

Verbal negation in Brazilian Portuguese: A corpus-based analysis

1. Introduction

This paper aims at analyzing verbal negation in Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth, BP) in a corpus-based perspective. Verbal negation in BP is studied mostly by Brazilians linguists, although some foreign scholars have given important contributions to the understanding of this phenomenon (cf. Schwegler (1991), Holm (2009), Schwenter (2005)). There are three kinds of negation which can take part in an utterance in BP: pre-verbal, double and post-verbal negation. For example:

(i) A Eva não gosta de viajar.
The-FEM Eva not like-PRES of travel-INF
'Eva doesn't like traveling'

(ii) A Eva não gosta de viajar não.
The-FEM Eva not like-PRES of travel-INF not
'Eva doesn't like traveling'

(iii) A Eva gosta de viajar não.
The-FEM Eva like-PRES of travel-INF not
'Eva doesn't like traveling'

2. Theoretical problems

Brazilian scholars analyze this phenomenon by different methodological devices, what implicates (in some cases) divergent theoretical considerations. Researches about verbal negation in BP tend to look at the development of this system in this language. Some consider what is known in the literature as Jespersen Cycle, namely, a tendency in natural languages in which the negative pre-verbal adverb is weakened and a new negative word appears in a post-verbal position in the utterance. The negative adverb undergoes phonetic weakening until it is no longer used, remaining just the new word that entered in post-verbal position in the system (as proposed by Jespersen (1917)). In this line of research, sociolinguistic studies tend to affirm that there is a change in course in BP verbal negation system, by analyzing sociolinguistic interview data. Functionalist studies propose that what motivates this change is usage pressure by speakers. Diachronic studies analyze verbal negation looking at old Brazilian texts, thereby dating precisely when the non-canonic forms (double and post-verbal) appeared in the written language. Differently, language contact studies consider that the BP verbal negation system developed by linguistic contact with African languages in the course of the history of formation of the Brazilian society, which certainly included linguistic contact with African slaves brought to Brazil by Portuguese colonizers. Not taking into account the genesis of BP verbal negation system, Schwenter (2005, p. 1449) proposes that there are pragmatic constraints in the usage of the three kinds of verbal negation in BP. This author presents these constraints in the following table:

<i>Form</i>	<i>Discourse-new</i>	<i>Inferrable</i>	<i>Directly activated</i>
NEG1	OK	OK	OK
NEG2	#	OK	OK
NEG3	#	#	OK

Sociolinguistic studies affirm that the three kinds of verbal negation in BP are in variation (and in a state of change in course). Other studies suggest that verbal negation in BP stemmed from a cycle that in certain ways involves change. But what we can observe in the table above is that if there are pragmatic constraints in the usage of the three kinds of verbal negation, it is the case that they can't be linguistic variants of the same variable, because they can't be used in the same context meaning the same thing. Therefore, studies as sociolinguistic, functionalist and diachronic ones couldn't treat each form of verbal negation as linguistic variants. We believe that this hypothesis could mean that the verbal negation system in BP didn't stem from cyclicity patterns that result in change in the system. This points out that verbal negation in BP should be studied from a pragmatic point of view.

3. Objectives

Our aim in this paper is to check Schwenter's hypothesis using empirical data, namely C-ORAL-BRASIL (RASO & MELLO, 2012) BP reference corpus of spontaneous speech. From the results we intend to propose a new form of analysis, which consider other aspects relevant to the study of verbal negation in BP.

4. Methodology

We mapped each utterance in the corpus that contained verbal negation through a platform named DBCoM¹, which offer searches by lemma, KWIC, among other things. We constructed a table of these utterances, organizing them according with typological negation patterns, as well as sociolinguistic information of the participants, for future testing hypothesis of some diatrasitic patterns in the realization of verbal negation in BP. The following step was testing Schwenter's hypothesis looking at the text of each utterance that contains double and post-verbal negation in their context of occurrence. We had to identify if utterances containing double negation were negating old or inferrable information, and if post-verbal negation utterances were directly negating activated information.

5. Results

In 729 utterances which contain double negation, only 19% were considered counter-examples for Schwenter's hypothesis. But for the 155 utterances which contain post-verbal negation, 55% were considered counter-examples for the tested hypothesis. We applied statistical tests carried with software R (R DEVELOPMENT CORE TEAM, 2011) to know if the data presented normal distribution. It wasn't the case for either data set. So we applied Wilcoxon rank sum test in order to confirm if the results could be considered significant statistically. The test showed that there is a tendency for Schwenter's hypothesis for double negation to be true, although this right tendency didn't apply for post-verbal negation. Taking into account the results and observing the utterances analyzed, we believe that constraints in verbal negation usage in BP follows from illocutionary patterns. But future research, looking at larger datasets, could tell us if this hypothesis is confirmed.

¹ This platform is available at the following link: <<http://150.164.100.23/login/auth>>. It requires registering for using its resources.

6. References

HOLM, J. The genesis of the Brazilian vernacular: insights from the indigenization of Portuguese in Angola. *Papia*, n. 19, p. 93-122, 2009.

JESPERSEN, O. *Negation in English and other languages*. København: A.F. Høst & Søn, 1917.

R DEVELOPMENT CORE TEAM. R: A language and environment for statistical computing. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria, 2011. URL: <<http://www.R-project.org/>>.

RASO, T. & MELLO, H. *C-ORAL-BRASIL I: Corpus de referência do português brasileiro falado informal*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2012.

SCHWEGLER, A. Predicate negation in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese: a change in progress. *Orbis*, 34, p. 187-214, 1991.

SCHWENTER, S. A. The pragmatics of negation in Brazilian Portuguese. *Lingua*, n. 115, p. 1427-1456, 2005.