

Cardinals and the DP-internal distribution of the plural morpheme in Brazilian Portuguese

Bruna Karla Pereira (UFVJM; CAPES)

In this paper, I argue that the DP-internal distribution of plural features, in non-standard Brazilian Portuguese (BP), is determined by the syntactic position of the cardinal numeral.

As observed by Danon (2011, p. 302), in Finnish (1), and in many other languages, “a (plural) number feature is only available above the position of the numeral”. In addition, Norris (2014) presents data from Estonian (2) where “material to the left of the numeral is plural, and material to the right is singular” (Norris, 2014, p. 143).

- (1) “Ne kaksi pien-tä auto-a seiso-ivat tiellä.
those.PL two.SG small-PART.SG car-PART.SG stand-past.3PL road.ADESS
‘Those two small cars stood at the road.’ (Brattico 2010)” (Danon, 2011, p. 301).
- (2) “nee-d viis ilusa-t maja
this-PL.NOM 5.NOM beautiful-PAR house.PAR
‘these five beautiful houses’ (Erelt et al. 1993b:143)” (Norris, 2014, p. 144).

Non-standard BP has a similar pattern. For instance, in (3a), the cardinal numeral ‘dois’ is right after D; as a result, only D is marked for plural with the morpheme ‘-s’. In (3b), the numeral is after D ‘os’ plus the adjective ‘únicos’, which explains the fact that both of them are marked for plural; as a result, everything to the right of the numeral is unmarked for this feature. Moreover, (3c) is ruled out because the position of the cardinal numeral (NumP) both blocks the plural marking on the constituents under its c-command and requires the plural marking on the constituents above it.

- (3) a. Os **(dois)** único balde vermelho
The-PL two only bucket red
‘The only two red buckets’
- b. Os únicos **(dois)** balde vermelho
The-PL only-PL two bucket red
‘The only two red buckets’
- c. *O único **(dois)** baldes vermelhos
The only two bucket-PL red-PL
‘The only two red buckets’

Therefore, the syntactic position of the cardinal numeral functions as a boundary in determining the distribution of the plural morpheme in non-standard BP. Current proposals on the issue do not account for this prediction; instead they argue for an “autonomous morphological component, deriving morphological aspects of language” (Costa and Figueiredo Silva, 2006, p. 44). For instance, according to Costa and Figueiredo Silva (2006), non-standard BP has a ‘singleton’ morpheme for plural, which is expected to appear only in the determiner. However, the plural morpheme may appear in more than one element of the DP, which makes Castro and Pratas (2006, p. 18) claim that the ‘singleton’ assumption does not account for these patterns.

To sum up, as opposed to current proposals, the analysis assumed here shows that the DP-internal plural marking is not only dependent on syntax but also consistent with the DP-internal hierarchy. Above all, it reveals the underlying reason why some constituents of the DP must, may or cannot be marked for plural in non-standard BP.

References

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