The Phonology – Syntax Interface in Diachrony: an inquiry into linear orders of European Portuguese object clitics

Taking evidence from European Portuguese (EP), the paper traces how phonological and syntactic hosts, responsible for various linear orders of sequences with clitics, may converge. The case in point involves interpolation, i.e. the introduction of an element between a clitic pronoun and the verb. In Romance linguistics, its significance stems from the fact that clitic-verb non-adjacency is assumed to lend support to the post-lexical (syntactic), rather than word-internal nature of clitic attachment (Miller & Monachesi, 2003).

For ca 200 years (mid-17th up to the mid-19th century), the *não* sentential negator tended to occupy an intermediate slot between a pronoun and the verb, thus leading to two concurrent models: *não* – clitic – verb (see (1)) and clitic – *não* – verb (see (2); Martins, 2016: 420-422). Two questions arise: a) how were interpolation and clitic-verb order patterned over appropriate contexts?, and b) why did this segment of grammar evolve?

Our corpus, compiled on 36 texts released between 1614 and 1858, contains 563 examples of both *não* – clitic – verb and clitic – *não* – verb sequences. The average ratio of interpolation to instances of clitic-verb adjacency attains 2.63 : 1 (408 : 155 occurrences). Yet, the two models are shown to have not been fully interchangeable. They were different in the type of pronouns given preference in each of them: vowel-initial 3rd person direct objects (*o*, *a*, *os*, *as*) were paired with interpolation (6.66 : 1; 100 to 15 attestations) more often than the remaining pronouns. The latter did not depart significantly from the average ratio.

These results are interpreted in terms of competing motivations framework (Moravcsik, 2010). Competing motivations are posited for explanatory purposes and study the interplay of at least two general desiderata that cannot be fulfilled satisfactorily at once.

The focus is laid on 3rd person pronouns, which are pervasive in the clitic – *não* – verb model, while underrepresented in *não* – clitic – verb sequences. Clitic-verb adjacency is seen as mirroring in a straightforward manner the attachment of pronouns to their syntactic governing category (i.e. the verb; Luís, 2014). Yet, this configuration frequently triggered allophonic shifts affecting proclitics. As *não* ends in the [ãw̃] nasal diphthong, it coerced the ensuing pronoun into taking a nasal onset (*no*, *na*, *nos*, *nas*). Indeed, in EP, the *não o* sequence surfaced frequently as one portmanteau form *nãono* (see (3)). Therefore, despite their syntactic dependency on the verb, object pronouns attached enclitically to the preceding non-verbal material, thus revealing a mismatch between syntactic and phonological hosts.

The motivation behind the reversal of this order consisted in getting the preverbal domain rid of clitic allophony. Ever since, the *no*, *na*, *nos*, *nas* forms became restricted to postverbal contexts. Accordingly, verbs and verbal stems gained the rank of both syntactic and phonological hosts for object pronouns (Vigário, 2003; see (4)). As a consequence, in present-day EP, interpolation lost much of its former momentum (see (5); although individual dialectal data offers a significant variation; cf. Magro, 2010).

Count: 484 words

Linguistic examples:

(1) ... applicava-ſe cuidadoſamente, para que a triſteza **naõ as affligiſſe**, ... (1701)

so that DEF.FEM sorrow NEG 3.PL.FEM-obj. afflict-3.SG.SUBJ.IMPERF.

'… was making all efforts so that the sorrow does not overcome them' (http://purl.pt/346)

(2) ..., ter Indios que o ſirvaõ, os quaes athegora **o naõ ſerviaõ** ... (1660)

DEF.MASC RELAT.PL up to now ACC-3.SG.MASC NEG serve-IMPERF.INDIC-3.PL

'… to get hold of Indians so that they serve him, that up to now have not been his servants' (http://purl.pt/16556)

(3) ... **naõ no fazendo** deſde o dia que lhe puzerem a dita pena ... (1639)

NEG ACC-3.SG.MASC do-GERUND since DEF.MASC day …

'… not doing this starting from the day when he will be inflicted this punishment' (*o* evolves into *no* under the influence of the nasal nucleus in *não*) (http://purl.pt/30213)

(4) viram- **na** / *viram-a (present-day EP)

see-PAST.PRF.3.SG. ACC-3.SG.FEM

'they saw her'

(5) ... que **não a** viram / ... *que **não na** viram (present-day EP)

that-COMPL NEG ACC-3.SG.FEM see-PAST.PRF.3.SG.

'that they did not see her'

References (selected)

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Corpora:

Corpus Informatizado do Português Medieval (http://cipm.fcsh.unl.pt/)

Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal - Biblioteca Digital (http://purl.pt/index/geral/PT/index.html)