



**DIACHRONIC CHANGES IN ROMANIA NOVA:  
LOSS OF CLITICS, LOSS OF FREE INVERSION AND EMERGENCE OF  
TOPIC SUBJECT CONSTRUCTIONS<sup>1</sup>**

**MUDANÇAS DIACRÔNICAS NO ROMANIA NOVA:  
PERDA DE CLÍTICOS, PERDA DE INVERSÃO LIVRE E APARECIMENTO DE  
CONSTRUÇÕES DE TÓPICO-SUJEITO**

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**Abstract:** Brazilian Portuguese (BP) is changing from a [+NULL SUBJECT] language to a [-NULL SUBJECT] language, triggered by the impoverishment of its agreement inflection. Some Brazilian linguists, supported by the macro-parametric view, started to raise the hypothesis that other properties of the Null Subject Parameter, such as free inversion, would also change. Kato (2000), studying free inversion in other Romance languages, realized that inversion was favored by the presence of clitics. Her conclusion was that what triggered the loss of inversion in BP was the change in its clitic system and not just in the loss of null subjects. Kato & Ordóñez (2019) claim that another syntactic change, the appearance of topic subjects, had the impoverishment of the clitic system also as its trigger. The present paper refines the previous works making them parts of a single diachronic change in BP, from a subject-prominent language to a topic and subject prominent language which, in Miyagawa's (2010), terms, instead of having just phi-features percolating from C to T, BP would license either phi-features or discursive-features percolating to T. We also claim that languages which percolate discourse features to T are those which use nouns instead of pronouns, there existing mixed languages like Brazilian Portuguese (Kato 2021).

**Keywords:** Brazilian Portuguese; Null Subjects; Free inversion; Clitic system; Clitic left dislocation; Topic Subjects; Discourse prominence

**Resumo:** O português brasileiro (PB) passou de uma língua [+SUJEITO NULO] para uma língua [-SUJEITO NULO], o que foi desencadeado pelo empobrecimento da sua flexão de concordância. Alguns linguistas brasileiros, ancorados em uma visão macroparamétrica, levantaram a hipótese de que outras propriedades do Parâmetro do Sujeito Nulo, tais como a inversão livre, também mudariam. Kato (2000), em um estudo sobre a inversão livre em outras línguas românicas constatou que a inversão era favorecida pela presença de clíticos. A conclusão é que o que desencadeou a perda da inversão no PB foi a mudança no sistema de clíticos e não apenas a perda dos sujeitos nulos. Kato e Ordóñez (2019) defendem que outra mudança – o surgimento do tópico-sujeito – também foi desencadeada pelo empobrecimento do sistema de clíticos. O presente trabalho refina as propostas dos trabalhos anteriores, tornando-os partes de uma mudança diacrônica maior única, de uma língua de sujeito proeminente para uma língua de sujeito e de tópico

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proeminentes, em que em lugar de ter apenas traços-phi percolando de C para T, o PB teria passado a ter também traços discursivos percolando para T. Isso seria possível em línguas que usam nomes em lugar de pronomes, sendo o Português Brasileiro uma língua mista (Kato 2021).

**Palavras-chave:** Português Brasileiro; Sujeito nulo; Inversão livre; Sistema de clínicos; Deslocamento clítico à esquerda; Tópico-sujeito; Proeminência discursiva

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1. *Two main morphological changes in Brazilian Portuguese in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many researchers thought that European Portuguese (EP) and Brazilian Portuguese (BP) differed in their phonology and lexicon, but not in their syntax. With the introduction in Brazil of Variation Theory and Parameter Theory, linguists started to pay attention on morphology and syntax, starting with synchronic data, but going also back in time into diachronic texts. If for the variationist, finding variation in present day data triggers questions on *when*, *why*, and *how* it started in the past, for the generativist working with parameters, the question was what properties had changed.

One major change detected in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by both sociolinguists and generativists was the impoverishment of the verbal agreement system in BP (GALVES, 1993; DUARTE, 1995). According to Kato (1999), with this impoverishment, BP replaces pronominal agreement/inflection (-o; -s; -Ø) by free weak pronouns *ô*, *cê*, *ei*, while maintaining the strong pronouns (*eu*, *você*, *ele*) in a doubling construction. The consequence is the change in the Null Subject Parameter (NSP), with the loss of referential NSs (KATO, 1999).

	19 <sup>th</sup> EP and BP	20 <sup>th</sup> BP	
(1) <sup>4</sup>	a. Fal- <b>o</b> inglês.	a'. <b>Ô</b> falo inglês.	a." <b>Eu</b> , ô falo inglês.
	b. Fala- <b>s</b> inglês.	b'. <b>Cê</b> fala inglês.	b." <b>Você</b> , cê fala inglês.
	c. Fala- <b>Ø</b> inglês.	c'. <b>Ei</b> fala inglês.	c." <b>Ele</b> , ei fala inglês.
	d. Fala- <b>mos</b> inglês	d'. <b>A gente</b> fala inglês	d." <b>A gente</b> , a gente fala inglês.
	e. Fala- <b>is</b> inglês	e'. <b>Cês</b> falam inglês.	e." <b>Vocês</b> , ceis falam inglês.
	f. Fala- <b>m</b> inglês	g'. <b>Eis</b> falam inglês .	g." <b>Eles</b> , eis falam inglês.

In the macro-parametric view, a parameter is not characterized by changing only one property, but more than one property (cf. Rizzi 1982). Therefore, it is expected that the loss of NSs will lead to other changes. The first candidate is the loss of free inversion, which is found in EP. Brazilian linguists observed that the loss of VXS order was partial in BP (see KATO & TARALLO, 1988, KATO, 2000; BERLINCK, 2000 *inter alia*). Inversion was not lost with existential and unaccusative verbs preserving the VS order. This raised the possibility of the existence of languages that meet the properties of one parameter only partially.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, there was also evidence that not only BP, but Romance in general, had V(X)S order constrained by the number and the phonological weight of its complements. In this respect, in this paper we will show that the inversion was a grammatical

<sup>4</sup> The second column has weak pronouns, using the phonetic transcription, instead of the written form, which is normally represented as identical to the strong ones.

<sup>5</sup> See Kato (2000), who proposed that BP was a partial NS language. More recently, it has also been proposed that there are partial NS languages (HOLMBERG, 2005; HOLMBERG & SHEEHAN, 2010), among which Finnish, Hebrew and BP.

phenomenon in part due to the possibility of NSs, and in part due to the availability of clitics. BP was particularly interesting as the clitic paradigm has also been impoverished, losing the third person proclitics (see CYRINO, 1993; NUNES, 1993, 2019; PAGOTTO, 1993), which were replaced by free weak pronouns or by a null category – see Chart I.<sup>6</sup>

18 <sup>th</sup> Century BP clitics			20 <sup>th</sup> Century BP clitics/pronouns		
Accusative	Dative	Reflexive	Accusative	Dative	Reflexive
me	me	me	me	me	me
te	te	te	te/você	te/para você	te/se
o/lo	lhe	se	Ø	pra ele/ela	Ø

**Chart I:**  
**Accusative, dative and reflexive clitics in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in BP**  
**(KATO, 1993)**

Similar to the impoverishment of inflection, doubling is easily found with the impoverishment of clitics, as seen in example (2). (see KATO, 2000).

- (2) a. Eu (**te**) amo **você**. (Caetano Veloso) BP (20<sup>th</sup> Century)  
 b. (**Me**) põe **eu** em cima. (child language) BP (20<sup>th</sup> Century)  
 c. Eu (Ø)-vi **ele**. (spoken BP) BP (20<sup>th</sup> Century)

## 2. The emergence of Topic Subject constructions in spoken Brazilian Portuguese

While diachronic studies revealed these changes in the pronominal systems in BP, projects working on spoken Brazilian Portuguese revealed the appearance of the so-called *Topic Subjects*, instances of which can be seen below.

- (3) a. O Valério cresceu o cabelo.  
 the Valerio grew his hair  
 ‘Valerio had his hair grow’  
 b. Crise na Argentina sobe dólar.  
 crisis in the Argentina raised the dollar  
 ‘The crisis in Argentina caused the dollar to go up.’
- (4) a. A revista ‘tá xerocando.  
 the magazine is xeroxing  
 ‘The magazine is being xeroxed.’  
 b. Esse prédio tá construindo desde o ano passado.  
 this building is building since the year last  
 ‘this building is being built since last year’

The common idea among authors working with topic subjects is that BP is partially becoming a topic prominent language, or a discourse-oriented language,<sup>7</sup> or a mixed type of language.

<sup>6</sup> Kato (1993) proposes that the Null Object in BP, contrary to a variable in EP, is a null clitic. Nunes (2019), on the other hand, proposes that the null clitic represents object agreement.

<sup>7</sup> See Pontes (1977); Kato (1989); Galves; (1993); Decat (1993) ,Negrão(1999); Negrão & Viotti, (2000); Duarte & Kato (2008); Nunes (2008); Modesto (2008), *inter alia*.

## II. THE ANALYSIS

This analysis section is organized as follows:

- a) Section 1 reviews Kato's (2000) article on free inversion in Romance and shows that it is constrained by the weight of the predicate. In this respect, BP is particularly sensitive to this constraint, as it lost part of its clitics, which are replaced by free pronouns. We propose an explanation of these effects following Cinque (1993).
- b) Section 2 presents the phenomenon of *Topic Subjects* and shows, after Kato & Ordoñez (2017, 2019), that this innovative construction is also due to the impoverishment of the paradigm of clitics, not only with the loss of NSs.<sup>8</sup> We compare BP with Dominican Spanish, which also changed in the NS Parameter, but preserved its entire clitic paradigm, and then we see that it has not been affected, entirely, or partially, by the loss of free inversion, and has not acquired the innovative Topic Subject construction.
- c) Section 3 tries to characterize Topic prominent, or Discourse-oriented languages, vs Subject prominent languages with regard to pronominal vs nominal referential systems (Kato 2021);
- d) Section 4 presents Kato and Ordoñez (2019) proposal to deal with the derivation of sentences containing *topic subjects* vs *clitic left dislocation* using Miyagawa's feature percolation hypothesis.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. Restricted V(X)S order in Romance

#### 1.1. Brazilian Portuguese vs EP

Several empirical studies show that the predicted V(X)S order in prototypical NS languages is constrained in BP by the number of arguments of the verb<sup>10</sup>. The verbs that accept inversion today in BP are only the unaccusatives, with only informational restrictions as shown in the contrasts below.

- |  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
| (5) a. Chegou o trem.                        |   | BP  |
| arrived the train                            | 'The train arrived.'                            |     |
| b. Dormiu o bebê.                            |   | %BP |
| slept the baby                               | 'The baby slept'                                |     |
| c. Assinou a carta o chefe do departamento.  |   | *BP |
| signed the letter the head of the department | 'The head of the department signed the letter.' |     |

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<sup>8</sup> Decat (1989) exceptionally deals with the phenomenon of Topic Subjects from a diachronic point of view, and relates their appearance to the change in the clitic system.

<sup>9</sup> Naves, Pilati & Salles (2013) also adopts Miyagawa's theory to analyze Topic Subjects, but their implementation is different.

<sup>10</sup> See Kato & Tarallo (1989), Kato (2000), Berlinck (2000). Kato (2002) and Kato & Duarte (2003) propose, however, that inversion in spoken BP was possible with V2 pattern, when a light element occupied the sentence initial position.

(i) **Ali** dorme o gato. (ii) **E se** salvou essa atitude sua.  
there sleeps the cat and himself saved this attitude his.  
'There the cat sleeps.' 'And this attitude of his saved himself.'

Pilati (2006) and Butters & Bonfin Duarte (2012) also support the V2 condition for VS order.

- d . Enviou a carta a todos o presidente da firma. \*\*BP  
 sent a letter to everyone the president of the company  
 ‘The president of the company sent a letter to everyone.’

But Kato (2000) observed that the mono-argumental restriction on unaccusatives was not peculiar to BP. Thus, Bentivoglio & D ‘Introno (1978) showed that Spanish inversion is found more easily when the objects are clitics. There is a clear contrast between postverbal subjects in which the object is a clitic and when it is a phrase.

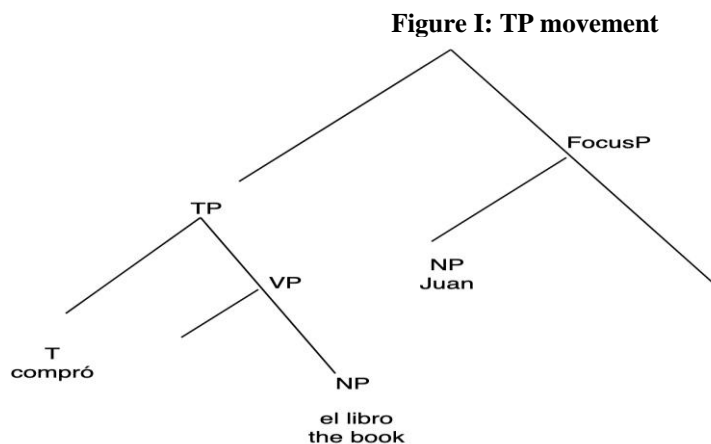
- (6) a. Lo instaló Esteban.  
 it installed Esteban ‘Esteban installed it.’  
 b. ?Instaló el calentador Esteban. ‘Installed the heater Esteban.’
- (7) a. Quería hacerla Juan.  
 wanted do-it John ‘John wanted to do it.’  
 b. ?Quería hacer la tarea Juan  
 wanted to do the homework Juan

The same is found **in Italian** (BENINCA & SALVI, 1988):

- (8) a. L’ha mangiata la mamma.  
 It-has eaten the mother  
 ‘The mother has eaten it.’  
 b. ?Há mangiato la torta la mamma.  
 Has eaten the pie the mother  
 ‘The mother has eaten the pie.’

In order to understand why such restriction exists we have to review the analysis of postverbal subjects in these contexts. Zubizarreta (1998) and Gallego (2005) proposed that the order VOS in Romance could result from a general predicate movement containing the object as in (7). This would be a prosodically motivated movement. Because the Spanish verb contains tense the movement of the verb contains the tense projection.

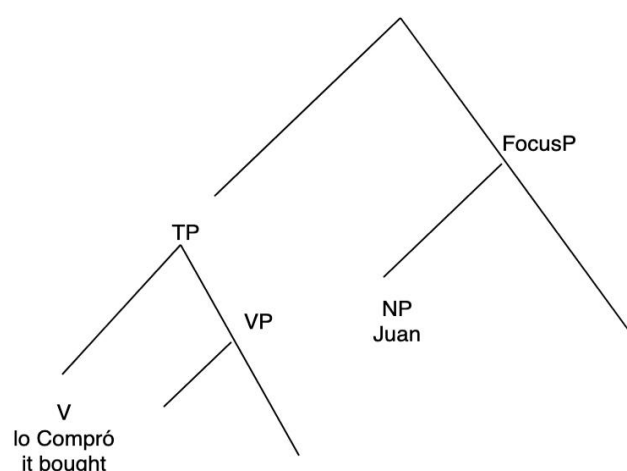
- (9) a. ??Compró el libro Juan.  
 Bought the book Juan



Under this analysis, the TP containing the verb and the object move above the focus position of the subject. This syntactic analysis can provide an interesting way to understand why the TP with an overt object creates a prosodic conflict with the focus subject. Under the algorithm for stress assignment proposed by Cinque (1993), the nominal XP most embedded in the structure should receive sentential stress<sup>11</sup>. The NP object *la tarea* 'homework' should receive the stress of the sentence in (9). However, the focus on the postverbal subject NP overrides such sentential stress rule. There is a conflict between focus assignment and stress assignment rules of the sentence. However, when the TP raising contains a clitic, such prosodic conflict does not arise since the clitic constitutes a head attached to the verb, and there is no embedding with overt material in it on the right of the verb. This is represented below:

(10) Lo compró Juan

Figure 2: TP-raising with clitics

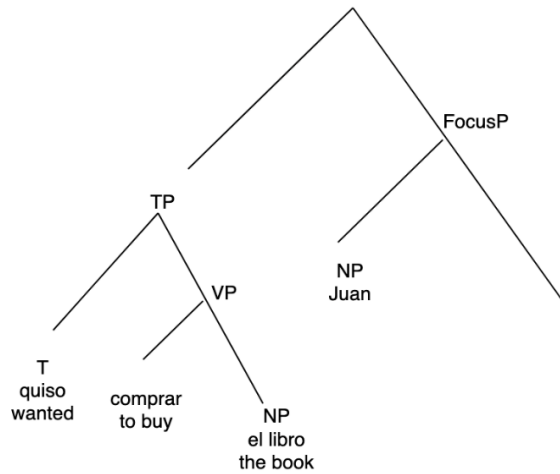


From this perspective, transitive verbs with clitics can appear with these postverbal focus subjects because there is no overt XP object embedded in the TP.<sup>12</sup> This proposal needs to be taken in tandem with the proposal that allows subjects to stay post-verbally in a focus position in the languages in question. This is permitted when the EPP can be satisfied by strong inflection. Thus, it is allowed in Italian and Spanish and EP. Since the strong inflection in BP is getting lost, such requirement is not met. Therefore, BP lost its post-verbal subjects with transitive verbs, because of two concomitant conditions: It lost part of its clitic paradigm making it more likely to create a prosodic conflict; and also, because agreement is not strong enough to sustain a subject in postverbal focus position. Observe that only NP's do account for this constraint. Therefore, in a series of modal verbs no conflict occurs when clitics are involved. However, conflict arises with a final NP as shown below:

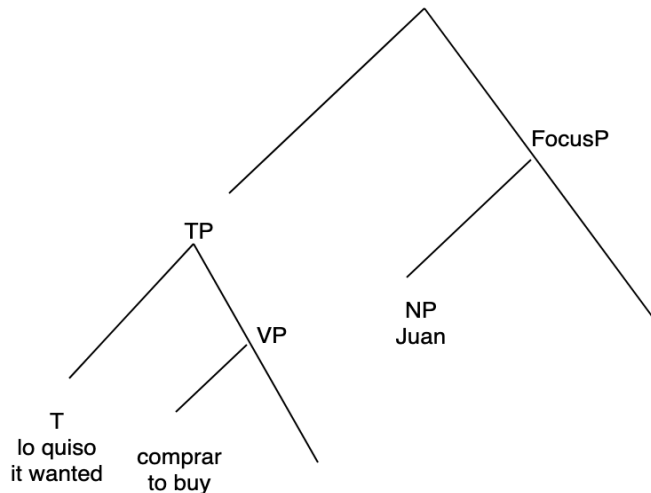
<sup>11</sup> It is crucial in our approach that only nominals count for this prosodic restriction.

<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, one can envision a rule in which the focus subject in postverbal position needs to be adjacent to the verb phonologically. In that case the absence of the overt subject as opposed to the clitic will satisfy such condition.

(11) ??quiso comprar el libro Juan.  
 wanted to buy the book Juan



(12) Lo quiso comprar Juan



While the sentences (9) and(11) are not totally ungrammatical, they are marginal and very infrequent<sup>13</sup>. However, the sentences with the clitic are well formed and very frequent. We assume that that kind of evidence of inversion with clitics is the one that leads children in Spanish, Italian to conclude that inversion is possible with transitive verbs. Since the paradigm is not attested in spoken BP with third person clitics, the evidence for inversion with transitive verbs is difficult to attest.<sup>14</sup>

This leaves the question of what to do with post-verbal subjects of unaccusative verbs, which are still permitted in contemporary BP. Kato (2002) has shown that

<sup>13</sup> Pilati (2017) points out that they are even possible in BP only with a locative subject or in presentational sentences. The evidence comes from written newspapers. As a matter of fact, this observation carries out in Spanish and Italian. V O S is more likely in presentational sentences in written registers. However, they are very rare in spoken language in general, except with clitics. We acknowledge that a full comparison of written and spoken language is needed to fully document this distinction. But we still think that the contrast needs to be accounted for and the analysis we propose accounts for it.

<sup>14</sup> But see Pilati for some interesting examples that involve a locative subject. We think these examples would fall under the same category of unaccusatives or existentials and would involve a locative. For transitive verbs and VOS see previous footnote.

unaccusative constructions in BP have been reanalyzed as existentials, with a null expletive and no agreement.

- (13) a. Chegaram os ovos. EP (Lit: 'There arrived the eggs)  
 b. Ø Chegou os ovos. BP (Lit: 'There arrived the eggs)

Therefore, an empty expletive is available. Observe that this is exactly what we find in languages like English for some unaccusative verbs and the overt expletive *there*.

## 1.2. The discursive function of SV and V(X)S sentences: before and after the change

The two changes: the loss of third person proclitics and the loss of null subjects lead to a change in the syntactic configuration of the discourse properties in BP. BP word order become more rigid. This will have consequences in how categorical andthetic sentences are expressed in BP with respect to subject and subject-like elements. According to Kuroda (1972) there are two kinds of sentences: the Aristotelian *categorical* sentence, which expresses a property or predication relation with an argument, and the *thetic* sentence, which expresses an event or state, without singling out an entity.

For Kato (1988), Martins (1994), and Kato & Martins (2016) Romance languages with null subjects distribute the categorical type *vs* the thetic type into SV(X) and V(X)S orders. Britto (2000) poses the following question: since BP is losing the V(X)S order (but see Pilati 2017), the way of expressing thetic sentences also changes. In BP the thetic pattern is now SV(X), and the categorical one manifests itself as doubling of the subject pronoun with a left dislocation as in (11)<sup>15</sup>. When there is no doubling the sentence is interpreted as thetic. Thus, the distribution of thetic and categorical functions changes from EP to BP and this is due to the changes in the clitic paradigm as we will see later.

- (14) - O que aconteceu? -Ligou a Joana . EP - A Joana ligou. BP  
 what happened? called the Joan the Joan called  
 (15) - O que houve com sua filha? - Sua filha ligou. EP - Sua filha, ela ligou. BP  
 what happened with your daughter your daughter, she called

Summing up thus far, Brazilian linguists first assumed that the partial loss of the VOS order (free inversion) was due to the partial loss of the NS. Kato (2000) reconsidered this first assumption and proposed that loss of the third person clitics was also the trigger that led to the partial loss of V(X)S order, a pattern prosodically conditioned; loss of referential null subjects cannot be the only reason for the lack of V (X) S order. The lack of V X S order was also due to the lack of clitics that could overcome the prosodic conflict that TP movement creates with respect to focus (see also Andrade and Galves 2014)<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, this partial loss of free inversion was proposed to cause the re-distribution of thetic sentences as SV(X) and of categorical sentences as Left Dislocated Structures. Subject with a doubling pronoun express a categorical sentence, while a subject with no doubling of a pronoun can indicate a thetic sentence.

<sup>15</sup> As pointed out by a reviewer, there is dialectal variation in this respect. It would be interesting to explore such variation by decomposing further this construction. We leave that aside in this paper.

<sup>16</sup> This loss of third person clitics led to the loss of inversion even in those examples where there are first and second person clitics. Thus, under such proposal the loss of 3<sup>rd</sup> person triggers shifted the whole BP grammar towards non-inversion, even when first and second person clitics are available. This is in some ways a familiar scenario in language shift.



## 2. The triggering factor in the emergence of topic-subjects

### 2.1. Topic-subjects vs Clitic Left Dislocation

The facts exposed earlier, namely the change in the clitic paradigm, bring us to a previous work of ours (KATO & ORDÓÑEZ, 2017, 2019). In that work we studied the emergence of the so-called topic-subject sentences in BP. The examples in b. are some of the topic-subject examples, which are recurrent in BP<sup>17</sup>, but ungrammatical in EP:

- |         |  |    |     |
|---------|--|----|-----|
| (16) a. | Ø Chove muito nessas florestas<br>rains a-lot in-these forests                 | BP | EP  |
|         | b. Estas florestas chovem muito. (Lit.: These forests rain a lot.)             | BP | *EP |
| (17) a. | Furou o pneu do Hamilton.<br>went-flat the tire of-the Hamilton                | BP | EP  |
|         | b. O Hamilton furou o pneu <sup>18</sup> . (Lit.: Hamilton had his tire flat.) | BP | *PE |
| (18) a. | Faltou sorte aos meus times.<br>lacked luck to my teams                        | BP | EP  |
|         | b. Meus times faltaram sorte. (Lit.: My teams lacked-3ppl luck.)               | BP | *EP |

In KATO & ORDÓÑEZ (2017, 2019), we modify the assumption in previous studies as in KATO & DUARTE (2008) about the relation between topic-subject constructions and the change in the Null Subject Parameter (NSP). Our claim is that null subjects cannot be the only factor responsible for the emergence of the topic subject constructions. We assume that, as in the case of loss of free inversion, topic-subject constructions are also the result of the loss of third person clitics<sup>19</sup>, and the consequent partial loss of clitic left dislocation (CLLD). Topic subject constructions replaced CLLD when clitics were not available. Thus, the combination of these two facts led to the eventual existence of topic subject constructions.

In the first place BP shows sensitivity to person in topic-subject constructions. Topic-subject constructions do not work with first and second persons, for which clitics are still allowed in BP.

- |         | Topic subjects                              | Clitic Left Dislocation   |
|---------|---|---|
| (19) a. | *Eu faltei sorte<br>I lacked-1ps luck       | b. Pra mim <b>me</b> faltou sorte.<br>to me DAT-1sg lack-3PS luck |
| (20) a. | *Nós faltamos sorte.<br>We lacked-1PPL luck | b. Pra nós <b>nos</b> faltou sorte<br>to us DAT-1ppl lacked luck  |

In those papers we proposed that one condition to have a topic-subject is the lack of third person clitics. Since first and second person clitics have been kept in BP, then it is natural that there are no topic-subject constructions involving first and second persons. Thus, the asymmetry that we see below between third person and first and second person has a natural explanation. If clitics are available, the result is CLLD and not a topic-

<sup>17</sup> A reviewer points out that there is dialectal variation in (16) and (17). So not all examples have the same status. This is quite interesting, and it indicates that probably a difference in terms of feature composition of the different possession structures could explain why this is so.

<sup>18</sup> We are leaving aside the causative interpretation in which Hamilton himself punctured the tire of his car.

<sup>19</sup> Pilati, Naves and Salles (2017) link the emergence of topic subject to differences in the properties of first and second person versus third person pronouns. This same conclusion can apply to the clitic system. Thus, their approach is compatible with ours.

subject construction. Also, it is important to point that EP, which has not lost any clitics, maintains CLLD for all persons and does not allow topic-subject constructions, contrary to BP:

- |  |    |                            |    |
|--|----|----------------------------|----|
| (21) a. Faltou sorte aos meus times.<br>Lacked luck to my teams                            | BP | and                        | EP |
| b. Aos meus times, faltou- <b>lhes</b> sorte <sup>20</sup><br>to my teams, lacked-DAT luck | EP | Clitic left dislocation    |    |
| c. Meus times faltaram sorte.<br>my teams lacked luck                                      | BP | Topic subject construction |    |

In KATO & ORDOÑEZ (2019), we showed, moreover, that sentences with null expletives and the corresponding topic-subject constructions are not discursively equivalent.<sup>21</sup> The example with a null expletive in (22A1) is presentative, or **thetic** while the corresponding topic-subject response in (23A2) is **categorical**, which replaced CLLD, in the absence of clitics.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (22) Q1 – O que aconteceu?                | (Lit.: What happened?)                    |
| A1 - Furou o pneu do Hamilton.            | (Hamilton's tire went flat) (Thetic)      |
| (23) Q2 - O que aconteceu com o Hamilton? | (What happened to Hamilton?)              |
| A2- O Hamilton furou o pneu.              | (Hamilton got a flat tire.) (Categorical) |

We can say, therefore, that the loss of third person clitics and the emergence of topic-subjects go together. Our hypothesis would be further corroborated if we find a language that differs minimally from BP in the clitic paradigm. This would be a language that has a similar loss of null subject properties but has kept the third person clitics. If topic-subjects are not possible in such a language, that means that the loss of third person clitics plays a crucial role. We will see below that Dominican Spanish (DS) is such a pair.

## 2.2. Lack of Topic Subjects in Dominican Spanish (DS)

As it was established by TORIBIO (1996) and KATO & ORDOÑEZ (2017) DS has modified its null subject properties. Despite the fact that DS lost the NS property, it has not acquired topic-subjects since its clitic system remained intact. Dominican Spanish uses CLLD for all contexts, and no topic-subject construction is possible as shown in the following contrasts<sup>22</sup>:

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| (24) a. * Estos bosques llueven mucho.      | (Topic Subjects) |
| b. A estos bosques <b>les</b> llueve mucho. | (CLLD)           |
| (25) a. *Mis equipos faltaron suerte.       | (Topic Subjects) |
| b. A mis equipos <b>les</b> faltó suerte.   | (CLLD)           |

<sup>20</sup> As pointed out by a reviewer, it is possible to have b without the clitic or empty clitic in BP. This is rather unexpected. We leave for future research what makes the clitic appear or not and whether this is an issue of register. We suspect both possibilities b) and c) are not in free variation in BP.

<sup>21</sup> On this respect, their study was based on Kato (2015).

<sup>22</sup> This examples in Spanish with clitics raise the issue on whether they have the same status of other dislocated XP. It is possible to think that these datives are in an inner XP position closer to Spec TP. We thank a reviewer for bringing this to our attention.

- (26) a. \*Estos relojes rompieron la aguja. (Topic Subjects)  
 b. A este relojes se les rompió la aguja. (CLLD)

### 3. The existence of *Topic-subjects* and *Topic and Subject prominent* languages

#### 3.1. The existence of phi-features in a language

We now return to the traditional proposal among Brazilian linguists that *Topic-subject* constructions result from the fact that BP is changing from a *Subject prominent* language to a *Topic and Subject prominent* language.

Kato (2021), using Japanese as a *Topic prominent* language, shows that this language has address forms, nominal in nature, instead of pronouns. To exemplify, the first person singular has several forms, depending on formality and whether male or female, women being always more formal than men.

(27)	English	Japanese	
	1 <sup>st</sup> /sing	1st sing formal female or male	1st sing male informal
	I	<i>watakushi</i> , <i>watashi</i> ,	<i>boku</i> , <i>ore</i> , <i>washi</i> etc
	2 <sup>nd</sup> /sing	2nd sing formal	2nd sing male informal
	you	<i>anata</i>	<i>kimi</i>

English, Spanish and EP have pronouns, while BP is a mixed type of language, with pronouns (1<sup>st</sup> and third), and nouns (second singular- *ocê*, *ocês*; and first plural; *a gente*):<sup>23</sup>

(28)	Brazilian Portuguese		
	1 <sup>st</sup> sing	<i>eu</i>	pronoun
	2 <sup>nd</sup> sing	<i>você</i>	N address form (triggers 3 <sup>rd</sup> p. sing agreement)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> sing	<i>ele/ela</i>	pronoun
	1 <sup>st</sup> pl	<i>a gente</i>	N (triggers 3 <sup>rd</sup> p. sing agreement)
	2 <sup>nd</sup> pl	<i>vocês</i>	N address form (triggers 3 <sup>rd</sup> p. pl agreement)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> pl	<i>eles/elas</i>	pronoun

Kato (2021) proposes that pronominal languages have phi-features, while languages with nominal referential expressions do not. Languages like BP, with both pronominal or nominal referential expressions, have phi-features in first and third persons, and no phi-features in second persons and first person plural ones, triggering the ‘default’ third person agreement.

She also proposes that pronominal languages are *Subject Prominent* languages, while nominal languages are *Topic Prominent* languages. BP would be a mixed type with the two constructions below, one in the pattern of a *Subject prominent* language, with a null expletive, and the other with a *Topic-subject* construction.

- (29) a. Ø chove muito nestas cidades  
 ‘It rains a lot in these towns.’  
 b. Estas cidades chovem muito.  
 these towns rain<sub>3rdpl</sub> a lot

<sup>23</sup> All languages have address forms but independent of the existence of pronouns.

### 3.2. Deriving *Topic-subject* constructions using the “feature inheritance” model

We will use Miyagawa’s (2010) “feature inheritance” proposal to show the difference in derivation between a language like BP and one like DS, as the latter uses the A’-position to place the raised element in a CLLD construction.

Miyagawa follows Chomsky (2005) and assumes that  $\phi$ -features are not merged in T but are merged in C. From C they are inherited by T during the derivation. With this formulation, he proposes to formally translate Li & Thompson’s (1976) functional typology of topic prominent languages vs. subject-prominent languages. According to Miyagawa, not only agreement features can be inherited by T, but also discursive features, like topic. This allows the possibility of mixed languages that can have both types of features inherited by T.

- (30) a.  $C, \phi \rightarrow T \phi \dots$  (agreement-prominent language – e.g. English)  
 b.  $C, \delta \rightarrow T\delta \dots$  (discourse-prominent language – e.g. Japanese)  
 c.  $C, \delta, \phi \rightarrow T \delta, \phi$  (mixed type of language – e.g. Bantu languages, BP)

In agreement-prominent languages, like English, what takes a constituent to Spec-T is what agrees with the verb, irrespectively of the discursive role.

- (31) a. Hamilton has won the race. (categorical)  
 b. A German won the race. (thetic)  
 c. In these forests, it rains a lot (categorical)  
 d. It rains a lot in these forests. (thetic)

In a Topic Prominent or a Discourse Prominent language, on the other hand, it is an argument with a discursive role that determines what obeys the EPP. If the sentence is categorical in Japanese the topic DP is marked *-wa* (=Topic) whereas if the sentence is not categorical the subject-DP is marked *-ga*, the nominative suffix.

- (32) a. [Hamilton-**wa**/<sub>TOP</sub> kiosso-o kata. (Categorical) Japanese  
 Hamilton-  $\delta$  race –accus won  
 b. [Aru doitsugin-**ga**] kiosso-o kata. (Thetic) Japanese  
 a German- nom race-accus won

We propose that BP is a mixed type of language, like members of the Bantu family.<sup>24</sup>

- (33) a.  $\emptyset$  Chove- $\phi$  muito nestas florestas. (Thetic)  
 b. Estas florestas chovem -  $\delta, \phi$  muito.(Categorical)

But the topic-subject example (34a) makes it clear that when the discursive topic feature is inherited by T, the  $\phi$ -feature has also to be inherited. Otherwise we would have a different construction in which only the  $\phi$ -feature is inherited by T and the DP with topic function is merged outside TP, in a higher position,  $\alpha$  in Miyagawa’s proposal. This would be a construction in EP and in DS.

<sup>24</sup> – See also Avelar & Galves (2013) in their study of Bantu and BP.

- (34) a. [ $\alpha$ P Nessas florestas- $\delta$  [TP chove- $\phi$  muito]] EP  
           these forests                      rain3PSG a lot
- b. [ $\alpha$ P A estos bosques- $\delta$  [ TP **les** llueve- $\phi$  mucho.]] DS  
           in these forests 3ps.cl rains a lot  
           (Lit.: those forests there rains a lot)

Therefore, according to this view, both languages have the topic and CLLD in an external position which we call  $\alpha$ P. However, T can inherit the discourse feature from C in BP, but not in DS. The reason for this contrast is that discourse features percolate to T only when clitics counterparts do not exist. We refer the reader to our previous papers to explain how this mechanism works.

### III CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have shown that the loss of third person clitics plays a crucial role in two different important changes that occurred in BP: the loss of subject inversion with transitive verbs and the emergence of the topic-subject constructions. This loss of third person clitics was concomitant to the impoverishment of verbal inflection. Little attention had been paid to this loss of clitics to explain such changes. Therefore, we emphasize the crucial role it played.

We also show how language change occurs as a consequence of two different morphological changes interacting with each other: impoverishment of verbal inflection and loss of third person clitics<sup>25</sup> (see also Pilati, Naves and Salles 2012). Both changes had to occur in order to obtain the final output. DS shows that the loss of null subject is not sufficient to explain the emergence of topic-subjects; DS is losing its null subject properties, but it has kept its third person clitics and no topic subjects are available. Finally, the lack of inversion in transitive verbs occurs first because third person clitics start to disappear. This is due to a prosodic constraint on overt complements when VP raises. This triggers the final loss of postverbal subjects.

Finally, BP word order became very restricted and the mapping of word order with discourse also changed. Topic subject can serve as a categorical sentence, as clitic-left dislocations in DS and EP. In order to establish why topic subjects must be categorical we adopted Miyagawa's theory of discourse feature percolation from C to T.

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<sup>25</sup> See also Pilati, Naves and Salles (2017) for the idea that there is a split in the pronominal system of BP. Their proposal is based on the referential differences of first, second versus third person.

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