% for upper class speakers; and 41% for middle class speakers. In the 80's corpus, the middle class group has passed the halfway point, with a

weight just barely over .500. Pluralization of *haber* has advanced within this social group.

The tendencies found suggest that non-pluralization of *haber* may be perceived as the prestigious variant by the upper social class speakers, while pluralization of *haber* is advancing within the middle class group and can be considered the norm within the lower class group.

The findings of this research show that the factor group *age* (5) is not significant. Patterns of pluralization are very similar across different generations. This result suggests that pluralization of *haber* is a stable change at least for some verb paradigms such as the *imperfect* and the *present perfect*. However, the corpus analyzed in this investigation does not allow me to observe the interaction between stylistic factors and the pluralization of *haber*. It has been claimed in the sociolinguistic literature that the difference between a stable variable and a variable in the initial change stage is that the former varies according to stylistic factors, whereas the latter does not. Future research will have to address this issue by observing the interaction between the pluralization of *haber* and factors such as speech style, social class, sex, and age.

5. Conclusion

Pluralization of existential *haber* is an extended phenomenon in Venezuelan Spanish. The informants pluralized 54% of the clauses examined in this investigation. However, pluralization is not the general rule for all verb tense paradigms. The phenomenon is progressing in the *imperfect* and *present perfect* tense paradigms, but it has not advanced much in *other tenses*.

Lower class speakers are more likely to pluralize than upper class speakers, whereas the phenomenon is slowly advancing within the middle class group. Future research should examine the correlation between stylistic variation and factor groups such as social class, age, and sex in order to observe whether this is a change from above or a change from below the level of social awareness.

Previous research regarding pluralization of *haber* shows the younger generation leading this change. The fact that the levels of pluralization are similar across the different age groups studied in this research as well as for male speakers and female speakers indicates that this phenomenon is firmly established in Venezuelan Spanish, at least in the *imperfect* and *present perfect* paradigms.

REFERENCES

- Bailey, Guy; Tom Wike; Jan Tillery; and Lori Sand. 1991. "The apparent time construct". *Language Variation and Change* 3.241-264.
- Bello, Andrés; Rodolfo Lenz, and Rodolfo Oroz. 1940. *El español en Chile*. Buenos Aires: Imprenta de la Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- Bello, Andrés. 1972. *Gramática de la lengua castellana destinada al uso de los americanos*. Caracas: Ministerio de Educación.
- Bentivoglio, Paola. 1987. *Los sujetos pronominales de primera persona en el habla de Caracas*. Caracas: Consejo de Desarrollo Científico y Humanístico.
- Bentivoglio, Paola and Mercedes Sedano. 1987. *Estudio sociolingüístico del habla de Caracas*. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela.
- Bentivoglio, Paola and Mercedes Sedano. 1989. "Haber: ¿Un verbo impersonal?" *Estudios sobre español de América y lingüística afroamericana*. Ponencias presentadas en el 45 congreso internacional de americanistas, 59-81. Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo.
- Bentivoglio, Paola and Mercedes Sedano. 1993. "Investigación sociolingüística: sus métodos aplicados a una experiencia venezolana". *Boletín de Lingüística* 8.3-35.
- De Mello, George. 1991. "Pluralización del verbo haber impersonal en el español hablado culto de once ciudades". *Thesaurus*. XLVI.445-471.
- De Mello, George. 1994. "Pluralización del verbo haber impersonal en el español hablado culto". *Studia Neophilologica* 66.77-91.
- Fontanella de Weinberg, María Beatriz. 1992. "Variación sincrónica y diacrónica de las construcciones con haber en el español americano". *Boletín de Filología de la Universidad de Chile* XXXIII.35-46.
- Gili Gaya, Samuel. 1979. *Curso de sintaxis superior española*. Barcelona: VOX.
- Givón, Talmy. 1976. "Topic, pronoun, and grammatical agreement" *Subject and topic* ed. by Charles N. Li, 151-188. New York: Academic Press.
- Kany, Charles. 1945. *American-Spanish syntax*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Labov, William. 1994. *Principles of linguistic change*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Lapesa, Rafael. 1980. *Historia de la lengua española*. Madrid: Gredos.

- Luque Moreno, J. 1978. "En torno al sintagma haber impersonal + sustantivo y sus orígenes latinos". *Revista española de lingüística* 8.125-147.
- Montes Giraldo, José. 1982. "Sobre el sintagma haber + sustantivo". *Thesaurus* 37.383-385.
- Obediente, Enrique. 1984. "La personalización de haber en el habla culta de Caracas". Paper presented at "VII Congreso internacional ALFAL", Santo Domingo, R.D.
- Oroz, Rodolfo. 1966. *La lengua castellana en Chile*. Santiago: Universidad de Chile.
- Rabanales, Ambrosio and Lidia Contreras. 1979. *El habla culta de Santiago de Chile: Materiales para su estudio Tomo I*. Santiago: Imprenta universitaria de la Universidad de Chile.
- Rand, David and David Sankoff. 1990. *Goldvarb 2.0*. Montreal. University of Montreal.
- Real Academia Española. 1973. *Esbozo de una nueva gramática de la lengua española*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe.
- Silva-Corvalán, Carmen. 1983. "On the interaction of word order and intonation: Some OV constructions in Spanish". *Discourse perspective on syntax* ed. by Flora Klein, 117-40. New York: Academic Press.
- Silva-Corvalán, Carmen. 1989. *Sociolingüística. Teoría y análisis*. Madrid: Alhambra.