

# On the pronominal status of Brazilian Portuguese *a gente*\*

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## 1 Introduction

In this paper I give an in-depth account of the Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth, BP) expression *a gente*, which has come to acquire 1 person plural pronominal reference—synonymous with *nós* ‘we.’<sup>2</sup> In the recent literature, *a gente* is classified as a grammaticalized personal pronoun which can alternate with the 1 person plural pronoun *nós* ‘we’ (i.e., Costa & Pereira 2005, Lopes 2002, Lopes 2003, Omena 2003, Pereira 2003, Zilles 2002, Zilles 2005)<sup>3</sup>. In this paper I will show that while *a gente* shares certain properties of personal pronouns—especially 1 person plural—it is not a pronoun, based on significant differences between *a gente* and genuine pronouns observed in standard and non-standard dialects of BP spoken in the Northeast of Brazil, differences which I claim are the reflexes of a rich syntactic structure.

I begin by briefly reviewing some of the past and current literature on *a gente*, taken from both the syntactic and sociolinguistic literature on the subject. Section 3 is concerned with applying pronoun diagnostics to *a gente*. In section 4 I propose an analysis for the two dialects of *a gente* that can account for the failure of *a gente* to pattern with the personal pronouns. Section 5 then looks at agreement and binding patterns governed by *a gente* in various syntactic environments. In Section 6 I briefly address the problem of compositionality for any analysis of *a gente*.

The analysis of *a gente* in this paper is based on fieldwork I conducted in Piripiri, Piauí, located in the northeast region of Brazil. In total, ten residents of Piripiri were consulted as native-speaker informants to obtain judgments of the syntactic properties of *a gente*, as presented in questionnaire form. Two varieties of BP spoken in Piripiri (BPP) emerged from the data collection (with five speakers in each group), which I refer to as *standard* and *non-standard* dialects.

## 2 Previous Accounts of *a gente*

Until the early 1970s, *a gente* received very little attention in terms of formal linguistic analysis, a fact which is hardly surprising given the then young generative research program. In fact, it

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Chris Collins, Paul Postal, John Singler, and the kind people of Piripiri, Piauí. A few more thanks to my family.

<sup>2</sup> In its non-generic usage. In this paper I will not consider indefinite or generic uses of *a gente*.

<sup>3</sup> In most of the literature on *a gente*, the preferred term is ‘free variation.’ I choose not to employ this term for purely syntactic reasons, as it implies that *a gente* can appear in any and all contexts as *nós*, which I will show to be false.

isn't until fairly recently—the late 1990s and early 2000s—that attempts have been made to find a place for *a gente* in the BP pronominal system as a syntactic object (Costa et al. 2001, Kato 1999, Lopes 2003, Menuzzi 1999/2000, Pereira 2003), which reflects an increasing body of quantitative sociolinguistic literature analyzing *a gente* as a sociolinguistic variable and variant of 1 person plural *nós* (i.e., Guy 1981, Duarte 1996, Fernandes 1999, Menon 1996, Omena 1996, and many of the respective cited references).

The first account we have of *a gente* as a personal pronoun emerges in Schmitz (1973), where an attempt is made to survey and describe the “linguistic flexibility” of *a gente* as recorded in traditional and modern of Portuguese and Brazilian grammars. Three descriptions emerge from his corpus research, common to all the literature he surveyed: 1) *a gente* is a *pronomo de tratamento* ‘address pronoun’, akin to *você, o senhor, a senhora*, which have the meaning ‘you,’ depending on the relationship between interlocutors and gender of the referent; 2) *a gente* is an indefinite pronoun, equivalent to *se* and similar to French *on*, English *one*, etc.; 3) *a gente* is a common expression employed in colloquial circumstances, and thus no formal analysis is given in the grammar.

Beginning with Schmitz (1973), the received wisdom is that *a gente* belongs to the class of expressions that in BP that refer to 1, 2, or 3 person—the personal pronouns, having evolved from a mass noun to a 1 person plural pronoun (Lopes 1999, 2001, 2003; Zilles 2002, 2005). For example, Costa & Pereira (2005: 1) write, “This expression, which literally means ‘the people’, is used as a first person plural pronoun, generally occurring in free variation with the first person plural pronoun *nós*.” Along similar lines Vianna (2007) writes,

Como pronomo pessoal, análogo a *nós*, passa a co-ocorrer com esse item, ocupando espaço dentro do sistema pronominal. Configuram-se, então, duas estratégias diferentes para uma mesma função básica: designar a primeira pessoa do plural.

As a personal pronoun, analogous to *nós*, [*a gente*] co-occurs with this item, occupying space in the pronominal system. Two differing strategies are made available for the same basic function: to designate the first person plural.

Even with a sizable body of scholarship describing the similarities between *a gente* and 1 person plural *nós*, the status given to *a gente* as a grammaticalized pronoun has yet to be critically analyzed, the primary goal of the next section.

### 3 Pronominal Status of *a gente* in Piripiri, Piauí

This section will proceed in the following fashion. I introduce three tests, all diagnostic of pronoun-hood: adjectival modification (from Menuzzi 1999, Bhat 2004), numeral co-occurrence (from Bhat 2004), and what I call here the “we men” test (from Postal 1969: 217-219). The prediction based on past and current literature, which I will test and show to be false, is for *a gente* to pattern strictly with 1 person plural *nós* (recall that *a gente* is said to be in “free variation” with *nós*) and the other BP pronouns in general. For each diagnostic, I present data from the standard BPP dialect first, followed by the non-standard BPP dialect. Where both dialects converge, the data will be consolidated. The results of these tests provide the primary evidence for my proposal on the structure(s) of *a gente*. Additionally, evidence from Conditions B and C of the Binding Theory will be considered.

## 3.1 Pronoun Diagnostics

### 3.1.1 Adjectival Modification

It is a well known fact that attributive adjectives can modify NPs or DPs (Baker 2004, Radford 2004). Consider the following examples, from English and BP:

- (1) [NP [AdjP small][NP boy]]  
 (2) [DP the [NP [AdjP small][NP boy]]]  
 (3) [NP [NP garoto] [AdjP pequeno]]  
       boy                   small  
 (4) [DP O [NP [NP garoto][AdjP pequeno]]]  
       the           boy           small

It is also the case that pronouns typically do not take adjectival modifiers or more generally combine with modifiers (Abney 1987, Bhat 2004), as in English<sup>4</sup>:

- (5) \*small me  
 (6) \*small us

The generalization seems to be that there is a constraint or restriction on pronoun-adjectival modification, at least of the attributive kind<sup>5</sup>. If *a gente* is to be considered a grammaticalized personal pronoun, then this constraint must be obeyed.

In support of this view, Menuzzi (1999, 2000) shows that in the dialects spoken in southern Brazil, *a gente* is not able to be modified by adjectives, like pronouns:

- (7) \* [A gente desatenta] não percebeu a cobra. (Menuzzi 1999: (27b))  
       a gente inattentive not perceived the snake  
       \* 'Inattentive we didn't notice the snake.'  
 (8) \* [Ele desatento] não percebeu a cobra. (Menuzzi 1999: (27c))  
       he inattentive not perceived the snake  
       \* 'Inattentive he didn't notice the snake.'

Examples (9)-(12) show that the standard BPP dialect obeys this constraint on pronoun-adjective modification, with *a gente* patterning with the standard personal pronouns.

<sup>4</sup> Note, however, the acceptability of 'poor me,' as in 'Poor me had to walk to school today.' Similar to, 'little old me,' 'the real me,' etc.

<sup>5</sup> When adjectives serve as resultative secondary predicates (Baker 2007) they seem to combine quite naturally with personal pronouns, at least in English.

- (i) If you listen to McCain I will slap **you silly**.  
<http://www.prometheus6.org/node/19844>  
 (ii) Even if Kyrgyzstan shoot **us dead** here, we'll stay here.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4550845.stm>  
 (iii) I can't stop worrying that the other shoe is not just going to drop but squash **me flat**.  
<http://tinyurl.com/6pzzr2>

However, BP, and Romance languages in general, don't allow these constructions (p.c. Cristina Real).

- (9) \*Eu feliz sorriu.  
I happy smiled-1.SG  
'Happy I smiled.'
- (10) \*Você feliz sorriu.  
you happy smiled-3.SG  
'Happy you smiled.'
- (11) \*Nós felizes sorrimos.  
we happy smiled-1.PL  
'Happy we smiled.'
- (12) \*A gente feliz sorriu.  
a gente happy smiled-3.SG  
'Happy we smiled.'

An alternate explanation for the ungrammaticality of (12), albeit a fairly weak one, might be to propose a constraint that blocks the noun *gente* from combining with adjectives. Examples (13)-(15) refute this possibility, consistently for both standard and non-standard BPP speakers.

- (13) Muita gente feliz sorriu.  
many people happy smiled-3.SG  
'Many happy people smiled.'
- (14) Esta gente feliz sorriu.  
that people happy smiled-3.SG  
'That happy people smiled.'
- (15) Aquela gente feliz sorriu.  
those people happy smiled-3.SG  
'Those happy people smiled.'

Quite unexpectedly, the non-standard BPP dialect appears to allow for pronoun-adjective modification, contrary to the proposed constraint on these constructions and in contrast to standard BPP, as seen in examples (16)-(18).

- (16) Eu feliz sorriu.  
I happy smiled-1.SG  
'Happy I smiled.'
- (17) Você feliz sorriu.  
you happy smiled-3.SG  
'Happy you smiled.'
- (18) Nós felizes sorrimos.  
we happy smiled-1.PL  
'Happy we smiled.'

Whether these examples are true instances of pronoun-adjective modification or merely apposition structures or some type of adverbial modification merits further investigation. Whatever the analysis turns out to be, examples (19) and (20) show that *a gente* cannot precede an adjective in the same way that *nós* can in (18), for either dialect.

(19) \*A gente feliz sorriu. (standard & non-standard dialects)  
 a gente happy smiled-3.SG  
 ‘Happy we smiled.’

(20) \*A gente feliz sorrimos. (non-standard dialect)<sup>6</sup>  
 a gente happy smiled-1.PL  
 ‘Happy we smiled.’

In summary, *a gente* cannot undergo adjectival modification, like the personal pronouns of the standard BPP dialect, and standard BP more generally. It is an unexpected finding that non-standard BPP allows for pronoun-adjectival modification but, crucially, *a gente* is blocked from these structures.

### 3.1.2 Numeral Co-occurrence

According to Bhat (2004), most languages allow numerals to co-occur with personal pronouns. The descriptive generalization, true for English and BP, is that numerals typically precede nouns and follow plural pronouns.

(21) a. two boys  
 b. we two

(22) a. dois rapazes  
 two boys  
 ‘two boys’  
 b. nós dois  
 we two  
 ‘we two’

The relevant fact is that this numeral co-occurrence can serve as a diagnostic for plural pronounhood.

We can now turn to the judgments of BPP speakers. In (23), we observe the prototypical case, where a numeral precedes and modifies a noun. Contrast this with (24)a-b which demonstrate the two BP plural pronouns *vocês* ‘you’ and *nós* ‘we’ followed by the numeral *três* ‘three.’

(23) Os três padres foram à igreja.  
 the three fathers went to-the church  
 ‘The three priests went to church.’

<sup>6</sup> The non-standard verbal agreement facts will be introduced in Section 4. For now, it suffices to say that (20) is not ruled out because of verbal agreement.

- (24) a. Vocês três foram à igreja.  
 you three went to-the church  
 ‘You three went to church.’
- b. Nós três fomos à igreja.  
 we three went to-the church  
 ‘We three went to church.’

Structurally, (24)a-b are identical. Consider now sentences (25)a-b, which show clear evidence of a difference between *a gente* and 1 person plural *nós*.

- (25) a. \*A gente três foi à igreja. (standard)  
 a gente three went to-the church  
 ‘We three went to church.’
- b. \*A gente três fomos à igreja. (non-standard)  
 a gente three went to-the church  
 ‘We three went to church.’

Since *a gente* and *nós* share an interpretation, it follows that the difference between the acceptability of (24)b and the unacceptability of (25) must be located in the syntax.

To summarize, 1 and 2 person plural pronouns can co-occur with numerals, but *a gente* cannot.

### 3.1.3 ‘We men’ (Postal 1969)

Postal (1969) notes that for English “in the plural, nonthird person elements can appear with both nonpronouns and/or restrictive relative phrases” (1969: 217), as an argument for the pronouns as definite articles analysis (see also Abney 1987, Longobardi 1994, and Panagiotidis 2002, who, among others, extend the analysis). Following Postal, I take the acceptability of these constructions to be diagnostic of 1 and 2 person plural pronouns that head a DP, and are not the head of an appositive. For the sake of brevity, I will not consider restrictive relative clauses here.

For European Portuguese, Raposo (1973) readily extends Postal’s original analysis and gives the examples in (26) as instances of 1 and 2 person plural pronouns heading a plural DP<sup>7</sup>.

- (26) a. Nós estudantes temos os nossos direitos a defender.  
 we students have the our rights to to-defend  
 ‘We students have our rights to defend.’
- b. Vocês sargentos laçam quinhentas vezes o pino.  
 you-pl sergeants tie 500 times the top  
 ‘You sergeants do 500 handstands.’

<sup>7</sup> Raposo (1973, 1998) also claims that 2 person singular is just as good, as in (i).

(i) tu João vem cá  
 you João come here  
 ‘You John come here.’

This construction is not possible in BPP.

Examples (27)a-b show that the acceptability of these constructions holds true for all speakers of BPP as well.

- (27) a. Vocês petistas<sup>8</sup> precisam votar amanhã.  
 you petistas need to-vote tomorrow  
 ‘You *petistas* need to vote tomorrow.’
- b. Nós petistas precisamos votar amanhã.  
 we petistas need to-vote tomorrow  
 ‘We *petistas* need to vote tomorrow.’

However, in (28), we observe that the presence of *a gente* in this position renders the sentence ungrammatical, in either dialect.

- (28) a. \*A gente petistas precisa votar amanhã. (standard)  
 a gente petistas need to-vote tomorrow  
 ‘We *petistas* need to vote tomorrow.’
- b. \*A gente petistas precisamos votar amanhã. (non-standard)  
 a gente petistas need to-vote tomorrow  
 ‘We *petistas* need to vote tomorrow.’

The examples in (30), (31), and (29) further illustrate that there is a clear and consistent difference between *a gente* and *nós* that holds across different syntactic positions: (29)a-b in subject position; (30)a-b in object position; (31)a-b in a PP.

- (29) a. Nós brasileiros não gostamos de vocês portugueses.  
 we Brazilians not like of you Portuguese  
 ‘We Brazilians don’t like you Portuguese.’
- b. \*A gente brasileiros não gosta de vocês portugueses.  
 a gente Brazilians not like of you Portuguese  
 ‘We Brazilians don’t like you Portuguese.’
- (30) a. Você viu nós petistas na reportagem esta noite?  
 you saw we petistas on-the report this night  
 ‘Did you see us *petistas* on the news last night?’
- b. \*Você viu a gente petistas na reportagem esta noite?  
 you saw a gente petistas on-the report this night  
 ‘Did you see us *petistas* on the news last night?’
- (31) a. Os portugueses não gostam de nós brasileiros.  
 the Portuguese not like of we Brazilians  
 ‘The Portuguese don’t like us Brazilians.’

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<sup>8</sup> *Petista* means member of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* ‘Worker’s Party.’

- b. \*Os portugueses não gostam de a gente brasileiros.  
 the Portuguese not like of a gente Brazilians  
 ‘The Portuguese don’t like us Brazilians.’

The evidence presented in this section converges with that of the previous section—*a gente* does not pattern syntactically with plural BP personal pronouns.

### 3.1.4 Conditions B and C

Another approach to diagnosing pronouns is to consider syntactic environments relevant to the Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981) of the Principles and Parameters program. Menuzzi (1999) notes that “*a gente* appears to have essentially the binding behavior of a pronoun,” by incurring Condition B rather than Condition C violations (p. 207). According to standard Binding Theoretic accounts, this is precisely the prediction made for pronouns. Examples (32)a-b, corresponding to Menuzzi 1999 (37a-b), demonstrate the Condition B effects, where the sentences are rendered ungrammatical in the absence of *mesmo* ‘-self.’

- (32) a. A gente viu a gente ??(mesmo) na TV.  
 a gente saw-3.SG a gente (self) on-the TV  
 ‘We saw {\*us/ourselves} on TV.’
- b. A gente passou a desconfiar da gente \*/??(mesmo) depois do incidente.  
 a gente started-3.SG to mistrust of-a gente (self) after of-the incident  
 ‘We started to mistrust {\*us/ourselves} after the incident.’

The judgments in (33), which hold across both BPP dialects, demonstrate *a gente* can be bound by itself ((33a)) without incurring Condition C violations, unlike the r-expression in (33c), and importantly, like 1 person plural *nós* ((33b)).

- (33) a. A gente viu uma cobra atrás da gente. (Menuzzi 1999, (33b))  
 a gente saw-3.SG a snake behind of-a gente  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’
- b. Nós vimos uma cobra atrás de nós.  
 we saw-1.PL a snake behind of we  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’
- c. \*O Paulo viu uma cobra atrás do Paulo. (Menuzzi 1999, (35a))  
 the Paulo saw-3.sg a snake behind of-the Paulo  
 \*‘Paulo saw a snake behind Paulo.’

Moreover, the examples in (34), from both BPP dialects, show that *a gente*, can “establish anaphoric dependencies with other expressions with [the same] interpretation,” namely 1 person plural *nós*. This binding relationship goes both ways, i.e., *nós* can also bind *a gente* (Menuzzi 1999: 208).

- (34) a. Nós vimos uma cobra atrás da gente.  
 we saw-1.PL a snake behind of-a gente  
 ‘We saw a cobra behind us.’
- b. A gente viu uma cobra atrás de nós.  
 a gente saw-3.SG a snake behind of we  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’

The evidence presented in this section, based on Condition B violations and lack of Condition C violations shows that as far as Binding Theory is concerned, *a gente* has the behavior of a personal pronoun. Once an analysis has been given for *a gente*, we will return to discuss further issues raised by Menuzzi (1999, 2000) concerning the binding of possessive pronouns and reflexives.

### 3.2 Pronoun Diagnostics Summary

Thus far I’ve shown some somewhat contradictory results with respect to *a gente*’s status as a pronoun. In certain instances (adjectival modification, Conditions B and C) *a gente* looks very much like a personal pronoun. So at a very superficial level, *a gente* may as well be a pronoun, with so many properties in common. These facts, in addition to a 1 person plural interpretation might lend themselves to a pronoun analysis, as many have assumed in their analyses. However, based on other criteria (numeral co-occurrence and “we men”), *a gente* is clearly not lining up with 1 person plural *nós*. Instead the presence of *a gente* renders these constructions ungrammatical, in contrast to the acceptability of 1 person plural *nós* in the same environments.

What can this mean? I propose that these diagnostics provide indirect evidence for a richer syntactic analysis of *a gente*, in comparison with the traditional BP pronominal system. To illustrate briefly, consider the schematic structure of *nós petistas* given in (35):

- (35) [DP [D nós][N petistas]]

Compare this with (36), which is ungrammatical.

- (36) \*[DP [D a gente][N petistas]]

Given the unacceptability of (36), I take the difference in acceptability between (35) and (36) to be the result of syntactic incompatibility.

Contra all previous approaches, I propose that the pronoun analysis for *a gente* is wrong and is unable explain in a straightforward manner the unacceptability of *a gente* in the just shown pronoun contexts for either BPP dialect. In the next section I argue that *a gente* is a complex DP (similar to an appositive) headed by a covert pronoun, a so-called pluringular (den Dikken 2001). It is this basic structure which underlies the standard BPP *a gente*, which I will show to be an imposter (Collins & Postal 2008).

## 4 Towards an Analysis

Crucial to my analysis is the assumption that there are actually two *a gentes*, each corresponding to what I have labeled the standard and non-standard BPP dialects. This labeling is partially motivated by the facts relevant to subject-verb agreement. In the standard BPP dialect, *a gente* requires 3 person singular agreement on the verb, despite its 1 person plural interpretation. Technically speaking, *a gente* is an imposter, as defined in (37) by Collins & Postal (2008:4, (9)):

(37) An imposter is a notionally *n* person DP which is grammatically *m* person,  $n \neq m$

To appreciate this mismatch between notional and grammatical person, consider first 1 person plural *nós* in (38), where both grammatical and notional person are 1 person plural.

- (38) a. Nós estamos com fome.  
we are-1.PL with hunger  
'We are hungry.'
- b. Nós fomos roubados/as.  
we were-1.PL robbed-M/F.SG/PL  
'We were robbed.'
- c. Nós vamos à praia.  
we go-1.PL to-the beach  
'We're going to the beach.'

Now, compare *nós* to *a gente* in (39)-(41), where *a gente* denotes 1 person plural but takes 3 person singular agreement on the verb (in the standard BPP dialect).

- (39) a. A gente está com fome.  
a gente is-3.SG with hunger  
'We are hungry.'
- b. \*A gente estamos com fome.  
a gente are-1.PL with hunger  
'We are hungry.'
- (40) a. A gente foi roubado/a.  
a gente was-3.SG stolen-M/F.SG  
'We were robbed.'
- b. \*A gente fomos roubado(s)/a(s).  
a gente were-1.PL stolen-M.SG(PL)/-F.SG(PL)  
'We were robbed.'

- (41) a. A gente vai à praia.  
we go-3.SG to-the beach  
'We're going to the beach.'
- b. \*A gente vamos à praia.  
we go-1.PL to-the beach  
'We're going to the beach.'

Without the (relevant) mismatch between notional and grammatical person, as described in (37), the utterance is ungrammatical. *A gente*, in the standard BPP dialect, appears to be yet another first person pronominal imposter, not unlike *the undersigned*, *the present authors*, or *yours truly*.

However, the non-standard BPP dialect presents a challenge to a straightforward imposter analysis, by allowing for both 3 person singular *and* 1 person plural verbal agreement. Consider the examples in (42)-(44).

- (42) a. A gente está com fome.  
a gente is-3.SG with hunger  
'We are hungry.'
- b. A gente estamos com fome.  
a gente are-1.PL with hunger  
'We are hungry.'
- (43) a. A gente foi roubado/a.  
a gente was-3.SG stolen-M/F.SG  
'We were robbed.'
- b. A gente fomos roubado(s)/a(s).  
a gente were-1.PL stolen- M.SG(PL)/-F.SG(PL)  
'We were robbed.'
- (44) a. A gente vai à praia.  
we go-3.SG to-the beach  
'We're going to the beach.'
- b. A gente vamos à praia.  
we go-1.PL to-the beach  
'We're going to the beach.'

I assume that the differing agreement patterns shown in (42)a-b, (43)a-b, and (44)a-b are actually the reflexes of two distinct syntactic structures (cf. Kayne 2007 and his treatment of French *on*) that correlate with the two BPP dialects described in this paper, and not the result of variable subject-verb agreement or production errors (see Rubino & Pine 1998 who make this claim related to language acquisition).

The important difference between these two dialects is that non-standard BPP allows for 1 person plural verbal agreement, while both the standard and non-standard speakers allow for 3 person singular agreement (standard BPP requires it). To account for this fact, I propose that

non-standard BPP speakers actually possess two forms of *a gente*, one an imposter with 1 person plural interpretation and 3 person singular verbal agreement—which are the defining properties of what I will call standard BPP *a gente*—and the other *a gente* with both 1 person plural interpretation and verbal agreement, presented now as non-standard *a gente*. In other words, non-standard BPP speakers have both standard and non-standard *a gente*, while standard BPP speakers only have the standard *a gente*.

With this assumption in mind, we can now move on to give an analysis to non-standard *a gente*, which becomes important for the analysis of standard *a gente*.

## 4.1 Non-standard *a gente*

The examples in (42)b, (43)b, and (44)b where *a gente* allows 1 person plural verbal agreement are reminiscent of the “plurilingual” constructions presented in den Dikken (2001). In his words, plurilinguals are “collective noun phrases headed by a formally singular noun [that] trigger plural agreement with the finite verb” (p. 28). Take for example committee-type nouns in British English:

- (45) The committee have decided. (den Dikken 2001: (14b))

Based on a number of facts including subject-verb agreement<sup>9</sup>, den Dikken proposes that plurilinguals are a kind of appositive structure headed by a null plural pronoun, as in (46), also adopted by Kayne (2007)<sup>10</sup>:

- (46) [DP1 pro<sub>[+plur]</sub>] [DP2 the committee<sub>[-plur]</sub>]

Under the assumption that Den Dikken’s analysis is correct for these types of constructions, I propose a plurilingual analysis for non-standard *a gente*. Consider again (42)b, repeated here as (47).

- (47) A gente estamos com fome.  
a gente are-1.PL with hunger  
‘We are hungry.’

Just as in (45), non-standard *a gente* is a 3 person DP on the surface and takes plural agreement<sup>11</sup>. The trivial difference between (47) and (45) is that *the committee* takes 3 person plural agreement while *a gente* takes 1 person plural agreement. The plurality of the verb in (45) is made clear by the acceptability of *all* in (48)a and the unacceptability in (48)b where the verb is singular (Kayne 2007: 3):

- (48) a. The committee have all voted yes.  
b. The jury has (\*all) voted for acquittal<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> The reader is referred to den Dikken (2001) for all arguments.

<sup>10</sup> Kayne (2007), in footnote 5 analyzes (i) as (ii):

- (i) The committee have all voted yes.  
(ii) THEY they committee have all voted yes.

<sup>11</sup> The literal translation for *a gente* ‘the people’ is also a collective noun.

<sup>12</sup> Kayne (2007) actually reports the judgement as “(?all)”. But for me, this sentence is completely out.

The plurality of *estamos* ‘are-1.PL’ in (47) can be accounted for if non-standard *a gente* is really an appositive DP headed by a silent 1 person plural pronoun (represented here as NÓS), rather than 3 person plural *pro*.

(49) [DP NÓS [DP *a gente*]]

In addition to the facts of subject-verb agreement, let me further motivate the presence of a 1 person plural pronoun, rather than 3 person plural *pro*, by showing evidence from tag questions.

The non-finite verb in a tag question must match the person and number features of the antecedent of the main clause (Dennis, Sugar, & Whitaker 1982; cf. Collins & Postal 2008). In BPP, the verb forms in the tag and in the anchor are identical, with no overt subject in the tag question, as in (50).

(50) Nós estamos com fome, não estamos?  
 we are-1.PL with hunger not are-1.PL  
 ‘We are hungry, aren’t we?’

Thus, the person and number features of non-standard *a gente* are readily confirmed on the verb of the tag. Consider now the examples in (51).

- (51) a. *A gente* estamos com fome, não estamos?  
*a gente* are-1.PL with hunger not are-1.PL  
 ‘We are hungry, aren’t we?’
- b. \**A gente* estamos com fome, não estou?  
*a gente* are-1.PL with hunger not are-1.SG  
 ‘We am hungry, aren’t we?’
- c. \**A gente* estamos com fome, não está?  
*a gente* are-1.PL with hunger not are-3.SG  
 ‘We are hungry, aren’t we?’
- d. \**A gente* estamos com fome, não estão?  
*a gente* are-1.PL with hunger not are-3.PL  
 ‘We are hungry, aren’t we?’

If the pluringular construction in (49) were headed by 3 plural *pro* we would expect (51)d to be acceptable, which is not the case. The only grammatical tag question environment for non-standard *a gente* is (51)a—1 person plural, where agreement on the finite verb is licensed by the presence of the phonologically null NÓS.

Furthermore, the proposal that non-standard *a gente* is headed by NÓS is consistent with Kayne’s (2007) conclusion that “silent first person plural pronouns are present in various Romance languages in certain special contexts,” based on his analysis of French, Italian, and Paduan clitics that take 1 person plural pronominal agreement. It should be clear that I am claiming that non-standard *a gente* is not a personal pronoun, but an appositive construction that

necessarily involves a silent pronoun—analogous in terms of structure to *we*, *the people* in English.

Before I return to the problems left unresolved in Section 3, in the next section I will show that the non-standard *a gente* described here is basic to the standard *a gente* construction. To accomplish this, I need to first introduce some of the basic concepts of Collins & Postal's (2008) theory of imposters.

## 4.2 Standard *a gente*

### 4.2.1 Imposters

Collins & Postal (2008) describe a rich class of expressions that refer to the speaker or hearer of an utterance (1 or 2 person) yet have 3 person verbal agreement, called imposters. The precise definition is given again in (52).

(52) An imposter is a notionally *n* person DP which is grammatically *m* person,  $n \neq m$

Some examples from English include:

(from Collins & Postal 2008: (5))

- (53) a. This reporter is/\*am signing off from Madrid, Spain.  
 b. Nixon is/\*am not going to resign.  
 c. Yours truly is/\*am unhappy.  
 d. Yours truly runs/\*run in the morning.  
 e. Is/\*are Madam not feeling well?  
 f. Is/\*are the general going to dine in his suite?

Based on the observation that imposters can antecede either 3 person or non-3 person pronominal forms and reflexives, e.g., (54), Collins & Postal propose a rich structure for imposters involving three distinct DPs: a notional core DP, which represents the denotational meaning of the imposter; a secondary DP, which is always the XP *a gente* in this study; and, a shell DP which contains both the secondary and notional DPs.

(54) PRO<sub>1</sub> to keep myself<sub>1</sub>/himself<sub>1</sub> from getting sunburned, Daddy<sub>1</sub> will put on suntan lotion.

In their theory, *Daddy* in (54) has the following derivation, where the XP constituent (a kind of appositive structure) has moved into the shell DP, which helps to account for local and long-distance binding effects.

(55) [<sub>DP</sub> Daddy] [<sub>D'</sub> D [<sub>XP</sub> ME, <Daddy>]] ... <[<sub>XP</sub> ME, Daddy]>

Once the secondary and notional DP have moved into the shell, the secondary DP raises to the specifier of the shell DP by means of predicate inversion (see den Dikken 2006), giving rise to 3 person verbal and pronominal agreement. The acceptability of both *myself* and *himself* in (54) crucially relies on the imposter configuration being able to provide two potential DPs as antecedents, given as the Shell Antecedence Hypothesis in (56):

- (56) Let A be the notional DP of an imposter whose shell DP is B.  
 Then if A Antecedes C, B Antecedes C, and if D Antecedes A, D Antecedes B.  
 (Collins & Postal (95))

Shell Antecedence maintains that all antecedence relations held by the core DP (while external to the shell DP) are preserved after movement into the shell, thus accounting for the dual possibilities in (54).

With these tools in place, I will now proceed to analyze standard *a gente* as an imposter, where non-standard *a gente* (the pluringular) is the appositive XP constituent that originates external to the shell DP, consisting of a core DP NÓS and a secondary DP *a gente*.

## 4.2.1 Imposter *a gente*

As mentioned at the beginning of Section 4, descriptively standard *a gente* fits in nicely with the open-ended class of expressions called imposters, due to the mismatch between referential and grammatical features (on the surface). That *a gente* is somehow semantically 1 Person and syntactically 3 Person is widely accepted fact.<sup>13</sup> Take, for example, the following quote from Omena (2003:65) as a representative view on the structure and interpretation of *a gente* (i.e., Menuzzi 1999, Menuzzi 2000, Costa & Pereira 2003, Costa & Pereira 2005, Costa et al. 2001):

[A] *gente* só se identifica com nós no significado, pois insere-se na oração como sujeito de terceira pessoa gramatical, como seu substantivo de origem.  
 ‘*A gente* is only grouped with *nós* in meaning, as it is inserted into a phrase as a grammatically 3 person subject, like its noun of origin [*gente*].’

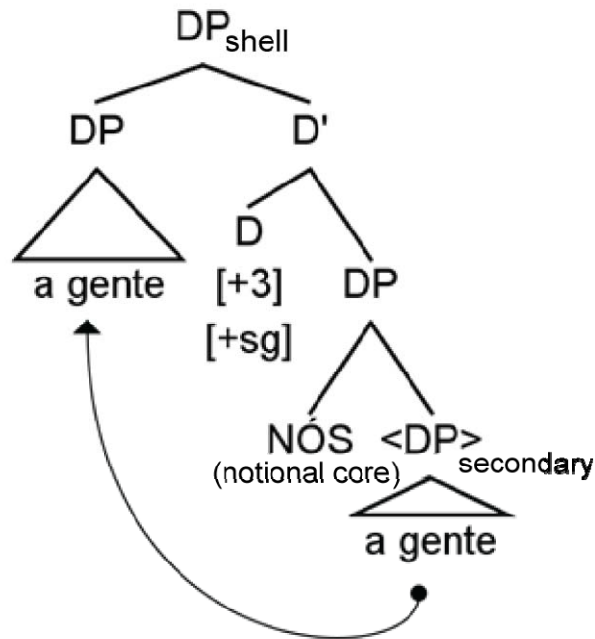
At the descriptive level this seems to be on the right track, but by leveraging the framework developed in Collins & Postal (2008) a more sophisticated analysis is possible, although not without complications.

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<sup>13</sup> At least for all reported standard dialects of BP. Pereira (2003) reports a European Portuguese dialect spoken in the Azores that allows for 3 Person plural agreement:

i.       A gente vão     por aí  
           a gente go-3.PL by there

Figure 1. *Imposter a gente*



Parallel to the structure of *Daddy* given in (55), I propose that standard *a gente* has imposter syntax, with non-standard *a gente* forming the external appositive DP (see Figure 1).

After the derivation has undergone predicate inversion, the shell D agrees with its specifier *a gente* via Spec-Head agreement, giving the D 3 person singular features and hence the 3 singular verbal agreement characteristic of standard *a gente* is obtained.

We can look again at tag questions as confirmatory evidence of *a gente*'s 3 person singular specification, for the standard BPP dialect:

- (57) A gente está com fome, não está?  
 a gente is-3.SG with hunger not is-3.SG  
 'We are hungry, aren't we?'

But not in any way 1 person singular or 1 person plural:

- (58) \*A gente está com fome, não estou?  
 a gente is-3.sg with hunger not am-1.sg  
 'I am hungry, aren't I?'
- (59) \*/??A gente está com fome, não estamos?  
 a gente is-3.SG with hunger not are-1.PL  
 'We are hungry, aren't we?'

Key to the explanatory power of the imposter analysis is the assumption that the External Origin Hypothesis is true—non-standard *a gente* originates lower than the shell DP before movement (see (60)), after which it undergoes predicate inversion (the notional DP moves into the specifier of the shell DP) allowing both 1 and 3 person pronouns to be bound with the proper c-command configurations—the topic of Section 5.

(60) [DP [DP a gente] [D' D [DP NÓS, <a gente>]]] ... <[DP NÓS, a gente]>

With an analysis in place for both non-standard and standard *a gente*, we are now in a position to revisit the pronoun diagnostics that *a gente* failed and offer an explanation.

### 4.3 Revisiting the Pronoun Diagnostics

Of the three pronoun diagnostics considered in Section 3, *a gente* did not pattern with the plural BP pronouns in the numeral co-occurrence and “we men” tests. I will briefly go through each of these failed diagnostics and show that the failure of non-standard *a gente* follows from the structure I have proposed, starting with “we men.” In view of the fact that I claim that non-standard *a gente* underlies standard *a gente*, explaining the facts pertaining to standard *a gente* would be redundant.

#### 4.3.1 “We men”

Recall that 1 person plural *nós* can take a noun complement, while *a gente* cannot.

- (61) a. Nós brasileiros não gostamos de vocês portugueses.  
 we Brazilians not like-1.PL of you Portuguese  
 ‘We Brazilians don’t like you Portuguese.’
- b. \*A gente brasileiros não gostamos de vocês portugueses.  
 a gente Brazilians not like-1.PL of you Portuguese  
 ‘We Brazilians don’t like you Portuguese.’

Recall also that I claim that non-standard *a gente* is a pluringular.

(62) [DP<sub>1</sub> NÓS [DP<sub>2</sub> a gente]]

Given these facts, the unacceptability of (61)b follows from the structure in (62) in a clear-cut fashion. \**a gente brasileiros* is out for the same reason that \**we linguists syntacticians* is bad: the second DP (*a gente*) is already in apposition to the pronoun (NÓS). Since *a gente* is not a pronoun it cannot replace the *nós* in (61)a.

#### 4.3.2 Numeral Co-occurrence

In (63)a-b, we see that non-standard *a gente* cannot take numerals like *nós*.

- (63) a. Nós três fomos à igreja.  
 we three went to-the church  
 ‘We three went to church.’

- b. \*A gente três fomos à igreja.  
 a gente three went to-the church  
 ‘We three went to church.’

I assume that in (63)a *três* ‘three’ is modifying the null plural pronominal noun ONES (Postal 1969), perhaps situated in Spec-NumP, the functional head hosting number features, following Panagiotidis (2002).

(64) [DP we [NumP three [NumP' Num [NP ONES]]]]

In this case, \**a gente três* is bad for the same reason that \**we linguists three* is bad—plural numerals follow pronouns and neither [NÓS *a gente*] nor *linguists* are pronouns.

Note however the acceptability of *we the three linguists*-type constructions, readily found online:

- (65) a. We, **the three authors**, contributed equally to this article, and our names are therefore listed in alphabetical order.  
<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/52069>
- b. ...We (**the Four Horsemen**) are going to be there to sign autographs and chat with everybody.  
<http://www.toymania.com/news/messages/2468.shtml>
- c. We, **the two founders**, were commiserating together over our corporate jobs....  
<http://madeincolorado.wordpress.com/2008/03/16/dadgear/>

These data coincide with Bhat’s (2004) generalization that numerals typically precede plural nouns and follow plural pronouns, another argument against the plural pronoun analysis for *a gente*. The reason why you can’t get \**nós a três gente* ‘we the three people’ is that *gente* is a singular noun.

## 4.4 Interim Summary

At this point it should be obvious that the personal pronoun analysis for *a gente* is untenable. I have shown that *a gente* fails the plural pronoun diagnostics because it is not a pronoun, but rather an appositive headed by a null 1 person plural pronoun, or an imposter which includes the non-standard appositive construction. This fact also straightforwardly explains the similarities that *a gente* has with other pronouns, e.g., Condition B and C of the Binding Theory.

The remainder of this paper will focus in on binding and agreement, first proceeding in a general, descriptive fashion, and then proceeding to derive the facts from the proposed structures from Section 4. Before we do that, however, I will briefly present data on subject-adjective agreement, useful for determining how *a gente* interacts with person, number, and gender features, which will be relevant for analyzing Menuzzi’s data at the end of Section 5.

## 5 Agreement and Binding

### 5.1 Subject-Adjective Agreement

In BP, (most) predicative adjectives and participles agree with the number and gender of the subject of the matrix clause. For example, consider example (66).

- (66) Ele está perdido.  
 he is lost-M.SG  
 'He is lost.'

The agreement on the adjective *perdido* 'lost' is *-o* (masculine, singular), concordant with *ele*, the masculine singular 3 person pronoun.

Given these facts, it is useful to consider *a gente* as the subject of a sentence and for different discourse contexts, to observe the permissible number and gender combinations that agree with standard and non-standard *a gente*. In the examples that follow, I will give a speaker-hearer context with *a gente* as the subject of the sentence. First we will look at the data for the standard *a gente*, followed by non-standard *a gente*.

The examples in (67) and (68) describe situations where a single speaker is interacting with a single hearer.

*João speaking of himself to Maria* (Standard)

- (67) a. \*A gente está cansado.  
 a gente is tired-M.SG  
 'I am tired.'
- b. \*A gente está cansada.  
 a gente is tired-F.SG  
 'I am tired.'
- c. Eu estou cansado.  
 I am tired-M.SG  
 'I am tired.'
- d. \*Eu estou cansada.  
 I am tired-F.SG  
 'I am tired.'

*Maria speaking of herself to João* (Standard)

- (68) a. \*A gente está cansada.  
 a gente is tired-F.SG  
 'I am tired.'
- b. \*A gente está cansado.  
 a gente is tired-M.SG  
 'I am tired.'

- c. Eu estou cansada.  
I am tired-F.SG  
'I am tired.'
- d. \*Eu estou cansado.  
I am tired-M.SG  
'I am tired.'

(67)a-b and (68)a-b show that *a gente* cannot refer to a single speaker, independent of the gender of the speaker.

The following examples in (69) and (70) describe a situation where a single speaker, referring to him or herself and another person, is interacting with a hearer. This context shows clearly that when *a gente* is in subject position, just like 1 person plural *nós*, the adjective agrees with the gender of the speaker, and not with the gender of the feminine noun *gente*. This suggests that the gender on the adjective is coming from the core DP.

*João speaking of himself and Pedro to Maria* (Standard)

- (69) a. A gente está cansado(\*s).  
a gente is tired-M.SG/PL  
'We are tired.'
- b. \*A gente está cansada(s).  
a gente is tired-F.SG/PL  
'We are tired.'
- c. Nós estamos cansados.  
we are tired-M.PL  
'We are tired.'
- d. \*Nós estamos cansadas.  
we are tired-F.PL  
'We are tired.'

*Maria speaking of herself and Fátima to João* (Standard)

- (70) a. A gente está cansada(\*s).  
a gente is tired-F.SG/PL  
'We are tired.'
- b. \*A gente está cansado(s).  
a gente is tired-F.SG/PL  
'We are tired.'
- c. Nós estamos cansadas.  
we are tired-F.PL  
'We are tired.'

- d. \*Nós estamos cansados.  
 we are tired-M.PL  
 ‘We are tired.’

In addition to gender agreement, these examples also demonstrate sensitivity to number agreement. Observe examples (69)a and (70)a where we see a reflex of the imposter’s grammatical 3 person singular specification (for the shell DP)—the sentence is ungrammatical if the adjective is plural. Compare this to (69)c and (70)c, the prototypical case for 1 person plural *nós*. I will return to the case of (69)a and (70)a at the end of this section.

Now let’s turn to the data on non-standard *a gente*. As before, the examples in (71) and (72) describe situations where a single speaker is interacting with a single hearer.

*João speaking of himself to Maria* (Non-Standard)

- (71) a. \*A gente estamos cansado(s).  
 a gente is tired-M.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’
- b. \*A gente estamos cansada(s).  
 a gente is tired-F.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’
- c. Eu estou cansado.  
 I am tired-M.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’
- d. \*Eu estou cansada.  
 I am tired-F.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’

*Maria speaking of herself to João* (Non-Standard)

- (72) a. \*A gente estamos cansada(s).  
 a gente is tired-F.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’
- b. \*A gente estamos cansado(s).  
 a gente is tired-M.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’
- c. Eu estou cansada.  
 I am tired-F.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’
- d. \*Eu estou cansado.  
 I am tired-M.SG  
 ‘I am tired.’

The judgments given in (71) and (72) mirror that of (67) and (68), whereby *a gente* does not have a 1 person singular reference.

The examples in (73) and (74) again describe situations where a single speaker, referring to him or herself and another person, is interacting with a hearer.

*João speaking of himself and Pedro to Maria* (Non-Standard)

- (73) a. A gente estamos cansado(s).<sup>14</sup>  
 a gente are tired-M.S/PL  
 ‘We are tired.’
- b. \*A gente estamos cansada(s).  
 a gente are tired-F.SG/PL  
 ‘We are tired.’
- c. Nós estamos cansado(s).  
 we are tired-M.SG/PL  
 ‘We are tired.’
- d. \*Nós estamos cansada(s).  
 we are tired-F.SG/PL  
 ‘We are tired.’

*Maria speaking of herself and Fátima to João* (Non-Standard)

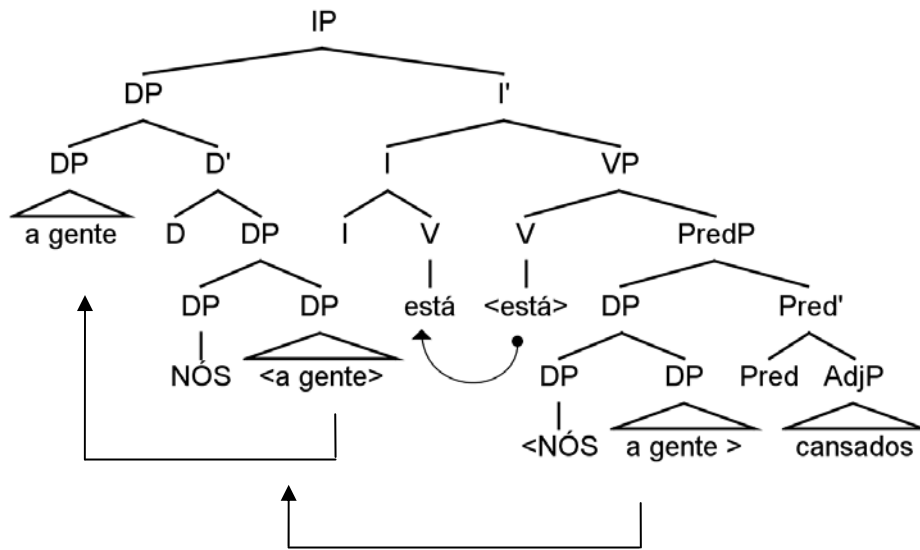
- (74) a. A gente estamos cansada(s).  
 a gente are tired-F.SG/PL  
 ‘We are tired.’
- b. \*A gente estamos cansado(s).  
 a gente are tired-M.SG/PL  
 ‘We are tired.’
- c. Nós estamos cansada(s).  
 we are tired-F.PL  
 ‘We are tired.’
- d. \*Nós estamos cansado(s).  
 we are tired-M.PL  
 ‘We are tired.’

With respect to gender agreement between standard and non-standard *a gente* and the adjective, the observed result is the same: gender comes from the core DP NÓS, and not the shell DP, which on the surface appears [+feminine]. This suggests that the gender feature on *a* (of *a gente*) is not available to syntax (cf. Menuzzi 1999, 2000).

<sup>14</sup>The optionality of the plural suffix on the adjectives in (73) and (74) is commonly attributed to phonological reduction (see, i.e., Azevedo 1984, Guy 1981, and Lipski 1975).

For number agreement there is a split: adjectives agree with the core for non-standard *a gente* (i.e., (73)a, (74)a) and with the shell for standard *a gente* (i.e., (69)a, (70)a). Non-standard *a gente* seems to be the easy case, with number and gender agreeing with the core DP. This is an unsurprising fact given the pluringular analysis. The puzzle lies with standard *a gente*—somehow the adjective is getting its gender from the core and number from the shell, a situation that deviates from the analysis given thus far.

Figure 2. *A gente está cansados.*



Strictly speaking, my analysis of standard *a gente* predicts that (69)a and (70)a should actually be *a gente está cansados-M.PL* and *a gente está cansadas-F.PL*, respectively, where number and gender come from the (plural) core DP before movement into the shell (see Figure 2). While this is not the observed case for standard BPP, these forms are in fact reported in Pereira (2003) as possible for European Portuguese *a gente*, in addition to the agreement already seen in standard BPP:

- (75) a. A gente ficou cansados.  
a gente became-3.SG tired-M.PL  
'We got tired.'
- b. A gente ficou cansadas.  
a gente became-3.SG tired-F.PL  
'We got tired.'

Of the five possible agreement patterns (for her data), Pereira reports that *a gente está cansados-M.PL/a gente está cansadas-F.PL*-like agreement is the majority case, based on a substantial corpus of questionnaire data (see Table 1).

Table 1. *a gente* adjective agreement in EP (Pereira 2003)

Agreement	Tokens	Percentage
-o	9361	5%
-a	29819	15%
-os	130822	65%
-as	17436	9%
null	12556	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	199994	

While the core DP agreement pattern (i.e., number and gender agreement on the adjective) is not observed in standard BPP, we have just seen that it is the most frequent pattern in European Portuguese and perhaps in other dialects of BP as well. How to account for the split-agreement for standard BPP *a gente* is a question I leave in abeyance.

## 5.2 Subject-Pronoun Agreement

When a possessive pronoun is bound, two types of agreement are observed in BP: person and number agreement with the antecedent, and number and gender agreement with the possessed noun. For example, in (76) *meus* ‘my’ agrees with the 1 person singular features of the antecedent, by virtue of being spelled out as *meu-* rather than *nosso-* (the 1 person plural form).

- (76) Eu gosto do meus amigos.  
 I-1.SG like of my-1.SG,M.PL friends- M.PL.  
 ‘I like my friends.’

Additionally, *meus* is marked as masculine (the feminine counterpart being *minha*) and plural (-s) in agreement with its noun complement.

By looking at the agreement on the possessive pronoun, the person and number features of the antecedent are readily observed, independent of the number features of the possessed noun. This syntactic environment allows us to more fully explore the possible and permissible person-number combinations that *a gente* can bind, diagnostic of its internal structure. Recall that standard *a gente* requires 3 person singular verbal agreement (Section 4). That having been established, the question arises, which possessive pronouns can standard *a gente* bind? 3 person singular, 1 person plural, or both? Is there any difference between standard and non-standard *a gente* with this respect? Another person and number combination of interest, 1 person singular, has been suggested by Schmitz (1973) and Zilles (2005) as a possible interpretation for *a gente*. If this turns out to be a possibility, *a gente* should readily bind 1 person singular possessives (i.e., *meu*, *minha*, etc.). This specific environment also serves as an opportune testing ground for the claim I make that both standard and non-standard *a gente* contain the null 1 person plural pronoun NÓS, which predicts both should readily bind 1 person plural pronouns.

Let’s turn to the data. The following sentences show that neither the standard, in (77), or non-standard instances of *a gente*, in (78), can bind<sup>15</sup> the 3 person singular possessive *seu*.

<sup>15</sup> I take binding to mean co-indexation and c-command.

- (77) a. \*A gente<sub>1</sub> gosta do seu<sub>1</sub> bairro.  
 a gente likes-3.SG of-the his-M.SG neighborhood  
 ‘We like our neighborhood.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> gosta do seu<sub>2</sub> bairro.  
 a gente likes-3.SG of-the his-m.SG neighborhood  
 ‘We like his neighborhood.’
- (78) a. \*A gente<sub>1</sub> gostamos do seu<sub>1</sub> bairro.  
 a gente like-1.PL of-the his-M.SG neighborhood  
 ‘We like our neighborhood.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> gostamos do seu<sub>2</sub> bairro.  
 a gente like-1.PL of-the his-M.SG neighborhood  
 ‘We like his neighborhood.’

Related to this is the fact that *a gente* cannot bind a 3 person anaphor, in either BPP dialect—(80)a for the standard dialect and (81)a for the non-standard. This suggests that Shell Antecedence ((56)) is not active for *a gente* in BPP, in contrast to the attested imposter cases in English, e.g. (79):

- (79) Daddy<sub>1</sub> saw a snake behind him<sub>1</sub>.
- (80) a. \*A gente<sub>1</sub> viu uma cobra atrás de si<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente saw-3.SG a snake behind of one  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> viu uma cobra atrás de nós<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente saw-3.SG a snake behind of we  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’
- (81) a. \*A gente<sub>1</sub> vimos uma cobra atrás de si<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente saw-1.PL a snake behind of one  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> vimos uma cobra atrás de nós<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente saw-1.PL a snake behind of we  
 ‘We saw a snake behind us.’

(80)b and (81)b show that Condition A of the binding theory is only satisfied when *a gente* binds the 1 person anaphor.

If *a gente* binds a 3 person singular possessive or local anaphor, the sentence is ungrammatical, if not uninterpretable, which is what is predicted for non-standard *a gente*. The results for standard *a gente* are somewhat surprising, given the 3 person singular nature of the DP *a gente*, which resides in the specifier of the imposter shell DP. I will return to this issue in the summary and conclusion.

In (82) and (83) we can see clearly that neither standard nor non-standard *a gente* can bind 1 person singular *meu*, easily refuting the claims of Schmitz (1973) and Zilles (2005), at least for BPP, who claim that *a gente* can mean 1 person singular, a variant of *eu* ‘I.’

(82) \*A gente<sub>1</sub> gosta do meu<sub>1</sub> bairro.  
a gente likes-3.SG of-the my-M.SG neighborhood  
‘I like my neighborhood.’

(83) \*A gente<sub>1</sub> gostamos do meu<sub>1</sub> bairro.<sup>16</sup>  
a gente like-1.PL of-the my-M.SG neighborhood  
‘We like my neighborhood.’

To briefly review their stance, Schmitz writes that *a gente* sometimes takes 1 person singular interpretation, noting that this interpretation is often times ambiguous between a 1 person singular and 1 person plural reading and offering a single sentence as evidence, (84) (cf. Zilles 2002, Zilles 2005: 26):

(84) A gente está zangado.  
a gente is-3.SG offended-M.SG  
‘I am offended.’

It is not clear to me how (84) shows any clear evidence for 1 person singular, other than the adjective being [+singular]. But in standard BP, predicates and participles agreeing with *a gente* are never [+plural], which we have already seen in (69)a and (70)a. Even in examples where more discourse context is given, e.g., Zilles (2005), it still is not clear if the speaker is employing *a gente* to refer only to 1 person singular, or at that point in the utterance merely widening the scope of reference, referring to 1 person plural. We have already seen an example very similar to (84), (43)a—repeated here as (85) for convenience—where the interpretation is 1 person plural:

(85) A gente foi roubado/a.  
a gente was-3.SG stolen-M/F.SG  
‘We were robbed.’

On the surface there is no appreciable difference between (84) and (85), and certainly no evidence to suggest a covert 1 person singular reference bearing element. Again, if this were the case, examples (67)a and (68)a should be acceptable. Given that they are not, and in conjunction with the evidence seen in (82) and (83), the only practical conclusion is that 1 person singular interpretation is not available for *a gente* in the Northeastern BP dialects studied here.

Finally, turning now to the examples in 0 through (89), we see that *a gente* productively binds the 1 person plural possessive *nosso* and the 1 person plural reflexive *nós mesmos* ‘ourselves’ in both dialects. By appealing to the External Origin Hypothesis, we can explain how standard BPP *a gente* in 0a-b takes 3 person singular verbal agreement yet binds a 1 person possessive or reflexive: prior to movement into the imposter shell, the silent pronoun NÓS is in a position lower in the structure where binding of the possessive can occur freely.

<sup>16</sup> My informants accepted sentences like (82) and (83) if they described a situation where a group of people live in different neighborhoods, but everyone involved agrees that the neighborhood of the speaker is pleasant.

- (86) a. A gente<sub>1</sub> gosta do nosso<sub>1</sub> bairro.  
 a gente like-3.SG of-the our-M.SG neighborhood  
 ‘We like our neighborhood.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> gosta de nós mesmos<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente like-3.sg of we same-pl  
 ‘We like ourselves.’

A schematic representation for (86)a can be seen in (87):

- (87) [<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> a gente] [<sub>D'</sub> D [<sub>DP</sub> NÓS, <a gente>]]]...<[<sub>DP</sub> NÓS, a gente]>...[<sub>PP</sub> [do [<sub>DP</sub> nosso bairro]]

(88)a-b contain similar examples from the internet, which I assume to be written by standard BP speakers.

- (88) a. A gente<sub>1</sub> senta-a ao nosso<sub>1</sub> lado no sofá...  
 a gente sits-3.SG-CL-3.F to-the our-M.SG side of-the sofa  
 ‘We sit her on our side of the sofa...’  
<http://ecosdogrupo.blogspot.com/>
- b. Quando a gente<sub>1</sub> gosta de nós mesmos<sub>1</sub>, não precisamos...  
 when a gente like-3.SG of we same not need-1.PL  
 ‘When we like ourselves, we don’t need...’  
<http://escolahospitaldocabelo.blogspot.com/2008/02/parabola-da-semana.html>

The following non-standard BPP examples in (89) are much simpler—*nosso* and *nós mesmos* are bound by the silent NÓS in situ.

- (89) a. A gente<sub>1</sub> gostamos do nosso<sub>1</sub> bairro.  
 a gente like-1.PL of-the our-M.SG neighborhood  
 ‘We like our neighborhood.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> gostamos de nós mesmos<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente like-1.pl of we same  
 ‘We like ourselves.’

Thus far it would seem from the examples presented in this section that both standard and non-standard *a gente* can only bind non-3 person plural pronominal elements.<sup>17</sup> These facts differ

<sup>17</sup> With the exception of the genitive PP *da gente* ‘of a gente,’ which shares a meaning with *nosso*.

- (i) a. A gente<sub>1</sub> gosta do bairro da gente<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente likes-3.sg of-the neighborhood of-a gente  
 ‘We like our neighborhood.’
- b. A gente<sub>1</sub> gostamos do bairro da gente<sub>1</sub>.  
 a gente like-1.pl of-the neighborhood of-a gente  
 ‘We like our neighborhood.’

from the kind of imposters described in Collins & Postal (2008). While their focus is mostly on reflexives, the facts are extended to possessive pronouns (for certain speakers). For example, (90)a-e show that 1 person imposters can bind both 1 and 3 person possessive pronouns<sup>18</sup>.

- (90) a. After losing his<sub>1</sub>/her<sub>1</sub>/my<sub>1</sub> cool, this reporter<sub>1</sub> apologized. (C&P 2008 (32c))
- b. Yes, I now have a few pics of **yours truly**<sub>1</sub> hiding behind **my**<sub>1</sub> logo.  
<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=54023774>
- c. There's **yours truly**<sub>1</sub> sitting at **his**<sub>1</sub> new workstation supposedly "working."  
<http://poofnwhiff.blogspot.com>
- d. A problem with this approach, as Hillson and **the present authors**<sub>1</sub> opined in **our**<sub>1</sub> previous paper, is that the principles of this interpretation...  
<http://www.merchantgould.com/attachments/68.doc>
- e. **The present writers**<sub>1</sub> express **their**<sub>1</sub> thanks to Mr. Noda...  
<http://joi.jlc.jst.go.jp/JST.Journalarchive/pjab1945/31.294?from=Google>

Two rough ideas come to mind as possible explanations for the differences between imposter *a gente* and the 1 person English imposters in (90): 1) *a gente* may belong to a subset of the class of imposter constructions, not yet described, for which Shell Antecedence is not operative; 2) *a gente* cannot bind a 3 person singular possessive or reflexive pronoun due to the loss of compositionality as a consequence of grammaticalization (Menuzzi 1999, 2000)—to be briefly discussed in Section 7. Whatever the solution might be, it becomes problematized in the next section where we observe that standard *a gente* does in fact bind 3 person singular reflexive clitics.

### 5.3 Binding Theoretic Properties of *a gente*

Now let's return to Menuzzi (1999, 2000), who to my knowledge is the first work on *a gente* in terms of Binding Theory. Menuzzi's work is based on questionnaires distributed to speakers of BP spoken in southern Brazil, a region distinct linguistically from the Northeastern BPP dialects presented here. By comparing his findings with the BPP dialects we can perhaps find generalizations common to both regional varieties of BP. In what follows, it can be assumed that the judgments of standard BPP speakers align with Menuzzi's informants, unless otherwise noted.

Menuzzi notes that *a gente* can bind and be bound by 1 person plural *nós*. In other words, *a gente* can antecede and be anteceded by *nós*. Standard BPP *a gente* reproduces this property in (92):

- (91) a. Nós achamos que o Paulo já viu a gente na TV.

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In fact, all BP possessive pronouns have a genitive PP counterpart, i.e., *meu* ~ *de mim*, *seu* ~ *dele*, *nosso* ~ *de nós*, etc. Imposters can enter into these same constructions as well, i.e., *o senhor* 'you-M' (literally, 'the man') ~ *do senhor*, *a senhora* 'you-f' (literally, 'the woman') ~ *da senhora*, etc.

<sup>18</sup> This may be an over-simplification. See Collins & Postal's (2008) discussion on word order effects on the acceptability of non 3-person reflexives and pronouns. However, (90)b demonstrates that this is not a categorical effect. I have also caught myself saying to my son, "Daddy needs to put my shoes on."

we think-1.PL that the Paulo already saw-3.SG a gente on-the TV  
 ‘We think that Paulo already saw us on TV.’

b. Nós perguntamos pr'o Paulo quando a gente apareceria na TV.  
 we asked-1.PL to-the Paulo when a gente would-appear-3.SG on-the TV  
 ‘We asked Paulo when we would appear on TV.’

(92) a. A gente acha que o Paulo já nos viu na TV.  
 a gente thinks-3.SG that the Paulo already CL-1.PL saw-3.SG on-the TV  
 ‘We think that Paulo already saw us on TV.’

b. A gente perguntou pr'o Paulo quando nós apareceríamos na TV.  
 a gente asked-3.SG to-the Paulo when we would-appear-1.PL on-the TV  
 ‘We asked Paulo when we would appear on TV.’

The results are mirrored for non-standard *a gente* in (93), which is explained in the same way as 0b—binding by the silent NÓS in the pluringular construction:

(93) a. A gente achamos que o Paulo já nos viu na TV.  
 a gente think-1.PL that the Paulo already CL-1.PL saw-3.SG on-the TV  
 ‘We think that Paulo already saw us on TV.’

b. A gente perguntamos pr'o Paulo quando nós apareceríamos na TV.  
 a gente asked-1.PL to-the Paulo when we would-appear-1.PL on-the TV  
 ‘We asked Paulo when we would appear on TV.’

Menuzzi reports that *a gente* can bind 1ppl pronouns in many of the same contexts as 1ppl *nós* shown in (94) and (95):

(94) a. Nós vimos o nosso carro ser roubado.  
 we saw-1.PL the our car to-be stolen  
 ‘We saw our car get stolen.’

b. Nós tínhamos visto uma cobra atrás de nós.  
 we had-1.PL seen a snake behind of we  
 ‘We had seen a snake behind us.’

c. Nós achamos que o Paulo já nos viu na TV.  
 we think-1.PL that the Paulo already CL-1.PL saw-3.SG on-the TV  
 ‘We think that Paulo already saw us on TV.’

d. Nós perguntamos pr'o Paulo quando nós apareceríamos na TV.  
 we asked to-the Paulo when we would-appear-1.PL on-the TV.  
 ‘We asked Paulo when we would appear on TV.’

- (95) a. A gente viu o nosso carro ser roubado.  
 a gente saw-3.SG the our car to-be stolen  
 ‘We saw our car get stolen.’
- b. A gente tinha visto uma cobra atrás de nós.  
 a gente had-3.SG seen a snake behind of we  
 ‘We had seen a snake behind us.’
- c. A gente acha que o Paulo já nos viu na TV.  
 a gente thinks-3.SG that the Paulo already CL-1.PL saw-3.SG on-the TV  
 ‘We think that Paulo already saw us on TV.’
- d. A gente perguntou pr'o Paulo quando nós apareceríamos na TV.  
 a gente asked-3.SG to-the Paulo when we would-appear-1.PL on-the TV  
 ‘We asked Paulo when we would appear on TV.’

The permissible binding environments are reproduced with non-standard *a gente* in (96):

- (96) a. A gente vimos o nosso carro ser roubado.  
 a gente saw-1.PL the our car to-be stolen  
 ‘We saw our car get stolen.’
- b. A gente tínhamos visto uma cobra atrás de nós.  
 a gente had-1.PL seen a snake behind of we  
 ‘We had seen a snake behind us.’
- c. A gente achamos que o Paulo já nos viu na TV.  
 a gente thinks-1.PL that the Paulo already CL-1.PL saw-3.SG on-the TV  
 ‘We think that Paulo already saw us on TV.’
- d. A gente perguntamos pr'o Paulo quando nós apareceríamos na TV.  
 a gente asked-1.PL to-the Paulo when we would-appear-1.PL on-the TV  
 ‘We asked Paulo when we would appear on TV.’

Thus far, the judgments reported in examples (91) through (96) are the same for BPP speakers and Menuzzi’s data. In effect, other than the verb agreement, non-standard *a gente* has exactly the same binding properties as the standard *a gente* in these contexts, which is what we would predict given the implicit relationship between the two and the facts pertaining to possessive pronouns illustrated in (77)-(78).

The following sets of sentences illustrate where this nice correspondence between regional dialects breaks down. Observe the near minimal pairs in (97) and (98) where Menuzzi reports that *a gente* cannot locally bind the 1 person plural clitic *nos*. Instead it must bind the 3 person singular clitic *se*:

- (97) a. Nós devíamos nos preparar para o pior.  
we should-1.PL CL-1.PL to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'  
(Menuzzi 1999: (48a))
- b. \*A gente devia nos preparar para o pior.  
a gente should-3.SG CL-1.PL to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'  
(Menuzzi 1999: (48b))
- (98) a. \*Nós devíamos se preparar para o pior. (Menuzzi 1999: (49))  
we should-1.PL CL-3.SG to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'  
(Menuzzi 1999: (49a))
- b. A gente devia se preparar para o pior.  
a gente should-3.SG CL-3.SG to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'  
(Menuzzi 1999: (49b))

Based on these facts, Menuzzi proposes the generalization found in (99):

- (99) *First Person Plural Anaphora in BP*
- a. 1ppl *a gente* can bind a 1ppl pronoun, but not locally
- b. 1 ppl *a gente* can bind a 3p anaphor, but only locally

Though the generalization in (99) holds true for his data, *both* standard and non-standard BPP *a gente* show different binding patterns, neither of which adheres to (99). We'll look first to non-standard *a gente* since it's the easier case to explain.

Non-standard *a gente*, as a pluringular, can only contain a single antecedent—the silent pronoun NÓS. It is not surprising, then, that non-standard BPP *a gente* can *only* bind 1 person plural clitics in (100) and (101):

- (100) a. Nós devíamos nos preparar para o pior.  
we should-1.PL CL-1.PL to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'
- b. A gente devíamos nos preparar para o pior.  
a gente should-1.PL CL-1.PL to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'
- (101) a. \*Nós devíamos se preparar para o pior.  
we should-1.PL CL-3.SG to-prepare for the worse  
'We should prepare ourselves for the worst.'

- b. \*A gente devíamos se preparar para o pior.  
 a gente should-1.PL CL-3.SG to-prepare for the worse  
 ‘We should prepare ourselves for the worst.’

This fact provides yet another piece of evidence in support of the pluringular analysis for non-standard *a gente*.

Now consider standard BPP *a gente*. (102)b shows that it binds the 1person plural clitic *and* the 3 person singular reflexive clitic in (103)b:

- (102) a. Nós devíamos nos preparar para o pior.  
 we should-1.PL CL-1.PL to-prepare for the worse  
 ‘We should prepare ourselves for the worst.’
- b. A gente devia nos preparar para o pior.  
 a gente should-3.SG CL-1.PL to-prepare for the worse  
 ‘We should prepare ourselves for the worst.’
- (103) a. \*Nós devíamos se preparar para o pior.  
 we should-1.PL CL-3.SG to-prepare for the worse  
 ‘We should prepare ourselves for the worst.’
- b. A gente devia se preparar para o pior.  
 a gente should-3.SG CL-3.SG to-prepare for the worse  
 ‘We should prepare ourselves for the worst.’

In fact, this behavior is predicted for the kinds of imposters described by Collins & Postal’s Shell Antecedence principle. But for standard *a gente* this is actually the first case where a pronominal form, here the reflexive clitic, has two antecedents available for binding purposes. 3 person possessives and anaphors were shown to be out, which suggests that Shell Antecedence is not active in BPP.

When compared to the imposters described by Collins & Postal, the case of standard BPP *a gente* is not so simple—standard *a gente* binds 3 person reflexive clitics but can never bind 3 person possessive pronouns or anaphors, e.g., (77). This is no easy issue to deal with; for now I will leave these questions open to further research. Let’s now briefly turn to the problem of compositionality brought up at the end of Section 5.2.

## 6 Compositionality Blocked

One final note on *a gente* is made by Menuzzi (2000). In his terms, *a gente* has lost its compositional meaning. Put more simply, it doesn’t mean ‘the people’ anymore. A very puzzling fact is that *gente* ‘people’ is productive in all imaginable compositional operations involving nouns, i.e., involving adjectives and possessive pronouns—except when it co-occurs with the feminine definite article *a* ‘the.’<sup>19</sup> While I have no convincing story for these facts, the data from

<sup>19</sup> Alec Marantz suggests (p.c.) that perhaps a suppletion strategy is employed by BP speakers when wanting to express the definite counterpart to *uma gente* ‘a people’—*as pessoas, o povo*, etc., in order to avoid a potential ambiguity between the pronominal or generic interpretation.

the BPP speakers show conclusively that when *a* is merged with *gente*, the historical DP meaning ‘the people’ is not available as a subject ((104)), an object ((105)), or in a PP ((106)).

- (104) a. \*A gente de Nova York ficou decepcionada com seu governador.  
 the people of New York became deceived with their governor  
 ‘The people from New York were betrayed by their governor.’  
 (*a gente = as pessoas ‘the people’*)
- b. Gente de Nova York ficou decepcionada com seu governador.  
 people of New York became deceived with their governor  
 ‘People from New York were betrayed by their governor.’  
 (*gente = pessoas ‘people’*)
- c. Muita gente de Nova York ficou decepcionada com seu governador.  
 many people of New York became deceived with their governor  
 ‘Many people from New York were betrayed by their governor.’  
 (*muita gente = muitas pessoas ‘many people’*)
- (105) a. \*Eu admiro a gente de Nova York.  
 I admire the people of New York  
 ‘I admire the people of New York.’  
 (*a gente = as pessoas ‘the people’*)
- b. Eu admiro gente de Nova York.  
 I admire people of New York  
 ‘I admire people from New York.’  
 (*gente = pessoas ‘people’*)
- c. Eu admiro muita gente de Nova York.  
 I admire many people of New York  
 ‘I admire many people from New York.’  
 (*muita gente = muitas pessoas ‘many people’*)
- (106) a. \*Os pesquisadores estão buscando para a gente de Nova York.  
 the investigators are searching for the people of New York  
 ‘The investigators are searching for the people of New York.’  
 (*a gente = as pessoas ‘the people’*)
- b. Os pesquisadores estão buscando para gente de Nova York.  
 the investigators are searching for people of New York  
 ‘The investigators are searching for people from New York.’  
 (*gente = pessoas ‘people’*)

- c. Os pesquisadores estão buscando para muita gente de Nova York.  
 the investigators are searching para many people of New York  
 ‘The investigators are searching for many people from New York.’  
 (*muita gente* =  *muitas pessoas* ‘many people’)

## 7 Conclusion and Directions for Further Research

In this paper I have shown that *a gente*, as used in two dialects spoken in Piauí, Brazil, is not a pronoun but a more complex syntactic object that contains the silent 1 person plural pronoun NÓS. I suggested two constructions to account for its pronominal-like properties: the non-standard pluringular *a gente* and the standard imposter *a gente*, which is derived from the non-standard. These structures are able to account for the agreement and antecedence relations observed across the following syntactic environments surveyed in this paper: subject-verb agreement, subject-adjective agreement, subject-pronoun agreement and binding of reflexive clitics. Table 1 contains a summary of the findings.

Table 2. Antecedence Summary Table

Agreement/Antecedence	Non-Standard BPP <i>pluringular</i>	Standard BPP <i>imposter</i>	English <i>imposter</i>
Subject-Verb Agreement	Core	Shell	Shell
Subject-Adjective Agreement	Number: Core Gender: Core	Number: Shell Gender: Core	N/A
Possessive Pronouns	Core	Core/*Shell	Core/Shell
Reflexive Pronouns	Core	Core/*Shell	Core/Shell
Reflexive Clitics	Core	Core/Shell	N/A

The first column, Non-Standard BPP, shows that agreement is always with the core NÓS, the DP that heads the pluringular. In the second column, describing Standard BPP, two generalizations remain unexplained: 1) agreement on adjectives and participles is split: number agreement is with the shell DP and gender agreement is with the core DP; 2) neither the possessive pronouns nor the non-clitic reflexives are able to be bound by the shell but only by the core, a fact that contrasts with English imposters, in the third column.

Ultimately, a principled explanation will need to be given for these facts, a topic for further investigation that ideally would be able to account for the problem of compositionality for *a gente*.

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