

## LEFT-DISLOCATED SUBJECTS AND PARAMETRIC CHANGE IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

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**Abstract:** The present paper, based on interviews with 12 university educated speakers belonging to 3 age groups and 4 hours of interviews broadcast by radio and television, shows that the appearance of left-dislocated subjects in Brazilian Portuguese can be seen as a consequence of the gradual loss of the property that allows for (or obliges) the null representation of pronominal subjects and suggests a parametric change in progress.

**Keywords:** left-dislocated subjects, null subject parameter, pronominal subjects, linguistic change, parametric change, linguistic embedding.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article intends to correlate the appearance of left-dislocated (LD) subjects in spoken Brazilian Portuguese (BP) to the process of change from a pro-drop to a non-null subject language. In fact, BP is undergoing a process of change in the representation of referential pronominal subjects that can be related to a significant reduction in its inflectional paradigm, caused by a change in the set of personal pronouns rather than by phonological processes.

Such reduction, implemented around the 30's (Duarte, 1993), with the replacement of "direct" second person pronouns *tu* and *vós* (*you*) by the address form *você(s)*, in most of the country, has been aggravated recently by the clear preference for *a gente* (*one*) over *nós* (*we*) for first person plural reference. All these pronominals take third person verb forms instead of a distinctive morphology, undermining the functional richness of the verbal paradigm (Roberts, 1993). Table 1 below shows the change in the set of personal pronouns and the reduction in the inflectional paradigm:

**Table 1. Pronominal and Inflectional Paradigms in Brazilian Portuguese**

Pers./Nb.	Pronoun	Paradigm 1	Paradigm 2	Paradigm 3
1 <sup>st</sup> sing.	<b>Eu</b>	am o	am o	am o
2 <sup>nd</sup> sing.	<b>Tu</b>	am a s	-	-
	<b>Você</b>	am a	am a	am a
3 <sup>rd</sup> sing.	<b>Ele/Ela</b>	am a	am a	am a
1 <sup>st</sup> plur.	<b>Nós</b>	am a mos	am a mos	-
	<b>A gente</b>	-	am a	am a
2 <sup>nd</sup> plur.	<b>Vós</b>	am a is	-	-
	<b>Vocês</b>	am a m	am a m	am a m
3 <sup>rd</sup> plur.	<b>Eles/Elas</b>	am a m	am a m	am a m

As a consequence, BP seems to have lost the “Avoid Pronoun” Principle, which sets it apart from European Portuguese and the other so-called pro-drop languages, such as Standard Italian and Spanish. As shown in Duarte (1995), referential null subjects have become every time less frequent in speech, as full pronominal subjects are allowed to appear in every grammatical person and every syntactic environment, independently of the semantic feature of the referent (definite [+/- animate], generic or arbitrary)<sup>1</sup>. Such a scenery seems to have prepared the way for the birth of LD subjects, a structure incompatible with the “Avoid Pronoun” Principle that underlies pro-drop systems.

## 2. LEFT-DISLOCATED SUBJECTS

Duranti & Ochs (1979), studying left-dislocation in Italian, observe that only complements coindexed with clitics can appear as dislocated elements; subjects, on the other hand, *never happen to be LD items*, probably because *subjects, to some extent, always have a coreferential pro-from in the sentence, such pro-form being the subject-verb agreement* (op. cit. 381). The same seems to be true for Spanish (Rivero, 1980) and European Portuguese (I. Duarte, 1987). Both argue that LD subjects in such languages can only appear in configurations of no syntactic adjacency and have necessarily a focal interpretation.

LD subjects are, however, a very common structure in spoken French - a non-null subject language - regardless of the informational status of the NP, the syntactic environment and the existence of contrastive or emphatic stress (see Barnes, 1986 and Blanche-Benveniste, 1993, whose empirical researches suggest that the subject clitic coreferent with the dislocated element can be seen as an obligatory agreement mark).

In BP, topic structures were first noticed in the 80's by Pontes (1987), who remarks the high frequency of LD subjects in the sample analysed. She also emphasises the lack of syntactic restrictions to the use of the structure, except for the fact that the LD NP is always a “given” element, which imposes an important pragmatic conditioning. Braga & Mollica (1985, 1986) also investigated the structure, showing interesting discursive and psycholinguistic

<sup>1</sup> Duarte (in preparation) investigates non referential subjects and finds a tendency to use demonstratives, locatives and even personal pronouns in impersonal sentences.

constraints to the occurrence of LD subjects. None of the referred works, however, related the birth of LD subjects to the loss of null subjects in BP.

### 3. LD SUBJECTS AND PARAMETRIC CHANGE IN BP

In Duarte (1995), I analysed the expression of pronominal subjects in the speech of twelve university educated speakers and in four hours of media speech (interviews broadcast by radio and TV) and found an overall rate of 79% and 71% of full subjects, respectively. Among them, 7% and 12% were in LD structures. An analysis of such structures showed that the restrictions pointed out when they were first noticed no longer operate. LD subjects can appear not only in any kind of syntactic environment, with or without an intervening element, as in (1)-(5) below

- (1) **A Clarinha<sub>i</sub>**, **ela<sub>i</sub>**, cozinha que é uma maravilha.  
"Clarinha *she* can cook very well."
- (2) Eu acho que **o povo brasileiro<sub>i</sub>**, **ele<sub>i</sub>**, tem uma grave doença.  
"I think that *Brazilian people they* suffer from a serious disease."
- (3) Não vou falar de bermuda, porque **os alunos<sub>i</sub>**, hoje em dia no verão  **eles<sub>i</sub>**, vêm assistir aulas com bermuda de qualquer tamanho..  
"(I) am not talking about bermudas, because *the students* nowadays *they* attend classes in bermudas any size."
- (4) A **minha filha<sub>i</sub>**, quando era pequena, **ela<sub>i</sub>**, sempre desceu, sempre brincou lá.  
"My daughter when (*she*) was little, *she* always played downstairs."
- (5) As **minhas amigas<sub>i</sub>**, que achavam ridículo véu e grinalda, hoje em dia **elas<sub>i</sub>**, tão casando de véu e grinalda.  
"My friends, who found veil and wreath ridiculous, today *they* are getting married in veil and wreath."

but also with "new" / indefinite NPs or lexically restricted quantified NPs:

- (6) Eu acho que **um trabalho sério<sub>i</sub>**, **ele<sub>i</sub>**, teria que começar por aí.  
"I think that *a serious work it* should start that way."
- (7) ... **qualquer pessoa<sub>i</sub>**, que vai praticar um esporte **ela<sub>i</sub>**, tem que se preparar...  
"...*any person who* is going to practice a sport *he/she* has to get fit..."

Moreover, LD subjects are also noticed in structures in which the dislocated NP is a pronoun with definite or arbitrary reference:

- (8) **Eu** às vezes **eu** peço a **ele** pra ir comprar o jornal pra mim...  
"I sometimes *I* ask *him* to go buy the newspaper for me..."

(9) Eu acho que eles hoje decididamente eles se vestem; não aceitam opinião dos pais.

*"I think that they today definitely they choose their own clothes; (they) don't accept their parents' opinion."*

(10) Você, quando você viaja, você passa a ser turista. Então você passa a fazer coisas que você nunca faria no Brasil.

*"You, when you travel, you become a tourist. Then you start doing things you would never do in Brazil."*

Another important aspect to notice is the fact that LD subjects have become an obligatory structure in the speech of younger generations, who no longer use the first person plural pronominal form **nós**, having replaced it by the expression **a gente**. Since this pronominal selects a third person singular verb form, the LD structure is the only available structure and the one they invariably use, a clear evidence of the embedding of LD subjects in BP system:

(11) **Eu e a Paula; a gente** ficava dizendo: "Herodes tinha razão!"

*"I and Paula one kept saying: "Herod was right!"*

(12) **Eu e o M. a gente** vai casar logo.

*"I and M.; one; is going to get married soon."*

One final remark is the fact that there seems to be in progress a process of phonological cliticization<sup>2</sup> of the pronominal subjects, shown in examples (3)-(5) and (7)-(10).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

An examination of the sentences presented above under a discursive perspective might say that LDs are due to limitations of the context in which speech takes place. However, speakers only make regular use of tools offered by their grammar, and it seems that LD subjects, like the ones exemplified above, are not available to speakers of a conventional pro-drop language. Therefore, without denying that discursive factors may condition the use of LD subjects (and the fact that they are characteristic of speech cannot be neglected), what is at play is the fact that such structures are incompatible with pro-drop languages and their significant occurrence in BP is the best argument in favor of its peculiar behavior in relation to the other languages in the pro-drop group.

One can hence suspect that the appearance of such structure in the system is linked to the loss of the property that underlies pro-drop languages: the "Avoid Pronoun" Principle. Such a suspicion is reinforced by the evidence that Middle French, while exhibiting a defective system of null subjects, began to show LD subjects, as can be seen if one observes attentively the examples shown in Vances's (1989) work, one of which is reproduced in (13), where one

<sup>2</sup> I adopt here the distinction suggested by Rizzi(1986), to whom the clitic nature of pronominal subjects in French is merely phonological, since the pronoun behaves as an NP, being located in Spec IP, as opposed to the syntactic clitics which occur in certain dialects in Northern Italy.

can see a characteristic of Middle French, in the use of null subjects in two different syntactic environments, and a characteristic of Modern French, in the use of a dislocated subject:

(13) “**Madame<sub>i</sub>**”, dist il froidement, **elle<sub>i</sub>** se racommande tres humblement a vostre bonne grace et **pro<sub>i</sub>** dis que **proj** l’avez briefement.”(op. cit. ex. 142, p.230)

In this way, LD subjects do not seem to constitute an accidental change in BP; rather they appear as an evidence of the embedding to which Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1986) refer, that is, they reflect a major change undergone by the grammatical system.

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