

# POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS FOR THE ADDRESSEE IN PROTESTANTS' PERSONAL LETTERS FROM THE 20TH CENTURY

O USO DE PRONOMES POSSESSIVOS COM REFERÊNCIA AO DESTINATÁRIO EM CARTAS  
PESSOAIS DE EVANGÉLICOS DO SÉCULO XX

EL USO DE PRONOMBRES POSESIVOS CON REFERENCIA AL DESTINATARIO EN CARTAS  
PERSONALES DE EVANGÉLICOS DEL SIGLO XX

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper describes and analyzes the use of the possessive pronouns 'teu', 'seu', and 'vosso' in Brazilian Portuguese from sample of written material formed by 44 letters addressed to an evangelical pastor, one of the pioneers in the diffusion of the Assembly of God in the North and Northeast Brazilian regions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taking as the constituents of a community of practice the senders of such letters, the use of possessives is analyzed in the light of the Theory of Power and Solidarity (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960), considering that the pronominal system is in variation (WEINREICH; LABOV; HERZOG, 1968), and applying the methodology of Historical Sociolinguistics (CONDE SILVESTRE, 2007). The results point out to a relatively conflictuous system in which the uses of pronouns are not categorically based on sender-addressee relations, but rather the forms 'teu', 'seu', and 'vosso' are used, to a considerable extent, according to the semantic of power and solidarity described by Brown and Gilman (1960).  
**KEYWORDS:** Possessive pronouns. Personal letters. Community of practice. Power and solidarity. Sociolinguistics.

**RESUMO:** O presente artigo descreve e analisa o uso dos possessivos 'teu', 'seu' e 'vosso' numa amostra de língua escrita composta por 44 cartas destinadas a um pastor evangélico, um dos pioneiros na difusão da Assembleia de Deus pelo Norte e Nordeste do Brasil durante o século XX. Tomando como constituintes de uma comunidade de prática os remetentes dessas cartas, analisa-se o emprego dos possessivos à luz da Teoria do Poder e da Solidariedade (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960), considerando-se que o sistema pronominal encontra-se em variação (WEINREICH; LABOV; HERZOG, 1968) e aplicando-se a metodologia da Sociolinguística Histórica (CONDE SILVESTRE, 2007). Os resultados apontam para um sistema relativamente em conflito, em que os usos dos pronomes não se dão categoricamente conforme as relações entre remetente e destinatário, porém as formas 'teu', 'seu' e 'vosso' obedecem, em uma medida considerável, à semântica do poder e da solidariedade descrita por Brown e Gilman (1960).  
**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Pronomes possessivos. Cartas pessoais. Comunidade de Prática. Poder e solidariedade. Sociolinguística.

**RESUMEN:** El presente artículo describe y analiza el uso de los posesivos 'teu', 'seu' y 'vosso' del portugués brasileño en una muestra de lengua escrita compuesta por 44 cartas destinadas a un pastor evangélico, uno de los pioneros en la difusión de la Asamblea de Dios por el norte y el nordeste de Brasil durante el siglo XX. Considerando los remitentes de estas cartas como constituyentes de una comunidad práctica, se analiza el empleo de los posesivos a la luz de la Teoría del Poder y de la Solidaridad (BROWN, GILMAN, 1960), partiendo del supuesto de que el sistema pronominal se encuentra en variación (WEINREICH; LABOV; HERZOG, 1968),

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y aplicándose la metodología de la Sociolingüística Histórica (CONDE SILVESTRE, 2007). Los resultados apuntan a un sistema relativamente en conflicto, en que los usos de los pronombres no se dan categóricamente conforme a las relaciones entre remitente y destinatario, pero las formas ‘*teu*’, ‘*seu*’ y ‘*vosso*’ obedecen, en una medida considerable, a la semántica del poder y de la solidaridad descrita por Brown y Gilman (1960).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Pronombres posesivos. Cartas personales. Comunidad práctica. Poder y solidaridad. Sociolingüística.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the Portuguese language, three words have been used as possessives with reference to the interlocutor, namely: ‘*teu*’ (literally: “thy/thine”), ‘*vosso*’ (lit.: “your” 2PERS PL), and ‘*seu*’ (lit.: ‘its’, whose reference was the noun *mercê*, ‘grace’ in ‘*vossa mercê*’, “your grace”). In terms of normative paradigm, the first corresponds to ‘*tu*’ [lit.: “thou”]; the second to ‘*vós*’ [lit.: “ye”], which, until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was used as a ceremonial form to address someone not intimate or superior; and the last one to ‘*você*’ [“you”], which arose from the contraction of ‘*Vossa Mercê*’, an expression initially used (15<sup>th</sup> century) to address the king of Portugal, but which, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was already almost universally used as treatment in all social strata. In the words of Faraco (1996, p.64), “[*você*] is the common-use pronoun for intimate treatment, being the pronoun ‘*tu*’ restricted to some regional varieties”.<sup>1</sup>

Although the pronoun ‘*vós*’, with its respective oblique forms (‘*vos*’ [“you”], ‘*convosco*’ [“with you”]) and possessive form (‘*vosso*’ [“your/yours”]), has become obsolete in most places where Portuguese is spoken, it is still used in the dialects of the North and center of Portugal (RAPOSO, 2013, p.130), and can be found in religious discourses, especially prayers, when addressed to God or to the Virgin (CUNHA, 1986, p.287).

While reading a set of letters written by members of the Assembly of God church, who were either born or living in Brazil’s North and Northeast regions, and written between 1940 and 1986, I noticed a recurrent use of the possessive ‘*vosso*’ referring to the recipient, thus to one individual only, besides the variable employment of the other two forms, ‘*teu*’ and ‘*seu*’. This paper<sup>2</sup> results from the attempt of understanding the variation amongst the possessives mentioned in a community of practice through writing, considering the relationship and the degree of intimacy between sender and recipient.

This study is based on the work of Brown and Gilman (1960) about the address pronouns used between interlocutors, which argues that there is a “close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life – the dimensions of power and solidarity” (BROWN, GILMAN, 1960, p.252). The research is also based on the Variationist Sociolinguistics’ basic theoretical assumption, which says that “every language constantly undergoes alteration” (WEINREICH; LABOV; HERZOG, 1968, p.100), and that the linguistic variation has a social meaning that “lies in its value in the negotiation of social membership” (LABOV, 2010, p.189). In addition, Wenger’s (1998) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s (1999) concepts of community of practice were considered in this paper, as we will later see. The methodology used is that of the Historical Sociolinguistics, since it is based on the characterization of historical aspects of the considered community, and on the social context to “reconstruct certain independent variables that in certain linguistic situations of the past could be correlated with the variation” (CONDE SILVESTRE, 2007, p.53)<sup>3</sup>.

## 2 THE PRONOUNS AND THE THEORY OF POWER AND SOLIDARITY

<sup>1</sup> All the translations presented throughout this paper were made by me. From the original: “[*você*] é o pronome de uso comum para o tratamento íntimo, estando o pronome ‘*tu*’ restrito a algumas variedades regionais”.

<sup>2</sup> This study is part of a research still under development in the PhD course of Linguistics that was registered in the Conselho de Ética e Pesquisa (CEP) – Council of Ethics and Research – of the Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC) – Federal University of Ceará – and approved under the CAAE nº 72927417.3.0000.5054.

<sup>3</sup> In the original: “reconstruir determinadas variables independientes que en ciertas situaciones lingüísticas del pasado pudieron estar correlacionadas con la variación”.

In most natural languages, according to a study developed by Brown and Gilman (1960), the relationship between the interlocutors is codified through deictic forms, which may be the ones traditionally called personal pronouns or the pronouns of address.

The authors call *T* and *V* the two deictic systems of persons used between the interlocutors in the treatment of one another. Thus, the forms used in ceremonial treatment (“polite pronoun”) are called “*V* forms” (from ‘*vos*’, “ye” in Latin), and those used in familiar treatment (“familiar pronoun”) are the “*T* forms” (from ‘*tu*’, “thou” in Latin).

In their famous 1960 paper, Brown and Gilman discuss the semantics of these deictic forms, considering semantics as “the co-variation between the pronoun used and the objective relationship existing between speaker and addressee” (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960, p.186). For them, the relationship between the interlocutors is based on two principles: power and solidarity. The authors explain:

One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that s/he is able to control the behavior of the other. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behavior. The power semantic is similarly nonreciprocal; the superior says *T* and receives *V* (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960, p.255).

According to them, in what concerns these relationships, societies are either in equilibrium or in conflict. In the first case, the role of each individual in society or in relation to their interlocutor, as well as the distinction between social classes, are clearly established, as was the case in the medieval European society. In the second case, the attitudes of a speaker towards their interlocutor are defined according to the situation in which they are. Therefore, in a relatively static society, the lower-rank interlocutors generally treat superiors by *V*, while they are treated by *T* in power relations (asymmetric relationships) and, in symmetrical relationships, members of higher social strata can treat themselves by reciprocal *V*, while those of the lower social strata do so by reciprocal *T*. For the authors, relationships in which there is intimacy or condescension are relations of solidarity. Power and solidarity would, therefore, be the two conditioning factors for the use of *T* and *V*:

In general terms, the *V* form is linked with differences between persons. Not all differences between persons imply a difference of power. [...] A rule for making distinctive use of *T* and *V* among equals can be formulated by generalizing the power semantics. Differences of power cause *V* to emerge in one direction of address; differences not concerned with power cause *V* to emerge in both directions. [...] The corresponding norms of address are symmetrical or reciprocal with *V* becoming more probable as solidarity declines. (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960, p.257-258).

For Brown and Gilman (1960, p.255), power can be based not only on wealth, but also on age, on the role institutionalized by the church, a business, the state, the military or the family, as well as the social gender and physical strength.

Lyons (2011, p.235) observes that the use of the non-reciprocal *V* has declined in most European languages since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “except in the case of adults and children who are not members of the same family and in some more special cases”. For him, the explanation is in the growth of more egalitarian or democratic attitudes in Western societies and in the overlapping of the solidarity factor, in which the reciprocal use of *T* is more cultivated.

In the history of some languages, *V* forms can become *T* forms. As an example, Brown and Gilman (1960) cite English, in which ‘you’, initially *V* (when used for a single interlocutor), became the *T* form replacing the pronoun ‘thou’. Similarly, in the so-called “Español del Río de la Plata”, spoken in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, ‘*vos*’ (“ye”) lost the value of ceremonial address that it had in European Spanish, and is now used as a form of intimacy.

In Portuguese, until the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, according to Faraco (1996), ‘*vós*’ was employed as *V* form. At the time of the discovery of Brazil, that pronoun was already in decline, being replaced by ‘*Vossa Mercê*’, which became, around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the word ‘*você*’, which had been *T* form until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (LOPES, 2009; RUMEU, 2013) and now is used as *T* form in most of the country (FARACO, 1996).

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to some studies (DUARTE, 1993; LOPES, 2007; RUMEU, 2013), the use of ‘você’ as *T* form was accentuated in the Brazilian Portuguese. The use of *V* forms as *T* forms characterizes the conflicting system described by Brown and Gilman (1960), and the period in which such a phenomenon happens corresponds to a phase of variation in the use of those pronouns.

As Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968, p.188) argue, “not all variability and heterogeneity in language structure involves change, but all change involves variability and heterogeneity”. Therefore, the function of the *T* form in Brazilian Portuguese has begun to present a change between the forms ‘tu’ and ‘você’ and, thus, all the oblique and possessive forms of these pronouns have started to vary as well. That is, if ‘tu’ and ‘você’ compete in the function of subject, ‘te’ (lit.: “thee”) competes with ‘lhe’ (“to you”; “to him/her”) in the function of object, ‘teu’ with ‘seu’ as possessives, etc.

In short, there is a variation in Brazilian Portuguese between the two pronominal systems that once performed different functions: the *T* system (‘tu’, ‘te’, ‘ti’, ‘contigo’, ‘teu’ – respectively “thou”, “thee”, “to thee”, “with thee”, “thy/thine” as these forms were used in English before the Norman Conquest) varies with the *V* system (‘você’, ‘o’, ‘lhe’, ‘se’, ‘si’, ‘consigo’, ‘seu’ – lit.: “your grace”, “it”, “to it”, “itself”, “to itself”, “with it”, “its”), resulting in a mixed system in which can be included other address forms (‘o senhor’ [lit.: “the lord”], ‘o amigo’ [“the friend”], etc.).

Considering that the letters analyzed in this study were produced between 1940 and 1986, and that all senders are members of the Assembly of God church writing to a prominent individual within the evangelical community, some questions can be raised regarding the use of deictic forms in such letters:

- 1) Do the relationships between sender and recipient reveal a system in equilibrium, since they are well demarcated in the community of practice in which they participate; or a system in conflict, since the letters were written in a period during which the solidarity factor had already been increasing – as Lyons (2011) points out to Western societies?
- 2) If the system is in equilibrium, what are the possessive forms employed by the senders considered inferior in relation to the recipient, and by those who play the same role, but without much intimacy?
- 3) If the system is in conflict, it is possible to use the possessive ‘teu’ by senders who also use the form ‘seu’ (or another possessive expression) with the same reference (the recipient), revealing a stylistic variation<sup>4</sup> in what concerns the use of those pronouns. So, what is the influence of the type of relationship between sender and recipient on the use of the possessive with reference to the interlocutor in the letters?

The present study has, hence, the objective of answering these questions and contributing to other researches on the use of possessives, which, after the insertion of ‘você’ into the chart of personal pronouns in the Brazilian Portuguese (BP), began to vary as a result of the instability produced by the combination of the paradigms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> persons singular (FARACO, 1996), something that can be interpreted as a phenomenon derived from the increase of the solidarity factor in social relationships. The *V* form ‘você’ would have acquired the trait [+ intimacy] and reduced its function of reverence, when, then, other expressions had to be put into circulation to replace it.

The variable use of the possessives, as well as of the personal pronouns in the functions of subject and complement in BP, have generated several studies in an attempt to understand one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Portuguese spoken in Brazil in relation to the one spoken in Portugal.

<sup>4</sup> According to Coelho and Nunes de Souza (2014, p.175), the variation of the use of the personal pronouns is a stylistic variation, since “they are linguistic forms that represent the relationship between the interlocutors, that is, in the study of the forms of treatment the *co-variation* is evident [...] between the language and the characteristics of the speakers”, relying on Brown and Gilman (1960, p.272), for whom “Linguistic styles are potentially expressive when there is co-variation between characteristics of language performance and characteristics of the performers”.

### 3 THE POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS IN PORTUGUESE

In this study, possessives are considered, based on Bagno (2011, p.767), the terms that indicate possession<sup>5</sup>, and which can both exercise the pronominal function (name substitution) and the determinant function. Sentences (1) and (2), respectively, exemplify these functions:

(1) *O livro de João é mais novo que o teu.* (“John’s book is newer than yours.”)

(2) *O teu livro é de uma edição anterior.* (“Your book is of an earlier edition.”)

As we can see, Portuguese uses the same form to both functions, unlike Spanish and French, in which there is a shorter form used before the noun (Sp.: *mi libro*; Fr.: *mon livre*), and a longer form used as a predicative (Sp.: *El libros es mío*; Fr.: *Le livre est mien*).

For Monteiro (2002), the possessives compose the paradigm of the personal pronouns morphologically, syntactically, and semantically, since they present the same radical of the personal pronouns (‘*me/meu*’, ‘*te/teu*’, ‘*se/seu*’, ‘*nos/nosso*’, ‘*vos/vosso*’ – like in English: “me/my/mine”, “thee/thy/thine”, etc. – complete the scheme of the pronominal functions (‘*eu*’ [“I”] – nominative, ‘*me*’ [“me”] – accusative, ‘*mim*’ [“to me”] – dative, ‘*meu*’ [“my”/“mine”] – genitive), and attribute to a person the notion of ownership.

As for the *T/V* distinction, while ‘*você*’ (formerly used as *V* form) came to play the *T* form function in variation with ‘*tu*’, the possessive of the canonical third person (‘*seu*’) started to compete with the one of the second canonical person (‘*teu*’). For Bagno (2011, p.769), “as with the oblique pronouns, the possessives referring to ‘*tu*’ and ‘*você*’ are used interchangeably in the correlation with these personal indices”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the use of ‘*teu*’ is verified in the BP when the interlocutor is treated both by ‘*você*’ and by ‘*tu*’, and the same is done with ‘*seu*’.

In what concerns the possessive ‘*vosso*’, this was *V* form during the period in which ‘*vós*’ played this role for a single interlocutor, and still is in some discursive genres.

Although the use of ‘*vós*’ as singular *V* form has declined in almost all the varieties of Portuguese still in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the possessive ‘*vosso*’ continued composing expressions of treatment such as ‘*Vossa Excelência*’, ‘*Vossa Senhoria*’, ‘*Vossa Magnificência*’, etc.

Even though the majority of the BP scholars point to the disappearance, in popular daily communication, of ‘*vós*’ and their corresponding forms - both in the singular *V* function and as in reference to the group to which it is addressed -, all the pronouns of the canonical second person plural, with reference to the singular or to the plural, are identified in the letters written by evangelicals analyzed in this study. The following examples, taken from these letters, attest to this statement:

(3) *Apas do Senhor seja com todos vós [...] que a graça do Senhor seja multiplicada em vossos corações. | Omeu ardente desejo, é, que esta vós emcontre gosando amais perfeita sau|de, juntamente com todos de nossa familia. [...] aminha alma gemme dentro de mim, com desejo, de vós ver. [L01]*<sup>7</sup>

(May the peace of the Lord be with **you** all. [...] may the grace of the Lord be multiplied in **your** hearts. | My ardent desire is that it finds **you** enjoying the most perfect health with all of our family. [...] my soul groans within me, longing to see **you**.)

<sup>5</sup> The notion of “possession” is not restricted only to the material and the juridical scope. According to Raposo (2013, p.906), the possessives also express other relationships, such as kinship (‘my brother’) and the relationship between a part and the whole, including parts of the body, “inalienable possession” (‘my heart’).

<sup>6</sup> In the original: “assim como ocorre com os oblíquos, os possessivos referentes a ‘tu’ e ‘você’ são usados indiferentemente na correlação com esses índices pessoais”.

<sup>7</sup> The code used at the end of each excerpt of the letters transcribed here consists of the letter L as in “letter”, followed by the number of the letter in the constitution of the sample. The transcription of the passages extracted from the letters keeps the original text unchanged. In the case of suppression of excerpts, the notation [...] was used and, in case of line change, a vertical bar (|).

(4) *Muito prezado irmão Zequinha [...] | Escrevo-**vos** esta, em resposta a **vossa** mui | amável cartinha, a qual veio conforto ao | meu coração. Embora que ao mesmo tempo tenha ficado | contrastada, parecia está sentindo a mesma tris-|teza que o irmão sentiu [...] foi Raimundo que | mandou o Helio filho de Fransquinha telefonar | para o sr. [...] Irmão mostrei a cartinha do sr. a | Mazú e ao Raimundinho, todos ficaram | ciente do **vossos** dizeres ficaram também | muito contrastados por saberem que o irmão | não recebeu aviso nenhum. Pois Raimundinho | mandou o Hélio telefonar como já **vos** disse. [L23]*

(Dearest brother Zequinha, [...] | I write to **you** in response to **your** very | kind little letter, which came as a comfort to | my heart. Although I have at the same time become sad, | it seems that I have been feeling the same sadness that the brother felt. [...] it was Raimundo who | told Helio, Fransquinha's son, to call [lit.] the lord. | [...] Brother, I have showed the letter of the lord to | Mazú and to Raimundinho, all became | aware of **your** words and became, too, | very sad to know that the brother | have not received any warning, for Raimundinho | told Helio to call, as I told **you**.)

In (3), the forms 'vós', 'vosso' and 'vos' refer to the group of persons in which the recipient is included, which is indicated by the determinant 'todos' ('all') before 'vós'. In (4), however, 'vos' and 'vossa/vosso' have as reference the addressee and, hence, are used as a singular *V* form, alternating with expressions such as 'o irmão' ('the brother') and 'o senhor'/'sr.' ('the Lord').

Few academic studies have been done on the 'teu'~'seu' variation in BP, in which Arduin (2005) and Lucena (2016) stand out. The first author analyzes the phenomenon in the Southern Region, with speech samples obtained from eight cities of the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, and concludes that the use of 'teu'/'seu' tends to follow the use of 'tu'/'você', according to the principle of formal parallelism, and that 'teu' is more used by women, less educated people, younger people, and in intimate relationships — or, in the words of Brown and Gilman (1960, p.261), when there is “a shift from power to solidarity as the governing semantic principle”. On the other hand, the second author's research has a diachronic nature – the sample used were personal letters written between 1857 and 1979 – and notices “a timid growth of the pronoun 'seu', both in the ascending and descending symmetric and asymmetric relationships established” (LUCENA, 2016, p.176).<sup>8</sup>

This research considers that the variable use of the possessives with reference to the second person singular is related to the fact that the senders of the letters supposedly have more contact with the biblical text (in which the canonical 2<sup>nd</sup> p. pl. pronouns are very recurrent), because they are all members of the Assembly of God, one of most conservative evangelical churches in Brazil. This study also considers that the use of possessives by these senders is related to the position that each individual occupies within the community of practice of which they are part of, and to their relation with the recipient.

#### 4 THE MEMBERS OF ASSEMBLY OF GOD AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The study presented here uses personal letters written by evangelical senders to the same addressee, pastor José Alencar de Macedo (1899-1991). They are letters both from members of the pastor's family and from friends in the condition of churchgoers and workmates, thus characterizing a web of relationships centered on an individual of prominent role within that community.

It is important to emphasize, regarding the relations of kinship between some senders and the recipient pastor, that: 1) in the case of his sisters, sons-in-law and granddaughter, they did not necessarily suffer the interference of the recipient's position within the community of practice to which they belonged, for they lived far from him; 2) in the case of his brothers-in-law, they were also pastors, therefore, more than the connection acquired by marriage with the sisters of the recipient, they were also linked to the latter by occupation and common experiences they had had in the pastoral life.

In all letters, the linguistic marks of the evangelical faith can be verified, reflected in the vocabulary that identifies them as followers of a strand of Christianity different from the one followed by the Catholics. In other words, the differences between Catholics and

<sup>8</sup> In the original: “um crescimento tímido do pronome 'seu', tanto nas relações simétricas quanto assimétricas ascendentes e descendentes estabelecidas”.

evangelicals are not restricted to the set of beliefs and dogmas of each Christian strand, but are also manifested in linguistic practices, especially in vocabulary.

As to the property that certain words and linguistic expressions have to point to the social identities of the speakers, to the relation established amongst themselves or with other entities taken as referents in the enunciation, Levinson (2007) calls it social deixis. For Vazquez (2009, p.58), in the interaction between two people, they select, from a repertoire offered by their language, the appropriate terms to demarcate their relationship, that is, “they reveal their relationship with their choice”.

Thus, in the case of the Brazilian evangelical community, specifically that of the Assembly of God church<sup>9</sup>, some linguistic expressions are used to identify their coreligionists, such as, for example, the greeting through the expression “*A paz do senhor!*” (lit.: “The peace of the Lord!”), which is verified in the greeting section of almost all 44 letters analyzed in this paper.

In a country with a Catholic majority, such as the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Brazil<sup>10</sup>, those who decided to follow another faith felt the need to stand out in the environment in which they lived, especially as a way of marking their religious identity. Because they present certain behavioral peculiarities, especially in what concerns the first generations of adepts of the evangelical churches spreaded around a massive-Catholic country, we can consider evangelicals that congregate in a single church a community of practice (CofP), as defined by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999, p.186):

A CofP is an aggregation of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, and values – in short, practices. A CofP can develop out of a formally or informally constituted enterprise: a choir, a gang, a secretarial pool, a family, a garage band, a friendship group, or an academic department.

For the authors, a CofP is not confused with a speech community. The distinction lies in the way that members of the community are associated, which leads them to develop certain practices which involve building a common orientation for the world around them — “The community as a whole constructs a joint sense of itself through the relation between its practices and those of other communities” (ECKERT; MCCONNELL-GINET, 1999, p.186), with the stylistic practice as the key to the whole process of identity building by members of the community.

Meyerhoff (2002, p.526) associates the CofP with an “analytical domain”, which generally comprises a smaller contingent of users, but can also guide us through principles of language use with a broader meaning. For her, the CofP distinguishes itself from a social network: while the latter presupposes a *quantity* of interaction, the former presupposes *quality* of interaction (HOLMES; MEYERHOFF, 1999, p.180).

According to Conde Silvestre (2012), the concept of CofP is difficult to apply when one investigates language from historical *corpora*, but recent advances in the compilation of samples of manuscript material, such as personal letters, have opened up new possibilities for researches, offering a new understanding of the relationship between language, text and society.

Wenger (1998) establishes three criteria for the existence of a CofP: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. The three criteria can be identified in the group of senders who produced the constituents of the sample analyzed here, characterizing these senders as members of the same CofP:

*Mutual engagement* — each sender is engaged in the same faith, sharing the same beliefs, some playing a prominent role in the church (the pastors, of whom the recipient is one), others as followers of those people’s teachings (the churchgoers), and others as family members of the recipient, from whom they seek advice.

<sup>9</sup> The Assembly of God church was taken to Brazil by the Swedish missionaries coming from the United States, Gunnar Vingren and Daniel Berg, who landed in Belém (PA) on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1910. (CORDOVA, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Catholicism is still the major religion in Brazil in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to Russo and Oliveira (2011).

*Joint enterprise* — senders are involved in the task of maintaining and propagating the faith that they profess, reporting, in many letters, the progress of their church activities in the community in which they live, as well as suggesting, at the end of the correspondence, specific biblical readings for the meditation of the interlocutor.

*Shared repertoire* — senders use, in their letters, terms that identify them as evangelicals, such as “*orar*” – [lit.] “orate” – (not “*rezar*” [“pray”]), “*hino*” – “hymn” – (not “cantic”), and “*culto*” – “worship service” – (not “mass”, “meeting”), as well as specific ways of treating others according to their importance within the community (“*pastor*” – “pastor”, “*irmão*” – “brother”, “*vós*” – “you”, etc.), and phraseological conventions (“*A paz do Senhor!*” – [lit.] “The peace of the Lord!”, “*em nome de Jesus*” – “in the name of Jesus” –, etc.), patterns of interaction (“*saúde F. por mim*” – “greet So-and-so for me”, “*recomende-me a F.*” – “recommend me to So-and-so”, “*para a sua meditação, leia...*” – “for your meditation, read...” –, etc.).

As argued by Conde Silvestre (2007, p.167)<sup>11</sup>,

A community of practice is defined, similarly to social networks, in terms of interaction between individuals, but is not limited to the observation of structural aspects, valuing, on the one hand, the subjective experience of the members of each group about the boundaries between their community and others and, on the other, considering the type of common activities — including the linguistic activity — in which its components participate and act as fundamental factors of its delimitation.

Thus, the CofP is not defined by the space in which its members live, but by the type of interaction between them. In this way, the samples analyzed herein represent a well-defined CofP, although its participants did not cohabitate the same area, maintaining an interaction between them at a distance, and occasionally meeting for the worship services (the churchgoers with the recipient pastor), or rarely, because they lived in different states (the sisters and the brothers-in-law of the recipient).

## 5 THE SAMPLES AND THE METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The samples analyzed here were extracted from the *corpus* of Araújo (2014) and consist of 44 letters written to the pastor of Ceará José Alencar de Macedo<sup>12</sup>, known as Pastor Zequinha, born in Catholic crib in the town of Crato, in 1899. As a child, he moved with his family to the state of Pará, where he met the famous Swedish missionary Gunnar Vingren, founder, along with Daniel Berg, of the Assembly of God in Brazil. In 1920, Vingren converted Macedo to Protestantism, baptizing him in the village of Timboteua. In the following years, the young man traveled through the state of Ceará diffusing the new church, extending his work also to the states of Rio Grande do Norte and Paraíba. He settled in the municipality of Quixadá, Ceará, in 1946, where he founded the Assembly of God (AG) church in that town, when he was pastor, directing for decades several congregations founded in the most diverse villages and towns of the central hinterlands of Ceará. During his pastoral exercise, he maintained contact with many other pastors of AG and a large number of churchgoers who visited him or wrote letters to him asking for advice. His only two blood sisters were married when they still lived in Pará, each with pastors of AG, who, like their brother-in-law, lived in several states of Brazil spreading evangelical faith and founding churches. Zequinha died at the age of 91, in Quixadá, in 1991.

The letters to the pastor were borrowed for copy from one of his daughters. From these letters, 44 were selected for analysis, divided into two blocks: *letters of intimacy relationships* and *letters of non-intimacy relationships*, each containing 22 communications. The definition of “intimacy” follows the criteria established by Nunes de Souza (2011)<sup>13</sup>, thus redefined: a) coexistence under the same roof; b) knowledge of life details and routine of the other; c) long and significant relationship.

<sup>11</sup> In the original: “Una comunidad práctica se define, igual que las redes sociales, en términos de interacción entre individuos, pero no se limita a la observación de los aspectos estructurales, sino que valora, por un lado, la experiencia subjetiva de los miembros de cada grupo con respecto a los límites entre su comunidad y otras y, por otro, considera el tipo de actividades comunes en las que participan y actúan sus componentes - incluyendo la actividad lingüística - como factores fundamentales de su delimitación.”

<sup>12</sup> The information gathered here on Pastor José Alencar de Macedo was extracted from Conde (1960), Aquino (2005), and Castro (2015).

<sup>13</sup> Nunes de Souza (2011) analyzed the application of the Theory of Power and Solidarity, by Brown and Gilman (1960), in theater plays in Florianópolis from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, controlling, amongst other extralinguistic variables, the intimacy relationships between the characters, considering that there was intimacy



Each block of letters, in turn, was divided into two categories: *symmetrical relationships* and *asymmetrical relationships*, according to the relationship between sender and recipient. The following table presents the sample in more detail:

<b>closeness</b>	<b>relationship</b>	<b>sender</b>	<b>quantity (sender/letter)</b>
intimacy	symmetrical	sisters	2/10
		brothers-in-law	2/7
	asymmetrical	sons-in-law	3/4
		daughter	1/1
non-intimacy	symmetrical	pastors	10/11
	asymmetrical	churchgoers (men)	5/5
		churchgoers (women)	6/6

**Chart 1:** Configuration of the analyzed sample

As can be seen from the chart, there are 22 letters of intimacy relationships, of which 17 are of symmetrical relationships, 10 written by 2 sisters (each one wrote 5 letters), and 7 written by 2 brothers-in-law (one wrote 3, the other wrote 4); and 5 letters of asymmetric relationships, from lower to higher, of which 4 were written by 3 sons-in-law (1 of them wrote 2 letters, the other 2 wrote 1 each), and 1 letter written by 1 granddaughter who was raised as a daughter (therefore, the use of the vocative “*papai*” – “dad” – in the letters). The non-intimacy letters also totaled 22, of which 11 are from symmetrical relationships, written by 10 pastors (1 of them wrote 2 letters) who exchanged ideas with the recipient about the pastoral occupation, and the 11 others are from asymmetrical relationships, also from lower to higher, 5 written by 5 male churchgoers, and 6 written by 6 female churchgoers.

All senders, except the granddaughter and the sons-in-law, were over 45 at the time they wrote the letters. The granddaughter was 24; and the sons-in-law were all less than 40 years old. The ages of the senders were not taken into consideration.

As for their origin, all the senders were from Ceará, except the two brothers-in-law (from Pará), and one of the pastors (from Rio Grande do Norte), but all have lived in Ceará for some time.

Thus, the groups of factors controlled in the analysis were: *closeness* (intimacy / non-intimacy), *type of relationship* (symmetrical / asymmetric), *sender-recipient relationship* (sister, brother-in-law, son-in-law, pastor, and churchgoer), and *gender* (male, female).

The occurrences of possessives in the letters were transcribed, coded and inserted in the GoldVarb X program to generate the percentages, which will be interpreted in the light of the so-called Theory of Power and Solidarity (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960) discussed previously. This study considers ‘*teu*’ a *T* form, and ‘*seu*’/‘*vosso*’ *V* forms.

## 6 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In the letters of the analyzed sample, 148 possessive expressions were counted, including, in addition to the pronouns, nominal constructions formed by *de* (of) + name. The table below shows these results:

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when: a) the characters were husband and wife, or lovers; b) the characters shared secrets; c) the characters gave indications of having an old and significant friendship. In such a research, the author stated that “to be considered intimate, it is necessary that the characters fit into at least one of these criteria” (p.153).

FORMS	OCCURRENCE	%
<i>TEU</i>	60	40.5
<i>SEU</i>	62	41.9
<i>VOSSO</i>	20	13.5
<i>DO SENHOR</i>	2	1.4
<i>DO IRMÃO</i>	4	2.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	148	100

**Table 1:** Occurrence of possessive expressions in the sample

As we can see, the form '*seu*' was the most recurrent (41.9%), but in tight competition with '*teu*' (40.5%). Applying the terminology of Brown and Gilman (1960), the *V* forms correspond to 59.5% of the occurrences in the sample, which signals to a greater influence of the power factor in the use of the possessive expressions related to the recipient.

As the focus of this study are the pronouns, the possessive expressions '*do senhor*' (lit.: 'of the lord') and '*do irmão*' (lit.: 'of the brother') were excluded from the analysis. Excerpts (5) and (6) illustrate these uses:

(5) *Irmão mostrei a cartinha do sr. a Mazú e ao Raimundinho, todos ficaram ciente do vossos dizeres* [C23] (Brother, I have showed the little letter *of the lord* to Mazú and to Raimundinho. Everyone was aware of your words).

(6) *Fico esperando a resposta do irmão, conforme o que o irmão queira mandar diser eu aceitarei com praser* [C14] (I wait for the answer *of the brother*. As to what the brother wants to have me say, I will accept it with pleasure).

Notice in (5) the alternation between the forms *V* '*do senhor*' ('*do sr.*') and '*vossos*' with reference to the addressee. Both letters from which the above passages were extracted are from churchgoers, the C23 from a woman, and the C14 from a man.

After excluding 6 occurrences of possessive nominal expressions, 142 occurrences were left, distributed according to the groups of controlled factors:

		' <i>TEU</i> '	' <i>SEU</i> '	' <i>VOSSO</i> '
GENDER	MALE	17/60 (28.3%)	53/62 (85.4%)	15/20 (75%)
	FEMALE	43/60 (71.7%)	9/62 (14.6%)	5/20 (25%)
CLOSENESS	INTIMACY	49/60 (81.6%)	30/62 (48.3%)	4/20 (20%)
	NON-INTIMACY	11/60 (18.4%)	32/62 (51.7%)	16/20 (80%)
RELATION	SYMMETRICAL	50/60 (83.3%)	40/62 (64.5%)	9/20 (45%)
	ASYMMETRICAL	10/60 (16.7%)	22/62 (35.5%)	11/20 (55%)
<b>TOTAL</b>		60/142 (42.3%)	62/142 (43.7%)	20/142 (14%)

**Table 2:** Possessive pronouns by social variables in the sample

By the table above, it is verified that the possessive 'teu' was more used by female senders (71.7%), in intimacy relationships (81.6%), and symmetrical relationships (83.3%) with percentages well above 50%. As for the possessive 'vosso', 75% of its 20 occurrences were in men's letters, and 80% in letters from senders outside the recipient's family circle, not being so different, only as regards the relationship level (45% in the symmetrical, and 55% in the asymmetrical). The pronoun 'seu' presented 85% of its 62 occurrences in men's letters, and 64.5% in letters of symmetrical relations, being distributed more evenly only in what concerns the closeness between sender and recipient (48.3% in intimacy relationships, and 51.7% in non-intimacy relationships).

As can be deduced, in the sample letters, 'teu' is reaffirmed as a legitimate *T* form, while 'vosso' is as *V* form, competing with 'seu', which is only more neutral as to the closeness of the interlocutors.

The fact that 'teu' has been used more by women than by men requires a more detailed understanding of the indexes generated by GoldVarb X. What made the Evangelical women, who (at least in the period in which the letters were written) are usually put in an inferior condition in relation to man<sup>14</sup>, use more often a *T* form to refer to the pastor recipient than the male senders? To answer this question, a cross between the groups of factors *sender's genre* and *closeness between sender and recipient* was made. The results are presented in the table below:

	WOMEN'S LETTERS	
	ALL THE POSSESSIVES	ONLY 'TEU'
TOTAL	57/142 (40.1%)	43/60 (71.6%)
REL. OF INTIMACY	42/57 (73.7%)	38/43 (88.4%)
REL. OF NON-INTIMACY	15/57 (26.3%)	5/43 (11.6%)

Table 3: Occurrences of possessives in women's letters regarding the group of closeness factors

It is observed that, of the 142 occurrences of possessives, 57 (40.1%) were found in women's letters, in which 43 (71.6%) of the 60 total appearances of 'teu' occurred. Of these 43 occurrences, 38 (88.4%) were given in letters of intimacy relationship, which were written by the two sisters of the recipient and by his granddaughter raised as a daughter. In fact, both sisters reported to the pastor predominantly through the 2<sup>nd</sup> canonical person (*T* form), as exemplified by the excerpts:

(7) *Meu prezado irmão Zeca, a paz de nosso | Senhor Jesus Cristo seja contigo e todos | de tua família, a mezes recebi uma carta tua na qual recordas os teus esforços no trabalho do Senhor, sei que quando | chegares na presença do Senhor levando | os molhos, lá terás a corôa de justissa que | o justo Juiz nos dará [...]. Dá minhas lembranças | a Maria e todos os teus filhos | Da tua | irmã que não te esquece [C22]*

(My dear brother Zeca, may the peace of our | Lord Jesus Christ be with you and all | of your family. Months ago, I received a letter of yours in which you remember your efforts in the work of the Lord. I know that, when | you come in the presence of the Lord carrying | the keys, there you shall have the crown of justice that | the righteous Judge will give us. [...] Send my greetings | to Maria and to all of your children. | From your | sister that does not forget you.)

(8) *Prezado e querido Zeca, recebi a tua carta fiquei | muito alegre, em ter tuas notícias, que vaes bem e | com saude, e toda a tua família graças ao Senhor que | nos guarda nestes dias tão difíceis.[...] Um forte abraço da tua irmã. [C32]*

(Dear and beloved Zeca, I have received your letter. I became | very happy for having your news, that you do well and | heal your, and all of your family, too, thanks to the Lord, who | keeps us on these difficult days. [...] A strong hug from your sister.)

<sup>14</sup> It is worth remembering that, in its first century of existence, only men exercised the role of pastors at the Assembly of God churches, a principle that has only been discussed in recent years during CGADB (Convenção Geral das Assembleias de Deus no Brasil) – General Convention of Assemblies of God in Brazil meetings.

As a consequence, the high incidence of ‘*teu*’ in the women’s letters is explained by the fact that most of the occurrences (88.4%) were in the letters from the recipient’s sisters. In this case, the dimension of solidarity related to intimacy overlapped the gender factor, when it is usually established, in the community of practice in question, the dimension of power. The granddaughter raised as a daughter also uses the *T* form, but alternating it with *V* forms:

(9) Querido papai | Peço-*lhe* abençoação | Escrevo-*te* para darte as minhas | notícias e saber das *tuas* | Papai sinto muita saudades *do* | *Senhor* principalmente pela manhã que | eu lembro quando eu ia bem | cedinho para ai dar o leite da Sara | e o *Senhor* esta tomando o *seu* café [...] Um abraço de *sua* filha [C38]

(Dear dad, | I ask you for blessing. | I write you to give you my | news and to know about yours. | Dad, I really miss | you, especially in the morning, when | I remember when I would | give Sara’s milk very early in the morning | and you would be drinking your coffee. [...] A hug from your daughter.)

As in the letters of the churchgoing women, who wrote to the pastor to ask for advice, prayers or favors and to inform about the routine, there is the predominant use of *V* forms, although ‘*teu*’ is also used:

(10) Presado Irmão Zequinha! | Apaz do Senhor. | Aviso-*lhe* que recebi *sua* carta, siente | dos *teus* diseres. [...] | Sem mais abrace a família | e aceite um cordial abraço da *sua* | irmã em Cristo Jesus [C20]

(Dear brother Zequinha! | May the peace of the Lord be with you. | I warn you that I have received your letter, knowing | about your words. [...] | Without further ado, hug the family | and accept a warm hug from your | sister in Christ Jesus.)

(11) Prezado irmão Zequinha | A paz do Senhor | Hoje é que tive condição de responder *tua* amavel carta, o irmão que tem muitas | experiências na vida, sabe muito bem | que [...] Peço as *vossas* orações em nome de Jesus para que o | Espírito Santo nos console. | Recomendações a irmã Mariinha e as meninas. | *Vossa* irmã em Cristo Jesus. [C36]

(Dear brother Zequinha, | may the peace of the Lord be with you! | Today I was able to answer your kind letter, the brother, who has many | experiences in life, knows well | that [...] I ask for your prayers, in the name of Jesus, so that the | Holy Spirit comfort us. | Recommendations to sister Mariinha and to the girls. | Your sister in Christ Jesus.)

As to the use of possessives according to what the sender is for the recipient, the table below shows the results:

	‘ <i>TEU</i> ’	‘ <i>SEU</i> ’	‘ <i>VOSSO</i> ’	TOTAL
SISTERS	37 (94.9%)	2 (5.1%)	0	39
BROTHERS-IN-LAW	11 (35.5%)	16 (51.6%)	4 (12.9%)	31
SONS-IN-LAW	0	10 (100%)	0	10
GRANDDAUGHTER	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	0	3
PASTORS	1 (3.2%)	25 (80.6%)	5 (16.1%)	31
CHURCHGOERS	10 (35.7%)	7 (25%)	11 (39.3%)	28
TOTAL	60 (42.3%)	62 (43.7%)	20 (14.1%)	142

**Table 4:** Occurrences of possessives by group of senders

As one can see, ‘*teu*’ was the possessive form massively employed by the sisters of the pastor referring to him (94.9%), which points to a relationship based on the dimension of solidarity. Although they were women and a few years younger than the recipient, which would characterize an asymmetrical relationship both on the basis of gender and age, the fact that they are their sisters prevails in a

relationship of solidarity, as Brown and Gilman (1960, p.258) explain: “If A has the same parents as B, B has the same parents as A. Solidarity is the name we give to the general relationship and solidarity is symmetrical.”

Still on the use of *‘teu’*, it did not exceed 36% in the letters of any of the other groups of senders and was not used in the letters of the sons-in-law, which signals a typical relationship of power between these and the pastor, from lower to higher, although the *V* form used by those senders was *‘seu’*, and not *‘vosso’*. This can be explained by the *intimacy* factor prevailing over *asymmetry*, since the sons-in-law are considered intimate of the recipient, by the previously established criteria. *‘Vosso’* seems to be related to the relationships outside the family circle — pastors and churchgoers —, although it has been well used by the brothers-in-law. What would justify this use?

The pastor’s brothers-in-law were also pastors, but their correspondences were not coded as letters of pastors or letters of extra-family relationships, so there was no overlapping of letters involving these two categories (brothers-in-law and pastors). The use of *‘vosso’* (as well as of the other canonical 2<sup>nd</sup> p. pl. pronouns) by the brothers-in-law can be explained by their familiarity with the biblical text, in which such pronouns are quite recurrent. This usage seems to consist of an individual style influenced by factors other than the relationship between the interlocutors, as if there were a semantic dimension governing the use of the pronouns in parallel with the style of the individual (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960, p.274). The following excerpts from letters of the brothers-in-law exemplify the alternating use of *T* and *V* forms:

(12) *Prezado irmão Zeca apaz seja comsigo | e familia [...]Acuzo que só agora foi que | recebemos carta tua, mas fiquei quase pasmado | em tú declarar que não tens recebido carta nos-|sa, pois te digo que nós temos te escrito uma após | outra, e nunca tivemos resposta. || Mas agora ficamos extremamente gratos | em receber uma notícia tua, pois a muito que | não sabíamos o que era feito de ti. [...] Diga para o Custódio que é neces-|sário permanecer nos caminhos do Senhor. [...] Do vosso irmão e cunhado [C02]*

(Dear brother Zeca, may the peace of the Lord be with you | and family. [...] I state that only now | we received your letter, but I was almost astonished | by you declaring that you have not received letters from us, | for I tell you that we have written to you one after | another, and we had never had an answer. || But now we are extremely grateful | to receive news from you, for it has been a long time that | we did not know what was made of you. [...] Tell Custódio that it is necessary | to remain in the ways of the Lord. [...] From your brother and brother-in-law.)

(13) *Prezado irmão: José Alencar de Macedo. | A paz do Senhor seja comvosco. | Dou em meu poder vossa carta de 1 de Dezembro, | aqual respondo-vos. [...] O que me perguntas, concernente a os estudos, fui-me bem [...] No sentido em tu falas, concernente os teus sofrimentos, [...] Sem mais muitas lembrança, para todos meus velhos amigos, e para to-|dos de v. familia [...] Do seu irmão sempre amigo [C04]*

(Dear brother: José Alencar de Macedo. | May the peace of the Lord be with you. | I give you, in my possession, your letter of December 1<sup>st</sup>, | to which I answer you. [...] What you asked me, concerning the studies, I did well. [...] In the sense that you speak, concerning your sufferings, [...]. With no more remembrance, to all my old friends, and to all of your family. [...] From your always friendly brother.)

*‘Vosso’* had 20 occurrences in the sample, which is equivalent to 14.1% of the total number of possessives used in the letters. These indicators make that pronoun the least used of its category, but still with considerable indices in the period covered by the sample, at least in the written modality and amongst the members of the community of practice under analysis. The possessive of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural, however, was already given as obsolete in the Brazilian Portuguese spoken in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although still widely used in Portugal (FARACO, 1996, p.70).<sup>15</sup> Of these 20 occurrences, 4 (or 20%) were given in the letters of the brother-in-law pastors, 5 (or 25%) in the letters of the friend pastors, and 11 (or 55%) in the letters of the churchgoers. Again, *‘vosso’* is reaffirmed as *V* form, having been most recurrent in asymmetric relationship letters (from lower to higher). Regarding gender, there was no significant

<sup>15</sup> In the research of Arduin (2007), with possessives in speech samples of the VARSUL project, collected in several cities of the Southern Region, there were no occurrences of *‘vosso’*; the thesis of Soares (1980) with a speech sample from Ceará also did not present occurrences of *‘vosso’*. Monteiro (1994, p.209) discusses about the disappearance and “extinction” of the pronoun *‘vosso’* in the Brazilian Portuguese.

difference in the use of ‘vosso’ amongst the churchgoers: 6 occurrences in men’s letters and 5 occurrences in women’s letters. The excerpts below are from letters of those senders:

(14) Meu presado irmão e pastor Zequinha | a paz do Senhor Jesus seja com *tigo*, e com | todos de **vossa** Digna casa. | Sim presado irmão venho pôr meio destas Linhas Respostar a **Sua** Estimada cartinha que fui Recêbedor, sim ao Ler a **vossa** cartinha | os nossos olhos derramaram Lágrimas ao ve as **vosso** Letras escritas [C16]

(My dear brother and pastor Zequinha, | may the peace of the Lord Jesus be with you, and with | all of your worthy house. | Yes, dear brother, I come through these lines to give answer to your dear little letter, of which I was the receiver. Yes, by reading your little letter | our eyes shed tears when seeing your written words.)

(15) Muito prezado irmão Zequinha [...] Escrevo-vos esta, em resposta a **vossa** mui | amável cartinha, a qual veio conforto ao | meu coração. [...] Irmão mostrei a cartinha do sr. a| Mazú e ao Raimundinho, todos ficaram | ciente do **vossos** dizeres [...] portanto peço que *oreis* por mim e minha família [...] A **vossa** irmã em Cristo [C23]

(Very dear brother Zequinha, [...] | I write to you in response to your very | kind little letter, which came as a comfort to | my heart. [...] Brother, I have showed the letter of the lord to | Mazú and to Raimundinho, all became | aware of your words [...] therefore I ask that you pray for me and my family. [...] Your sister in Christ)

In the letters of the churchgoers, as shown in table 4, 28 possessive occurrences were counted, of which the majority (11 or 39.3%) was the pronoun ‘vosso’, and the minority (7 or 25%) was the pronoun ‘seu’, having ‘teu’ reached an intermediate recurrence (10 or 35.7%), which seems to contradict the semantics of Brown and Gilman’s power and solidarity.

The churchgoer/pastor relationship would form a relationship defined by the dimension of power, therefore asymmetrical, from inferior (churchgoer) to superior (pastor), in which the former would use *V* to address the latter. The percentage of *T* forms in letters of churchgoers to the pastor, therefore, points to a conflicting system in which “the solidarity semantic has gained supremacy” (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960, p.260). It is possible to understand the use of the churchgoers’ *T* with the pastor as a reinterpretation — as Brown and Gilman propose — of attributes overcharged with power, turning them into attributes of symmetrical solidarity. In the words of the authors:

Relationships like *older than*, *father of*, *nobler than* and *richer than* are now reinterpreted for purposes of *T* and *V* as relations of *the same age as*, *the same family as*, *the same kind of ancestry as*, and *the same income as*. To the degree that these relationships hold, the probability of a mutual *T* increases and, in the degree that they do not hold, the probability of a mutual *V* increases (BROWN; GILMAN, 1960, p.260).

Thus, the relationship between the churchgoer and the pastor can be understood by some as a relationship between members of the same church. It is also to be considered that the churchgoers, in general, had ages close to that of the pastor, which may interfere with the view of the relationship established between them as to symmetry. Here is an example of a letter of a churchgoer in which *T* alternates with *V*:

(16) Prezado irmão Zequinha | Faço votos a Deus para que estejais com saúde juntamente com a irmã Mariinha e todos os **teus** filhos. [...] Peço-te irmão que | mande-me dizer [...] Nada mais que lhe mereça atenção. [...] Muitas recomendações a irmã e os **seus** filhos, e os irmãos saúde todos com a paz do Senhor, responda-me esta. | **Tua** irmã em Cristo Jesus [C05]

(Dear brother Zequinha, | I wish to God that thou art healthy together with sister Mariinha and all of your children. [...] I ask you, brother, that | you tell me to say [...] nothing else that deserves attention to you. [...] Many recommendations to the sister and your children, and, to the brothers, greet all with the peace of the Lord, answer me this. | Your sister in Christ Jesus.)

The pastors, however, preferred the form ‘seu’ (80.6%) to ‘vosso’ (16.1%), avoiding ‘teu’ (only 1 occurrence in the pastors’ letters — 3.2%), confirming the words of Brown and Gilman (1960, p.258) on the use of forms of treatment in symmetrical relationships, but without intimacy: “[...] solidarity is symmetrical. The corresponding norms of address are symmetrical or reciprocal with *V*

becoming more probable as solidarity declines” (see note 7). It was not possible to analyze the letters of Pastor José Alencar de Macedo to his colleagues of ministry who sent him letters, thus, the claim that the use of *V* (for ‘seu’ or ‘vosso’) has been reciprocal is just a guess, based on the fact that they are interlocutors of the same gender, same age group, and same occupation, but without the intimacy according to the established criteria. Examples (17) and (18) were extracted from letters of pastors:

(17) *Estimado irmão Zequinha, saudações no Senhor. | Antes de tudo rogo a Deus que esta o en-|contre desfrutando gloriosas bênçãos celestiais, ao lado de sua es-|timada família [...] a fim de que nada possa impedir a sua vinda [...] Muito teria que dizer-lhe, mas me reservo | para fazê-lo com a sua presença que espero que seja certa | Saude a todos de sua mui digna família. | Na expectativa de sua pronta resposta [C018]*

(Dear brother Zequinha, greetings in the Lord. | First and foremost, I pray to God that he will find | you enjoying glorious heavenly blessings, next to your | beloved family [...], so that nothing can prevent your coming. [...] A lot I would have to tell you, but I refrain | to do it in your presence, which I hope is right. | Greet every one of your most honorable family. | In anticipation of your prompt response.)

(18) *Saldação com a paz do Senhor | Irmão Zequinha, é com muito prazer que hoje estou | vos escrevendo esta cartinha primeiramente para vos dar as nossas notícias, e aos mesmtempo receberasvóssas. | [...] Omesmo desejo que esta var-vos encontrar gosando as | mesmas juntamente com todos de vossa casa e a Igreja que ainda muito vos | ama. [...] só deve sér mostrada | esta carta as pessoas de vossa inteira confiança [...] e neste caso segundo as vóssas palavras quando mi responder eu continuarei | tranquilo [C39]*

(Greetings with the peace of the Lord, | brother Zequinha. It is with great pleasure that I am | writing you this little letter, first to give you our news, and at the same time to receive yours. | [...] Also, I wish that this will find you enjoying the | same, together with all of your household and the church that still loves you a lot. [...] Should only be shown, | this letter, to the people of your entire trust [...] and, in this case, according to your words when you respond me, I will continue | tranquil.)

As has been said, all the pastors of the Assembly of God, throughout the first century of this church, were necessarily men, so that the relationship between the pastoral senders and the pastoral recipient can be considered symmetrical with respect to gender, age, and occupation, but they were not intimate relationships, hence the rejection of the *T* form. In this sense, although a certain oscillation between ‘seu’ and ‘vosso’ was found in the letters of shepherds, both *V* forms, one can say that, in relation to the dichotomy presented by Brown and Gilman (1960), the relationships between these interlocutors were in relative balance, the use of ‘vosso’ being in their letters both a mark of the individual style, influenced by contact with the biblical text, and a form of reverence to the pioneer pastor who, having been baptized by Gunnar Vingren, led the Assembly of God to several places in Brazil’s North and Northeast regions.

## 7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In BP, the variation of the personal pronouns — of which the possessive is a type, according to Monteiro (1994, p.116-117) — results from the passage from ‘você’ as *V* form to *T* form, a process that began already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (FARACO, 1996), but that is not yet fully completed in some regions. Researches such as Soares (1980), Modesto (2006), Martins (2010), and Guimarães (2014) reveal a tendency to use ‘você’ still as *V* form, in the interactions amongst not very intimate people and in asymmetric relationships.

In this study, adepts of the evangelical church Assembly of God (AG), who corresponded through letters with pastor José Alencar de Macedo, one of the pioneers in the expansion of the AG through several areas of the country’s North and Northeast, were considered as constituting a community of practice with their own habits and linguistic behaviors. Therefore, it was sought, in this study, to analyze the use of the possessives ‘teu’, ‘seu’ and ‘vosso’ in these letters with reference to the recipient, in the light of the Theory of Power and Solidarity of Brown and Gilman (1960), starting from the assumption that ‘teu’ corresponded to the *T* form, and the other two to the *V* form.

The research showed that, in the letters of the evangelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the occurrences of ‘*teu*’ predominated in the relationships of closeness (81.6%) and in the symmetrical relationships (83.3%); ‘*seu*’ was not as distinctive as to the closeness of the relationships (48.3% in the intimate, and 51.7% in the non-intimate), but it was more frequent in the symmetrical relationships (64.5%); and ‘*vosso*’ — which corresponded to 14% of the possessives used — predominated in the relationships of non-intimacy (80%). As for the gender of the sender, ‘*teu*’ was more used by women (71.7%), while ‘*seu*’ and ‘*vosso*’ were more recurrent in men’s letters — 85.4% and 75% of their respective occurrences.

However, it was by group of senders that the use of the three possessives with reference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing. (the recipient pastor) was more in line with the description of Brown and Gilman (1960) of the forms of treatment: in the letters of the pastor’s sisters, who had a relationship of intimacy and solidarity with him, ‘*teu*’ corresponded to 94.9% of the possessives, while ‘*vosso*’ was not used. ‘*Seu*’ presented the following percentages of use: it corresponded to 100% of the possessives used by the sons-in-law (relationship of intimacy, however asymmetric); to 80.6% of the possessives used by pastors (relationship of non-intimacy, however symmetrical); to 66.7% of the possessives used by the granddaughter (relationship of intimacy, however asymmetrical); to 51.6% of the possessives used by the brothers-in-law (relationship of intimacy and symmetrical), and to only 25% of the possessives in the letters of the churchgoers (relationship of non-intimacy and asymmetrical).

‘*Vosso*’ was found amongst the letters of the churchgoers (39.3%), pastors (16.1%) and brothers-in-law (12.9%), which can be both a sign of reverence and influence of the biblical text, since the brothers-in-law were also pastors.

Regarding the questions formulated in the second section of this article, the answers were as follows:

- 1) Since there was only categorical use of ‘*seu*’ by the sons-in-law and semi-categorical use of ‘*teu*’ by the sisters, it can be said that the dimensions of power and solidarity are in conflict in the community of practice analyzed, but not so intensely as other studies on other communities point out.<sup>16</sup>
- 2) In this conflicting context, the possessive form mostly used by the senders who were considered inferior to the recipient in some respect — the granddaughter, the sons-in-law and the churchgoers — was ‘*seu*’ (46.3%, considering all three groups as only one); and also by those who play the same role in the CP, but without much intimacy with the recipient — the pastors —, but at a much higher rate (80.6%).
- 3) The use of ‘*teu*’ and ‘*seu*’ in the analyzed CP was governed, in the letters, by the solidarity factor: the greater the closeness and the symmetry between the interlocutors, the more recurrent was the *T* form.

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<sup>16</sup> Sales (2007), for example, found 65.5% of ‘*teu*’ and 26.5% of ‘*seu*’ amongst the possessives used in a sample of 37 letters from Bahia in the 1940s; Arduin (2007) found 86% of ‘*teu*’ and 14% of ‘*seu*’ in a speech sample from inhabitants of several cities in the Southern Region.



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