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FOCUS STRUCTURES AND VS ORDER
IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE[1]
(Estruturas de foco e a ordem VS no Português Brasileiro)

ABSTRACT

Brazilian Portuguese has been shown to still license VS order with monoargumental verbs, but with some peculiar properties, such as lack of subject-verb agreement and lack of sentence focus reading. In this paper we claim that BP is not a language in an unstable state of syntactic change. All its constructions are shown to be coherent with a grammar that does not have a strong head C (cf. Uriagereka, 1992) to attract the tensed verb, or to check a constituent (Chomsky 1995) as the narrow focus of the sentence. Focused elements are uniformly the predicate of the tense operator, which may appear lexicalized as the copula or only discernible by prosodic (the pause) or morphological features. What gives the final shape of some focus constructions in BP are deletion operations at the PF interface.

Key-words: VS order, focus, agreement, clefting, copula.

RESUMO

A literatura tem mostrado que o Português Brasileiro (PB) vem perdendo a ordem VS, mas ainda licencia VS com verbos mono-argumentais, com algumas propriedades peculiares tais como a possibilidade de ausência de concordância verbo-sujeito e a não-possibilidade de leitura com foco sentencial. Neste trabalho, defende-se a idéia de que essas construções são legítimas construções de uma gramática estável que perdeu a possibilidade de gerar VS através de um núcleo forte que provoca a subida do verbo flexionado. O sujeito posposto focalizado é o predicado de um operador de tempo nulo ou lexicalizado via copula. O que dá a forma final dessas construções de foco são operações de apagamento na interface PF.

Palavras-chaves: ordem VS, foco, concordância verbal, clivagem, cópula.

1. The decrease of free inversion in Brazilian Portuguese

Among the changes that Brazilian Portuguese (BP) has been undergoing, the loss of VS inversion (both the Germanic VSO and the Romance VOS types) has been one of the most documented (see a.o. Berlinck, 1995). According to her data, these patterns were quite common in the 19th century:

(1) a. Tem **ele** nove anos e será prudente criarmo-lo desde já para frade. (1845) (VSO)

(lit.: has he nine years and will-be prudent (we) rear-him from now on)

b. **Tocou** à minha cunhada, como principal bem de fortuna e fonte de renda, a conhecida fábrica de meias da rua de Santa Engrácia. (1896) (VOS)

(lit.: touched to my sister-in-law, as main good of fortune and source of income the known

factory of socks of the street Santa Engrácia)

Berlinck claims that in the 20th century BP has only maintained the unaccusative VS of the type in (2):

(2) Nesses planos estávamos, quando **apareceu este homem**, não sei donde, (...)(1845)

European Portuguese (EP), on the other hand, seems to have preserved both VSO and VOS orders. (cf Costa, 1998, 2000):

(3) a. Comeu o Paulo a sopa. (lit.: ate the Paul the soup) EP
   b. Comeu a sopa o Paulo. (lit.: ate the soup the Paul) EP

Kato & Tarallo (1988) show, however, that in present BP VS can still appear not only with unaccusatives verbs, but also in V1 constructions with unergative verbs (exs in (4)), in a few V2 type constructions (exs in (5) and in Subject Right Dislocated structures (SRD) (ex. (6).

(4) a. Viajou comigo um estrangeiro. (lit.: travelled with me a foreigner)
   b. Telefonou o cliente das 10. (lit: telephoned the client of 10 o'clock.)

(5) a. Ali moram os meninos. (lit.: there live the boys)
   b. R$50.000 custou meu carro. (lit.: 50.000 cost my car)

(6)   Dormiu cedo o menorzinho (lit.: slept early the little one)

The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the VS forms in (4), with the verb in first position, relating them to other facts of BP grammar, such as loss of agreement and copula erasure. The V2 type was studied in Kato (forth) and Kato and Mioto (2005), and the SRD type in Kato and Tarallo(1988, 2000).

2. Brazilian Portuguese (BP): a puzzle for the parameter model of language change

With **mono-argumental** verbs, BP can have subject focus in postverbal position like other Romance Null Subject (NS) languages or in an *in-situ* pre-verbal position like English. With verbs with more than one argument, Null Subject languages like EP can also obtain subject focus in the post-verbal position, but the possibility of focusing just the subject with such verbs in BP is attained only through the *in-situ* extra-heavy accent strategy.

(7) a. – O João telefonou? ("Has John called?")
   b1. – Não. Telefonou o PEDRO. (lit.: telephoned the Peter)
   b2. – Não. O PEDRO telefonou. (lit.: the PETER telephoned)

(8) a. – O cachorro comeu os chocolates? ("Did the dog eat the chocolates?")
   b1. – Não. Comeu-os o GATO.   (lit: ate them the CAT)   EP
   b2. - Não. O GATO comeu.   (lit: the CAT ate)   BP

A diachronic hypothesis for BP could be that the mono-argumental VS constructions are residual cases of the old VS structure and the *in-situ* focus are the innovative form. From a socio-variationist perspective, it is common to assume that change spreads from certain contexts (social or linguistic) to others. But this view is untenable in the parametric perspective since it would entail the acceptance of V-raising as affecting certain contexts and not others. In order to assume a parametric change, a different hypothesis has to be entertained.

My claim in this paper is that V-raising to a functional head above IP is not possible in BP and that all the forms for constituent focusing in this variety of Portuguese are coherent with one grammar and one strategy, namely the cleft and pseudo-cleft sentences, universal strategies for constituent, or identificational focusing.

3. Forms derived from the reduction of cleft sentences and pseudoclefts in BP

BP has, along with the normal cleft and pseudo-cleft sentences, some constructions that may be claimed to be reduced types of cleft structures (cf. Casteleiro, 1979 and Kato & Raposo, 1996). The wh-questions are analyzed also as deriving from cleft sentences, and they also exhibit a reduced form.

(9) a. (É) o PEDRO que ama a Maria.   B P
    b. (Quem) o Pedro ama é a Maria.   BP   EP
    c. Quem (é) que ama a Maria?   B P

Notice that reduction consists of copula erasure in (9)a and c, and of the wh-operator in (9)b, the only one licensed in EP.

4. Further reduction

With wh-questions, Duarte (1992) first observed that the VS order, which was the norm until the 18th century, gave way to the cleft questions:

(10)   a. Que faz você?   (18th century)
       b. O que é que você faz?   (19th century on)
       c. O que você faz?   (20th century)

According to the author, the SV order in (10)c. is a consequence of (10)b., in which the same word order is observed. However, Lopes Rossi (1995) correctly points out that EP also introduced the cleft sentences, but does not license the SV order without *é que*.

Kato and Raposo (1996) establish the correlation of the SV order, not with the canonic cleft form *é que*, but rather, with the reduced form *que*, which is disallowed in EP.

(11)   a. O que que você faz ?   (20th century)   BP   *EP
       b. O que você faz?   (20th century)   BP   *EP

The b. form would result from a PF erasure of *que*. Likewise, the *in-situ* focus on the subject would derive from the PF erasure of *que* in a structure like (12)a. (cf. Kato & Mioto, 2005)

(12) a. O PEDRO (que) ama a Maria.(lit.: the Peter that loves the Maria)
       b. O PEDRO ama a Maria (lit. the PETER loves Maria)

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[2] For Cinque (1993), the information focus of a sentence (as opposed to the identificational focus), is the deepmost element in the sentence. Moreover, the information focus can propagate leftwards, and may have the whole sentence as the informational focus. This does not happen with [10]b2 as the focus does not propagate upwards, excluding the verb as part of the focalized constituent.

5. Puzzles in BP VS order

5.1. The subject focus reading of VS construction in BP: a problem for Cinque's algorithm[2]

Except for some unaccusative constructions, VS in BP can only be interpreted as having identificational focus reading, contrary to other Null subject languages, which can conform to Cinque's (1993) algorithm, according to which any constituent containing the stressed element can be the focus.

(13) a. – O que foi? (lit.: What was it? = 'What happened?')
     b1. [$_F$O Pedro [telefonou]]   BP
     b2. [$_F$Telefonou [o Pedro]].   *BP

(14)a. – Quem telefonou?
     b1.– Telefonou [$_F$o PEDRO].   BP

5.2. The lack of agreement in both unergative and unaccusative VS constructions

Though BP has preserved the VS order with mono-argumental verbs, there is another ongoing change, namely the lack of verbal agreement with postposed subjects, even for speakers who retain agreement with preposed subjects:

(15)   a. Chegou as cartas (lit. arrived+3psing the letters)
       b. * As cartas chegou. (lit the letters arrived+3psing)

(16)   a. Telefonou uns clientes (lit. telephoned+3psing some clients)
       b. *Uns clientes telefonou. (lit. some clients telephoned+3psing)
       c. Viajou comigo o Pedro e a Maria (lit. travelled+3psing with me
          the Pedro and the Maria)

A partial solution to this problem is given in Kato (2002), who analyzes the unaccusative VS order in BP as an existential construction. However, she does not provide a solution for the inergative VS and neither for unaccusative VS with a definite postverbal DP.

5.3. The use of nominative pronouns as objects:

Present day BP does not present third person clitics like EP, as in (17), but resorts to the null object or the the non-clitic third person pronoun *ele:*

(17) A Maria viu-**o**. (lit the Maria saw-3psingcl. "Mary saw him) EP

(18) A:– Alguém viu o Pedro? (lit. someone saw the Pedro? "Has someone
seen Peter?")
    B:– A Maria viu ∅. (lit.: the Maria saw)
    B'– A Maria viu ele. (lit.: the Maria saw he)

(19) A:– Quem a Maria viu? (lit. who the Maria saw? "who did Mary
see?")
    B:– A Maria viu ELE (lit. the Maria saw HE "Maria saw HIM")

6. Proposal: deriving VS from reduced, or semi-pseudoclefts in BP

As we saw in section 3., previous work (cf a.o. Casteleiros, 1979), semi-
pseudoclefts ((20)b, (21)b and (22)b.) are assumed to derive from pseudoclefts
((20a.), (21)a. and (22)a.). What we are proposing is an additional reduction.
From the b. forms we derive the c. forms, through copula erasure, like in other
cases of cleft reduction.

(20) a. O que eu quero é um EXPRESSO (lit. what I want is an expresso)
    pseudocleft
    b. Eu quero é um EXPRESSO. (lit. I want is an expresso)_
    semi-pseudocleft
    c. Eu quero # um EXPRESSO. (lit. I want # an expresso)

(21) a. Quem telefonou foi o PEDRO.   (lit.: who telephoned-3rd p.s.
    was Peter.) pseudo-cleft
    b. Telefonou foi o PEDRO. (lit.: telephoned-3rd p.s. was Peter)
    semi-pseudo-cleft
    c. Telefonou # o PEDRO.
    V#S

(22) a. O que chegou foram os OVOS. (lit.: what arrived-3rd p s. were
    the eggs) pseudo-cleft
    Chegou foram os OVOS. (lit.:arrived_3rd p.s. were the eggs)
    semi-pseudo-cleft
    Chegou # os OVOS. (lit.: arrived-3rd p.s.# the eggs)
    V#S

As the VS forms are assumed to derive from pseudoclefts, and in these

structures the only focus reading is the identificational type, we succeed in explaining why sentence informational focus cannot be obtained in such VS forms.

The VS forms in (21)c and (22)c. are disguised cases of VS order. In other words, they can be considered a type of VS, not with the lexical verb, but with the copula. Notice, moreover, that it is the copula that agrees with the postposed DP, and not the lexical verb. When it is erased, what we have left is an apparent lack of agreement.

The erasure of the copula seems to leave a slight pause, unlike copula erasure in the beginning of a clause, like in the sentences below:

(23)   a. (É) lindo o seu cabelo!
        b. (É) A MARIA que ama o Pedro.

As for the non-accusative "object" ELE, observe that in the pseudo cleft clause from which we assume it originates, it has the copula predicate position, which requires the "default" nominative case of strong pronouns.[2]

(24) a. Quem eu encontrei foi ELE.   (lit.: who I met was he.)
     b. Eu encontrei foi ELE. (lit.: I met was he)
     c. Eu encontrei #   ELE (lit.: I met was he)

Further evidence of the pseudo-cleft origin of VS sentences in BP comes from the fact that, , though licencing VS, the order VOS is disallowed in this variety. In order to derive a VOS sentence from a semi-pseudocleft, we would have to imagine that it comes from (25)b, which is somehow ill-formed:

(25)   a. Quem comeu os chocolates foi a Maria.
        b. *Comeu os chocolates foi a Maria.
        c. * Comeu os chocolates a MARIA.

For some reason, semi- pseudoclefts is not possible when the wh-operator is the subject. We will leave this problem for future work. What we wanted to show is the fact that the ill-formedness of VOS word order is also connected to the ill-formedness of its corresponding semi-pseudocleft structure.

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[3] To see more about strong pronouns in this position, consult Kato (1999).

CONCLUSIONS

By deriving VS constructions in BP from pseudocleft sentences, I was able to account for:

– an identificational focus reading signalled not only by primary stress, but by the two tone units which result from the gap left by the copula. The copula and the pause separate the last constituent, the focus, from what appears before it , the presupposition;

– the monoargumentality constraint postulated by Kato and Tarallo(1989) since the complement of the copula is always a single constituent;

– the apparent loss of agreement between the V and the "subject" in BP; the real agreement carrier (the copula) is erased;

– the possibility of a non-clitic pronoun in post-verbal position, assumed to have the "default" nominative case of strong pronouns.

Concluding, BP is not a language in an unstable state of syntactic change. All its constructions are coherent with a grammar that does not have a strong head C (cf. Uriagereka, 1992) to attract the tensed verb, or to check a constituent (Chomsky, 1995) as the narrow focus of the sentence. Focused elements are uniformly the predicate of the tense operator, which may appear lexicalized as the copula or only discernible by prosodic (the pause) or morphological features. What gives the final shape of some focus constructions in BP are deletion operations at the PF interface.

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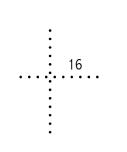
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