Null objects in Brazilian Portuguese, revisited

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Abstract

Authors studying the null object in Brazilian Portuguese generally distinguish two classes of sentences: those in which the verb preceding the null object is identical to the verb which precedes the null object's antecedent, and those in which these two verbs are distinct. The present study examines the latter class of sentences. On the basis of novel empirical evidence, it is argued that this class admits two distinct derivations: one, in which the null object is *pro*, and the other, in which the null object is derived via ellipsis. It is further argued that both derivations are available independent of whether the null object is embedded within a coordinate structure.

Keywords: Null objects, Brazilian Portuguese, Ellipsis

Resumo

Autores que investigam o objeto nulo no português brasileiro geralmente distinguem duas classes de sentenças: aquelas em que o verbo que precede o objeto nulo é idêntico ao verbo que precede o antecedente do objeto nulo, e aquelas em que os dois verbos são distintos. O presente estudo examina a última classe de sentenças. Com base em novas evidências empíricas, este trabalho argumenta que esta classe admite duas derivações distintas: uma em que o objeto nulo é *pro*, e outra em que o objeto nulo é derivado por elipse. Adicionalmente, este trabalho argumenta que ambas as derivações estão disponíveis, independentemente de o objeto nulo estar em uma estrutura coordenada.

Palavras-chave: Objetos nulos, Português brasileiro, Elipse

Authors studying the null object in Brazilian Portuguese generally distinguish two classes of sentences: those in which the verb preceding the null object is identical to the verb which precedes the null object's antecedent, and those in which these two verbs are distinct.

(1) Class #1: Verb-Identical Null Object Sentences

    a.   O João assinou os documentos, e   a   Maria assinou __ também.
         the João signed the documents, and the Maria signed   __ too.
         "João signed the documents, and Maria signed __ too."

    b.   O João assinou os documentos antes da   Maria assinar __.
         the João signed the documents before of.the Maria to.sign __.
         "João signed the documents before Maria signed __."

(2) Class #2: Verb-Distinct Null Object Sentences

    a.   O João assinou os documentos, e   a   Maria carimbou __.
         the João signed the documents, and the Maria stamped   __.
         "João signed the documents, and Maria stamped __."

    b.   O João assinou os documentos antes da   Maria carimbar __.
         the João signed the documents before of.the Maria to.stamp __.
         "João signed the documents before Maria stamped __."

It is generally agreed that Class #1 involves Verb-stranding Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VVPE), a sub-species of VP Ellipsis in which the verb raises to I^o, stranding the elided VP.

(3)   O João assinou+I^o [$_{VP}$ t$_V$ os documentos] e a Maria assinou+I^o [$_{VP}$ t$_V$ os documentos] também.

There is, however, little agreement regarding the proper treatment of Class #2. One source of disagreement concerns the nature of the empty category (hereafter, 'EC'). Generally, three positions can be discerned: (i) the EC is *pro* (FARRELL, 1990; GALVES, 2001); (ii) the EC is derived via ellipsis (CYRINO, 1994); (iii) the EC is generated under two distinct derivations: one, in which it is *pro*, and the other, in which it is derived via ellipsis (FERREIRA, 2000; MODESTO, 2000).

(4)   a. . . . e a Maria carimbou *pro*.

        b. . . . e a Maria carimbou os documentos.

        c. . . . e a Maria carimbou *pro* / os documentos.

Furthermore, there is disagreement internal to the third position regarding the extent to which ellipsis is available. Ferreira proposes that the ellipsis option is available when the EC is embedded within a coordinate structure (as in (2a)), but not when it is embedded within a non-coordinate structure (as in (2b)). By contrast, Modesto argues that ellipsis is available in both structures. A final source of

disagreement concerns the nature of the ellipsis operation, itself: for Cyrino, this operation is an instance of DP-ellipsis; for Modesto, it is VVPE.[1]

(5)   a. ... e a Maria carimbou+I° [$_{VP}$ t$_V$ ~~os documentos~~]

   b. ... e a Maria carimbou+I° ~~[$_{VP}$ t$_V$ os documentos]~~

In this short article, I present novel empirical evidence in support of the following two claims:

(6)   a.   Class #2 sentences admit two distinct derivations: one, in which the EC is *pro*, and the other, in which the EC is derived via ellipsis.

   b.   Both derivations are available in both structures (i.e., coordinate structures and non-coordinate structures).

As to the status of the elliptical operation, itself, (i.e., whether it is DP-ellipsis or VVPE) I must leave the discussion of this important issue for a future occasion.[2]

As an initial argument in support of the claims under (6a) and (6b), consider (7a) and (7b). Three versions of these two sentences are presented: one, in which the second clause contains a pronoun in direct object position, one, in which it contains a repetition of the previous clause's direct object, and one, in which it contains an EC. The pronominal version of (7a) and (7b) allows a strict reading, but not a sloppy reading, whereas the version containing the repetition of the previous clause's direct object allows a sloppy reading, but not a strict reading. Crucially, the version of (7a) and (7b) which contains an EC allows both readings, suggesting that Class #2 sentences admit two derivations: one, in which the EC is *pro*, and one, in which the EC is derived via ellipsis (see (8); also, see the table under (9) for

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[1]Cyrino implements the DP-ellipsis operation using an LF-copying approach, along the lines of Fiengo and May (1994). Here and below, I set aside the distinction between copying approaches to ellipsis and deletion approaches and use the term 'ellipsis' in a manner consistent with both approaches.

[2]The majority of the data I present below is compatible with both analyses. The exception is (14b), which provides prima facie evidence against the VVPE analysis. Note, first, that this example contains overt post-verbal material, presumably positioned within the VP. Note, moreover, that the EC in this example can be generated under ellipsis, as will be argued below. Hence, if this example is to involve VVPE, one must maintain that the post-verbal material has overtly raised out of the VP (cf. Lasnik's (1995, 1999) analysis of pseudogapping), a position which would require independent justification. As a further argument against a VVPE account, it is tempting to cite an observation dating back to Cyrino (1994): in Brazilian Portuguese, VVPE is possible only when the verb preceding the elided VP is identical to the verb preceding the antecedent VP. It is currently not clear to me, however, whether this constraint holds for the speakers I have consulted; if it does, though, then the elliptical derivation of Class #2 sentences cannot involve VVPE – at least not for the speakers who have contributed to the present study.

a summary of the reading(s) associated with each version of (7a)/(7b)). Moreover, both derivations are available independent of whether the EC is embedded within a coordinate structure or a non-coordinate structure.[3]

(7) a.   A Maria pintou o   cabelo, e/mas a   Júlia cortou ele/o cabelo/__.
            the Maria dyed   the hair,   and/but the Julia cut   it/the hair/__.

        "Maria$_1$ dyed her$_1$ hair, and/but Julia$_2$ cut it (Maria's hair)/her$_2$ hair/her$_{1/2}$ hair."

    b.   A Maria pintou o   cabelo antes   da   Júlia cortar ele/o cabelo/__.
            the Maria dyed   the hair   before of.the Julia to.cut it/the hair/__.

        "Maria$_1$ dyed her$_1$ hair before Julia$_2$ cut it (Maria's hair)/her$_2$ hair/her$_{1/2}$ hair."

(8) a.   ... Júlia cortou/cortar *pro*. → Strict Reading

    b.   ... Júlia cortou/cortar ~~o cabelo~~. → Sloppy Reading

(9)

	Strict Reading	Sloppy Reading
Pronoun	✓	✗
Repeated DP	✗	✓
Empty Category	✓	✓

Additional evidence in support of the claims under (6) comes from (10a) and (10b). The pronominal version of these two sentences gives rise to an E-type reading (i.e., the professor/millionaire decided to buy the apartments that the students had decided to rent); by contrast, the repeated DP version gives rise to a "one apartment" reading (i.e., the professor/millionaire decided to buy one apartment, not all of the apartments). Tellingly, the version containing an EC allows both readings, and it does so in both the coordinate and the non-coordinate structure. Once again, then, the interpretative properties of Class #2

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[3]The judgements reported in this paragraph are due to four speakers. A fifth speaker produced an identical pattern of judgements, except that for this speaker, the EC version of (7a) allows only the sloppy reading. A sixth speaker similarly produced an identical pattern of judgements, with the exception that for this speaker, the repeated DP version of (7b) additionally allows a strict reading, provided "cortar" is given contrastive focus intonation.

sentences corroborate the claims put forward under (6).[4,5]

(10)   a.   Cada (um dos)   aluno(s)   decidiu alugar um apartamento, e/mas   o
             each (one of.the) student(s) decided to.rent an   apartment,   and/but the
             professor/milionário decidiu comprar eles/um apartamento/__.
             professor/millionaire decided to.buy   them/an apartment/__.
             "Each (of the) student(s) decided to rent an apartment, and/but the professor/
             millionaire decided to buy them/an apartment/__ (= them/an apartment)."

       b.   Cada (um dos)   aluno(s)   decidiu alugar um apartamento antes   do
             each (one of.the) student(s) decided to.rent an   apartment   before of.the
             professor/milionário decidir   comprar eles/um apartamento/__.
             professor/millionaire to.decide to.buy   them/an apartment/__.
             "Each (of the) student(s) decided to rent an apartment before the professor/
             millionaire decided to buy them/an apartment/__ (= them/an apartment)."

(11)		E-type Reading	One-apartment Reading
	Pronoun	✓	✗
	Repeated DP	✗	✓
	Empty Category	✓	✓

As a final argument in support of (6), consider (12a) and (12b).[6] The pronominal version of (12a)

and (12b) can be understood as asserting that Maria got all of the questions wrong; call this, the "all

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[4]The following two sentences, in which the E-type reading is particularly salient, reinforce the conclusion that Class #2 sentences admit an E-type reading:

(i)   a.   Cada (um dos)   aluno(s)   ia   alugar um apartamento, mas o   milionário decidiu comprar
             each (one of.the) student(s) would to.rent an   apartment,   but the millionaire decided to.buy
             __ antes.
             __ before.
             "Each (of the) student(s) would have rented an apartment, but the millionaire decided to buy __ (=
             them) beforehand."

      b.   Cada (um dos)   aluno(s)   pretendia alugar um apartamento antes   do   milionário
             each (one of.the) student(s) intended to.rent an   apartment   before of.the millionaire
             anunciar   que ia   comprar __.
             to.announce that would to.buy   __.
             "Each (of the) student(s) was intending to rent an apartment before the millionaire announced that
             he would buy __ (= them)."

[5]The judgements reported in this paragraph are due to four speakers.

[6]The sentences in (12) were each judged against a background context. For (12a): João and Maria took an examination consisting of five questions; João got Questions 1, 2, and 3 right and Questions 4 and 5 wrong. For (12b): João and Maria's school is holding a geography competition, for which the students have been divided up into two-person teams. The competition's rules are as follows: first, one member of each team enters the auditorium and completes a questionnaire consisting of five geography questions (e.g., What is the capital of *Sergipe*?). Then, the second member of each team enters the auditorium and completes a questionnaire containing the same five questions. Each team advances to the next round if one or both of its members gets three or more

wrong" reading. The repeated DP version, on the other hand, can be understood as asserting that the set of questions Maria got wrong is partially distinct from the set of questions João got right (hereafter, the "partially distinct sets" reading); in terms of the context provided in fn. 6, João got Questions 1, 2, and 3 right, while Maria got (say) Questions 3, 4, and 5 wrong. Revealingly, the EC version allows both readings, an observation which lends further support to the claims listed under (6).[7,8]

(12) a. O   João acertou a   maioria das   perguntas, e/mas a   Maria erro u   elas/a
           the João got.right the majority of.the questions, and/but the Maria got.wrong them/the
           maioria das   perguntas/__.
           majority of.the questions/__.
           "João got the majority of the questions right, and/but Maria got them/the majority
           of the questions/__ (= them/the majority of the questions) wrong."

      b. O   João acertou a   maioria das   perguntas depois que a   Maria erro u
           the João got.right the majority of.the questions after   that the Maria got.wrong
           elas/a   maioria das   perguntas/__.
           them/the majority of.the questions/__.
           "João got the majority of the questions right after Maria got them/the majority
           of the questions/__ (= them/the majority of the questions) wrong."

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of the questions correct. Now, suppose that João and Maria are on the same team, that the first round of the competition has just come to a close, and that João has gotten Questions 1, 2, and 3 right and Questions 4 and 5 wrong.

[7]The three versions of (12a) and (12b) also allow a "same set" reading, under which the set of questions Maria got wrong is identical to the set of questions João got right; in terms of the background context provided above, João got Questions 1, 2, and 3 right, and Maria got Questions 1, 2, and 3 wrong. Given that this reading is available in both the pronominal version and the repeated DP version, it cannot be used to probe the status of the EC.

For the sake of thoroughness, I note that although some speakers did not allow the "same set" reading for the pronominal version of (12a), they did allow it for the following sentences.

(i) a. O   editor aprovou a   maioria dos   artigos, mas a   secretária dele   arquivou eles junto
          the editor approved the majority of.the articles, but the secretary of.him archived them together
          com os   artigos que ele rejeitou.
          with the articles that he rejected.
          "The editor approved the majority of the articles, but his secretary archived them along with the
          articles he rejected." (Example due to Marcelo Ferreira)

     b. O   editor aprovou a   maioria dos   artigos, mas a   secretária arquivou eles junto   dos
          the editor approved the majority of.the articles, but the secretary archived them together with.the
          artigos rejeitados.
          articles rejected.
          "The editor approved the majority of the articles, but the secretary archived them along with the
          rejected articles." (Example due to Elaine Grolla)

[8]The judgements in this paragraph are due to four speakers.

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	"all wrong"	"partially distinct sets"
(13) Pronoun	✓	✗
Repeated DP	✗	✓
Empty Category	✓	✓

Summarizing, in this article, I have compared the interpretation of Class #2 sentences with the interpretation of two minimally-differing classes of sentences: those in which the EC is replaced by an overt pronoun, and those in which the EC is replaced by its antecedent, the DP functioning as the direct object of the previous clause. As I have shown, the sentences in Class #2 are systematically ambiguous, with one of their readings identical to the readings produced by the analogous overt pronoun sentences, and the other, identical to those produced by the analogous repeated DP sentences. This finding follows without further assumption if Class #2 sentences admit two derivations in the manner put forward under (6); when the EC is *pro*, the readings associated with the analogous overt pronoun sentences are generated, and when it is elliptical, the readings associated with the analogous repeated DP sentences are generated.

Before closing, a short comment is in order. In this article, I have argued that the elliptical derivation is available in both coordinate and non-coordinate structures. Ferreira (2000, p. 83-86), by contrast, argues that the ellipsis option is available in coordinate structures, but not in non-coordinate structures. Ferreira offers two arguments in support of this conclusion. First, according to Ferreira, Class #2 sentences allow sloppy readings when the EC is in a coordinate sentence, but not when it is in a non-coordinate sentence.

(14) a. João espera ganhar seu carro no   Natal,   mas Pedro vai comprar __ antes.
          João hopes to.win his car   on.the Christmas, but Pedro will buy   __ before.
          "João$_1$ hopes to get his$_1$ car on Christmas, but Pedro$_2$ will buy __ (= his$_{1/2}$ car) beforehand." (FERREIRA, 2000, p. 85, citing CYRINO, 1997)

      b. João publicou seu livro pela   editora A antes da   Maria enviar __ para a
          João published his book through.the editor A before of.the Maria to.send __ to   the
          editora B.
          editor B.
          "João published his book through Publisher A before Maria sent __ (= João's book/*Maria book) to Publisher B." (FERREIRA, 2000, p. 85)

Second, Ferreira notes that the EC in Class #2 sentences can undergo a process reminiscent of vehicle change (FIENGO & MAY, 1994), but only when it is embedded within a coordinate sentence. Thus,

the EC in (15a) can be understood as "a present", indicating that it has undergone a vehicle change-like transformation from a negative existential to a positive existential. The EC in (15b), on the other hand, can only be understood as a bound variable.

(15)   a.   O João não deu nenhum presente pra   Maria, mas o   Pedro deu __ pra   Patrícia.
the João NEG gave no   present   to.the Maria, but the Pedro gave __ to.the Patricia.
"João didn't give any presents to Maria, but Pedro gave __ (= a present)
to Patricia."

b.   O João não relatou nenhum acontecimento à   Maria antes do   Pedro relatar
the João NEG related no   happening   to.the Maria before of.the Pedro to.relate
__ à   Patrícia.
__ to.the Patricia.
"João didn't relate any happening to Maria before Pedro related __
to Patricia."

= There is no x, x a happening, such that João related x to Maria before Pedro
related x to Patricia.

≠ João didn't relate any happenings to Maria before Pedro related some happening
to Patricia.

(FERREIRA, 2000, p. 84)

However, the judgements Ferreira reports for (14b) and (15b) do not seem to be generally shared. Thus, according to the four speakers I consulted, (14b) allows a sloppy reading when it is embedded within the following context, which renders the sloppy reading particularly salient.[9,10]

(16)   *Maria é muito competitiva. Sempre que o João publica algo, ela tenta publicar algo também.*

Pedro: Coitada da Maria. Ela tem tantas responsabilidades administrativas que quase não tem tempo pra sua própria pesquisa.

Júlia: Então tá sendo difícil pra ela continuar competindo com o João?

Pedro: Muito! Ele publicou o livro dele pela editora A antes dela enviar __ para a editora B.

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[9]For one of the four speakers, (14b) allows a sloppy reading even when a background context is not provided.
[10]Translation of (16):
Maria is very competitive. Whenever João publishes something, she tries to publish something, too.
Pedro: Poor Maria. She has so many administrative responsibilities; she barely has any time for her own research.
Julia: So it's been hard for her to keep up with João, right?
Pedro: That's right! He published his book through Publisher A before she sent __ (= her book) to Publisher B.
Note that (14b) contains the prenominal possessive pronoun *seu* 'his' whereas the version of (14b) presented in the dialogue contains the postnominal possessive *dele* 'his', lit., 'of him'. In colloquial speech (of which the dialogue is an example), *seu* is generally employed as a second person possessive pronoun, hence the substitution.

Similarly, the four speakers I consulted indicate that (15b) allows vehicle change, provided the example is embedded within an appropriate context. Thus, in the context of the following dialogue, the EC can be interpreted as "some happening", indicating that vehicle change is available.[11]

(17) *O João estuda na USP, e a namorada dele, Maria, estuda na UnB. Pedro (que é o amigo do*
      João) também estuda na USP, e Patrícia (que é a namorada do Pedro) estuda na UnB.
      Uma vez por mês, o João e o Pedro vão juntos à UnB para visitar a Maria e a Patrícia. Os
      rapazes geralmente têm muito pra contar (o João está estudando uma planta rara e sempre tem
      várias descobertas para contar. O Pedro é amigo de todo mundo e sempre tem várias histórias
      para contar.) Infelizmente, o João fala demais e nunca deixa o Pedro falar. Desta vez, Pedro
      pediu para o João deixá-lo falar primeiro, pelo menos por alguns minutos. Depois, ele vai
      deixar o João falar.
      Eduardo e Rafael sabem do que Pedro e João tinham combinado.
      Eduardo: *E aí? Como foi a viagem do Pedro e do João? O João fez sua parte do compromisso?*
      Rafael: *Fez, sim. Ele não relatou nenhum acontecimento à Maria antes do Pedro relatar __ à*
      Patrícia.

Upon closer inspection, then, the EC in (14b) and (15b) can indeed be generated under ellipsis. Ferreira's examples thus provide further support for the conclusion reached herein, that the ellipsis option may apply in non-coordinate structures.[12]

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[11]Translation of (17):
João studies at USP, and his girlfriend, Maria, studies at UnB. Pedro (who is João's friend) also studies at USP, and Patricia (who is Pedro's girlfriend) studies at UnB.
Once a month, João and Pedro go to UnB together to visit Maria and Patricia. The guys generally have quite a lot of things to tell Maria and Patricia. (João is studying a rare plant and always has various discoveries to talk about. Pedro is friends with everyone and always has a lot of anecdotes to share.) Unfortunately, João always talks too much and never gives Pedro a chance to talk. This time around, Pedro told João to let him talk first, at least for a few minutes. Then, he'll let João talk.
Eduardo and Rafael know about Pedro and João's agreement.
Eduardo: *So, how was Pedro and João's trip? Did João keep his side of the bargain?*
Rafael: *Yes, he did. He didn't relate any happenings to Maria before Pedro related __ (= some happening) to Patricia.*

[12]Marcelo Ferreira (p.c.) informs me that he does not allow the sloppy reading for (14b), nor vehicle change in (15b), even with the contexts provided in the text. Moreover, he does not allow the "partially distinct sets" reading for the EC version of (12b), though he does for the EC version of (12a). (Recall that the "partially distinct sets" reading diagnoses the ellipsis option.) It is possible, then, that there are speakers of Brazilian Portuguese for whom the ellipsis option is indeed restricted to coordinate structures.

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