



AN ANALYSIS OF BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE WH-NEGATIVES

PAULO MEDEIROS JUNIOR*

ABSTRACT

This squib contains a preliminary discussion on the constructions I call here, following Cheung (2008), *Wh*-negatives, in Brazilian Portuguese. *Wh*-negatives are *Wh*-sentences with a structure which is similar to an interrogative, but without a question semantics; on the contrary, its semantic content expresses a denial. I will propose that — contrary to what Cheung (2008) attests — the *Wh*-word or *Wh*-phrase in these constructions is in Force (and not in the IntP projection) and that the activation of this projection (ForceP) is responsible for triggering the negative force in the utterance, despite the structure. I will also propose that in Brazilian Portuguese, *Wh*-phrases integrating *Wh*-negatives need to receive focal stress and that the derivation of these constructions does not involve movement of an operator from the base position to the periphery of the sentence; in these constructions, the *Wh*-phrase seems to be merged directly in Spec, FocP, from where it moves to Spec, ForceP.

Keywords: *Wh*-negatives, interrogatives, questions, focus, force

RESUMO

O presente *squib* contém discussão preliminar acerca das construções que chamo aqui, seguindo Cheung (2008), negativas-*Wh* no PB. As negativas-*Wh* são sentenças-*Wh* com estrutura semelhante à de uma interrogativa, mas que não contém semântica de pergunta; ao contrário, seu conteúdo semântico expressa uma negação. Vou propor que — contrariamente ao que atesta Cheung (2008) — a palavra ou sintagma-*Wh* nessas construções se encontra em Força (e não na projeção IntP) e que é a ativação dessa projeção (ForceP) a responsável por disparar a força negativa no enunciado, a despeito da estrutura. Vou propor ainda que, no português do Brasil, sintagmas-*Wh* em negativas-*Wh* precisam receber *stress* focal e que a derivação dessas construções não envolve movimento de um operador da posição de base para a periferia da sentença; nessas construções, o sintagma-*Wh* parece ser concatenado diretamente em Spec, FocP, de onde se desloca para Spec, ForceP.

Palavras-chave: negativas-*Wh*, interrogativas, perguntas, foco, força

* Universidade de Brasília, UnB. Professor Adjunto 2 do Departamento de Linguística, Português e Línguas Clássicas (LIP) da UnB. *E-mail:* medeirosjunior@unb.br.

1 INTRODUCTION

Wh-constructions exhibit a varied spectrum of occurrences in Portuguese: Wh-interrogatives (1) e (2); Wh-relatives (3); free relatives (4); Wh-exclamatives (5) and what I call here (following the original designation given by Cheung (2008)) Wh-negatives (6):

- (1) a. Quem o João encontrou no parque?
Who the John met at the park
'Who did John meet at the park?'
- b. Quando a Maria chegou?
When the Mary arrived
'When did Mary arrive?'
- c. Onde a Maria vai com tanta pressa?
Where the Mary goes with so much hurry
'Where is Mary going in such a hurry?'
- (2) a. Queremos saber [quem o João encontrou no parque].
(We) want to know who the John met at the park
'We wonder who has John met at the park.'
- b. Perguntaram [quando a Maria chegou].
(Indef.) asked when the Mary arrived
'People wonder when did Mary arrive.'
- c. Eu me pergunto [onde a Maria vai com tanta pressa].
I (reflex.1stp) ask where the Mary goes with so much hurry
'I wonder (ask myself) where is Mary going in such a rush.'
- (3) a. Conheço a professora [de quem você falou].
(I) Know the teacher of whom you talked
'I know the teacher you talked about.'
- b. O João, [que é médico], agora canta em bares noturnos.
the John, who is (a) doctor, now sings in night pubs
'John, who is a doctor, now sings in night pubs.'
- c. A pessoa [de quem eu gosto] chegou.
the person of whom I like arrived
'The person who/that I like has arrived.'

- (4) a. Eles comem [o que a mãe dá].
they eat what the mother gives
'They eat what(ever) their mother gives them.'
- b. [Quem faz essas coisas] não merece confiança.
who(ever) does these things not deserve trust
'Who(ever) does such things does not deserve any trust.'
- c. Ela reside [onde passamos as nossas últimas férias].
she resides where (we) spent the our last vacation
'She lives where we spent our last vacation'.
- (5) a. Que linda casa você tem!
what pretty house you have
'What a pretty house you have!'
- b. Que linda casa!
what pretty house
'What a pretty house!'
- c. Que casa!
what house
'What a house!'
- (6) a. Quando (que) criança é divertido?
when (that) child is funny
'When are children funny?'
- b. De onde que o João gosta de tomate?
from where that the John likes of tomato
- c. Quem (foi que) disse que a Ana é amiga da Tereza?
who (was that) said that the Ana is friend of the Tereza
'Who said Ana is Tereza's friend?'
- d. Quando que o João frequenta esse tipo de lugar agora?
when that the John goes to this kind of place now
'When does John go this kind of place now?'
- e. Desde quando (que) uma coisa dessa pode dar certo?
since when (that) one thing of these can work
'Since when can such a thing work?'

In (1), we find root interrogatives; in (2), indirect questions. Data in (3) contain headed relatives and data in (4) contain free relatives. In (5), one can find Wh-exclamatives and in (6) the Wh-negative constructions.

I will argue here, following Cheung (2008), that the constructions in (6), despite the appearances, are distinct from (1) and, hence, do not constitute ordinary root interrogatives. I will propose that those are syntactic structures with a negative flavor. However, I shall argue, contrarily to what Cheung (2008) attests, that the Wh-phrase in these sentences bears two distinct features: a Focus feature, responsible to posit it primarily in Spec, FocP (due to prosodic evidence in the data) and a Force feature, that might trigger displacement of the wh-phrase to Spec-ForceP, where negative illocutionary force is activated¹.

The purpose of this paper is then twofold: 1) characterizing what I call here a Wh-negative and describing its structure, approaching Brazilian Portuguese data; and 2) differentiating these constructions from root interrogatives.

I am going to place the discussion within the cartographic syntax framework, in the line of what's proposed by Rizzi (1997) and related works.

The paper is organized as follows: in section 2, I discuss the nature of what Cheung calls negative wh-constructions and I call here Wh-negatives. In section 3, I will try to show Wh-negatives are different from ordinary Wh-interrogatives and, in section, 4 I will describe how Brazilian Portuguese Wh-negatives are to be derived. Section 5 brings the final remarks and section 6 contains the references.

2 WHAT EXACTLY IS A WH-NEGATIVE?

What Cheung (2008) names originally as negative Wh-constructions are sentences with the following syntactic constitution: Wh-Negative Phrase + *p* (where *p* stands for *sentence without the Wh-word*):

- (7) **Since when** is John watching TV now?!
- (i) NWh-Word = since when
 - (ii) *p* = John is watching TV now

(CHEUNG, 2008, p. 2)

It is important to observe, though, that those sentences present originally the form of an interrogative construction, which is a structure headed by a moved Wh-element, containing some sort of interrogative intonation.

¹ What I call here negative illocutionary force is something similar to what Searle (1969) and Tsohatzidis (2001) call illocutionary negation: a syntactic construction with negative semantics.

In this paper, I will assume, with Cheung's proposal, this is the appropriate description for this kind of structure.

One of the tasks of any approach on the topic will be, then, having to deal with the distinction between Wh-negatives and ordinary Wh-interrogative sentences. Cheung himself argues that some Wh-negatives could be interpreted as ordinary interrogatives; the author exemplifies it with the following example:

- (8) Since when do you know how to cook ramen?
 (i) No way do you know how to kook ramen. (NWh interpretation)
 (ii) Since what time do you know how to cook ramen? (Interrogative interpretation)
 (Possible answer: since I took that cooking class.)

(CHEUNG, 2008, p. 6)

In Cheung's analysis, the similarity between a Wh-negative and an ordinary Wh-interrogative is due to the existence of a single surface string that corresponds to two different interpretations. I will assume here Cheung is basically correct.

The author, then, suggests some tests to differentiate Wh-negatives from ordinary Wh-interrogatives; I will focus on three of them here: (i) a substitution test, which suggests Wh-phrases in Wh-negatives cannot be replaced by any other synonym Wh-element (the procedure would be ok in ordinary interrogatives); (ii) an adjunct doubling test, which reveals that Wh-negatives accept adjunct phrases of the same semantic type of the introductory wh-element they contain, so that both can co-occur in the sentence (something not possible in ordinary interrogatives); (iii) and a third test, an embedding test, which shows Wh-negatives cannot be embedded (while it is known that one can perfectly embed an interrogative sentence)². I shall return to those tests in this paper, as I am going to evaluate them when applied to Brazilian Portuguese data.

This being so, one might understand a Wh-negative as a Wh-sentence with negative semantics content, even though in the surface it might look very much like an ordinary Wh-interrogative.

As mentioned in the introduction, Wh-negatives are common sentences in Brazilian Portuguese; data in (6) above evidence this fact perfectly. It is important to observe, though, that — in Brazilian Portuguese — the Wh-phrase integrating these constructions must

² Substitution test:

(i) {Since when/*Since what time/*Since which year} is John watching TV now?

(CHEUNG, 2008, p. 7)

Adjunct doubling test:

(ii) **Since when** has he been working at UCLA **since 2000**?

(CHEUNG, 2008, p. 8)

Embedding test:

(iii) *John asked/wondered/thought since when he quit smoking?

(CHEUNG, 2008, p. 9)

receive a special focal stress in order to have undoubtedly the expected interpretation (i.e. negative semantics). Let's check (6a), repeated here as (9):

- (9) QUANDO (que) criança é divertido?
 when that child is fun
 'When is it that children are fun?' =
 Children are not fun at all.

The sentence in (9) is ambiguous in terms of constituting a root Wh-interrogative and what we call here a Wh-negative. Speakers tend massively to interpret it as an ordinary Wh-question when the prosody is flat for the whole sentence; in this situation, a suitable answer for the question would be what is found in (10b):

- (10) a. Quando (que) criança é divertido?
 b. Possible answer:
 Criança é divertido até fazer 5 anos, depois disso, irrita.
 child is fun 'till gets 5 years, after this irritates
 'Children are fun until they are 5 years old; after that, they irritate us.'

However, if one gives a special focal intonation to the Wh-phrase introducing the sentence (as it is seen in (11) below), speakers will tend massively to interpret it as a negative:

- (11) QUANDO (que) criança é divertido?
 when that child is fun

In this case, the meaning of the Wh-sentence is clearly: *Children are not funny at all, it doesn't matter when.*

3 WH-NEGATIVES ARE NOT ORDINARY INTERROGATIVES

Pragmatically, a question is a requirement for information. One might notice, however, that interrogative sentences are question constructions with a proper syntax (see CHOMSKY, 1977; CHENG, 1991), some of them involving wh-movement, the so called Wh-interrogatives. It is important, then, to consider both things on characterizing Wh-interrogatives in opposition to the Wh-negative constructions.

A Wh-interrogative would, then, be derived as shown in (12) and (13) for Brazilian Portuguese:

- (12) Who_i did John see t_i?
 (13) Quem_i o João viu t_i?
 who the John saw

The big concern here is: what we call a Wh-negative sentence seems to present the same structure ordinary interrogatives do, as one can perfectly see by the contrast in (14) and (15) Brazilian Portuguese data:

(14) De onde que o João conhece a Maria? (Wh-interrogative)
 from where (that) the John knows the Mary
 'From where does John know Mary?'

(15) DE ONDE que o João gosta de salada? (Wh-negative)
 from where (that) the John likes salad

One might observe, however, that (14) contain a genuine request for information; one wants to know where did John meet Mary for the first time. The semantics is a clear result of the movement of a Wh-operator to CP (see CHENG, 1991). (14) would then be derived as follows:

(16) [De onde]_i que o João conhece a Maria t_i?
 from where (that) the John knows the Mary
 'From where does John Know Mary?'

Concerning the sentence in (15), one cannot make sure it is derived exactly as (14)/(16), and there are some good reasons to believe they do not emerge the same way.

As one can perfectly notice, (17) bellow would be a natural response for the request in (14)/(16), while (18) would never be a suitable response for (15):

(17) Ele (João) conhece a Maria de Washington.
 he (John) knows the Mary from Washington

(18) *O João gosta de salada de Washington
 the John likes salad from Washington

The conclusion must be the following: there is no operator movement from the adjunct position to the periphery of the clause, or else it would clearly characterize the construction of an interrogative sentence. I will argue here, concerning Brazilian Portuguese data, that the Wh-phrase in these sentences is generated in a Focus projection (RIZZI, 1997), due to focal stress it clearly receives in these utterances, and then is moved to Spec-ForceP (RIZZI; BOCCI, 2017) to activate the negative illocutionary force (or — in our terms here — to constitute illocutionary negation).

If one considers data from (19) to (21), one might see those are some constructions which bare undoubtedly negative semantic content, despite the apparent interrogative structure:

(19) DE ONDE que o João gosta de tomate?
 from where that the John likes of tomato =
 John doesn't like tomatoes at all.

(20) QUANDO que o João frequenta esse tipo de lugar agora?
 when that the John goes to this kind of place now
 'When does John go to this kind of place now?'
 John doesn't go to this kind of place.

(21) DESDE QUANDO (que) uma coisa dessa pode dar certo?
 since when (that) one thing of these can work
 'Since when can such a thing work?' =
 Such a thing might never work.

As argued before, in (19), the Wh-phrase *De onde* doesn't seem to be pragmatically compatible with an interrogative element, considering the fact that it would never (at least not in this context) be asking for information about a specific place. When the speaker utters a sentence like that, he/she is not exactly expecting an answer such as *De São Paulo* ('From São Paulo'). He/she is actually negating the fact that John likes tomatoes.

The adverb *agora* ('now') surely contributes for the construction of a negative interpretation in (20), as it contrasts with *quando* ('when'), which could be instantiating the construction of a regular and ordinary question in that sentence. The presence of *agora* at the end of the sentence surely invalidates any sort of interrogative flavor to the sentence as it clearly carries the same time features the word *quando* seems to bear and could perfectly fit the place of the answer for a possible question. If one takes (20) to be an ordinary question (and Brazilian Portuguese speakers do not), a suitable answer could be *AGORA, agora ele frequenta esse tipo de lugar* ('Now, now he frequently goes to this kind of place'). This being so, pragmatically, (13) does not contain a request for information.

Just as (15), (21) would never be uttered by a Brazilian Portuguese speaker if one really seeks for some information on the time of something. When someone utters (14) the intention is clearly to negate the possibility of such a thing to work; one could say it is certainly due to the presence of the epistemic modal *pode*, and the final meaning is clearly: *such a thing could never work*.

As seen before, Cheung (2008) proposes some syntactic tests to differentiate Wh-negatives from Wh-interrogatives; concerning Brazilian Portuguese data, if one applies the same tests, results seem to be close, the reason why I am assuming those are good tests and I proposing they are effective to evidence a distinction between these utterances:

(i) **Substitution test:**

It is not possible to replace *quando* ('when') in (21) for some other time expression like *que dia* ('what day'), ou *que ano* ('what year'):

(22) DESDE QUANDO/*que dia/ *que ano que uma coisa dessas pode dar certo?

(ii) **Adjunct doubling test:**

As the expression *QUANDO* (in (20)) does not point to some time information being requested or highlighted, one can perfectly associate to the sentence a second adjunct bearing time semantics, as evidence in (23) below:

- (23) *QUANDO* que o João frequenta esse tipo de lugar [desde a infância]?
 when that the John attends this type of place since the childhood
 'When does John go to this kind of place since he was a kid?'

(iii) **Embedding test:**

One cannot embed a *wh*-negative sentence in Brazilian Portuguese (24a), while embedding interrogatives is something perfectly viable (24b)³:

- (24) a. *A Maria quer saber DE ONDE que o João gosta de tomate.
 the Mary wonders from where that the John likes tomato
- b. A Maria quer saber de onde que o João trouxe os tomates.
 the Mary wonders from where that the John brought the tomatoes
 'Mary wonders where did John bring the tomatoes from.'

Hence, these tests evidence structural differences between *wh*-interrogatives and *wh*-negatives in Brazilian Portuguese.

Besides this, as observed in the previous section, ordinary *Wh*-interrogative sentences and *Wh*-negatives differ in terms of the necessity of a focal stress in the *Wh*-phrase integrating the last group.

Sentences like (21), if pronounced with flat intonation or with final ascendent intonation as an ordinary interrogative are massively rejected by speakers, as shown in (25) below:

- (25) **Desde quando que uma coisa dessas pode dar certo?*

In the next section, I will suggest a derivation for *Wh*-negatives in Brazilian Portuguese.

³ For general discussion on Brazilian Portuguese embedded interrogatives see Alvarenga (1981), Rocha (1990) and Medeiros Junior (2019).

4 HOW ARE BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE WH-NEGATIVES DERIVED?

I will propose here that sentences like (16), (19), (20) and (21) (i.e. Brazilian Portuguese Wh-negatives) must be derived as follows:

- (i) The Wh-phrase is merged in Spec, FocP to satisfy a Focus Criterion (RIZZI, 1997);
- (ii) The Wh-phrase is moved to Spec, ForceP to satisfy a Force criterion and then activate the negative illocutionary force.

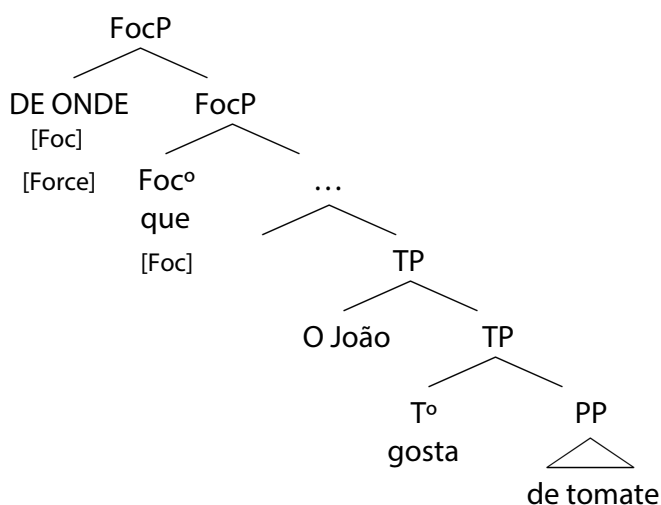
As demonstrated in section 3, sentences like (19) with a flat intonation on the wh-phrase are rejected by speakers in a generalized way. This being so, one might conclude that the Wh-phrase integrating a Wh-negative is supposed to bear originally a Focus feature which might activate a Focus Criterion, hence triggering the activation of the Foc projection in the Left Periphery of the sentence.

Let's take (19), repeated bellow as (26), as an example:

(26) DE ONDE que o João gosta de tomate?

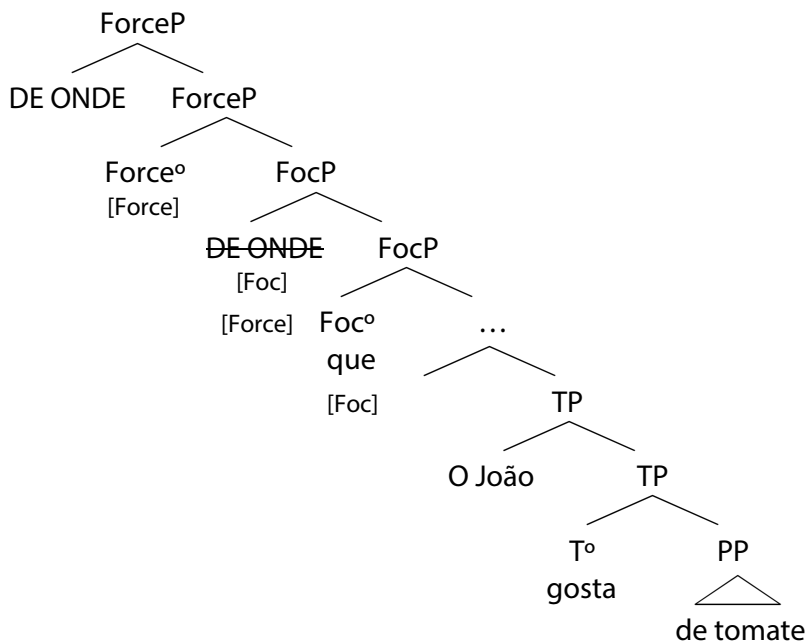
As argued before, it doesn't seem to be the case that the Wh-phrase is being displaced from an adjunct position as a question operator, considering the fact that the final utterance doesn't contain a true request for information on the time John started liking tomatoes. I will suggest here the Wh-phrase is merged in Spec, FocP in satisfaction of a Foc Criterion, because of the [+Foc] feature it carries:

(27) Step 1:



displacement of the Wh-phrase to its Spec, in a satisfaction of a Force Criterion, as shown below:

(28) Step 2:



There are empirical reasons to believe Step 1 occurs the way it does:

- (i) The Wh-phrase bears undoubtedly a Focus feature that must be checked prior to Spell out, for it has an impact on phonology: the Wh-phrase in Wh-negatives carries a focal stress;
- (ii) It is not displaced from an adjunct position as an interrogative operator to the periphery of the clause, because the resulting sentence is not a request for information; it, then, merges at the Spec, FocP in satisfaction of a Foc Criterion.

Step 2 is yet to be taken as correct, if one considers the fact that the utterance in (19) must get a specific interpretation, which is the semantics of negative. As there are no negative operators morphologically realized, bearing scope on the whole sentence, one might conclude that the negative illocutionary force might be obtained by the activation of the Force node and the subsequent displacement of the Wh-phrase to its Spec.

If Step 1 is correct, it predicts that no negative Wh-sentence with a flat intonation on the Wh-phrase will be possible in the language, and this fact is empirically verified in (25).

If Step 2 is correct, it predicts that within an utterance in which the Wh-phrase doesn't necessarily reach Force, the interpretation must not (or at least might not) be that of a negative sentence. Let's take a look at (29):

- (29) Desde quando o João trabalha na Só-frango?
 Since when the John works at Só-frango
 'Since when has John been working at Só-frango?'

The sentence in (29) can receive negative or ordinary interrogative interpretation in Brazilian Portuguese; it is ambiguous. One must observe, though, that, if the intonation of the Wh-phrase is flat (with no focal stress), the reading is preferably interrogative; in this case, A below is a suitable answer for it:

A – Desde o ano passado.
 since the year last
 ‘Since last year.’

The Wh-phrase in these cases might be at Spec, IntP (see RIZZI; BOCCI, 2017) and it might have been displaced from an adjunct position to the Spec of the interrogative projection, since the resulting sentence is a genuine request for information on time:

(30) [_{IntP} [Desde quando]_i [_{Int}⁰ que [_{TP} O João trabalha na Só-frango t_i]]]

However, if the whole Wh-phrase preceding *que* gets Focal stress, the sentence gets negative semantics (31) and the derivation goes on as seen in (32):

(31) DESDE QUANDO que o João trabalha na Só-frango? (Wh-negative)

(32) [_{ForceP} [DESDE QUANDO]_i [_{Force}⁰ [_{FocP} t_i [_{Foc}⁰ que o João trabalha na Só-frango?]]]]]

One might also consider the fact that all Wh-negatives seem to be built essentially from adjunct Wh-phrases, what might suggest these Wh-expressions could really be generated in the left periphery of the sentence (i.e. outside VP), once they are not required by the sentence verb. Besides this, ordinary interrogatives in BP allow in situ wh-phrases (as seen in (33)), while Wh-negatives seem to block it (as seen in (34))⁴:

(33) a. A Maria conhece o João de onde?
 The Mary knows the John of where?
 ‘Where does Mary know John from?’

b. De onde (que) a Maria conhece o João?
 Of where (that) the Mary knows the John?
 ‘Where does Mary know John from?’

(34) a. DE ONDE que a Maria conhece o João?
 OF WHERE that the Mary knows the John?
 ‘Mary doesn’t know John at all.’

b. *A Maria conhece o João DE ONDE?
 The Mary knows the John OF WHERE?

This being so, the analysis above seems to be adequately headed.

⁴ I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for the suggestion of these additional arguments on the case

5 FINAL REMARKS

The purpose of the discussion in this squib is to establish a preliminary debate on the constructions I call here *Wh*-negatives focusing on Brazilian Portuguese data. The analysis has led us to conclude these constructions are consistently different from ordinary *Wh*-interrogatives, mainly concerning their semantics.

I have also tried to evidence how the derivation of *Wh*-negatives differ from that of *Wh*-interrogatives, proposing that in ordinary *Wh*-interrogatives there is movement from within the TP to the periphery of the clause whereas the *Wh*-phrase in a *Wh*-negative is supposed to be merged in Spec, FocP and then moved to Spec, ForceP.

Analyzed data has evidenced that the *Wh*-phrase in a *Wh*-negative must bear focal stress in Brazilian Portuguese in order to enable the negation illocutionary force.

Further discussion is yet to be built on the topic as this paper only starts discussion concerning Brazilian Portuguese data.

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