Exploring the syntax/diachrony of a recent type of negation in BP

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Abstract

In this squib, I describe a novel type of negation in Brazilian Portuguese that has been found in oral/informal speech, whereby the negative marker *não* appears between an auxiliary and a lexical verb. I advance an analysis based on the nanosyntax approach to syntax in order to explain this low position of negation, uncommon in other Romance languages. Given its properties, I propose that this new kind of negation is best analyzed as Focus Negation, merged in the low left periphery of the clause. Additionally, I present my hypothesis on why this type of focus negation may have evolved and became possible in the language.

Keywords: negation; nanosyntax; Brazilian Portuguese; diachronic syntax

Resumo

Neste *squib*, descrevo um novo tipo de negação no português brasileiro, a qual tem sido encontrada no discurso oral/informal, e em que o marcador negativo *não* aparece entre um verbo auxiliar e um verbo lexical. Eu apresento uma análise baseada em um enfoque da nanossintaxe com a finalidade de explicar essa posição baixa da negação, incomum em outras línguas românicas. Dadas as suas propriedades, eu proponho que esse novo tipo de negação pode ser analisado como *Focus Negation*, concatenada na periferia baixa da sentença. Além disso, eu apresento minha hipótese sobre por que esse tipo de negação pode ter surgido e se tornado possível na língua.

Palavras-chave: negação; nanossintaxe; português brasileiro; sintaxe diacrônica

1   Introduction

It is well-known that there are three positions for the negative word *não* in sentential negation in Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth, BP) (see Teixeira de Sousa, 2012, 2015, and references therein):

(1)   a.   Eu   *não*   comi   o   chocolate.   Neg1
           I   not   ate   the   chocolate

      b.   Eu   *não*   comi   o   chocolate,   *não*.   Neg2
           I   not   ate   the   chocolate   no

      c.   Comi   (o   chocolate)   *não*.   Neg3
           ate   the   chocolate   no
           'I didn't eat the chocolate.'

(1a) is the unmarked form for sentential negation. According to the literature referenced above, (1b) and (1c) are related to pragmatic/discourse functions.

Recently, another position for the negative word *não* has been noted in the literature on negation in BP (Cyrino, 2022a, 2022b; De Paula, 2014): *não* is possible between the auxiliary and the main verb, as in (2).

(2)   a.   Não   se   esqueça: eu   nunca   estou   *não*   pensando   em   você.
           not   CL3   forget   I   never   am   not   thinking   in   you
           'Don't forget, I am never not thinking about you.'

      b.   Ultimamente   tenho   *não*   feito   as   refeições   no   horário   certo.
           lately   have   not   done   the   meals   in-the time   right
           'Lately (I) have not had my meals in the correct time.'

      c.   Minha   conexão   é   discada;   então   eu   estou   *não*   trabalhando
           my   connection is   dialed   so   I   am   not   working
           com meu servidor.
           with my   server
           'My connection is dialed; so I am not working with my server.'

      d.   Tenho   *não*   estado   tão   presente   no   Instagram   esse   ano...
           have   not   been   so   present   in-the   Instagram   this   year
           'I have not been so present in Instagram this year...'

This is a novel construction produced in oral speech, but it can also be easily found on the internet, in social media, in which, though written, informal language is used to convey naturalness. In this squib, I will present a brief analysis on the properties of this novel negation, (henceforth, 'low *não*') based on the work in Cyrino (2022a, 2022b, 2023, 2024a, 2024b), and I will present some considerations on the diachronic reanalysis that may have led to the appearance of this construction in BP.

2   On the pragmatic properties of 'low *não*' in BP

Besides appearing between the auxiliary and the lexical verb, this type of negation in BP has some interesting pragmatic properties, which I mention below.

First, 'low *não*' must be stressed (for emphasis), and it conveys a contrast between what the *speaker* thinks the *hearer* knows, that is, according to the *speaker*, the hearer is getting new/unexpected information. In (3) the *speaker* believes the hearer does not know the information in the sentence, and uses 'low *não*' to emphasize this fact:[1]

(3) [Context: The *speaker* is talking to his friend about a certain dish that was not good]

Não	solicitei	a	troca	porque	já	estava	*não*	gostando
not	asked	the	replacement	because	already	was	not	liking

do   atendimento
of-the service
'I did not ask for a replacement because I was already not appreciating the service.'

Additionally, since it requires emphatic intonation, the negative clitic form *num* is not possible in 'low *não*' constructions (4):

(4) Ela   tem   *não/*num*   vivido   bem   ultimamente.
     she   has   not   lived   well   lately
     'She has not lived well lately.'

Interestingly, 'low *não*' may also *co-occur* with sentential negation. In this case, the sentence is interpreted as double negation, that is, as its positive counterpart:

(5) [Context: The doctor ordered the speaker to stop eating sugar, but, since she is not following his orders, assuming the hearer doesn't know the latter fact, she says]

O médico me mandou não comer açúcar, mas...
'The doctor ordered me not to eat sugar, but...'
eu   não   tenho   *não*   comido   açúcar.
I   not   have   not   eaten   sugar
'I have not not eaten sugar.'
'It's not the case that I have not eaten sugar' = I have eaten sugar

Hence, when used in a sentence, 'low *não*' does not deny a proposition previously asserted; its function is to modify the main verb and to convey information that is assumed by the *speaker* not to be known by the hearer.

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[1]Not all the examples in this report are taken from the internet, but all of them had their grammaticality confirmed either by introspection or by the judgement of BP speakers I consulted.
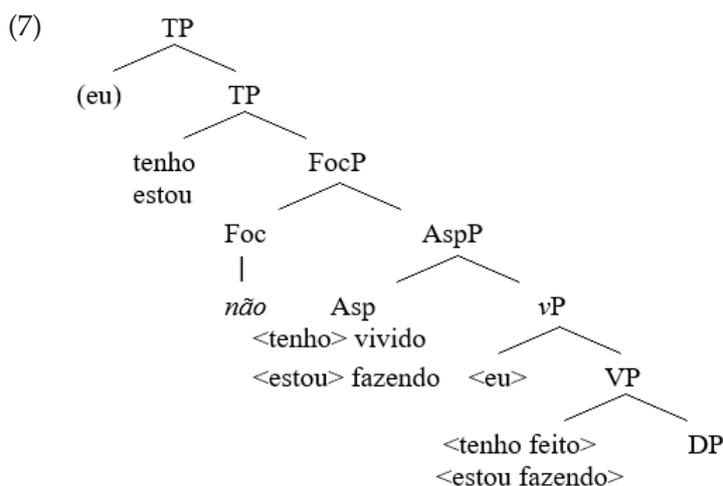
3   On the syntax of 'low *não*'

Consider the contrast in (6).

(6) a. Eu   *não*   tenho   lido   jornal   ultimamente.
         I   not   have   read   newspaper   lately

     b. Eu   tenho   *não*   lido   jornal   ultimamente.
         I   have   not   read   newspaper   lately
         'I have not read newspapers lately.'

In (6a), *não* conveys simple sentential negation, whereby the speaker states his recent habits, whereas in (6b), there is an extra reading for the sentence. The *speaker* is making a statement which intends to convey what *he thinks is present in the hearer's knowledge about his habits*. In order to do that, he uses intonational stress on a pre-verbal *não*.

Following the nanosyntax approach to negation in DeClercq (2013), Cyrino (2022a, 2022b, 2024a, 2024b) analyzes this occurrence of negation in BP as an instance of Focus negation, (henceforth, Foc^{Neg}).

Considering periphrastic constructions in BP, Cyrino (2022a, 2022b, 2023, 2024a, 2024b) proposes that Foc^{Neg}P is merged in the verbal low left periphery (Belletti, 2004), and it does not take scope over the *tensed* predicate. BP is a language that has low verb movement to an Aspectual head (Cyrino; Matos, 2005); hence FocusP (Foc^{Neg}P) is merged above AspP in the language.[2] The analysis assumes the recent proposals for periphrastic tenses in BP (Araújo-Adriano, 2022), whereby both auxiliaries and lexical verbs are merged inside the verbal domain. Since BP has lost main verb movement (see Cyrino, 2013, among others), the lexical verb moves only as high as Asp. Auxiliaries *estar* 'be' and *ter* 'have' are first merged inside vP; lexical verbs get their suffix *-ndo* '-ing' and *-do* '-ed' inside the vP. Cyrino (2022a, 2022b, 2024a, 2024b) proposes the structure in (7) for 'low *não*':

(7)

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                    TP
                  /    \
              (eu)      TP
                      /    \
                 tenho      FocP
                 estou     /    \
                        Foc      AspP
                         |      /    \
                       não   Asp      vP
                         <tenho> vivido   /    \
                         <estou> fazendo <eu>   VP
                                               /    \
                                      <tenho feito>   DP
                                      <estou fazendo>
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In the next section I address the question: why did this possibility for negation arise in BP?

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[2]It has been argued in the literature that FocP (and TopP) in the low left periphery are merged above AspP in some languages (see for example Ouwayda & Shlonsky (2016) and Marwan & Abusalim (2021)).

4   On the diachronic change leading to 'low *não*'

In this section I present a hypothesis for the appearance of 'low *não*' based on studies on how negation is/has been expressed and received a morphological analysis in BP.

Before I present my hypothesis for the diachronic process, we must consider the syncretism in forms of negation in BP. In the introduction, we have seen this syncretism in the three types of *não* — the well-studied forms of BP negation — , and in this squib, I have briefly presented a fourth type.

To understand the appearance of 'low *não*', I turn to DeClercq's (2013, 2020) nanosyntax approach once again. The author observes the syncretism in negative markers in different languages, and she proposes that these markers can be arranged in a paradigm of contiguous cells in a nanosyntactic tree. Negative markers are of four types: negative polarity markers, negative focus markers, negative degree/classifier markers and negative quantity markers, seen in (8):

(8)   Classification of four types of negative markers (De Clercq, 2013, 2020):
    a.   Negative polarity markers (Pol^{Neg})   *She is not happy, is she?*
    b.   Focus markers (Foc^{Neg})   *She is NOT happy, isn't she?*
    c.   Classifying markers ($Class^{Neg}$)   *She is non-professional.*
    d   Quantity markers (Q^{Neg})   *She is unhappy.*

Considering BP, except for Q^{Neg}, we also observe syncretism in negative markers:

(9)   a.   Eu *não* tenho comido chocolate. Pol^{Neg}: *não*
       'I haven't eaten chocolate.'

     b.   Eu tenho comido *não* chocolate, mas peras. Foc^{Neg}: *não*
       'I have eaten not chocolate, but pears.'

     c.   Eu tenho sido um cantor *não* profissional. $Class^{Neg}$: *não*
       'I have been a nonprofessional singer.'

     d   Eu tenho sido *in*feliz. Q^{Neg}: *in*
   'I have been unhappy.'

If we consider BP $Class^{Neg}$ *não*, we observe that it attaches to gradable adjectives (10a), participles (10b), and deverbal nouns, (10c):

(10)   a.   O   sistema   é   lento, *não*-confiável e   parcial.   (Adjective)
       the system   is   slow not-trustworthy and   partial
       'The system is slow, untrustworthy and partial.'

     b.   Use um dado *não* viciado e   numerado   de 1 a 6.   (Participle)
       use a   dice   not vitiated and numbered   from 1 to 6
       'Use an unbiased dice numbered from 1 to 6.'

     c.   O   *não*-pagamento da   dívida   trará   consequências.   (Noun)
       the non payment   of-the debt   bring.FUT consequences
       'The nonpayment of the debt will bring consequences.'

These facts lead us to a hypothesis on why the emergence of 'low *não*' was possible in BP. Considering the diachrony of constituent negation in a morphology framework, the literature shows that negative prefixes as *a-*, *in-* and *des-* have been possible in the language since the 16th century. As for *não*, data from the 16th century (Campos, 2009) show only 2 occurrences of the negative marker, and they appear next to participles (adjectives):

(11) a. Ao   derradeiro   e   quinto   módo   chamam   infinitivo,
          to-the   last   and   fifth   mood   call.3PL   infinitive
          que   quer   dizer   *nam*   acabádo...
          that   wants   say   not   finished
          'They call the fifth mood 'infinitive', which means not finished.'

      b. e   som   chamadas   principe   *nom*   animado:
          and   are   called   prince   not   animated
          e   o   rrei he principe animado
          and   the king is prince   animated
          'and they are called 'non-animated prince'
          and the king is 'animated prince'.'

Both Campos (2009) and Pereira (2012) show that forms as the ones in (10c), where *não* attaches to a noun, although possible, were rarely used before the 19th century. In fact, Pereira (2012) shows that this use becomes more frequent in the 20th century. The graph in (12), from Pereira (2012), shows the parallel trajectory of *não*+participle and *não*+adjective (blue and red line respectively), besides the rise of *não*+noun (green line) in her data.

(12)
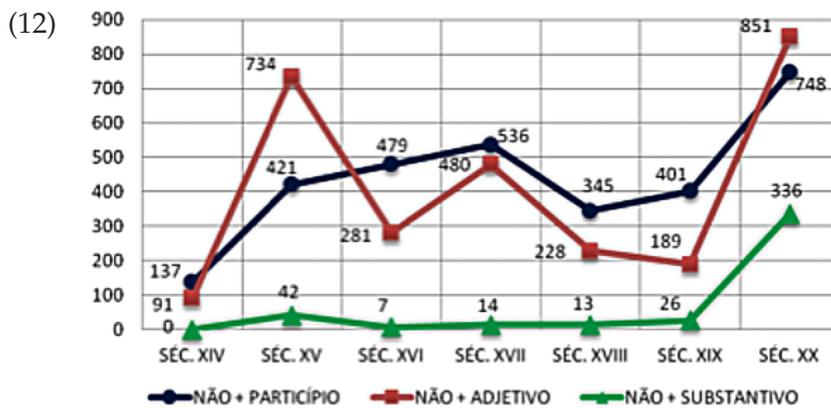
Source: Pereira (2012, p. 105).

We may hypothesize that the existence of the prefix *não-*, which can be analyzed as the category Class^{Neg} *não* in the framework assumed in this squib, led to a reanalysis of the negator *não*, which, when modifying a *nonfinite* verbal form[3], is merged into a Foc^{Neg} position. In other words, the negative marker *não* that appeared as constituent negation for *nouns*, *adjectives* and *participles*, allowed, from the 19th century on, a new form of negation with *não* to become possible in BP and to be reanalyzed as Foc^{Neg}.

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[3]In this squib, I concentrate on nonfinite verbal forms as participles and gerunds, but see Cyrino (2022a, 2022b), in which infinitives in progressive periphrases are included in the study of the 'low *não*' construction.

The reanalysis was *structurally* possible since the lexical verb lost its movement and was merged in Asp, whereas the auxiliary verb moved up to Tense. This split made a Focus position in the low left periphery available for the merge of Foc^{Neg}.

The *late* appearance of Class^{Neg} *não* in BP seen in the blue line in the diachronic data above may have played a part in the appearance of the novel 'low *não*', since it demonstrates that *não* could attach to non-inflected verbal forms. Importantly, as pointed out above, this change was possible because of other changes in BP syntax, such as the loss of (high) lexical verb movement in general. Additionally, since both Class^{Neg} *não*- and Foc^{Neg} *não* express 'contradiction' (De Clercq, 2013, 2020), the diachronic change, represented in (13), could have been facilitated. In other words, the affix *não*- could be reanalyzed as the novel 'low *não*', which also appears right before *non-inflected forms* of the verb.

(12)   *não*-Adj/Part > *não* V[-finite]

Nevertheless, the hypothesis presented in this squib awaits further detailed studies to confirm its validity.

5   Conclusion

Although negation may appear in several positions in the languages (Espinal, 1991; Zanuttini, 1997; Poletto, 2008, De Clercq, 2013, 2020, among others), why was it possible for *não* in BP to appear between the auxiliary and the main verb and have specific properties, in an innovative way? Cyrino (2024b) describes the differences among low occurrence of negation in Romance languages as Catalan, Italian and French and BP. The main reason is that, differently from these other languages, BP underwent several other syntactic changes around the 18th/19th century, such as the loss of complex predicates (periphrastic tenses and restructuring) (Cyrino, 2013), the loss of main verb movement to T (Cyrino, 2013; Tescari-Neto, 2013), and the analyticization of verbal forms (Araújo-Adriano, 2022). These changes paved the way for a negative marker such as *não* to be able to attach to nonfinite verbal forms and express contradiction and/or what has been called FALSUM focus in the literature (see Cyrino, 2024b).

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