Prosody, syntax, and pragmatics: insubordination in spoken Brazilian Portuguese

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Abstract. In this paper, we approach the phenomenon of insubordination in spoken Brazilian Portuguese through data on adverbial clauses extracted from the C-ORAL-BRASIL corpus [Raso and Mello 2012]. Differently from the traditional conception of insubordination [Evans 2007], we propose a synchronic view, strongly based on the analysis of the prosody/pragmatics interface in spoken language. We show that in spoken Brazilian Portuguese formally dependent syntactic structures can acquire pragmatic autonomy by virtue of specific prosodic patterns conveying certain informational values.

1. Introduction: insubordination

The term 'insubordination' refers to the independent, main-clause use of form-wise dependent structures [Evans 2007: 367, 2009], such as free conditionals used as invitations or requests, infinitives used as commands, and alike [see also Decat 2001, 2004]. According to this view, insubordination is conceived as the final step of a process of constructionalization of the dependent clause after the ellipsis of its matrix clause, resulting in a new, conventionalized use of the former, which may not retain any of its original syntactic and semantic values.

Based on the corpus-based analysis of adverbial clauses in spoken Brazilian Portuguese (BP), in this paper we claim for a different conception of insubordination, synchronic and pragmatics-based, as it is shown in the following sections.

2. The prosody/pragmatics interface for the analysis of spoken language

For an adequate analysis of spoken language, it is of paramount importance to take into account its prosodic dimension, since prosody fulfills primary functions in speech.

Firstly, the speech continuum is segmented into utterances by prosodic breaks perceived as conclusive (terminal breaks, '//'), while non-terminal, i.e. non-conclusive ('/'), prosodic breaks segment tone units internal to utterances. Speech segmentation is fundamental to the understanding of what kind of linguistic relation exists between sequences of lexical items, as it is shown by example (1) extracted from the C-ORAL-BRASIL corpus:[1]

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[1] It is highly recommended to listen to the audio files provided for each example. All the audio files can be downloaded at: http://www.c-oral-brasil.org > Multimídia > Bossaglia, Mello & Raso_Prosody, syntax, and pragmatics: insubordination in spoken Brazilian Portuguese.

(1) *não tá dando a altura daquele que a Isa marcou lá né*

    *PAU: *não // tá dando a altura daquele que a <Isa> marcou <lá> / né //* (bpubdl01, 14-15) [2]

      'No // it is reaching the height of that one that Isa marked there / isn't it //'

Without the prosodic information, one could interpret the initial negation in (1) as compositional to the following predicate, which is not the case, since it constitutes, actually, an utterance of its own, as it is signaled by the double bars in the transcription.

      Following the Language into Act Theory (L-AcT) [Cresti 2000, Moneglia and Raso 2014], we assume that the reference unit for spontaneous speech is the utterance, i.e. the smallest stretch of speech provided with pragmatic autonomy (illocutionary force), and hence interpretable as a speech act [Austin 1962]. Such pragmatic autonomy is conveyed by a prosodic nucleus, without which it would not be possible to recognize the illocution. Compare (2), an illocutionary prepositional phrase, and (3), a non-illocutionary clause:

(2) *TER: *com a Dona Deise* // (bfamcv02, 367)

      'with Miss Deise'

(3) *JOR: *e é um caso interessante nesse mercado* /

      'and it's an interesting case in that business /

Example (3) does not carry an illocutionary prosodic nucleus, and it is not interpretable as an autonomous speech act. Actually, it represents a Topic information unit, which is part of a bigger utterance, whose illocution is conveyed by the second information unit, the Comment:

(4) *JOR: *e é um caso interessante nesse mercado* /=TOP= *que muito deles me convidavam pra ser sócio deles* //=COM= (bfammn06, 60)

      'and it's an interesting case in that business / that many of them invited me to be their partner'

Prosody is also responsible for conveying the functional values of the several information units which may form the utterance, conveying specific pragmatic and communicative functions combined into specific patterns. In (4), in fact, the Topic unit as well carries a functional prosodic nucleus conveying its informational function, i.e. that of defining a domain for the application of the illocutionary force of the Comment. A detailed description of the prosodic (following the IPO approach, see t'Hart et al. 1990) and functional characteristics of information units (IUs) within the L-AcT's framework can be found in Moneglia and Raso (2014). For the purposes of this paper,

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[2] The actual source of each example is given according to the C-ORAL conventions: starred abbreviations stand for the speakers' identification; *b* stands for Brazilian Portuguese; *fam* for private/familiar context, *pub* for public context; *dl* for dialogue, *cv* for conversation, *mn* for monologue; the first number specifies the transcribed recording session, while the second one stands for the utterance number within that transcribed text.

we recall that they are divided into *textual* units, which form the actual text of the utterance (they are Topic, Comment, Appendixes of Topic/Comment, Parenthesis, Locutive Introducer; their locutive content is the target of syntactic/semantic analysis), and *dialogic* units, which fulfill different functions related to the interaction (they are not part of the semantics nor syntactic text of the utterance, and correspond to what is known as "discourse markers" within other approaches, see Raso and Vieira 2016).[3]

The analysis of spoken syntax must, therefore, take into account its interface with the pragmatic/informational organization of speech.

3. The analysis of spoken syntax

As mentioned, the unit of reference for spontaneous speech is found on pragmatic grounds, rather than syntactic ones. Actually, traditional syntactic units such as the sentence and even the clause are not so easily found in spoken language, since a considerable amount of it is made up by verbless utterances, and, in general, it is quite common that spoken syntax is fragmented and unintegrated [Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1990, Miller and Weinert 1998, Cresti 2014]. According to L-AcT, the final output of spoken syntax results from the *combination* (vs. *composition*) of the locutive content of different IUs, which are understood as semantic and syntactic islands: true syntactic dependency relationships would be restricted only to the domain of a single information unit, while the relationship between different information units is pragmatic in the first place, i.e. related to their communicative functions, which are prosodically conveyed [Cresti 2014]. In examples (5) and (6) below, the same syntactic construction is performed within a single IU and across an informational pattern, respectively:

(5) *PAU: *tô achando que vou fazer ela com um metro* //=COM= (bpubdl01, 259)

      'I'm thinking about making it one meter (long) //'

(6) *PAU: *acho que com um metro e vinte* /=TOP= *ela fica boa* /=COM= *né* //=PHA= (bpubdl01, 260)

      'I think that with a meter and twenty / it will be fine / you know //'

In the utterance in (5) a true dependency relationship exists between matrix and complement clauses. The same would not hold for the complement clause in (6), depending from the same epistemic verb *achar*, but performed through a Topic-Comment pattern. In this latter case, the first level of the utterance's organization is the pragmatic one, a "Theme in Topic" construction in this case [Cresti 2014]: main clause and a focalised part of the complement (complementizer plus PP) clause the Topic serves as background information for the illocution performed by the rest of the complement. The traditional syntactic dependency hierarchy between main and

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[3] Tags for IUs within the C-ORAL-BRASIL are: TOP Topic, COM Comment, APT Appendix of Topic, APC Appendix of Comment, PAR Parenthesis, INT Locutive Introducer, COB Bound Comment, CMM Multiple Comment (textual units); PHA Phatic, CNT Conative, EXP Expressive, INP Incipit, ALL Allocutive, DCT Discourse Connector (dialogic units). Units without informational value have the following tags: TMT Time Taking, UNC Unclassifiable, SCA Scanning unit (tonal part of another IU), EMP Empty unit.

complement clause is reverted from a pragmatic standpoint, since it is the illocutionary IU (Comment) the one necessary for the utterance to be pragmatically autonomous, while the Topic unit is pragmatically 'subordinated' to it.

According to this conception of spoken syntax, no true syntactic dependency would hold across different IUs or utterances. This stems from the fact that in order to be interpretable, the utterance does not *require* the presence of a predicate nor of well-formed syntactic structures, since prosody is the first means to convey the illocution in addition to the informational relation that holds between its tonal units, like the relation of *pragmatic aboutness* between Topic and Comment in (7):

(7) *TER: *do lado da mãe* /=SCA= *da Fafica* /=TOP= *tudo pobrezim* //=COM= (bfamcv03, 186)

    'from the mother's side / Fafica's (mother) / all poor //'

Nonetheless, various syntactic structures are found within spoken data, and their analysis must consider the way they are performed within or across IUs and utterances. In the following sections, we present data on insubordination based on the analysis of adverbial clauses in spoken Brazilian Portuguese.

4. Insubordination and adverbial clauses in spoken Brazilian Portuguese

4.1. Methodology: the DB-IPIC BP minicorpus

For this study, we retrieved our data from the informationally annotated DB-IPIC (*Database for Information Patterning Interlinguistic Comparison*, Panunzi and Mittmann 2014) minicorpus of spoken BP (20 recording sessions, 5483 utterances), extracted from and representative of the C-ORAL-BRASIL corpus, provided with the audio files and the text-to-speech alignment, for an adequate analysis of spoken data.

We retrieved the adverbial clauses by searching for adverbial subordinators, and then checked their configuration within or across information units and utterances.

5. Adverbial clauses in spoken BP

5.1. Adverbial clauses in a dedicated Information Unit

In our data, Cause/Reason, Time and Conditional are the most represented adverbial values found for the adverbial subordinators, being *porque* 'because', *quando* 'when', and *se* 'if' the most frequent ones for each value, respectively. Adverbial clauses are very rarely (nearly 6%) performed together with their main clause within the same information unit, and appear mostly in a dedicated information unit fulfilling specific informational, rather than merely syntactic, values (see Bossaglia 2015 for a detailed description and for more examples).

Specifically, Time and Conditional clauses are performed mostly (89%) in Topic units, with their main clause in Comment, while Cause clauses appear mostly in Comment units or in patterns of illocutionary units, as it is shown in (8) – (10) below:

(8) *LUZ: *porque **quando** cê chega num lugar que cê se sente em casa* /=TOP= *cê sabe imediatamente* //=COM= (bfamdl03, 11)

'because when you arrive in a place in which you feel at home / you know it immediately //'

(9) *PAU: *se ficar alto demais* /=TOP= *ele fica feio* //=COM= (bpubdl01, 74)

'if it's too high / it's ugly //'

(10) *DFL: *e eu ficava até com uma certa inveja* /=COB= *porque papai era muito sisudo* //=COM= (bfammn02, 176)

'and I used to get even a little envious / because dad was very sullen //'

It is possible to observe that the strong preference for Time and Condition clauses to appear in Topic units fits with their semantic values, since Topic units serve to delimit a specific pragmatic domain of application of the illocution in Comment in the same way they do from a semantic perspective.

Within the data, *porque*-clauses in a dedicated IU often express a causal relation with a main clause, but not necessarily at the propositional level (*direct* cause): in some cases, these clauses describe a relation of epistemic cause, i.e. the speakers use them in order to justify why they know/infer what they said through the main clause (shift of the causal relation to the epistemic domain, or *indirect* cause: Couper-Kuhlen 1996, Sweetser 1990, Dancygier and Sweetser 2005), as it is the case in (11):

(11) *DFL: *que o meu avô* /=TOP= *era de uma família abastada* /=COB= *porque o professor ia em casa* /=CMM= *nũ ia po grupo não* //=CMM= (bfammn02, 53)

'that my grandpa / (he) had a rich family / because the professor went to his place / he didn't go to the regular school //'

It is clear, then, that in spoken language certain informational patterns through which the adverbial clauses are performed make them assume new, discourse-oriented functions [see, among others: Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1990, Ford 1993, Moeschler 1996, Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen 2005, Hopper and Thompson 2008, Debaisieux 2013, Sansinenã et al. 2015]. A further analysis of the pragmatic functions that *porque*-clauses acquire when performed in a dedicated utterance is provided in the next section, in which we illustrate insubordinated uses of adverbial clauses.

5.2. Adverbial clauses in a dedicated utterance: insubordination

In the data, nearly 30% of adverbial clauses are performed as insubordinated, i.e. forming an autonomous utterance by themselves. Differently from Evans (2007), we believe insubordinated constructions to be analyzable synchronically as formally dependent structures (subordinate clauses) provided with pragmatic autonomy by virtue of their illocutionary force. With respect to Time and Cause clauses, it is possible to find main clause-like material within the adjacent linguistic context, while protases are often found without any retrievable apodosis. A few examples are illustrated below.

(12) [friends doing grocery shopping together]

*FLA: *vê o* [/1]=SCA= *a* /=SCA= *&valid* [/1]=EMP= *&he* /=TMT= *fabricação dele* //=COM= *porque arroz novo é ruim* //=COM= (bfamdl01, 545-546)

'look at the [/1] the / expiring [/1] ehm / manifacturing date of it // because young rice is bad //

In (12), the *porque*-clause performed through the second utterance clearly does not express a causal relation at the propositional level in reference to the clause in the previous utterance: rather, *FLA uses it in order to provide a justification for her previous speech act (which we could label as 'order'). In cases like this, the causal relation is found not between the two clauses, nor is it shifted to the epistemic domain (cf. section 5.1), but it relates two different *speech acts* (shift of causal relation to the speech act domain: Couper-Kuhlen 1996, Dancygier and Sweetser 2005).

A similar shift is particularly straightforward in example (13), one of the few occurrences of concessive insubordinated clauses within our data:

(13) [customer talking to a retailer in a shoe store while trying a pair of shoes]

*JAN: *essa aqui não fecha no meu pé* //=COM= **apesar que meu pé tá meio sujo** /=COM= *né* //=PHA= *então não fecha* //=COM= (bpubdl01, 161-163)

'this one doesn't fit my foot // although my foot is kinda dirty / you know // so it doesn't fit //'

Between the insubordinate concessive clause (introduced by *apesar que*) and the clause performed in the first utterance there is not any concessive relation at the propositional level (rather, in the real world such relationship would be one of direct cause). Through the concessive clause, *JAN is rectifying her previous speech act, that she seems to recognize as unnecessary (it is obvious that the shoe would not fit, considering that her foot is dirty). This use of concessive clauses in spoken language as a means of correcting the 'validity' of a speech act is well-attested cross-linguistically [Günthner 2000, Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2000].

(14) [retailer of a shoe store talking to a customer]

*EUG: *se cê quiser comprar as duas* //=COM= *eu fico mais feliz* /=COM= *viu* //=PHA= (bpubdl01, 223-224)

'if you want to buy both // I'll be happier / you know //'

In (14) a conditional sentence is performed through two separate utterances, the protasis through the first one and the apodosis through the second. From the textual, semantic, and even morpho-syntactic standpoints, it would be possible to recognize a dependency relation between the two clauses. Nonetheless, the protasis is fulfilling an autonomous illocution of 'suggestion', which is prosodically conveyed and interpretable as such independently of the presence of the apodosis, which in turn fulfils an assertive speech act. This could be better appreciated listening to the protasis only. What we are therefore saying is not that a relationship does not exist between these two utterances/illocutions; there is a relationship but it is not defined on the basis of the morpho-syntactic appearance of their locutive contents.

We label insubordinated adverbial clauses with retrievable main clause-like material in the adjacent linguistic context as "semi'-insubordinated clauses, because they maintain a strong textual or pragmatic link with another utterance (see, in a diachronic perspective, the concept of 'dyadic dependence' as possible source for insubordinated constructions in Sansineña et al. 2015, which still does not correspond,

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though, to our conception of insubordination). The adverbial subordinators, in these cases, explicitly signal the type of semantic relation existing between two speech acts, although not at the propositional level anymore.

Then, fully insubordinated clauses are those ones for which no main clause-like material is retrievable in the linguistic adjacent context. So far, only protases were found in this configuration in the data, as it is shown in (15):

(15) [man and woman in a car, looking for a specific street and driving through a very steep one]

    *ANE: *então é paralela a essa* //=COM=

    *CES: *<é>* //=COM=

    *ANE: *<então vamo> <subir* /=CMM= *e> olhar quais são* //=CMM=

    *CES: *<então>* +

    *ANE: *qual é* /=SCA= *a paralela* //=COM=

    *CES: *muito obrigado* /=COM= *dona* //=ALL= *brigado* //=COM=

    *ANE: *eh* /=PHA= **se cê nũ tiver um carrinho que [/1]**=SCA= **que sobe aqui** //=COM=

    *CES: *ahn* //=COM= *é* //=COM= *isso não é muito bom* //=COM= (bfamdl05, 31-41)

'A: so it's the (street) parallel to this one // C: yeah // A: so let's go up / and see which are // C: then + A: which one is / the parallel one // C: thank you / madam // thank you // A: well / **if you don't have a good car that [/1] that climbs here** // C: uhm // yeah // this one is not so good //'

In the above example, no apodosis for the conditional clause in bold is found within the adjacent linguistic context. The insubordinated, 'loose' protasis is nonetheless completely autonomous thanks to its prosodic profile, conveying the nucleus of an illocution that we could label as 'expression of obviousness'.

Although differening in their degree of textual 'detachment', we consider both typologies of insubordinated clauses (semi- and fully) as completely independent from a pragmatic standpoint. Listening to the insubordinated adverbial clauses in the examples above, one can perceive that they are prosodically and pragmatically autonomous, and perfectly interpretable as independent units within the speech flow (for a much more detailed analysis, see Bossaglia et al. *forthcoming* on insubordinated adverbial clauses in spoken BP and Italian).

6. Conclusions

In this paper we proposed a synchronic, pragmatics-based conception of the phenomenon of insubordination, based on the analysis of adverbial clauses' uses in BP spontaneous speech.

In our view, for a proper study of spontaneous speech it is necessary to take its prosodic component into account,; prosody is responsible for carrying the illocutionary force of the utterances, and required for the segmentation of the speech continuum into utterances and smaller functional units. The study of spoken syntax cannot, therefore, disregard the interface with the information patterns through which the locutive content of the utterance is packaged. In fact, we showed that adverbial clauses in spoken BP are

frequently used in dedicated IUs, fulfilling specific communicative functions, and that the primary level of the organization of the utterance is a pragmatic one, even when syntactic dependency between different information units seems to be detectable.

In our view, it is not necessary (nor possible, perhaps) to trace a grammaticalization and constructionalization path in order to explain insubordinate clauses, since within our pragmatic conception of spoken language dependent structures are constantly allowed to acquire pragmatic autonomy as speech acts. In this process, prosody has a primary role in conveying the linguistic means to signal the independent status of the insubordinated clauses.

Although it has already been explored in several languages [Lombardi Vallauri 2004, 2010; Mithun 2008; Sansineña et al. 2015, among others], further research on the possible correlations between specific insubordinated clauses and illocutions based on the analysis of actual spontaneous interactions in spoken BP is needed.

Acknowledgments

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