

## A Comment on Comment Clauses: data from European Portuguese

Recently, the study of parentheticals has received particular attention. For European Portuguese (EP), some work has been done, but comment clauses (CCs) have not been particularly studied. In this paper, we discuss the prosodic properties of CCs in EP by analyzing their prosodic realization in a corpus of spontaneous speech. Building on regular patterns found for the prosodic structure of these constructions, we will try to find systematic relations between prosody and discourse structure in terms of semantic-pragmatic meaning.

In the study of parentheticals, CCs are often grouped with other elements and receive different designations according to the theoretical approach adopted. “Parentheticals” (Dehé & Kavalova, 2007, a.o.), “extra-sentential elements” (Astruc, 2005, a.o.), and “peripheral elements” (Prieto, 2002, a.o.) are some of the ways used to name those elements. Other challenges in the study of parentheticals are (i) the difficulty in defining CCs and draw clear boundaries between them and other parentheticals, such as discourse markers; and (ii) the attempt to describe parentheticals as a group, regardless their heterogeneous nature. Nevertheless, some authors (Bolinger, 1989; Kaltenböck, 2007; Dehé, 2009b; Dehé & Whichmann, 2010) do a differentiated analysis of some types of parentheticals.

Furthermore, and regarding the prosodic features of CCs and the prosody-pragmatics relations, the results discussed in studies like Peters (2006), Kaltenböck (2007), Dehé (2009b), and Dehé & Whichmann (2010) indicate that CCs tend to not form a major intonational phrase (IP), being accentuated or not. Secondly, CCs seem to be associated to various intonation contours. Lowered pitch, higher pitch and rising contours are some of the prosodic realizations of parentheticals described by authors as Bolinger (1989), Whichmann (2000), Dehé (2009b), Dehé & Whichmann (2010), for English, and, as Frota (2000; in press) and Abalada *et al.* (in press), for EP.

Authors as Kaltenböck (2007) and Dehé & Whichmann (2010) take into account the interface between prosody and semantic-pragmatics meaning in their analysis. Kaltenböck (2007) focuses on the role of prosody in the disambiguation of the semantic-pragmatic scope of the CCs, the level of juncture between the CC and the sentence being a key factor to determine the scope of the first one. On the other hand, Dehé & Whichmann (2010) propose an analysis of

'cline of grammaticalisation', where the prosodic properties of CCs, along with their semantic-pragmatic status, place CCs in a continuum between 'propositional' and 'formulaic' meaning.

For this study, we used the Portuguese C-ORAL-ROM corpus (Bacelar do Nascimento *et al.*, 2005), constituted by formal and informal speech, in a total of approximately 300.000 words. Based on the adoption of a narrow definition of CC and on the available data, we selected a sample of 30 occurrences of CCs involving the verb 'dizer' ('to say'), namely the forms 'diria' ('I would say') – 1<sup>st</sup> person singular of the conditional – and 'digamos' ('let's say') – 1<sup>st</sup> person plural of the subjunctive present. Our main goal was to find regular patterns in restricted and similar constructions and, later, try to explore other types of verbs and structures.

Regarding the prosodic annotation, we used Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2009) and we followed the annotation conventions of *Towards a P\_ToBI* (Viana *et al.*, 2007). The analysis focused on three aspects: (i) the break indices on the left and right boundaries of the CCs; (ii) the intonation contour of the intonational phrase immediately before CCs; and (iii) the pitch accents and boundary tone of the CCs.

Considering the break indices, our data shows a tendency for CCs to not form an IP (10%). However, it is important to note that 73,3% of the CCs form a minor intonational phrase and that 16,7% do not form an independent intonational phrase.

Regarding the conditional form, we can hypothesize that the differences in the strength of the break index on the left and right boundaries are associated to the informational structure of the sentence. We observed, as Kaltenböck (2007), that the level of juncture between the context and the CC (in interpolated contexts) is a clue to identify the semantic-pragmatic scope of the CC. Nevertheless, the subjunctive form tends to be associated to the elements on its right. Similar results were described for vocatives with different syntactic distributions in EP (Abalada *et al.*, in press). Crucially, the authors show that medial vocatives tend to associate to the material occurring at the end of the sentence.

This asymmetry of behaviour leads us to question the meaning of the two forms of the verb 'dizer'. The role of prosodic realization of CCs in determining their scope and level of 'prosodic integration' (Dehé & Whichmann, 2010) seems to indicate that CCs with the verb 'dizer' do not have a formulaic meaning, but, simultaneously, can be undergoing a process of

losing a full propositional meaning. Perhaps, 'diria' and 'digamos' are in different stages of grammaticalisation, 'digamos' being the one further along in this process.

Concerning the intonation contours, firstly we should note that a high percentage (86,6%) of CCs is accentuated. Secondly, our data shows very similar percentages of low (L\*) and descendent pitch accents (H+L\*) and low boundary tones (L%) (40%), on the one hand, and high (H\*) and rising (L+H\*) pitch accents with high (H%) or low boundary tones (L%) (46,6%), on the other hand. In this context, and though we cannot draw a distinction between the two forms of the verb 'dizer', we must consider that different intonation contours have been associated with parentheticals. Finally, it is interesting noting that there are 30% of cases of tonal copy of the previous nuclear contour by the CC, mostly with high and rising intonation contours.

Concluding, we can state that the intonation contours found in our data are similar to what has been described for parentheticals and, particularly, for CCs. Most importantly, the relation between prosodic structure and semantic-pragmatic meaning translates in the importance of prosodic structure in scope disambiguation and in the fact that the 'cline of grammaticalisation' seems to be an operational concept, since it can clarify the status of CCs in the informational structure of a sentence.

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