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Towards phrasal attachment of European Portuguese proclitics. An empirical diachronic inquiry into syntax – phonology interface

One of the prominent features of present-day European Portuguese (EP) is the asymmetry of preverbal and postverbal clitic pronouns. While the former fail to exhibit clitic-specific allomorphy (which is considered a proof of their post-lexical insertion; Vigário, 2003), enclitics interact in intricate ways with a verb form, thus displaying an affix-like behavior (Spencer & Luís, 2012: 205-206). Yet, morpho-phonological features of clitic-verb sequences have not always been mapped onto syntactic level that way. The aim of the paper is to uncover mechanisms that prompted an exclusively phrasal attachment of preverbal pronouns.

The central topic is interpolation, i.e. the insertion of an element between a clitic pronoun and the verb (Martins, 2016). In Romance linguistics, its significance is due to the fact that clitic-verb non-adjacency is assumed to argue in favour of the syntactic rather than word-internal nature of clitic attachment (Miller & Monachesi, 2003; Luís & Kaiser, 2016). Over centuries, interpolation, which nowadays arises only in some syntactic configurations (after so-called ‘proclisis triggers’; Duarte & Matos, 2000), was varying with respect to both the list of expressions separating a clitic from the verb and the presence of proclisis triggers (non-triggered interpolations are found in 17th and 18th centuries). For about 180 years (mid-17th to the early 19th century), it relied uniquely on the *não* negative marker (see (1)). Our thesis is that the interpolation of *não* helped pave the way for the present-day non-affixal attachment of preverbal clitic pronouns. In modern EP, although interpolation has lost ground to proclisis, it remains extant in dialectal oral production (Magro, 2010).

- (1) ..., os quaes athegora **o** **naõ ferviaõ** (1660)
DEF.M.PL REL up-to-now ACC-3.M.SG NEG serve.IND.IPFV.3.PL
‘... that up to now have not been his servants’ (<http://purl.pt/16556>)

The corpus, compiled from 41 texts released between 1614 and 1858, contains 12,339 clitic-verb combinations. Among them, 708 examples represent contexts suitable for the interpolation of *não*. In these contexts, the average ratio of interpolation to cases of clitic-verb adjacency is 2.68 : 1 (516 vs. 192 occurrences). Yet, the two models are shown to have not been fully equivalent. They differed with respect to the pronoun type they tended to employ: vowel-initial 3rd person direct objects (*o*, *a*, *os*, *as*) tended to precede *não* (126 cases of interpolation vs. 28 occurrences of clitic-verb adjacency, i.e. 4.5 : 1). By contrast, the remaining pronouns did not depart significantly from the average ratio.

	Clitic-verb combinations	interpolation-favouring contexts	interpolation vs. clitic-verb adjacency	frequency of interpolation
17 th cent. (12 texts)	3,528	239	205 : 34	85.77 %
18 th cent. (15 texts)	4,878	270	182 : 88	67.40 %
19 th cent. (14 texts)	3,933	199	129 : 70	64.82 %
Total	12,339	708	516 : 192	72.88 %

Table 1. Ratios of the interpolation of *não* to clitic-verb adjacency (17th-19th centuries)

Moreover, in Classical EP (approximately 1550-1800) preverbal pronouns were phonologically integrated into the preceding non-verbal sound material. If placed next to some of the proclisis-triggers (e.g. the *wh*-pronoun *quem* ‘who’, some prepositions; see (2)), pronouns were on occasions subject to allomorphic variation.

- (2) **pello** **permitir** Deos noſſo Senhor afsi, ... (1614)
 for-ACC.3.M.SG allow-INF God our Lord So
 ‘... , for so was allowed by God, our Lord’ (*pello* < *por* + *o*) <http://purl.pt/29503>

Yet, during this period, it was the *não* negative marker (ending in the [ẽw̃] nasal diphthong) that most frequently coerced the ensuing vowel-initial pronouns into taking a nasal onset (*o* > *no*, *a* > *na*, etc.), thereby producing allomorphic liaisons in preverbal position.

- (3) **naõ no** **fazendo** defde o dia que lhe puzerem a dita pena ... (1639)
 NEG ACC-3.M.SG do-PTCP since ART day REL DAT.3.SG put-SBJV.FUT.3.PL
 ‘... not doing this from the day when he will receive this punishment’ (*naõ no* < *naõ o*)

The reversal of this order, i.e. interpolation, blocked allomorphy: once *não* separated a clitic pronoun and the verb, the *não no*, *não na*, etc. sequences became unlikely. Therefore, morpho-phonological links between *o*, *a*, *os*, *as* and the preceding expressions were lost (except in individual dialectal performance). That is how the overrepresentation of 3rd person pronouns in interpolation is explained. Consequently, in modern EP, clitic allomorphy is found only in enclisis (*que não a viram* ‘that they did not see her’ vs. *viram-na* ‘they saw her’).

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