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# Rethinking Subject Doubling in Brazilian Portuguese

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**Abstract** This article shows that subject doubling (SD) is not uniform in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). Focusing on pronouns, we draw on classical proposals for the segmentation of pronouns in natural languages to show that resumptive pronouns display heterogeneous properties, being either strong or deficient. We also provide evidence that the subject may remain in an argument position without moving to the left periphery of the sentence. We propose two SD structures in BP: one with topic doubling and another with argumental doubling. Splitting occurs only in the former, whereas in the latter both elements behave as a single syntactic object.

**Keywords** Syntactic doubling. Subject. Topic. Pronouns. Brazilian Portuguese.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Subject Is Not Always Left Dislocated. – 3 More than One Type of Resumptive Pronoun. – 4 Deficient Pronouns, but Not Clitics. – 5 Subject and Pronoun Positions in Brazilian Subject Doubling. – 6 Conclusions.

## 1 Introduction

Syntactic doubling constructions challenge current linguistic theories, as they appear to violate three fundamental principles of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics: the Economy Principle (Chomsky 1995), the Principle of Compositionality (Frege 1892), and Grice's

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Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975).[1] These constructions seem to defy economy when both the 'doublee' and the 'doubler'[2] bear the same thematic role; compositionality is also compromised insofar as the doubler does not directly contribute to the semantic interpretation of the resulting structure; and finally, doubling appears to yield a sentence that is more informative than required.

According to Barbiers (2008), one way to address this issue, at least from a syntactic perspective, is to propose an analysis in which the doubling phenomenon arises because a single syntactic element is associated with more than one syntactic position. To mitigate the semantic and pragmatic problem, it has been argued that syntactic doubling is only apparent, with the doubler contributing to both the semantic and pragmatic interpretation of the sentence.

In this paper, we discuss some syntactic properties of the subject-doubling construction in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). In this language, doubling may occur through a nominal or pronominal subject constituent followed, directly or indirectly, by a personal pronoun that generally agrees in gender and number with the head element of the subject, as illustrated below.

(1) O meu irmão mais novo ele é um cara que viaja muito
the my brother more young he is a guy that travels a lot
'My youngest brother is a guy who travels a lot'

(2) Ele, por exemplo, ele gosta de Racionais
he for example he likes of Racionais
'For example, he likes Racionais'

Doubling constructions are also observed in languages such as French and the Trentino dialect spoken in Northern Italy:

(3) Le garçon, il mangeait une pomme
the boy he ate an apple
'The boy ate an apple'

(Coveney 2005, 96)

**1** We would like to thank the organizers of this Festschrift in honor of Anna Cardinaletti for their dedication and care in bringing together a collection of works inspired by Anna's contributions. We are especially grateful to Anna for her pioneering work on subjecthood, which has provided the theoretical foundations that have guided and shaped our own research. Building on her insights, we have sought to further develop the study of subject syntax in Brazilian Portuguese.

**2** The term doubling suggests the duplication of a single argument. In this paper, we follow Belletti (2005) in using the terms "doublee" and "doubler" to refer to the duplicated elements.

(4) Nane el vien doman
Nane he comes tomorrow
'Nane is coming tomorrow'

(Cardinaletti 2019, 9)

In this paper, we argue that, unlike what has been proposed for other languages such as French (Kayne 2000), subject doubling in BP should not necessarily be analyzed as a topicalization strategy, nor as a Subject Clitic Left Dislocation construction (Camacho 2006). Drawing on the diagnostics proposed by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999), we show that resumptive pronouns do not behave uniformly, giving rise to distinct constructions. According to this approach, we maintain that, although they sometimes resemble deficient items, these elements cannot be regarded as clitics, unlike what occurs in Northern Italian dialects.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents a discussion of the positions occupied by the subject in this construction, showing that the subject may appear either left-dislocated or not; section 3 examines the behavior of resumptive pronouns, highlighting that they sometimes behave as strong pronouns and sometimes as deficient ones; section 4 refines this observation by showing that, although these pronouns may be deficient, they do not display the properties of clitics; finally, section 5 provides an explanation that accounts for the distinct patterns of subject doubling in BP.

## 2 The Subject Is Not Always Left Dislocated

In the literature, subject doubling in BP has traditionally been analyzed as a case in which the subject constituent occupies a position in the left periphery of the clause and is resumed by a pronoun in the TP domain. Duarte (1995), building on Pontes (1987), argues that this construction should be classified as a left-dislocation structure. This view is also adopted by Vasco (2006) and Orsini and Vasco (2007), who observe that subject doubling involves a topicalized element followed by a copy-pronoun corresponding to the clausal subject. Galves (2001), in turn, proposes that subject doubling in the third person functions as a "reminder strategy", involving the topicalization of the subject constituent along with an independent reminder pronoun in subject position.

Indeed, it is not possible to dissociate the possibility of subject displacement in this construction from its topic-like behavior. One piece of evidence supporting this view

comes from the possibility of displaced constituents intervening between these elements and the pronoun, as is the case with the contrastive focus object in (5b).

(5) a. A Maria ela comeu uma fruta
the Mary she ate a fruit
'Mary ate a fruit'

b. A Maria, UMA FRUTA ela comeu (não um legume)
the Mary A FRUIT she ate not a vegetable
'Mary ate a fruit (not a vegetable)'

It is worth emphasizing as well that the lack of pauses (comma intonation) following the subject does not affect the acceptability of such sentences, as in (5a). However, it is interesting to note that although the DP may appear in the left periphery, the pronoun must remain in a non-dislocated position, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of (6), where the resumptive precedes the contrastive focus.

(6) *A Maria, ela UMA FRUTA comeu (não um legume)
the Mary she A FRUIT ate not a vegetable

This fact resembles the weak Italian pronoun *egli*, which cannot be left-dislocated (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999, 68):

(7) *Egli a Gianni [pro non gli ha parlato]
he to Gianni pro not to.him has spoken

Another aspect that runs counter to analyses claiming that the subject in SD always occupies a left-peripheral topic position is the possibility of extraction (Quarezemin 2019). Rizzi (2004) shows that when a constituent is dislocated in the left periphery of an embedded clause, Wh-extraction is blocked, as can be seen in (8b); however, this is not the case when SD occurs in the subordinate clause, as illustrated in (8a).

(8) a. Onde o Pedro acha que [a Ana ela] encontrou o
where the Peter thinks that the Ana she met the
João?
John
'Where does Peter think that Ana met John?'

b. *Onde o Pedro acha que o João a Ana (ela)
where the Peter thinks that the John the Ana she
encontrou?
met

In addition, Quarezemin (2020) observes that pragmatic effects also point to a distinction between SD, on the one hand, and sentences with an explicitly left-dislocated phrase, on the other.

(9) a. O que aconteceu?
what happened
'What happened?'

b. A Ana ela comprou um carro
the Ana she bought a car
'Ana bought a car'

c. #Um carro, Ana comprou (ele)
a car Ana bought it

It can be observed that only SD occurs in out-of-the-blue contexts. The sentence with a left-dislocated object does not fit wide-focus contexts, as shown in (9c). The evidence presented so far suggests that the DP in a SD construction does not always occupy a topic position in the A′-domain, but may also appear within the TP zone. This leads us to Generalization 1 in (10), which will be refined below. This generalization requires assuming two possible structural configurations for the construction, as represented in (11).

(10) Generalization 1: subjects in SD may appear either in the CP or the TP domain.

(11) a. [$_{CP}$ subj [$_{TP}$ Resumptive Pronoun …
b. [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ subj Resumptive Pronoun …

## 3 More than One Type of Resumptive Pronoun

In this section, we analyze the resumptive pronouns in light of the typology of pronominal categories proposed by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999). Their analysis roughly distinguishes two groups of pronouns: strong and deficient. Two properties that distinguish these groups are particularly relevant for the present study: only strong pronouns can be coordinated and c-modified.

Applying these diagnostics to BP subject-doubling sentences, Krieck (2022) observes that resumptive pronouns can be successfully coordinated or c-modified.

(12) A Maria e o João, depois de casar, ele e ela
the Mary and the John after of to.get.married he and she
querem ter filhos.
want to.have children
'After getting married, Mary and John want to have children.'

(13) O João, hoje à noite, só ele vai sair.
the John tonight only he will go.out
'Only John will go out tonight.'

It seems, however, that this is only possible when some material intervenes between the subject and the resumptive pronoun. When no morphophonological material or prosodic break is present, both coordination and c-modification of the resumptive pronoun result in ungrammaticality, as shown by the data below.

(14) *A Maria e o João ele e ela querem ter filhos
the Mary and the John he and she want to.have children

(15) *O João só ele vai sair
the John only he will go.out

This diagnostic suggests that a strong pronoun can only occur when the subject appears in a topicalized position. Moreover, when the projections QembP and FinP are activated, coordinated or c-modified pronouns cannot occur, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of (16a′, b′). This indicates that, in such cases, the pronoun is deficient rather than strong.

(16) a. Eu fico me perguntando [$_{QembP}$ que coisa [$_{Qemb}$ que [$_{IP}$ o
I keep me asking what thing that the
Bruno e a Maria eles cozinharam
Bruno and the Maria they cooked
'I keep wondering what Bruno and Maria cooked.'

a'. *Eu fico me perguntando [$_{QembP}$ que coisa [$_{Qemb}$ que [$_{IP}$ o
I keep me asking what thing that the
Bruno e a Maria ele e ela cozinharam
Bruno and the Maria he and she cooked

b. Eu fico me perguntando [$_{QembP}$ que coisa [$_{Qemb}$ que [$_{IP}$ o
I keep me asking what thing that the
Bruno ele cozinhou
Bruno he cooked
'I keep wondering what Bruno cooked.'

b'. *Eu fico me perguntando [$_{QembP}$ que coisa [$_{Qemb}$ que [$_{IP}$ o
I keep me asking what thing that the
Bruno só ele cozinhou
Bruno only he cooked

The data above confirm the hypothesis presented in the previous section that there are two available positions for hosting subjects. They also show that pronouns cannot be homogeneously categorized, and that their distinct behavior appears to be associated with the position occupied by the subject, given the clear difference in the acceptability of strong pronouns when the subject is dislocated and when it is not.

At this stage, we must determine whether deficient pronouns are also possible when DPs occupy a topicalized position, or whether only strong pronouns are allowed in that context. To address this issue, we examine the behavior of the pronoun *cê*, an apparent reduced form of the second-person singular pronoun *você* 'you'. Othero (2013) and Barbosa (2005) point out that these two forms display distinct behaviors, the former patterning as a deficient pronoun and the latter as a strong one. The data below illustrate a restriction on the c-modification and focalization of *cê* when compared to *você*.

(17) a. Só você chegou mais cedo
only you arrived more early
'Only you arrived earlier'

b. *Só cê chegou mais cedo
only you arrived more early

(18) a. VOCÊ eu acho que terá que vir amanhã (não eu)
YOU I think that will.have that come tomorrow not me
'I think YOU are the one who will have to come tomorrow, not me'

b. *CÊ eu acho que terá que vir amanhã (não eu)
YOU I think that will.have that come tomorrow not me

The reduced form cê has a different status from the reduced pronouns of the first and third person. To begin with, its morphological form differs from that of the strong pronoun você, whereas the reduced

forms of the first and third person are morphologically homophonous and can only be distinguished in speech. It is also worth noting that the third-person deficient forms cannot appear at the beginning of a simple clause, nor can they be doubled by their strong or weak counterparts.

It thus seems that both strong and deficient pronouns, the latter in more restricted contexts, function as doublers with topicalized DPs and pronouns. This observation leads us to Generalization 2 below and to the refinement of the structures proposed in (11).

(19) Generalization 2: When the subject occurs in the CP domain, doubler pronouns may be either strong or deficient (a,b). When it occurs in the TP domain, resumptive pronouns can only be deficient (c).

(20) a. [CP subj [TP $RP_{strong}$ …
b. [CP subj [TP $RP_{deficient}$ …
c. [CP [TP subj $RP_{deficient}$ …

## 4 Deficient Pronouns, but Not Clitics

The pronominal class analysis proposed by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) assumes that the simple division of pronouns into strong and deficient does not fully capture their properties, and that a further split within the deficient class, between weak pronouns, on the one hand, and clitics, on the other, is necessary. In this section, we show that this distinction is particularly relevant to the case of resumptive pronouns, arguing that the elements found in BP subject-doubling sentences are not clitics but weak pronouns.

In previous analyses (Quarezemin 2020; Krieck 2021), we argued that subject-doubling sentences could represent a case of Subj lexicalization (as proposed by Rizzi 2018 for Northern Italian dialects). In this case, that head would act as a probe, attracting the subject to its specifier and thus allowing doubling, as illustrated in (21).

(21) a. A Maria ela saiu
the Mary she left
'Mary left'
b. [$_{SubjP}$ A Maria [$_{Subj}$ ela…

Our proposal was based on the defective paradigm of reduced weak pronouns in BP (Kato, Duarte 2014), which, due to morphophonological reduction, are obligatorily deficient. At the time, it was argued that in

a subject-doubling structure these pronouns would no longer behave as weak forms, but rather as clitics.

It is widely acknowledged that clitic pronouns are syntactically dependent on the verb. In this regard, among the properties of clitics discussed by Kayne (1975), we highlight two: (i) clitics cannot be separated from the verb by any intervening element, and (ii) negation operators cannot appear between the clitic and the verb. Let us consider, for instance, how both properties apply to the impersonal clitic se in BP.

(22) a. Em breve se saberá a hora da festa
soon cl.3SG.IMPERS know.FUT the time of.the party
'Soon the time of the party will be known.'

b. *Se em breve saberá a hora da festa
cl.3SG.IMPERS soon know.FUT the time of.the party
'Soon the time of the party will be known.'

(23) a. Não se sabe a hora da festa
not cl.3SG.IMPERS know.PRES the time of.the party
'The time of the party is not known.'

b. *Se não sabe a hora da festa
cl.3sg.impers não know.PRES the time of.the party

If the pronoun in (21) could function as a clitic in SD, we would expect them to behave identically to the pronoun se, namely, that no adverbial form or negation marker could intervene between them and the verb. However, these conditions are not always maintained, as shown below.

(24) a. Eles, eis em breve saberão a hora da festa
they they soon will.know the time of.the party

b. Eles, em breve eis saberão a hora da festa
they soon they will.know the time of.the party
'They will know the time of the party soon'

(25) a. Eles, eis não sabem a hora da festa
they they not know the time of.the party
'They don't know the time of the party'

b. *Eles, não eis saberão a hora da festa
they not they will.know the time of.the party

The data in (24) show that adjacency between the doubler pronoun and the verb can be easily disrupted, indicating that, in BP, there is no strong dependency relation between the pronoun and the verbal form, unlike what we find with the impersonal pronoun se. Regarding the negation operator in (25), the only possible configuration is for it to remain adjacent to the verb, thereby excluding adjacency between the resumptive and the verb. Considering these properties, the reduced pronoun in (21) seems to retain a weak status when it appears in SD contexts.

Based on the facts presented, we argue for two distinct configurations of subject doubling in BP: when the DP is topicalized, the pronoun is strong, and may be weak in a pronominal doubling construction, as in (24); when the DP occurs in the TP zone, the pronoun is only weak and cannot be analyzed as a clitic. This assumption is also consistent with analyses showing that the loss of the clitic pronoun system in BP is directly related to the distinct behavior of SD constructions in this language, as compared to other Romance languages, such as French (Kato 1993; 2017). Accordingly, we propose a third generalization, accompanied by the structural possibilities, which refine those in (20).

(26) Generalization 3: When subjects occur in the CP domain, doubler pronouns are either strong or weak. When they occur in the TP domain, doubler pronouns can only be weak.

(27) a. [CP subj [TP $RP_{strong}$ …
b. [CP subj [TP $RP_{weak}$ …
c. [CP [TP subj $RP_{weak}$ …

## 5 Subject and Pronoun Positions in Brazilian Subject Doubling

Before turning to the syntax of SD, it is important to recall a few points. First, BP is not a language that exhibits generalized syntactic doubling constructions, as there are no instances of object doubling, unlike in Spanish. Although both pronominal and non-pronominal doubling occur, the former is restricted to cases where the doublee is topicalized. This scenario may be related to the weakening of the object clitic system in BP (Carvalho, Calindro 2018; Kato, Ordoñez 2021), as well as to the fact that the EPP is no longer satisfied by agreement markers in BP. According to Barbosa et al. (2005), BP and European Portuguese (EP) differ with respect to EPP checking: it is satisfied via phrase movement in the former, whereas the latter resorts to agreement markers through affixal clitics. One

consequence of these properties is that SD in BP is more frequent, since the doubler pronoun compensates for the absence of a fully productive agreement system, as observed in EP.

Although the role of the doubler pronoun may be related to the agreement system in BP, we have shown in the previous sections that these elements cannot be treated as clitics. We find two distinct groups, the strong doubler pronoun and the weak doubler pronoun. The former is in complementary distribution with the subject DP, and therefore, in constructions where doubling occurs, the DP must necessarily appear in the left periphery of the sentence, leaving the pronoun in the argumental position, SpecSubjP, as shown in (28).

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (28) | [$_{TopP}$ | o | menino | [$_{SubjP}$ | ele | [$_{TP}$ | dormiu | tarde | ]]]] |
| | | the | boy | | he | | slept | late | |

Note that the nominative Case feature is checked by the pronoun that moves to SpecSubjP, thereby ensuring its status as "the subject of predication", in the sense of Cardinaletti (1997, 2004). This is a way of dissociating phi-features from Case-system features. Regarding the resumption of the topic by the weak pronoun in SD, we observed in the previous section that these elements do not behave like clitics. In this respect, we compare them with the Italian pronouns egli and esso, and follow Cardinaletti (2004, 133), who argues that these pronouns, although syntactically weak, share the same distribution as strong subjects, occurring therefore in SpecSubjP.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (29) | [$_{TopP}$ | você | [$_{SubjP}$ | cê$_{i}$ | [$_{TP}$ | t$_{i}$ | [$_{T}$ | precisa | estudar | mais | ]]]] |
| | | you | | you | | | | need | to.study | more | |

When analyzing SD with a topicalized DP or pronoun resumed by a strong or weak pronoun, we observe a splitting between the two elements during the course of the derivation. In this case, we can follow the Big DP analysis, assuming that the two doubling elements are projected within the same DP in a thematic position. Subsequently, the doublee moves out of vP to the left periphery of the sentence, leaving the remaining DP available for Case and phi-feature checking, as well as for the checking of the criterial feature "subject of predication". It is interesting to note that this splitting does not seem to occur when the DP is resumed by a weak pronoun, with both elements remaining in argumental position. When doubling takes place within the argumental domain, adjacency between the doublee and the doubler must be preserved.

Before addressing this point, it is important to examine the lower area of the left periphery in embedded interrogative clauses, which

provides indirect support for this observation. As shown by Krieck (2021, 2022), SD can also occur below an embedded interrogative expression *que coisa* (what thing).

(30) a. Eu fico me perguntando que coisa (que) [$_{IP}$ o Bruno
I keep me asking what thing that the Bruno
ele cozinhou pra Carla
he cooked to Carla
'I keep wondering what Bruno cooked to Carla.'

b. [$_{QembP}$ que coisa$_i$ [$_{Qemb}$ (que) [$_{TP}$ o Bruno ele $t_i$ ]]
what thing that the Bruno he

Considering that Qemb is a low head within CP, whose projection, according to Rizzi and Bocci (2017), may follow but never precede topics, it is possible to argue that both the subject and the pronoun occupy an A-position. For these cases, we follow the analysis proposed by Quarezemin and Ordóñez (2024), who treat subject doubling in the argumental domain as a single syntactic object, a Big DP that does not undergo any stripping when moved to the subject position.

## 6 Conclusions

This study argued that, unlike what has been proposed for other languages such as French, subject doubling in Brazilian Portuguese should not necessarily be analyzed as a topicalization strategy. Drawing on the diagnostics proposed by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999), the analysis showed that resumptive pronouns did not behave uniformly, giving rise to distinct constructions. It was further maintained that, although they sometimes resembled deficient items, these elements could not be regarded as clitics, unlike what occurred in Northern Italian dialects.

Furthermore, two distinct groups were identified: the strong doubler pronoun and the weak doubler pronoun. The former is in complementary distribution with the subject DP, and therefore, in constructions where doubling occurs, the DP must appear in the left periphery of the sentence, leaving the pronoun in the argumental position. It was also shown that in cases of SD involving a topicalized DP or pronoun resumed by a strong or weak pronoun, a splitting between the two elements arises during the course of the derivation. This splitting, however, does not seem to occur when the subject DP is resumed by a weak pronoun, with both elements remaining in argumental position. When doubling takes place within the argumental domain, adjacency between the doublee and the doubler must be preserved.

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