Topics, Subjects and Grammatical Change: From Classical to Modern European Portuguese

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Introduction: This paper presents a diachronic account of the syntax of subjects in Portuguese, based on data extracted from a large annotated historical corpus (TBC 2010). Portuguese provides an interesting field for comparative/historical syntax, particularly with respect to the syntax of subjects: in Modern European Portuguese (henceforth EP), the general pattern as regards the position of lexical subjects is comparable to the pattern observed in other null-subject Romance languages, with generalized SV and the possibility of VS in Romance inversion (Ambar, 1992; Costa, 2004); however, in Portuguese texts written up to the 18th century the immediate pre-verbal position is reserved for pragmatically prominent constituents, regardless of their syntactic status as subjects, complements, or other - in other words, there is strong evidence of a "V2 grammar" (Torres Moraes, 1995; Galves, 1996; Paixão de Sousa, 2004; Galves & Paixão de Sousa, 2010). Recent work has shown that the change to EP SV syntax occurred in the texts written by the generations born in the first half of the 18th century: Galves & Paixão de Sousa (2010) attest that the proportion of post-verbal subjects fall from an average of 27% - 37% in the 16th and 17th centuries to an average of 15%-12% in the 18th and 19th centuries, while the proportion of pre-verbal subjects increases from an average of 18%-21% in the 16th and 17th centuries to an average of 47%-42% in the 18th and 19th centuries (the proportions of null subjects, while varying considerably along this four-century period - 55%-41%-37%-46% - show no significant tendency for change). The general picture, in short, is that before the 18th century, subjects tend to behave like other arguments as to their order in the clauses; after that point, subjects start to show a specific behavior as to their order in the clauses.

Main Proposal: In this paper we bring an analysis of the evolution of XVS to SVX in Modern European Portuguese based on a corpus of 13 syntactically annotated

texts written by Portuguese authors born between 1510 and 1836. By contrasting active sentences with passive sentences, we reveal how the behavior of the preposed internal arguments of passives patterns with the behavior of the external arguments of active clauses. Tis comparative study, grounded on the methodology in Kroch (1989), was motivated by the following prediction, based on the available data from active sentences: (i) if preposed constituents (either subjects or objects) are topicalized in 16th-17th century Portuguese because of their status of prominent; (ii) if, along the time, the frequency of VS falls, giving rise to generalized SV; and (iii) if we assume that the change does not affect the frequency of topic prominent elements - then, word order will present frequency alterations only in true SV sentences, not in sentences with prominent topics which are not subjects. The comparison between SV and XV constructions where X is an internal argument is, therefore, a key element in our argumentation. This includes XV constructions in which X is an object, but also (and in particular), passive constructions, in which the internal argument is a syntactic subject. Following the predictions above, the internal argument of passive constructions should show the same statistical pattern of subjects, that is: it should appear preferably post-posed up to the 17th century, and preferably preposed from the 18th century on. We will show that this is precisely the case: the internal arguments of analytical passives behave exactly like the external arguments of active clauses, increasingly appearing as preposed, and overcoming post-posed in the turn of the 18th century. In other words, internal arguments in analytical passives behave, expectedly, as subjects. Interestingly, this contrasts with what happens with the internal arguments of one particular construction that is often analyzed as a "synthetic" counterpart of the passives, the passive SE construction. The so-called "passive-accusative" SE appears with transitive verbs and triggers agreement between the internal argument DP and the verb (cf. example 1):

(1) "Pròximamente, no ano de mil seiscentos cincoenta e cinco, [se cativaram] no rio das Amazonas dois mil índios, entre os quais muitos eram amigos e aliados dos portugueses, e vassalos de Vossa Majestade, tudo contra a disposição da lei que veio naquele ano a este Estado, e tudo mandado obrar pelos mesmos que tinham maior obrigação de fazer observar a mesma lei; (Vieira, born 1606, Letters)

Pròximamente, no ano de mil seiscentos cincoenta e cinco, [se cativaram] no rio
'Shortly, in-the year of thousand six-hundred fifty-five, [SE=capture-PST.3PL] in-the river
das Amazonas dois mil índios
of-the Amazons two thousand indians'

In Cavalcante & Paixão de Sousa (2009) sentences with "passive-SE" were compared with sentences containing other clitics drawn from Paixão de Sousa (2004). No increase was found in the preposing of the internal argument along the period - in fact, preposing decreases after the 18th century. In other words, the internal arguments of "passive-SE" constructions do not behave like the subjects of active and analytical passive clauses. Cavalcante & Paixão de Sousa (2009) interpret this as evidence that internal arguments in passive SE constructions never occupy the subject position: rather, their behavior shows that the pre-verbal phrase is actually a topicalized complement, be it in EP or in 16th-17th century Portuguese, despite triggering verbal agreement. Cavalcante & Paixão de Sousa (2009), however, did not examine the contrast between passive sentences and active sentences without clitics, which we do in this paper.

Conclusion: Two main conclusions are drawn from this paper: first, the change in the syntax of subjects in Portuguese after the 18th century happens regardless of the status of the subjects as external or internal arguments. Second, this change does not affect non-subjects. This presents important consequences to the understanding of the change from 16th-17th century Portuguese to Modern European Portuguese and to the understanding of the syntax of subjects in Modern European Portuguese. As regards the diachronic aspects, our work consolidates the analyses of Galves et al. 2005, Galves & Paixão de Sousa (2010) and Paixão de Sousa (2004) to the effect that the change from 16th-17th century Portuguese to Modern European Portuguese is fundamentally a change in subject-position. More specifically, the change consists in the upsurge of a grammar in which there is a pre-verbal position exclusive for subjects. As regards Modern European Portuguese, this impacts two much-debated issues in recent literature: first, it provides statistical support to the analyses according to which pre-verbal subjects in EP do not occupy a clause-external topic position, as argued by Pilar Barbosa in many papers (cf. a.o Barbosa 2000) but rather, a

clause-internal subject position (Costa & Galves, 2002; Costa & Duarte, 2003). Second, it provides further evidence to the analyses according to which the internal arguments of "passive-SE" constructions do not occupy the subject position, but rather, a topic position (Raposo & Uriagereka, 1996). In conclusion, our paper reveals the crucial role of the diachronic relation between topics and subjects in the grammatical change that originated Modern European Portuguese, and proposes that the dynamics of this change may elucidate important discussions on the syntax of the current language.

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