

Book Review

Jairo Nunes (Ed.), **Minimalist Essays on Brazilian Portuguese Syntax**
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This book consists of a collection of ten essays on some major syntactic properties of Brazilian Portuguese (BP) considered in light of recent developments of the Minimalist program (Chomsky, 1995 *et seq.*). The essays are grouped around two intertwined themes: (i) Movement and empty categories and (ii) The syntax-morphology interface. The discussion offered in each essay strengthens and supports the results presented in other chapters, a feature that confers on the volume a high degree of coherence. Though the book is devoted to a series of themes in BP syntax, it will be of interest to a wide spectrum of scholars, ranging from those interested in the more empirical aspects of (micro)variation to those grappling with the theoretical or methodological issues that arise when considering linguistic phenomena from a Minimalist point of view.

This review is divided in two parts: the ensuing section provides a short summary of each chapter. It is followed by a section containing a few comments on several of the issues addressed in the essays that compose this excellent volume.

1. Summary of the Chapters

In Chapter 1 ('Brazilian Portuguese under Minimalist lenses'), the editor offers a brief and concise overview of the rationale behind the transition from a Principles and Parameters Government and Binding (GB) model to the general guidelines of the Minimalist program (MP). The bulk of this first chapter is devoted to providing an overview of the major issues discussed in the different essays and the links between them. Nunes highlights the relevance of the theoretical tools used for the analysis of the topics under discussion while pointing out how they expand the empirical and explanatory coverage provided by previous accounts.

In Chapter 2 ('Null subjects and finite control in Brazilian Portuguese'), Ferreira discusses the distribution and interpretation of referential null subjects in BP. After demonstrating that null subjects are only allowed in subordinate clauses, the author shows that this empty category in finite subordinate clauses has the characteristics of a controlled PRO but not that of a null subject *pro* or of a variable bound by an empty operator. Ferreira assumes the Minimalist reanalysis of controlled PRO as the deleted copy of a raised subject proposed in Hornstein (1999, 2001). Evidence for this analysis is provided by the distribution of empty subjects. The impossibility of having null pronominals (*pro*) in BP subordinate tensed clauses is related to the impoverishment of the T agreement system, which blocks case checking and triggers upward movement.

Floripi & Nunes examine null possessor constructions in Chapter 3 ('Movement and resumption in null possessor constructions in Brazilian Portuguese'). They note that null possessors within nominal constructions headed by relational nouns behave either like pronouns or like anaphors and suggest that these empty categories do not correspond to one and the same element but rather to two different syntactic objects that result from the application of different grammatical strategies. Null possessors of the pronominal types constitute a last resort strategy that BP falls back on when possessive constructions appear in configurations that disallow extraction. Null possessive anaphors behave like controlled PRO. Following Hornstein's analysis of control assumed in Chapter 2, they characterize anaphoric empty possessors as the trace (i.e. copy) of a constituent raised to a local c-commanding position.

Chapter 4 by Augusto ('Patterns of extraction out of factive islands in Brazilian Portuguese') discusses the distribution of argument/adjunct extraction out of factive constructions. Augusto suggests that certain interpretive aspects of these structures are a consequence of the requirement that factives select [+specific] complements. Specificity requires, in turn, a

Top(ic)P functional layer in factive complementation. The presence of a TopP accounts for the weak island effects observed in these constructions, since it acts as an escape hatch for argument extraction, while blocking adjunct extraction. Argument/adjunct asymmetries do not obtain when the tense properties of the subordinate clause are interpretively or morphologically linked to those of the matrix clause (non inflected infinitives and past imperfective subjunctive complements respectively). In these structures, where no TopP projection is instantiated, arguments and adjuncts can both be extracted. This paper illustrates a case where selectional requirements of predicates can be satisfied by different syntactic configurations.

In Chapter 5 ('A uniform raising analysis for standard and nonstandard relative clauses in Brazilian Portuguese'), Kato and Nunes reanalyze three types of restrictive relative constructions. In addition to exhibiting the more familiar pied piping and resumptive pronoun relatives, BP also has a construction where an apparently deleted relativized PP is free of island effects. The insensitivity of these structures to islandhood conditions is argued to follow from the fact that the deleted segment is not a PP but rather a null object pronominal *pro*. The proposed account is shown to be independently supported by the behavior of free relatives and by the phonological evidence provided by stress shift patterns discussed in Chapter 6 of the volume. In this chapter, the authors offer a unified analysis of the three types of relative constructions in BP, following Kayne's (1994) approach but also enriched with their hypothesis on the distribution of inherent case.

Chapter 6 ('Stress shift as a diagnostics for identifying empty categories in Brazilian Portuguese') by Nunes and Santos seeks to identify empty category types by applying BP stress patterns to relative clauses and parasitic gap constructions. Santos (2003) had previously observed that the first of two adjacent primary stressed syllables recedes one syllable if a trace intervenes between them. A null pronoun, by contrast, does not induce such a receding effect. This essay shows that *pro* counts as an intervening element when computing stress adjacency, despite being as phonologically null as a trace. The authors offer the interesting conjecture that prosodic shifts, which appear to be insensitive to the presence of traces, might be a byproduct of linearization procedures that trigger trace deletion (see also Nunes, 1999, 2004). Stress pattern tests also allow the authors to show that parasitic gaps in BP involve traces whereas PP deleted relatives (see Chapter 5) should involve *pro*.

Chapter 7 ('The comitative-copular basis of possessive-existential constructions in Brazilian Portuguese') by Avelar opens the section of the book devoted to issues related to the syntax-morphology interface. The author argues that both possessive and existential *ter* ('have') constructions share a propositional layer in their lexical structure. He claims that several properties

of this verbal element can be accounted for if it is conceived as resulting from the fusion of the features that make up the abstract copula *estar* ('be') on the one hand and those of an abstract comitative preposition *com* ('with') on the other. Evidence for his claim is the parallel behavior that different predicates with comitative phrases and locative PP complements exhibit. Locative expressions in these contexts appear to license referential null subjects in BP, a language where these null categories are highly restricted (see Chapter 2). The co-existence of impersonal sentences with overt *estar com* ('to be with') and locative PPs in subject position offers further support for this hypothesis.

In Chapter 8 ('Topicalization of verbal projections in Brazilian Portuguese'), Bastos-Gee analyzes constructions involving verbal predicate fronting in the left periphery of BP sentences. The author claims that left peripheral verbs and left peripheral full \bar{y} Ps should be analyzed as topics. The resulting constructions show two instances of the same verb, one in the topic and the other in the internal clausal structure, with different morphological inflection (an infinitival in the topic and a finite form clause internally). Bastos-Gee analyzes the three different types of verbal topicalization structures found in BP, two of which obtain from operations of copy and raise to the dedicated left peripheral position while the other is the product of base generation in the left periphery. The two raising types are shown to be sensitive to islandhood conditions whereas the base generated type, which does not involve movement, is free from such restrictions. Interpretive and pragmatic characterizations of the types of verbal predicate fronting are also discussed.

Chapter 9 ('Preposition contraction and morphological sideward movement in Brazilian Portuguese') by Nunes and Ximenes analyzes instances of preposition copying that superficially appear as PP coordination. The authors suggest that the structures involve DP coordination exclusively, but the PP coordination effect obtains because one of the prepositions is copied at the morphological component through morphological sideward movement, a sub-species of a general grammatical operation that allows the grammar to avoid construction specific rules. Prepositional copy is triggered by a general Parallelism Requirement that imposes restrictions on categorial uniformity to coordinated structures. The condition is satisfied by operations of copy and merge after the syntactic computation has taken place.

Nunes and Zocca analyze verbal and nominal ellipsis in Chapter 10 ('Lack of morphological identity and ellipsis resolution in Brazilian Portuguese'). They show that previous proposals on ellipsis resolution, which allow a range of morphological variability between the phonologically realized string and the deleted one, fail to account for some impossible variability patterns observed in BP. Nunes and Zocca show that ellipsis involving morphological

variability is possible if it is assumed that verbs enter the numeration with the relevant uninterpretable features but with no inflectional morphology at the syntactic component. However, irregular verbs that idiosyncratically express the uninterpretable syntactic features associated with them (such as *ser/estar* ‘to be’ and *ter* ‘have’) require isomorphism under deletion, a fact that suggests that only idiosyncratically inflected verbs must enter the numeration morphologically specified. The authors extend their analysis to nominal structures where grammatical gender differences associated with nominal predicates present a similar pattern under ellipsis. Morphological variability is allowed for number features but gender variability under ellipsis is blocked if lexical idiosyncrasies involving gender specification exist. The evidence is argued to support the hypothesis that uninterpretable features are hosted in functional categories and valued in the course of derivation (Chomsky, 2001) together with Halle & Marantz (1993) vocabulary late insertion proposal.

2. Comments

Minimalism has now the status of a conjecture intended to explore the design of the language faculty (see Chomsky, 2004; Boeckx, 2006; Hornstein *et al.*, to mention only a few). This volume constitutes an important collection of studies that illustrate how a number of recently proposed directions developing the minimalist conjecture can be empirically tested and explored. I will comment here on only a few minimalist solutions of the many adopted and developed in this collection of essays.

Several chapters of the book assess the status of empty pronominal-like categories as seen through a Minimalist lens. All of them assume what we may call a radical reinterpretation of the old notion Avoid Pronoun, developed in Hornstein (2001, 2006; see also Kayne, 2002). The reader may recall that, in the Principles and Parameters (GB) model, Avoid Pronoun was conceived as an option whereby phonologically unrealized pronominal elements are preferable when the option null/overt is possible. The question was left open as to whether Avoid Pronoun was to be treated as a conversational guideline or a principle of grammar (see Chomsky, 1981: 65).

Hornstein has recently reconsidered the idea behind this notion under strict economy conditions. Pronominalization could be viewed as a general last resort strategy that the derivational system appeals to when movement can not apply, being Control a sub-species of movement. His hypotheses seeks to unify under a common denominator four subsystems that were previously regarded as independently at work within the classical Principles and Parameters GB hypothesis, then placed under the government rubric: the Theory of Binding, the notion of Governing category/Complete Functional Complex, the Theory of Construal and Case Theory. The attempted

unification is a move that eliminates the need for positing different levels of representation, other than the strictly necessary PF and LF, while draining the GB subsystems of their independent explanatory power. Different authors of the volume adopt this Minimalist Avoid Pronoun general hypothesis because not only can it offer deeper insights into many BP constructions and their mutual connections but also, in more general terms, it helps to clarify the driving forces behind movement operations and the abstract nature of A-chains with their locality requirements.

Crucial for this Minimalist Avoid Pronoun idea to be implemented is the assumption that raising can target thematic positions. The proposal implies conceiving thematic roles as features that can be acquired via movement (see Bošković, 1994, and Hornstein, 1999, 2001). Further research may show whether or not this assumption will ultimately allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of thematic roles, whatever those conceptual entities may be. In my view, the thematic-role-as-feature proposal raises some questions. The tenet that there is no limit on the number of theta roles that a given A-chain may acquire by movement has a possible consequence that may be illustrated with a specific proposal from this volume, Ferreira's discussion of null subordinate subjects (Chapter 2), but the consequence generalizes to all cases that adopt this hypothesis. Ferreira's account allows one to suppose that iterative applications of raising are possible within a potentially infinite string of subcategorized subordinate object clauses, as long as they all have *Phi* incomplete Ts that prevent structural Case to be assigned to their subject. The head of the A-chain in the main clause can then be loaded with no small number of thematic role instances as a result of successive raising operations from clause to clause. One wonders whether or not the computation can possibly be taxed with such a substantial memory burden.

It should be noted that Theta-role features do not have the status of other feature types at the syntactic component, as A. Gallego (p.c.) points out. They can not be related to other associated features "at a distance" under an Agree-based system, like the other syntactic features that participate in checking mechanisms. Moreover, no intervention effects appear to obtain in these cases. A related but different question regarding the theta-role-as-feature hypothesis is its consistency with respect to both the Inclusiveness Condition (see Chomsky, 1995:225) and the copy theory of movement. The condition disallows interpretive material to be added in the course of the derivation. Under one (arguable) interpretation of Inclusiveness, the addition of thematic roles to a chain should not be allowed. Furthermore, all copies of the A-chain are not equal under this procedure, since each copy differs from its immediate predecessor in the derivation by having a new theta-role feature. The assumption that, as the derivation proceeds, all members of the A-chain keep on downward copying the added theta-roles, by whichever percolation

procedure one may implement, appears to be questionable under any interpretation of cyclicity. Of course, the motivation underlying the theta-role-as-feature hypothesis is that there is no Deep Structure with its conditions (like the Theta Criterion) to appeal to under strict Minimalist guidelines. It would be desirable to deduce its consequences from a more principled, and strictly necessary, requirement.

The copy theory of movement is also developed by Bastos-Gee for cases of topicalization of verbal projections in BP (see Chapter 8). She poses the question of why the two verb occurrences exhibit different morphological forms in these constructions. Lack of isomorphism can be observed in the range of cases she discusses, independently of whether the verbal projection has been raised (i.e. copied) to the topic position or is base generated in it. The clause internal verbal element receives regular inflected morphology while that in the left periphery is in the infinitive. Bastos-Gee suggests that the peripheral copy is in the infinitive because it is the default form of the verb. Defaultness, however, does not appear to be a satisfactory account for the morphology of this verbal left peripheral form because it is nothing more than the citation form of the verb and not its default form, which is the third person singular. Thus, the morphological component must assign infinitive morphology for some reason other than defaultness; perhaps it does so because the infinitive overtly lacks specification for tense or agreement.

Floripi & Nunes's account of null possessors in BP (Chapter 3) triggers the interesting question as to why, under somewhat similar abstract conditions, many languages other than BP should massively resort to anti-economical strategies for possessivization and can not have raised (null) possessors. Other languages use instead overt expressions when pronominal anaphora is intended, as in the Catalan *La Isabel parla amb la seva pròpia mare* (lit. 'the Isabel talks with the her own mother'). Floripi & Nunes's well-argued discussion on the distribution of null possessors in BP leads one to suppose that the explanation for cross-linguistic differences may arguably lie either in the Case properties of pre-nominal possessors or in the combined Case/interpretive properties of post-nominal pronouns in languages other than BP (Cat. *La Isabel parla amb la mare d'ella* 'the Isabel talks with the mother of her'). Possessor raising in BP is said to be allowed under structural Case conditions but blocked under inherent Case assignment. The latter is claimed to be a last resort strategy that applies when structural case is unavailable. It is not clear on conceptual grounds why inherent case should be more costly than structural case, considering that structural Case assignment to a null subject (see Chapter 2) is possible in clausal structures only if raising applies. Raising, however, is also a costly operation.

Finally, I would like to briefly comment on the specificity feature proposed in Augusto's account on the properties of factive constructions (Chapter 4). As noted in the summary above, she claims that factive predicates select [+specific] complements. If we assume that this is a crosslinguistic generalization and not a particular characteristic of BP factives, I would suggest that specificity may not be the feature that triggers the presence of the Topic functional layer in factive complementation. Factive predicates in Spanish (and Catalan) can license [-specific] complements, as witnessed by Spanish constructions of the types *Pedro lamenta cualquier injerencia en sus asuntos privados* ('Pedro regrets any meddling in his private affairs'); *Ana deploraba cualquier comentario inapropiado* ('Ana deplored any inappropriate comment'), where the indefinite *cualquier* 'any' renders the complement unspecific. Thus, some other feature could be responsible for the presence of the Topic layer that dominates factive complements and acts as an escape hatch for these constructions.

The above remarks sketch a few questions or problems that are posed by some of the analyses offered in this volume, but none of my comments are intended to diminish its importance and interest. The essays assume and develop specific interpretations of general measures adopted towards the construction of a possible Minimalist theory of grammar. Let me finish this review by saying that Nunes and his collaborators have done a remarkable job in gathering together an apparently diverse set of phenomena in a very coherent fashion and with a high degree of internal consistency. I regard this book as a strong contribution to the development of the Minimalist research program. The book is, moreover, well written and well edited (notwithstanding two minor typographical errors on pages 65 and 72).

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