Topicalization as predication: The syntax-semantics interface of low topics in Brazilian Portuguese

This paper investigates syntactic and interpretive asymmetries between high topics (CP area; see Rizzi 1997) and low topics (vP area; see Belletti 2004) in Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and proposes an account for a previously unnoticed restriction, which aims at contributing to the understanding of the mapping of topics from the syntax to the semantics/pragmatic interface. Observe the contrast in (1). While high topicalization does not impose any restrictions on the scope possibilities between deny and two people, low topicalization (between the TP projections and vP) forces wide scope of two people. The sentences in (2) independently show that the examples involve a movement to the clausal spine (not a DP-internal one) and to a low position (not to a right-dislocated one). This situation is replicated in more complex cases, as in (3)a-b, where both quantifiers must take scope over the matrix predicate forget.

1. a. **Dos Democratas**, o presidente negou ter contratado duas pessoas __ deny>2; 2>deny of-the Democrats, the president denied to have hired two people
   b. O presidente negou ter contratado, **dos Democratas**, duas pessoas __ *deny>2; 2>deny the president denied to have hired, of-the Democrats, two people
      ‘The president denied to have hired two people of the Democrats.’

2. a. O presidente contratou, **dos Democratas**, no ano passado, duas pessoas __.
   the president hired, of-the Democrats, in-the year past, two people
      ‘The president hired two people of the Democrats last year.’
   b. O presidente não contratou, **dos Democratas**, nenhuma pessoa __ no ano passado.
   the president not hired, of-the Democrats, no person __ in-the year past
      ‘The president didn’t hire any person of the Democrats last year.’

3. a. Os alunos esqueceram de resenhar, **do Chomsky**, dois livros __ cada um.
   the students forgot of review, of-the Chomsky, two books __ each one
      ‘The students forgot to review two books by Chomsky each.’  \( \forall > 2 > \) forget; *forget > \( \forall > 2 \)
   b. Os alunos esqueceram de resenhar, **de cada autor**, dois livros __.
   the students forgot of review, of each author, two books __
      ‘The students forgot to review two books by each author.’  \( \forall > 2 > \) forget; *forget > \( \forall > 2 \)

I propose that this restriction follows from the interpretive properties of low topicalization in BP. Low topics are interpreted as contrastive: they open a set of alternatives (e.g. a set of political parties in (1)b or a set of authors in (3)), and the element chosen (e.g. the Democrats or Chomsky) is mapped to a predicate of type \(<e,t>\) (e.g. hiring two people or reading two books). Given that TopP is sandwiched between \(T^0\) and vP, as in (4)a, and is “transparent” to them, in the sense that no syntactic relation between \(T^0\) and \(v^0/vP\) is disrupted by TopP (e.g. verb movement takes place normally), I assume that the topic must return to \(T^0\) the same function it selects, as in (4)b. Given that vP is usually a saturated predicate of type \(t\), and that the low topic works as predication, the \(T^0\) head must force vP to remain of type \(<e,t>\). This is accomplished if the subject is interpreted higher than the topic (postponing the saturation of vP). That this can happen is shown by contrasts like (5): the subject can bind into the low topic, as in (5)a, but cannot reconstruct to its original position, as in (5)b (genitive de ‘of’ is independently shown to be dummy).

4. a. [CP [TP \(T^0+\text{verb} [\text{TopP topic} [vP [VP ]]]]]]
   b. [CP [TP \(T^0+\text{verb} [<e,t>\text{TopP topic} \text{TopP} [<e,t>\text{vP} [VP ]]]]]]

5. a. [O professor], recomendou, [d[ele mesmo]], só dois livros __.
   the professor recommended, of-him self, only two books
      ‘The professor recommended only two books by himself.’
   b. *[Os alunos d[ele mesmo]], resenham, [d[O Chomsky]], só dois livros __.
   the students of-him self reviewed, of-the Chomsky, only two books
      ‘*The students of himself reviewed only two books by Chomsky.’

The question that arises is whether this “saturation postponement” would cause a problem to the interpretive interface. Assuming a cyclic model, the answer is ‘no’, as long as type resolution is done within the cycle (or phase: given that the verb in BP moves to \(T^0\), the vP phase is extended to TP; see den Dikken 2007 a.o.). The analysis in which low topics select for type \(<e,t>\) (as opposed to high topics, which apply
over a saturated proposition of type \textit{t}) predicts that low topicalization should be strictly local. This prediction is borne out. Although low topics can occur in embedded clauses, as in (6), they do not tolerate long-distance dependencies, as in (7)a, which sharply contrasts with the high topicalization in (7)b, which is possible across domains in BP (including a variety of islands). Low topics also provide evidence for the locality of agreement. Given that BP does not have left-branch extraction, the adjective \textit{yellow} in (8)B must be base-generated in its surface position. As a result, it cannot agree with the noun it is associated with, for by the time the adjective enters the structure the noun is already spelled out within the DP phase (for the phasehood of DP, see Bošković 2014). Default masculine singular surfaces.

(6) (A Maria disse que) o João comprou, \textbf{com capa dura}, só dois livros ___.
    (the Mary said that) the John bought, with cover hard, only two books
    ‘(Mary said that) John bought only two books with a hard cover.’

(7) a. *A Maria disse, \textbf{com capa dura}, que o João comprou só dois livros ___.
    the Mary said, with cover hard, that the John bought only two books
    b. \textbf{Com capa dura}, a Maria disse que o João comprou só dois livros ___.
       with cover hard the Mary said that the John bought only two books

(8) A: You’ll have to dress up all in yellow for the party.
B: (Vixe,) eu tenho, \textbf{amarelo}, só duas camisas!
    (gee,) I have, \textbf{yellow}, only two shirts
B’: (Vixe,) eu tenho, ??\textbf{amarelas}, só duas camisas!
    (gee,) I have, \textbf{yellow}, only two shirts
    ‘(Gee,) as for yellow (clothes), I have only two coats!’

We can now return to our initial puzzle: why does the low topic force wide scope of \textit{two people} in (1)b? The reason is simple: quantifier raising cannot target a projection of type \textit{<e,t>}; it must target a projection of type \textit{t}. The first such projection that the quantifier finds is one above \textit{deny}, namely the (saturated) matrix \textit{vP}. Similarly in (2) and (3), \textit{QR} cannot target the \textit{vP} selected by the low \textit{Top} head. The sentence in (3)b is particularly interesting: \textit{two books} must take scope over the low topic, therefore it must move to the higher \textit{vP}. However, the topic is a distributive quantifier that must scope over \textit{two books}. The contradictory requirements are resolved by raising \textit{each author} higher than \textit{two books} (the example also displays the lack of a freezing effect in the topic position, contra Rizzi 1997).

Finally, I consider the apparent counter-example in (9), where both scope possibilities are attested. Here, however, what we have is sentential negation, rather than lexical negation (\textit{e.g.} \textit{deny, forget}). Given that sentential negation applies to a saturated proposition \(t\), and independently \textit{Neg} selects for a TP in BP, the object \textit{three beers} can \textit{QR} from under the topic and still target a projection of type \(t\) under negation, as in (10). In this case, the reading that arises is one of “not even” (John did not get to the third beer) (in fact, (9) is odd with the flat reading “it is not the case that”).

(9) O João não bebeu, \textbf{da Itália,} três cervejas ___.
    the John not drank, of-the Italy, three beers
    ‘John didn’t drink three beers \textbf{from Italy.}’

(10) \[ \text{Neg} \text{ the John not [TP three beers [TP drank [TopP of-the Italy [vP t3 ] ] ] ] ] ] \]

To conclude, this paper highlights the importance of investigating the asymmetries between the high and the low informational peripheries. Specifically, I try to show how the novel data presented on the interaction of low topicalization and quantifier raising can be accounted for when the semantic/pragmatic function of low topicalization (a contrastive mapping between the topialized element and a predicate) is translated into the derivational component as a type selection (\textit{Top} selects for \textit{<e,t>}), with consequences for both PF (\textit{e.g.} agreement) and LF (\textit{e.g.} \textit{QR}). Low topicalization, despite being a poorly investigated phenomenon, displays important idiosyncrasies that can shed light on a number of interface problems.