

## Introduction

ERNESTINA CARRILHO

BEATRIZ FERNÁNDEZ

During the last decades, comparative syntax has encouraged incursions into an almost unexplored area of linguistic variation, that of dialect syntax. After inspection of closely related languages, syntactic comparative research also focused onto closely related language varieties, as families of dialects, which provided an almost laboratorial setting for studying syntactic variation under strictly controlled conditions (cf. Kayne 1996, Kayne 2005: 5-8). This new microcomparative approach developed as an important tool for investigating dialect syntax, but also as a highly restrained way of searching for invariant linguistic principles, as envisaged by the end of the past century within the framework of Principles and Parameters Theory (Chomsky 1981) of generative syntax: “Microcomparative syntax is a powerful tool, whose growth is perhaps to be compared with the development of the earliest microscopes, that allows us to probe questions concerning the most primitive units of syntactic variation. And since the invariant principles of UG [Universal Grammar] can hardly be understood in isolation from syntactic variation, this tool promises to provide invaluable evidence that will shape our understanding of those principles themselves” (Kayne 1996: xvii). The study of nonstandard and/or non standardized language continues today to strengthen the relevance of microcomparative data for understanding the properties of natural language and the nature of linguistic variation.

Since the early nineties, concerted syntactic research over dialects within a linguistic area has provided new empirical coverage for searching the grammatical basis of linguistic differences and similarities and for shaping new inquiries into the locus and limits of syntactic variation (cf. Barbiers 2009). Besides the inaugural syntactic atlases *ASIS* (*Syntactic Atlas of Northern Italy*) and *SAND* (*Syntactic Atlas of Dutch Dialects*), over the last

two decades several dialect syntax projects and resources have been launched in different European linguistic areas, among which *ARBRES* (*Towards an Atlas of Dialectal Microvariation in Breton*), *BASYQUE* (*Basic Syntactic Atlas of the Basque Language*), *CORDIAL-SIN* (*Syntax-oriented Corpus of Portuguese Dialects*) and *COSER* (*Audible Corpus of Spoken Rural Spanish*). Advancements in the study of the syntactic properties of dialects further evolved into large-scale microcomparative syntactic research, extended to different dialect families (as permitted by networks such as *Edisyn – European Dialect Syntax*). In this context, collaboration of scholars from different linguistic backgrounds (such as dialectology, sociolinguistics, typology and generative syntax) has granted significant advances in the study of dialect syntax, on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

This issue of the *Journal of Portuguese Linguistics* presents a collection of selected papers developed within *Wedisyn – Dialect Syntax in Westmost Europe*, the network launched by the *BasDiSyn* group in 2009 as an initiative to share knowledge and expertise in the collection and analysis of syntactic dialect variation in languages spoken in Westmost Europe (Asturian, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Galician, Occitan, Portuguese and Spanish). Some of the papers have been partially presented and discussed at one of the annual workshops held by this network (Baiona 2010, Barcelona 2011, Uviéu 2012). External anonymous reviewing of the submissions to this issue on *Syntactic microvariation in Westmost European languages* assured the selection procedure and provided invaluable fine-tuning between the intra-network interests pursued by each paper and the general comparative setting acknowledged as background.

The papers published in this issue address syntactic microvariation concerning the structural differentiation of intransitive verbs (“Three levels of root insertion in Basque intransitive verbs” by Ane Berro), the structure of naming constructions (“The syntax of naming constructions in European Portuguese dialects: variation and change” by Adriana Cardoso & Catarina Magro), the limits of pronominalization in impersonal *se* constructions (“The pronominal coding of the patient in reflexive indefinite agent constructions in Peninsular Spanish” by Carlota de Benito Moreno), agreement in quantified expressions (“When quantifiers do not agree: three systems” by Urtzi Etxeberria & Ricardo Etxepare), dative complements (“Dative (first) complements in Basque” by Beatriz Fernández & Jon Ortiz de Urbina) and prepositional vs. bare infinitives (“ $\Phi$ -feature agreement: the distribution of the Breton bare and prepositional infinitives with the preposition *da*” by Mélanie Jouitteau). The empirical ground is provided by dialects of European Portuguese, Peninsular Spanish, Basque and Breton, which altogether open new insights into comparative issues regarding case (in special, dative case), prepositions as case assigners, agreement and sublexical structure, among others. The overall volume reveals and brings together the two axes developed by dialect syntax: theoretical issues are surveyed and discussed by

means of close dialectal data examination; unexplored dialectal syntactic variation is closely inspected paving the way for further theoretical developments. It is hoped that this new comparative setting also contributes to new insights into known and unexplored aspects of the grammar of Portuguese.

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Ernestina Carrilho  
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa  
[ernestina.carrilho@campus.ul.pt](mailto:ernestina.carrilho@campus.ul.pt)

Beatriz Fernández  
University of the Basque Country  
(UPV/EHU)  
[beatriz.fernandezf@ehu.es](mailto:beatriz.fernandezf@ehu.es)