

Variation and change in Brazilian Portuguese syntax: three related phenomena

Most dialects in Brazilian Portuguese exhibit evidence of an on-going loss of the properties of the null subject (NS) parameter, namely loss of the “avoid pronoun” principle and subject verb inversion (cf. Duarte 1995). Connected with this change, there is also the loss of movement of the clitics to the pre-auxiliary position, resulting in generalized proclisis to the main verb (cf. Cyrino, 1993), with the consequence that these dialects now allow clitics in sentence initial position. The changes are attributed to the loss of the second person *tu*, a fact that led to the impoverishment of its inflectional system.

In this paper we investigate a different dialect, from the south of Brazil (Florianópolis), which, in contrast to the other dialects studied, retained the pronoun *tu*, preserving intact the inflectional paradigm. Previous studies on word order in this dialect have shown, however, a decrease of VS order, and a clear preference for overt pronouns, like in the other dialects (Coelho, 2000).

The aim of this paper is to investigate whether the variable behavior of subject/verb inversion in Brazilian Portuguese spoken in Florianópolis (FBP) is related a) to the increasing tendency to place clitic complements in pre-verbal position; b) to the fact that VS with transitive verbs is still possible if the complement is a clitic and is in pre-verbal position (as in “*Me impressionou o filme*” – me-cl impressed the movie - ‘The movie impressed me’); or c) to the increase in the preference for overt subject pronouns, despite the retention of *tu*.

Our hypothesis is that the changes that have been occurring in both types of dialects have not to do with a change in the Null Subject Parameter, but with a restriction to the V1 (verb initial) word order, proposed in Kato and Duarte (2005). In accordance with those authors, we analyze the *V1 constraint as a prosodic/rhythmic phenomenon.

References

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