Use of the impersonal pluralized verb *haber* in Caribbean varieties of Spanish
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According to prescriptive grammars of Spanish, impersonal verbs can only be conjugated in the third person singular. One such verb is the Spanish verb *haber*, ‘there is’. However, we often find pluralized forms of this verb being used by native speakers of Spanish, as in 1:

1. *Había-n muchas personas.*
   *There were-PL many persons.*

This phenomenon, known as ‘the pluralization of *haber*’ has been studied in several countries of Central and Latin America, and is reported to be increasing in frequency despite being stigmatized by speakers of higher education levels (Diaz-Campos 2003, De Mello 1994). A study by Claes (2014) explains this phenomenon as a result of a change in the function of the complement of the verb. When the verb *haber* is pluralized, the direct object of the verb is used as the subject. This causes pluralization of the verb when the direct object is plural since it creates subject-verb agreement. Claes argues that this phenomenon shows a linguistic change in progress in the language where a personal form of impersonal *haber* emerges. This conclusion, however, is not shared by all. Another opinion relating to this phenomenon is expressed by Quintanilla-Aguilar (2009) who argues that pluralized forms of impersonal *haber* can be traced back to the 18th century and represent simply variation that has been and will remain stable.

In this study I look at the effect that certain sociolinguistic parameters like age, sex and socioeconomic status have on the frequency of use of plural forms of the impersonal verb *haber*. This can allow us to see whether the phenomenon shows characteristics of a linguistic change in progress or not (Labov 2001).

For this project I use three corpora representing the Caribbean varieties of Spanish: One corpus composed of 30 interviews from Holguín (Tennant et al. 2006), a corpus composed of 29 interviews from La Habana, Cuba ((Gonzales Mafud et al. 2010), and a corpus composed of 23 interviews from San Juan, Puerto Rico (Morales and Vaquero 1990). Using this data I compare the frequency of use of pluralized impersonal *haber* according to age (Younger N=43; Older N=42), education level (Higher education N=16; Lower education N =14), and sex (Men, N=43; Women, N=42) of the participants. Furthermore, I also briefly look at the effect that other linguistic factors have on the use of this phenomenon in Caribbean Spanish: (+ human) trait of the direct object, the tenses of the verb most frequently pluralized, and the distance and position of the SN (direct object) relative to the verb in the sentence.

Some preliminary results show that the factor most strongly predicting the use of plural forms of *haber* is the educational level of the speaker. Furthermore, the older group uses plural forms more often than the younger group, but this could also be due to a confounding effect with educational level. Further investigation is required to tease apart the effects of these different factors. I also find in the data strong indicators of stigmatization of pluralized *haber* forms. This may indicate that the stigma tied to the phenomenon may be having an effect on the progression of the linguistic change.
Bibliography


