

Topicalization as Predication: The Syntax-Semantics Interface of Low Topics in Brazilian Portuguese

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1. Introduction

The majority of the works on topicalization in the generative literature deals with phenomena involving the (high) left periphery of the sentence, i.e. the CP area. However, topicalization has also been shown to occur in the (low) left periphery of vP (e.g. by Belletti 2004 for Italian). This paper expands the investigation of low topicalization by examining data from Brazilian Portuguese (BP). The idiosyncrasies of low topics in BP are revealed through the comparison of the CP and the vP area, for which I use minimal pairs like (1), where (a) illustrates a high topic and (b) illustrates a low topic.^{1,2} Although I mostly use adnominal PPs, adverbial elements and categories other than PPs are also possible as both high and low topics, as shown in (2). Throughout the paper, I make use of Topic projections represented in the clausal spine as in (3), which I adopt from Rizzi (1997) and Belletti (2004).³

- (1) a. **Do Kafka**, o João resenhou só dois livros. *High topic: CP area*
of-the Kafka the John reviewed only two books
b. O João resenhou, **do Kafka**, só dois livros. *Low topic: vP area*
the John reviewed of-the Kafka only two books
'John reviewed only two books by Kafka.'
- (2) a. **Com pressa, (desesperadamente)**, o João leu só dois livros.
with hurry (desperately) the John read only two books
b. O João leu, **com pressa, (desesperadamente)**, só dois livros.
the John read with hurry (desperately) only two books
'John read only two books in a hurry (desperately).'
- (3) [CP [H-TopP (**high topic**) [TP *subject verb* [L-TopP (**low topic**) [vP/AgroP *object*]]]]]

I first show that low topicalization is significantly different from high topicalization, in the sense that the former only allows for a subset of the interpretations possible in the latter and crucially has a stricter discursive articulation of topic and comment. I then move onto a more specific asymmetry, which was previously unobserved: while a high topic does not impose any constraints on the scopal behavior of quantifiers generated within its comment, a quantifier generated under a (clause-mate) low topic cannot be interpreted in a position lower than the low TopP. In order to account for this fact, I propose that contrary to high topicalization, which operates over complete propositions (of type *t*), low topicalization (in BP at least) operates over *unsaturated verbal predicates* (of type $\langle e, t \rangle$).

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¹ Translations will often be given in a non-topicalized form, where the topic appears underlined.

² To the best of my knowledge, constructions like (1)b in BP were first noticed by Avelar (2006). This work, however, does not deal with the topichood of the moved elements, but rather focuses on the internal structure of the DP that they originate in.

³ Subject and verb are standardly assumed to move to the TP area in BP; see e.g. Tescari Neto (2013).

2. The interpretation of high and low topicalization

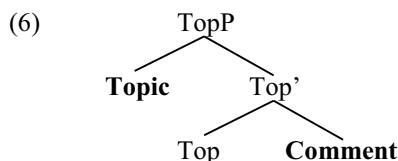
High topics in BP can be of a variety of types.⁴ They can have either *aboutness(-shift)* or *contrastive* interpretation⁵ and can be linked to a comment-internal position (*connected* topic) or not (*strict hanging* topic). Low topics are, however, more restricted. Thus (4) shows that a high but not a low topic can have aboutness interpretation, and (5) shows that a (strict) hanging topic is possible in the high but not in the low topic position.

- (4) A: *Tell me something about the Renaissance fair.*
 B: **(N)a feira renascentista**, eu vou levar o João.
 (in-)the fair renaissance I will take the John
 B': #Eu vou levar, **na feira renascentista**, o João.
 I will take in-the fair renaissance the John
 'I will take John to the renaissance fair.'
- (5) a. **Fruta**, eu gosto de maçã.
 fruit I like of apple
 b. *Eu gosto, **fruta**, de maçã.
 I like fruit of apple
 'As for fruits, I like apples.'

In other words, low topics must have contrastive interpretation and connected construal. In order to keep the comparison between high and low topics fair in what follows, I will restrict myself to cases of contrastive topicalization, which is appropriate in contexts where a set of alternatives is evoked (see e.g. Büring 2003 and references therein for the semantics and the prosody of contrastive topics).

2.1. High topics: *H-topic* > *Comment*

High topicalization is usually assumed to involve a bi-articulated structure in the discourse, where the *topic* is related to a *comment*, in a relation that is read off syntax. Rizzi (1997) proposed that the articulation of topic and comment is made via a Topic projection in the CP domain, which relates its specifier and its complement in the manner shown in (6). Usually, which is also the case in BP, the informational composition of the comment of a high topic may vary with respect to what is new (focus) and what is old (given) information. In other words, a high topic may be associated with a comment that is partially new, as in (7)a, or with a comment that is entirely new, as in (7)b. The first case is illustrated in (8): Sentence (a) can be felicitously followed by either (b), where the direct object is new/focus, or (c), where the verbal predicate is new/focus. The second case is illustrated in (9), where each alternative of the set of topics (oranges and limes) is associated with a different comment.⁶



- (7) a. H-topic > [(old) *(new) (old)]_{Comment}
 b. H-topic > [*(new)]_{Comment}

⁴ For (high) topicalization in BP, see Pontes (1987) and Kato (1998), among many others.

⁵ For a classification of topics, see e.g. Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007) and Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010).

⁶ It is true though that at some level the two (or more) alternative topics must be related, in a contextually salient way. It is thus hard to think of a context where (i) below would be pragmatically felicitous.

(i) #Bananas, I usually eat with sugar, and this book, I will read tomorrow.

- (8) a. **Do Kafka**, eu li todos os livros.
of-the Kafka I read all the books
'I read all the books by Kafka.'
- b. E **do Pinker**, eu li só dois livros.
and of-the Pinker I read only two books
'And I read *only two books* by Pinker.'
- c. E **do Pinker**, eu assisti várias palestras.
and of-the Pinker I watched several lectures
'And I *saw several lectures* by Pinker.'
- (9) **As laranjas**, eu vou descascar, e **os limões**, a Maria vai picar.
the oranges I will peel and the limes the Mary will chop up
'I will peel the oranges, and Mary will chop up the limes.'

As seen above, to a certain extent high topics disregard the informational composition of their comments. This is not the case with low topics, as we will see below.

2.2. Low topics: *Ground-comment* > *L-topic* > *Focus-comment*

Before discussing the interpretive properties of low topicalization, it must be shown that the examples analyzed here do involve the low left periphery (of vP), rather than (a combination of) e.g. DP-internal movement or right-dislocation, which are possibilities independently attested in BP.⁷ First, note that in (10) the negative concord item *nenhuma pessoa* 'no person' is properly licensed by the sentential negation, which means it is in a low position. The fact that an adverb (e.g. *secretamente* 'secretly') can intervene between *dos Democratas* 'of the Democrats' and the (structurally low) direct object crucially shows that the topic moves out of the DP where it originates. Also, the topic being in between the negation and the negative concord item shows that it is located in the middle field of the sentence.

- (10) O FBI não investigou, **dos Democratas**_i, (secretamente,) *nenhuma pessoa* t_i
the FBI not investigated of-the Democrats (secretly) no person
(ano passado).
(year past)
'The FBI didn't (secretly) investigate any person of the Democrats (last year).'

That being so, the discursive articulation of high topicalization proposed by Rizzi (1997), as in (6) above, cannot be extended to low topicalization. Given that low topics surface in the middle field of the sentence, they end up sandwiched between two portions of the comment, therefore a *Topic* > *Comment* articulation cannot be straightforwardly read off syntax, for part of the comment is not selected and c-commanded by the L-Top head. Interestingly, there is a clear division of labor between the two portions of the comment. The material that is higher than the low topic must be old, common-ground information; all the new information must be part of the material that is lower than the low topic.

The restriction on the higher portion, which I call *ground-comment*, is shown below. Note that the possible answers to the question in (11)A must contain new information on the verb; (11)B, where the verb precedes the topic, is an odd answer to it. The same effect is found when (12)B is used as a response to (12)A, which requires new information on the subject (which also precedes the low topic).

- (11) *There are several books by different authors on the table.*
A: *What did you do with the books **by Kafka**?*
B: #Eu *resenhei*, **do Kafka**, todos os livros.
I reviewed of-the Kafka all the books.
'I *reviewed* all the books by Kafka.'

⁷ For additional evidence, see Avelar (2006:94ff). For DP-internal topicalization in BP, see Bastos-Gee (2011).

(12) *Students were expected to review a number of books by different authors.*

A: *Who reviewed the books **by Kafka**?*

B: #*Eu resenhei, **do Kafka**, todos os livros.*

I reviewed of-the Kafka all the books.

'I reviewed all the books by Kafka.'

When both the verb and the subject are part of the common ground, low topicalization is possible: the question in (13)A can be felicitously answered by (13)B.

(13) *There are several books by different authors on the table.*

A: *How many books **by Kafka** did you review?*

B: *Eu resenhei, **do Kafka**, todos os livros.*

I reviewed of-the Kafka all the books.

'I reviewed *all the books* by Kafka.'

No such restriction arises with high topicalization: any of the questions in (14)A-A" can be felicitously answered by (14)B (which will have a different intonation for each case, depending on the relevant new information). Recall from (7) that the comment of high topics can be freely composed of new information (entirely or partially), unlike low topics.

(14) A: *What did you do with the books **by Kafka**?*

A': *Who reviewed the books **by Kafka**?*

A": *How many books **by Kafka** did you review?*

B: **Do Kafka**, eu resenhei todos os livros.

of-the Kafka I reviewed all the books

'I reviewed all the books by Kafka.'

The new/focalized information associated with the contrastive low topic must be part of the lower portion of the comment, which I call *focus-comment*. This is the case in the felicitous (13)B above and (15)B-B' below, where each of John and Mary (the relevant answers to *who* in the question) is linked to one of the alternative fairs.

(15) A: *Have you decided who you're taking to each fair (this week)?*

B: *Eu vou levar, **na feira renascentista**, o João (essa semana).*

I will take in-the fair renaissance the John (this week)

'I will take *John* to the renaissance fair (this week).'

B': *Eu vou levar, **na feira agrícola**, a Maria (essa semana).*

I will take in-the fair agricultural the Mary (this week)

'I will take *Mary* to the county fair (this week).'

The discursive articulation of low topicalization can thus be summarized as in (16)a, with the informational composition detailed in (16)b: the ground-comment cannot contain new information, which must appear in the focus-comment.

(16) a. Ground-comment > L-topic > Focus-comment

b. [(*new)]_{G-Comment} > L-topic > [*(new)]_{F-Comment}

Not only does low topicalization have stricter pragmatic requirements than high topicalization, but it also imposes restrictions on the interpretation of other elements in the sentence. More specifically, in the next section I will show how the presence of topics affects the scope of quantifiers generated within their comments. The novel data presented in the next section bear on the main proposal of the paper that low topicalization operates over unsaturated verbal predicates of type <e,t>.

3. Scope interactions in high and low topicalization

In this section, I present a previously unobserved asymmetry between high and low topicalization involving scope; in particular, I show that quantifiers generated under topics have different scopal possibilities depending on whether the topic is in the CP or the vP area.

First, note that the base sentence in (17), without topicalization, is ambiguous in that the quantified expression *duas pessoas dos Democratas* ‘two people of the Democrats’ can have either wide or narrow scope with respect to the matrix verb *negou* ‘denied’. Sentence (17) is thus compatible with both scenarios described below. Scenario 1, where there are two (specific) people of the Democrats that the president denied to have hired, evokes the scopal relation $2 > deny$. Conversely, in scenario 2, where the negation falls over the number of Democrats hired by the president, the scopal relation evoked is $deny > 2$.

- (17) O presidente negou ter contratado duas pessoas dos Democratas.
 the president denied to.have hired two people of-the Democrats
 ‘The president denied to have hired two people of the Democrats.’ $2 > deny; deny > 2$
- (18) **Scenario 1:** *The president says, “I hired many people among the Republicans and many people among the Democrats. But I did not hire John, Peter, and Mary, among the Republicans, and Bill and Sue, among the Democrats.”*
- (19) **Scenario 2:** *The president must fill the positions for the Office of Human Rights. For that office, it is the law that the president cannot hire more than one person of his own party. One senator believes that Obama did not meet his obligation, and says, “Obama should be prosecuted. He hired two Republicans, which conforms to the law, but he also hired two people among the Democrats, which is illegal.” The president replies, “I did not hire two Democrats!”*

Now let us examine whether the scopal relations are affected when topicalization takes place in (17). In (20), where *dos Democratas* is a high topic, nothing changes in the scopal possibilities between the matrix verb *negou* and the embedded quantifier *duas pessoas*: the sentence is equally ambiguous and thus compatible with both scenario 1 and scenario 2. Each interpretation is associated with a different intonation, in the same manner as (17): surface scope is achieved by a less marked intonation, whereas inverse scope is achieved with a rising intonation on the quantifier.

- (20) **Dos Democratas**, o presidente negou ter contratado duas pessoas.
 of-the Democrats the president denied to.have hired two people
 ‘The president denied to have hired two people of the Democrats.’ $2 > deny; deny > 2$

Crucially, when topicalization is low, as in (21), the sentence becomes infelicitous in scenario 2, although still compatible with scenario 1. In other words, the embedded object quantifier *duas pessoas* must take wide scope over the matrix lexical negation *negou* (the sentence therefore only allows for one of the two intonations alluded to above, namely the one where the quantifier receives a rising intonation). The fact that inverse scope is the only possibility here is particularly interesting, considering that BP is otherwise a language that favors surface scope (i.e. inverse scope, when possible at all, is associated with a special intonation).

- (21) O presidente negou ter contratado, **dos Democratas**, duas pessoas.
 the president denied to.have hired of-the Democrats two people
 ‘The president denied to have hired *two people* of the Democrats.’ $2 > deny; *deny > 2$

Furthermore, in (22), where there are two quantifiers within the focus-comment, both have to be interpreted in a higher position. Whereas the scopal relation $\forall > 2 > forget$ is available, the scopal relation $forget > \forall > 2$ is not (sentence (22) thus has the reading in which for every student *x*, there are two books by Kafka that *x* forgot to review, but not the reading in which the students had to review two books by Kafka each and they forgot to do so).

- (22) Os alunos esqueceram de resenhar, **do Kafka**, dois livros cada um (esse semestre).
 the students forgot of to.review of-the Kafka two books each one (this semester)
 ‘The students forgot to review *two books by Kafka* each (this semester).’

It should be noted that this restriction is clause-bound: the quantifier in the embedded clause of (23) can (in fact, must) be interpreted under *negou* (i.e. within its CP), despite the low topic in the matrix.

- (23) *In all of his recent speeches on TV, the president has denied something.*
 O presidente negou, **no pronunciamento de ontem**, que ele contratou duas
 the president denied in-the speech of yesterday that he hired two
 pessoas dos Democratas.
 people of-the Democrats
 ‘In his speech yesterday, the president denied that he hired two people of the Democrats.’

Based on these data, I conclude that a quantifier cannot be interpreted under a clause-mate low topic in BP. In other words, QR cannot target a position under a clause-mate low topic, a rather puzzling state of affairs, considering that high topics disregard the scopal relations within their comments. The question is why this asymmetry arises, i.e. why low topics have such an effect in scopal relations.

4. Topicalization as “predication”

In order to account for the scopal restriction presented in the previous section, I propose an account based on the semantic type of the relevant elements. In particular, I propose that low topics operate over *unsaturated verbal predicates*, contrary to high topics, which are commonly assumed to operate over complete propositions (of type t).⁸ This amounts to saying that the complement of L-Top cannot be of type t . I then hypothesize that the vP selected by L-Top is of type $\langle e, t \rangle$. In other words, the asymmetry discussed above is a consequence of the two (i.e. high and low) Top heads differing in their semantic composition. While H-Top relates a topic (of type α) to a proposition of type t , L-Top relates a topic (of type α) to a verbal predicate of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ (to be saturated later on by the subject), as in (24) and (25).

- (24)
- $$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{H-TopP } t \\
 \swarrow \quad \searrow \\
 \text{High topic } \alpha \quad \text{H-Top}' \langle \alpha, t \rangle \\
 \quad \quad \quad \swarrow \quad \searrow \\
 \quad \quad \quad \text{H-Top} \langle t, \langle \alpha, t \rangle \rangle \quad \text{TP } t
 \end{array}$$

- (25)
- $$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{L-TopP } \langle e, t \rangle \\
 \swarrow \quad \searrow \\
 \text{Low topic } \alpha \quad \text{L-Top}' \langle \alpha, et \rangle \\
 \quad \quad \quad \swarrow \quad \searrow \\
 \quad \quad \quad \text{L-Top} \langle et, \langle \alpha, et \rangle \rangle \quad \text{vP } \langle et \rangle
 \end{array}$$

We can now go back to (21), where *duas pessoas* must take scope over *negou*. Observe in (26) that the quantifier cannot target the embedded vP, for it is of type $\langle e, t \rangle$; it must then raise (at least) as far as the first projection of type t available (since QR is standardly taken to target positions of type t), namely the (saturated) matrix vP.⁹ Once *duas pessoas* is adjoined to the vP where *negou* is interpreted, its wide scope is accounted for (the semantically vacuous movement of *negou* to T is not represented here).

⁸ Or even something of a higher order. For instance, Krifka (2001) suggests that aboutness topics are speech acts on their own, conjoined to another speech act (their comments). See Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) and references therein for a discussion of the distinction between aboutness and contrastive (high) topics regarding what they operate over.

⁹ Notice that if the quantifier could adjoin to PartP or XP, it would be able to move from under the topic and still be under the scope of ‘denied’. Given that this interpretation is ruled out, I conclude that these projections are not possible targets of QR. This remains to be deduced and will be left for future research.

Interestingly, the focus-comment can actually move to the higher part of the clause — but only if it has an independent reason (other than focus) to do so. In (38)a, the relevant element is a *wh*-DP, moved to (the matrix) CP by virtue of its *wh*-feature (note that, as (38)b shows, low topicalization is also compatible with *wh*-elements in situ).¹³ Being in the CP-domain, the fronted *wh*-DP is outside the ground-comment and therefore can be (or refer to) new information.¹⁴ By now, it goes without saying that no such restriction arises with high topicalization. The sentence in (39) is thus well formed.

- (38) a. *Quantos livros* parecem ter chegado, **do Kafka**, (ontem)?
 how.many books seem to.have arrived of-the Kafka (yesterday)
 b. Parecem ter chegado, **do Kafka**, (ontem) *quantos livros* (ontem)?
 seem to.have arrived of-the Kafka (yesterday) how.many books (yesterday)
 ‘How many books by Kafka seem to have arrived (yesterday).’
- (39) **Do Kafka**, só cinco livros_F parecem ter chegado (ontem).
 of-the Kafka only five books seem to.have arrived (yesterday)
 ‘There seem to have arrived *only five books* by Kafka (yesterday).’

I take the data above to indicate that focus is not the relevant factor to explain the idiosyncratic behavior of quantifiers generated under a low topic.¹⁵ Rather, the impossibility of QR under a low topic follows from a semantic requirement, namely that the low Top head selects for a complement of type $\langle e, t \rangle$, with the consequence that the first possible landing site of QR is necessarily above the low TopP. Such idiosyncrasy of low topicalization may shed light on the deeper question of why a language would allow for topicalization in multiple areas of its clausal spine. The reason is that H-Top and L-Top are not identical in their properties, which is reflected in their semantic (type) selection as well as in their impact on the mapping of sentences with topicalization from syntax to the semantico-pragmatic interface.

5. Final remarks

This paper highlighted the importance of including a contrastive analysis between different areas of the clause in the study of topicalization as an interface phenomenon. A number of idiosyncrasies of topicalization in the *low* left periphery (of vP) came to light when it was compared to the *high* left periphery (of CP). It was shown that whereas high topics do not impose any restrictions on the informational composition of their comments (with respect to what is new or old information), low topics clearly distinguish the functions of the two portions of the comment (*ground*- and *focus*-comment), which challenges the traditional discursive articulation of *Topic* > *Comment*.

Beyond characterizing the topics themselves, I also addressed the question of how topics may affect the behavior of other elements in the sentence. More specifically, I investigated what the possible QR landing sites are for quantifiers generated under topics. A puzzling (and previously unnoticed) contrast arose: the complement of the low Top head (in the cases addressed here, vP) ceases to be a possible target of QR, whereas no such restriction arises with high topicalization. In order to account for that, I proposed that Brazilian Portuguese has two different Top heads, H-Top and L-Top, which select for complements of different semantic types: *t* and $\langle e, t \rangle$, respectively. Low topicalization can thus be viewed as a kind of “predication”, in the sense that it relates a topic α to an unsaturated verbal predicate.

The analysis proposed here thus contributes to filling in the bridge between the syntax and the semantics/pragmatics of topicalization. It also shows that the comparison between the CP and the vP areas is crucial in that respect.

¹³ For discontinuous *wh*-elements in BP, see Avelar (2006) and Bastos-Gee (2011).

¹⁴ These data suggest that the TP/VP area and the CP area may constitute independent pragmatic domains for the computation of old and new information. In particular, the low topic cannot be preceded by new information in its own domain (TP), but can be preceded by new information in a separate domain (CP). The hypothesis that there is a bipartite pragmatic articulation in the clause, as well as what it follows from (e.g. phases), is left for future research.

¹⁵ Also, recall that in (22) both quantifiers (one of which is not focalized) have to be interpreted in a higher position.

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