Informational and Contrastive Focus in European and Brazilian Portuguese

European and Brazilian Portuguese have long been considered dialects of the same language; however, in recent decades, linguists have suggested that they are in fact typologically different enough to be categorized as different languages, despite their nearly equivalent lexicon, morphological similarity, and mutual intelligibility (Kato & Raposo 1996). Regardless of whether this is true, European and Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth, EP and BP) do indeed have interesting differences in their syntax, including syntactic differences linked to discourse-pragmatics. This paper will examine the treatment of information (presentational) focus and contrastive focus in EP and BP.

Many researchers agree that presentational focus can be expressed in Portuguese through overt changes in the syntax and that contrastive focus is expressed through focal stress on the focused element, as shown in (1). According to the data in the literature, information focalized elements in EP are expected to occur following the verb, whereas in BP, the focalized element precedes the verb, as seen in examples (2-5).

My objective is to compare the data presented in the literature with natural language corpora to what extent the two are in agreement. The methodology of this comparison is as follows: I will annotate the entire texts of two children’s stories from both EP and BP, coding for i) main constituent order, (although I will mostly be interested in SV versus VS order, since this is the pattern distinguishing presentational focus in the two languages) and ii) presentational and contrastive focus. It is worth mentioning that, if the analyses presented in the literature are accurate, it will not be possible to identify a difference between EP and BP with regards to contrastive focus; however, it is not guaranteed that the literature will agree with the corpora.

Results will be coded as “consistent” or “inconsistent” with the analyses outlined in the previous literature review, reported as percentages of accuracy, and subsequently discussed in light of the current analyses of focus in EP and BP.

References for examples to follow:

Contrastive focus (both EP and BP), with focalized constituents in all caps, reproduced from Ambar (1999):

1) a. A MARIA beijou o Pedro. (with focal stress on focalized element)
   
   *MARY kissed Peter
   
   c. A Maria beijou O PEDRO
   
   d. A Maria BEIJOU o Pedro.

Presentational focus in EP and BP, reproduced from Kato and Raposo (1996):

2) a. Quem comeu a tarte?
   
   *Who ate the pie
   
   b. (A tarte) comeu A JOANA.
   
   *The pie ate the Joana
   
   c. *A JOANA comeu.
   
   d. *A JOANA comeu a tarte.
   
   e. #Comeu A JOANA a tarte.¹

Presentational focus in BP vs. EP, reproduced from Kato and Raposo (1996):

3) a. Quem comeu o bolo?
   
   *Who ate the cake
   
   b. (O bolo) comeu A MARIA. (EP/*BP)
   
   (The cake) ate the Maria
   
   c. (O bolo) A MARIA comeu. (*EP/BP)

4) a. Quanto custou o seu carro? (EP/BP)
   
   *How much cost the your car
   
   b. (O carro) custou-me $5,000,00. (EP/*BP)
   
   c. $5,000,00 me custou o carro. (*EP/BP)

5) a. A Maria recomendou-me ESTES DISCOS (EP/BP*)
   
   The Maria recommended me these discs
   
   b. ESTES DISCOS a Maria me recomendou. (*EP/BP)

¹ in EP discourse-old constituents do not follow the verb.