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Sociolinguistics as a powerful tool to follow the course of a parametric change

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Abstract

This paper presents a new contrastive analysis of the expression of referential pronominal subjects in European Portuguese (EP) and Brazilian Portuguese (BP), based on two recent samples, recorded in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, in 2009-2010, according to the same social stratification. The results reinforce EP's status of a "consistent" Null Subject Language (NSL) (Roberts and Holmberg, 2010) and allow to follow the change in course in BP by offering answers to the empirical problems posed by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968), particularly those related to the constraints and to the embedding of the change. Inherently human referents have been the most remarkable feature in the process, since 2nd person overt subjects lead the change and reveal an almost complete stage. The slower course of the change with 3rd person referents confirms the role of animacy in the process: [+human/+animate] subjects are preferably overt, whereas [-animate] subjects show more resistance in spite of a significant rise in the rate of overt pronouns when compared to a sample of the same speech community recorded in 1992. A multivariate analysis of 3rd person in both varieties points out the same structural relevant factors constraining overt/null subjects: the structural pattern (function of the antecedent), the cluster of semantic features of the referent (animacy and specificity) and the structure of the Complementizer Phrase (CP). The comparison allows to claim that the multivariate analysis is a powerful instrument to understand the internal factors controlling [+/- prodrop] systems. Even though rates of overt subjects are significantly higher in BP, already outnumbering null subjects in every structural environment (contrary to what is found for EP), Relative Weights obtained reveal the same effects in both varieties. Moreover, the analysis reveals some important evidence of the embedding of the change, in the present case, supporting the hypothesis of the resetting of the Parameter value by BP – from a NSL to a non-NSL.

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Maria Eugenia L. Duarte

1 Introduction

The aims of this paper are (i) to present a recent contrastive analysis of the expression of referential pronominal subjects in European Portuguese (EP) and Brazilian Portuguese (BP), showing that the parametric change in progress attested in the speech of Rio de Janeiro by Duarte (1995; 2000) and confirmed in other investigations carried out in many regions of the country proceeds in every relevant structural environments characterizing Null Subject Languages of the Romance group, namely Italian, Spanish and EP; (ii) to show that the combination of the theoretical framework as well as the methodology of Sociolinguistics with the grammatical descriptions of the properties related to the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) is a powerful tool to identify the internal factors that show more resistance to the change in progress, to predict the course of the change and to explain the emergence of new features, incompatible with Null Subject systems, that appear in the system in a non-accidental way.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the what is considered to be the trigger of the parametric change in course in BP, brief theoretical assumptions and the methodology. The results of the multivariate contrastive analysis appear in Section 3; Section 4 brings some evidence of the “embedding” of the change in BP; some concluding remarks appear in Section 5.

2 The Background, Some Theoretical Assumptions and Methodology

Table 1 shows the significant reduction undergone by BP inflectional verb paradigm:

Person	Singular	Plural
1st	Eu trabalho	Nós trabalhamos A gente trabalha
2nd	Tu trabalha(s) Você trabalha	Vós trabalhais Vocês trabalha(m)
3rd	Ele / Ela trabalha	Eles / Elas trabalha(m)

Table 1: BP inflectional verb paradigm (verb *trabalhar* “to work”).

Due to contacts during colonization, the apocope of 2nd person singular <-s> associated with the conservative pronoun *tu* (you) and 2nd and 3rd person plural denasalization and reduction of the diphthong [ãw] (orthographic <-am>) with the loss of the posterior glide, which can eliminate the distinctive 3rd plural inflectional ending of diphthong [ãw] (orthographic <-am>, with the loss of the posterior glide, which can eliminate the distinctive 3rd plural inflectional ending a variable process very well described by Scherre and Naro (2003), among many others, can be pointed out as the first trigger to the inflectional impoverishment. The case of <-s> deletion is a widespread phenomenon in the areas where *tu* is used for second person reference; as for the diphthong reduction, this is subject to social factors as well as to monitoring of the speech. The situation has been aggravated by the full grammaticatization of two nominal expressions: *a gente* (literally “the people”) entered the pronominal paradigm in competition with conservative *nós* (we), and *você*, from the former address form *Vossa Mercê* (Your Grace) became another 2nd person pronoun for singular; its plural form *vocês* has completely replaced the extinct *vós* (you) for 2nd plural (see Lopes and Brocardo 2016).

Today, *você* covers a large part of the territory as the only 2nd person singular and is also used in variation with *tu* in some areas of the South, North and North-East of Brazil (Scherre et al 2015). And *a gente* is by far the most frequent 1st person plural pronoun all over the country. Both new

pronouns, due to their nominal origin, occur with the unmarked 3rd person singular (*you work, a person works*), which contributed to further the “impoverishment” of BP verbal paradigm that may exhibit only three (sometimes four) distinct endings.¹

Considering that “consistent” NSLs (Roberts and Holmberg 2010) exhibit rich inflection, which may include two syncretisms and a zero ending, it is no surprise that BP has reset the value of the NSP, and, in spite of the fact that generativists assume that the change is abrupt, we know that more than the origin (or the trigger) of a change, it is its propagation that interests in the study of a change in process (Labov 1994). In BP, the semantic feature of the referent and the function of the antecedent have proven to be extremely important. The change affected inherently human referents (2nd and 1st persons) more quickly and was slower with 3rd person, because of the interaction of animacy and specificity of the referents (Cyrino, Duarte and Kato 2000); an antecedent in a different function, distant or in relation of anti c-command favors an overt subject more quickly than an antecedent in a c-command relation with the subject under analysis.

The data analyzed come from four samples recorded in 2009-2010 in two neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro (Copacabana and Nova Iguaçu) and Lisbon (Oeiras and Cacém), comprising a total of 72 speakers stratified according to age, years of school attendance and gender (available at www.corporaport.ufrj.br). Only referential 1st, 2nd and 3rd person anaphoric subjects are considered in the analysis presented here. Sentences expressing contrast or emphasis and the second member of coordinated structures with the same subject have been excluded from the corpus analyzed, since the first must be overt and the latter can be null in most languages. The linguistic factors considered include person, distinctive inflectional verb ending, tense/mood, the structural patterns, the type of clause (which takes into account the structure of CP) and the semantic features of 3rd person referent. The multivariate analysis used Goldvarb-X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte and Smith 2005).

3 The Analysis

We collected 2040 data for EP and 2216 BP. The first run for each variety confirmed our expectations regarding the status of EP as a consistent NSL and the progress of the change in BP. Figure 1 shows the distribution of null subjects for both varieties according to age groups:

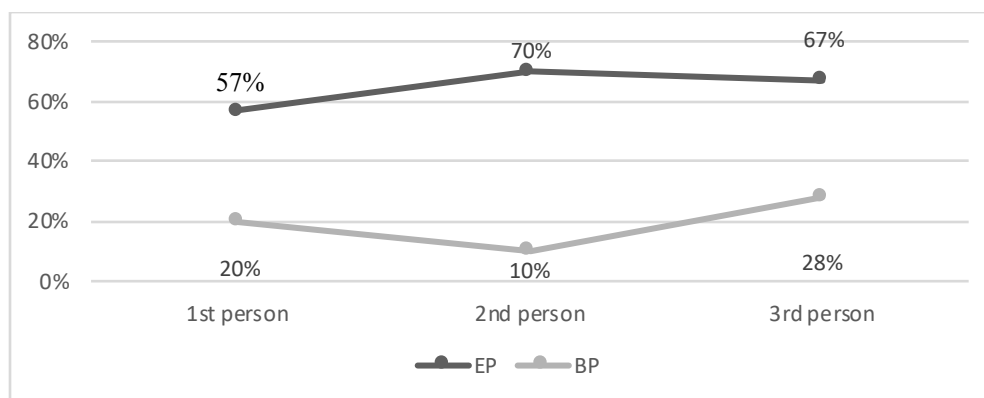


Fig. 1. Null (vs overt) pronominal subjects according to person in EP and BP.

When we compare such results with Duarte’s (1995) findings for Rio de Janeiro community, we attest what could be considered a completed change for 2nd person, with the same 10% of null subjects, which are occur particularly in Yes/No questions, also found in non-null subject systems (*Know that man?*). 1st and 3rd persons show a decrease of null subjects in the lapse of about 16 years separating both samples: an average 25% for 1st and 38% for 3rd in the 1990s. This paper will show

¹EP has both *you* and *a person*. However *you* and the original 2nd person *tu* are in complementary distribution with respect to familiar relations or different degrees of courtesy. As for *a person*, its use is still rare as compared with conservative *us*. The fact that *you* is rarely null and *a person* still preserves its origin appearing as an NP, has lead Lopes and Brocardo (2016) to conclude that their grammaticization is still in course in EP.

the analysis for 3rd person only. Goldvarb-X selected the following structural factors for EP and BP **in the same order**: the antecedent position, the cluster of the semantic features of the referent and the structure of CP (a more refined group than the type of clause). The age group has not been selected, but the distribution of 3rd person subjects across the three groups in Table 2 reinforces the stability of EP and confirms the change in progress in BP, attested in Duarte (1995).

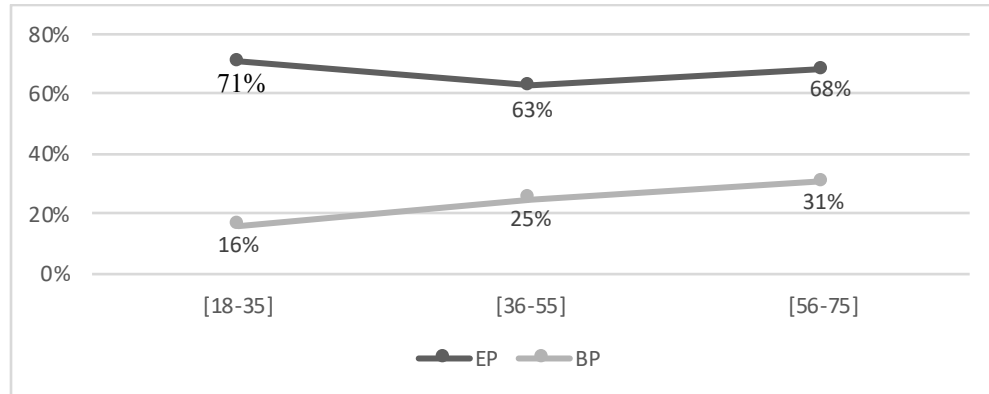


Fig. 2 Null (vs overt) 3rd person pronominal subjects according to age groups in EP and BP.

Let's now turn our attention to the first group selected, which refers to the structural patterns, illustrated in the following examples for both EP and BP:

Pattern A: The antecedent in main clause c-commands the subject in the subordinate clause.

- (1) a. [*O pobre*]_i continua com essa mentalidade porque \emptyset_i só pensa nele. (EP)
 the poor continues with this mentality because only thinks in-him
 'The poor guy keeps this mentality because he only thinks of himself.'
- b. [*Os pais*]_i passam aos filhos o que *eles*_i têm, né? (BP)
 the parents pass to-the children what they have, right?
 'Parents transmit to their children what they know, see?'

Pattern B: The antecedent in a preceding subordinate clause does not c-command the subject in the following main clause.

- (2) a. Quando *ele*_i mudar \emptyset_i ainda vai estar mais um ano nesta escola. (EP)
 when he moves still is-going to-be more one year in-this school
 'When he moves, he is still going to stay one more year in this school.'
- b. Se *ele*_i tem medo, alguma coisa *ele*_i fez. (BP)
 if he has fear some thing he did
 'If he is afraid, he must have done something wrong.'

Pattern C: The antecedent is the subject in the immediately adjacent clause.

- (3) a. [*O dono*]_i é um amigo meu. \emptyset_i Tem tido problemas. (EP)
 the owner is a friend my has had problems
 'The owner is a friend of mine. He has had problems.'
- b. [*O ex-prefeito*]_i era mais preparado. *Ele*_i investia mais. (BP)
 the former-mayor was more prepared. He invested more
 'The former mayor had a better education. He invested more.'

Pattern D: The antecedent is in a different function.

- (4) a. Tinham medo d[*o pai*]_i porque \emptyset_i batia-lhes. (EP)
 had-3PP fear of the father because beat.PST them.CL
 'They were afraid of their father because he beat them.'

- b. Eu não posso ter sentado do lado de [*um cara bonitinho*];
 I not can have sat of-the side of a guy handsome
 sem saber que *ele*_i era superperigoso. (PB)
 without to-know that he was superdangerous
 ‘I cannot have been sat beside a handsome guy without noticing he was super-dangerous.’

- Pattern E: Between the antecedent and the subject there is one or more intervening clauses
 (5) a. Havia [*amigos meus*]_i, que jogavam à bola na rua. Eu não podia porque o meu
 was friends my that played the ball in-the street. I not could because the my
pai não deixava. Ø_i chamavam, mas eu não podia. (EP)
 father not let called-3PP but I not could
 ‘There were friends of mine that played ball in the street. I couldn’t because my father
 wouldn’t let me. They called me but I was not allowed to.’
 b. E *ele*_i tinha ido comprar bolas. Aí, não tinha as bolas que nós queríamos
 and he had gone to-buy balloons then not have the balloons that we wanted
*Ele*_i trouxe o dinheiro de volta. (PB)
 He brought the money of back
 ‘And he had left to buy some balloons. But there were not the ones we wanted. He brought
 the money back.’

The results can be seen in Table 2:

Antecedent	EP Input: 0.756			BP Input: 0.248		
	N / T	%	R. W.	N / T	%	R. W.
A (c-command)	78/83	94%	0.930	19/46	41%	0.765
B (no c-command)	13/14	93%	0.854	15/116	11,5%	0.197
C (in adjacent clause)	402/515	78%	0.588	225/586	38%	0.646
D (in another function)	77/153	50%	0.274	37/175	21%	0.428
E (distant)	66/183	36%	0.183	35/241	14,5%	0.330
	range		0.747	range		0.435
	Log likelihood = -44.136 Significance = 0.000			Log likelihood = -624.928 Significance = 0.000		

Table 2. Null (vs overt) 3rd person subjects according to the sentential pattern.

The percentages and the relative weights obtained for EP reflect the exact behavior of a “consistent” NSL of the Romance group: a null subject is the unmarked choice regardless of c-command between a subject and its antecedent, reaching 94% and 93% respectively. Same function is, therefore, crucial, which is also confirmed when the antecedent is in an adjacent clause (78%). Notice that even in less favorable structural conditions – antecedent in another function or distant, EP still reaches 50% and 36% of null subjects. Relative weights give us a picture of the strength of patterns A and B in relation to patterns D and E.

When examine the results for BP, the scenario is completely different: we see a system in change and identify that the first significant loss is the possibility of identification of a null subject in a non-c-command relation with its antecedent. Percentage as well as relative weight, 11,5% and 0.197 are the lowest, followed by patterns D and E (0.428 and 0.330, respectively). As expected, patterns C and A still show some resistance, but already announce the preference for overt subjects (38% and 41% of null subjects). The ranges for both varieties reinforce the progress of the change in BP.

The examples that follow illustrate the cluster of semantic features of the referent:

[-animate / -specific]

- (5) a. Nós temos de pensar que [*a escola*]_i não é uma ilha. Ø_i Está dentro de um contexto. (EP)
 we have to think that the school not is an island is inside of a context
 ‘We have to think that the school is not an island. It is inserted in a context.’

- b. [*Escola pública*]_i nunca é boa opção porque *elas* são ruins. (BP)
 school public never is good option because they are bad
 ‘Public schools are never a good option because they are bad.’

[-animate / +specific]

- (6) a. Portanto, [*a globalização*]_i existe. \emptyset_i Já é uma realidade. (EP)
 therefore the globalization exists already is a reality
 ‘Therefore globalization does exist. It is a reality.’
 b. [*O sistema público*]_i é totalmente diferente de empresas privadas. \emptyset_i não funciona da mesma maneira. (BP)
 the system public is totally different of companies private not works of-the same way
 ‘The public system is completely different from private companies. It does not work the same way.’

[+animate / -specific]

- (7) a. Quando [*as crianças*]_i são deixadas sem orientação, \emptyset_i acabam por escolher caminhos que não são os mais correctos. (EP)
 when the children are left without orientation end-up by to-choose ways that not are the most correct
 ‘When children are left without some orientation, they end up choosing wrong directions.’
 b. [*O juiz*]_i tem que atender a gente. Se você bater o pé, *ele* tem que te atender. (BP)
 the judge has to attend the people if you beat the foot he has to you-CL attend
 ‘The judge has to attend us. If you insist, he has to attend you.’

[+animate / +specific]

- (8) a. Estimulo a independência d[*o meu filho*]_i, \emptyset_i Não é um miúdo, pelo contrário.(EP)
 stimulate-1PS the independence of the my son not is-3PS a child on-the contrary
 ‘I stimulate my son’s independence. He is no longer a child.’
 b. [*Minha mãe*]_i sempre foi professora. Ela_i foi diretora de uma escola do Estado há vinte e cinco anos. (BP)
 my mother always was teacher She was principal of a school of-the State there-are twenty and five years
 ‘My mother has always been a teacher. She has been the principal of a State school for twenty five years.’

Table 3 shows the distribution of the data according to the cluster of semantic features:

	EP Input: 0.756			BP Input: 0.248		
FEATURES	N / T	%	R.W.	N / T	%	R. W.
-ani/-spec	12/12	100%	---	7/12	58%	0.863
-ani/+spec	137/142	96,5%	0.942	73/173	42%	0.692
+ani/-spec	191/246	78%	0.562	62/191	32,5%	0.555
+ani/+spec	308/559	55%	0.307	189/803	23,5%	0,437
	<i>range</i>		0.635	<i>range</i>		0.426
	Log likelihood = -440.725 Significance = 0.000			Log likelihood = -624.928 Significance = 0.000		

Table 3. Null (vs overt) 3rd person subjects according to the semantic features.

Once again, we find the effect of animacy in the expression of overt pronouns in a null subject language. Non-animate referents associated with the feature [-specific] are categorically null and those associated with the feature [+specific] reach 96.5% of overt pronouns (five occurrences). In

fact, EP differs from Italian and Peninsular and South American and part of the Caribbean Spanish in this respect. These varieties do not have personal pronouns for [-animate] referents.² And if EP does allow such pronouns, their use is extremely rare though. Our five occurrences refer to “the globalization”, “the Brazilian soap operas”, “the colonial war”, “liberty and democracy” and “these courses”. Referents bearing a [+animate] feature can exhibit overt pronouns but, as shown in Table 2, the interaction with specificity plays an important role. The lowest rate for overt pronouns is found for [+animate/+specific] referents.

As for BP, the development of [-animate] pronouns can be seen as a first side effect of the change (together with the high rate for embedded subjects c-commanded by the subject in the main clause (two crucial properties of consistent NSLs). As expected, null subjects with [-animate] referents show more resistance, with 58% and 42% of occurrence, but it is clear that the system is halfway to overt pronouns. [+animate subjects] already reach 32,5% and 23,5% if associated with [-specific] and [+specific] referents. Again, the observation of the relative weights is extremely important to have a picture of the strength of animacy and specificity in the process. In fact we have a gradient when we examine the weights. And, once again, we can see that the range revealed for both varieties attests the weakening of BP, just like we observed for the antecedent function in Table 2.

The third factor group selected considers the structure of CP. Therefore, more than distinguishing root sentences from embedded sentences, we can group clauses according to the presence of a pronoun (relative, interrogative) in Specifier of the Complementizer Phrase, a complementizer (subordinate conjunctions) in the head of CP and no element in CP. Table 4 shows the relevance of such group.

	EP Input: 0.757			BP Input: 0.248		
CP	N / T	%	R.W.	N / T	%	R. W.
Empty CP	438/632	69%	0.578	252/901	28%	0.517
Element in C'	161/238	68%	0.422	74/217	34%	0.561
El. in Spec,CP	40/81	49%	0.179	05/61	08%	0.130
	<i>range</i>		0.399	<i>range</i>		0.426
	Log likelihood = -440.725 Significance = 0.000			Loglikelihood = -624.928 Significance = 0.000		

Table 4. Null (vs overt) 3rd person subjects according to the structure of CP.

The importance of this group is that it reveals that even in a consistent NSL, the presence of a relative or interrogative pronoun disfavors null subjects when compared to sentences headed by a complementizer or with an empty CP. Percentages and relative weights reinforce the two extremes, and they show us why the change with elements in Spec,TP is close to completion in BP.

4 Some evidence of the embedding of the change in BP

We have seen that important properties of consistent NSLs have been lost or are in the course of completion. Two other phenomena can be seen as evidence of the change. One of them is really expected: indeterminate subjects are usually null in NSLs, with the verb in the 3rd person plural or associated to the indefinite clitic SE. The first strategy excludes the speaker and the second may exclude or include the speaker.³ The analysis of the same samples attests that EP in fact prefers null 3rd person for exclusive reference (69%) and the clitic SE (31%), whereas, for inclusive reference, the clitic is by far the preferred strategy (83%). The use of 2nd person *tu* (you) and, more rarely, *você*

²This is what is attested by Marins (2009) for spoken Italian and by Soares da Silva (2011) for European Argentinian and Puerto Rican Spanish.

³For the use of exclusive and inclusive, see Holmberg and Phimsawat (2017). The authors replace the use of arbitrary and generic, respectively. They also refer to the semi-inclusive reference, which in English is represented by *we*, which necessarily includes the speaker. In EP and BP, there are two strategies, *nós* and *a gente* (*we*), the same pronouns showed in Table 1. As expected, EP prefers null 1st person plural (*nós*), whereas BP prefers overt *a gente*, both for definite and indeterminate reference.

(you), usually null, reach 17%.

BP also resorts to 3rd person plural for exclusive reference, but the competition between overt *eles* (they-MASC) and a null subject is already attested (37% and 51%, respectively). As for the clitic SE, the analysis confirms its obsolescence: only 4% have been attested for exclusive reference. The most frequent strategies to convey inclusive reference are the pronouns *você* and *tu* (subject to diatopic variation in the same way they are used for definite reference) reaching 91%. As for the clitic SE, we found 3%, confirming its disappearance.

The only unexpected structure noticed in BP but absent in EP is a null indeterminate subject with the verb in the 3rd person singular without any other mark. It can convey exclusive (8%) as well as inclusive (6%) reference. They are illustrated below:

- (9) a. Na televisão \emptyset fala muito isso.
 on-the television speak-3PS much that
 ‘They often talk about that on television.’
 b. Tem de ajudar o ser humano a se desenvolver... como ser humano.
 have-3PS to help the being human to himself develop as being human
 ‘One has (you have) to help the human being to develop himself as a human being.’

How can we find a good explanation for the development of such null generic subjects in a system that tends to fill referential subjects? Galves (1987) believes that it is the impossibility of identification of a null third person definite subject that allows this generic interpretation. More recently, both exclusive and inclusive 3rd person singular null generic subjects have been attributed to the status of BP as a “partial” NSL (Roberts and Homberg 2010, among others). If we take into account the fact that our quantitative analysis shows only 8% and 6% of such structures for both types of reference and that overt “they” and “you” are extremely frequent and can always be used to replace the null generic (the opposite is not true), and, finally, that this use is not increasing among younger groups, we can only think it is a marginal structure in a system undergoing change.

- (10) a. Na televisão (*eles*) falam muito isso.
 on-the television (they) speak-3PP much that
 ‘They often talk about that on television.’
 b. Você tem de ajudar o ser humano a se desenvolver... como ser humano.
 you have-2PS to help the being human to himself develop as being human
 ‘One has (you have) to help the human being to develop himself as a human being.’

The other phenomenon that is certainly a consequence of the change is the unrestricted use of left-dislocated subjects, incompatible with a “consistent” NSL, but very frequent in spoken French, a non-null subject language. Such structures are a clear evidence of the embedding of the change, and can be found definite, indefinite and even quantified subjects, with, animate and non-animate referents, in matrix and embedded clauses, as shown in (11).

- (11) a. *Aí, [muitas dessas pessoas]_i elas_i estudavam artes cênicas.*
 then many of-these people they used-to study arts scenic.
 ‘Ten many of these people used to study scenic arts.’
 b. [*Um robô*]_i *ele_i vai tirar as medidas*
 a robot he(it) is-going to-take the measurements
 ‘A robot is going to take the measurements.’
 c. *Eu acho [que essa área de programação visual]_i ela_i é um pouco mais difícil.*
 I think that this area of programming visual she (it) is a bit more difficult
 ‘I think this area of visual programming is a bit more difficult.’

5 Concluding Remarks

The comparison presented here allows the claim that the multivariate analysis is extremely important to follow the course of a parametric change. As we have seen, even though rates of overt subjects are significantly higher in BP, already outnumbering null subjects by far (contrary to what is found for EP), Relative Weights obtained reveal the same effects in both varieties. This means that the proposed association of a model to study language change based on empirical foundations and the properties associated to parameters, as a grammatical component so as to elaborate the factor groups and raise hypotheses – does allow us to draw theoretical implications from quantitative results – and is, therefore, very effective to understand the course of change, to predict what is coming next, to interpret the emergence of new forms not as a “product of chance” but as a by-product of other changes already implemented in the system. In this respect, our analysis reveals some important side effects of the parametric change in the resetting of the NSP in BP: the development of overt non-animate personal pronouns, the preference for overt co-referential subjects in embedded contexts, overt indeterminate subjects and the unrestricted use of left-dislocated subjects – all absent in neutral sentences in “consistent” null subject Romance languages.

The proceeding of this investigation will lead us to analyze impersonal sentences in the samples used for the present investigation. If the change followed the course of French, for instance, one would expect the development of a lexical expletive, such as *il*. However, this does not seem to be following, as expected, the route taken by French in the past and by an area of Dominican Spanish in the present (Martinez-Sans 2011). Brazilian Portuguese discourse orientation has prevented that. Since topic prominent languages do not exhibit meaningless items (Li and Thompson 1976), the solution found by the system so as to avoid a null expletive seems to have been the use of different raising operations, which are in variation with null expletive subjects in the present (Duarte 2017). This makes it clear that the reduction of the inflectional paradigm is certainly in the root of the change but topic prominence must be taken into account to explain the course of this change in progress.

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