

European and Brazilian Portuguese wh-questions

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1 The aims

Diachronic studies of Brazilian Portuguese (BP) have shown some major changes in the syntax of wh-questions since the 18th century (Duarte, 1992; Lopes Rossi, 1996). On the other hand, formal synchronic analyses of European Portuguese (EP) (Ambar, 1988; Ambar & Pollock, 1998, Kato & Raposo, 1996) lead us to assume that this variety has apparently preserved the properties of the classic period. The aim of this paper is to compare contemporary European and Brazilian Portuguese wh-questions using similar written corpora and speakers' intuition of both varieties, focusing on the aspects that Brazilians have found to have changed. The ultimate goal is to provide a analysis of the empirical generalizations found, using as framework the Principles and Parameters Model.

The questions to be answered are the following: a) since BP wh-questions patterns have been raised using diachronic corpora and EP patterns have been postulated using the linguists' intuitions, how do the two varieties compare when similar corpora and the same theoretical frame are used? b) how do the empirical facts in EP corpora compare with what is claimed for it in the formal analyses? c) since written language is often considered more conservative than spoken language, can we expect older wh-constructions in BP texts, more in consonance with what is expected of the European variety? d) what theoretical account can we give for eventual qualitative and/or quantitative differences?

The corpus used consisted mainly of newspapers and plays, the former taken from the internet. We also used tests of grammaticality and interpretation, through e-mail, for specific hypotheses concerning optionality.

2 Results

2.1 Expected results

The patterns described in the formal studies of EP and the diachronic studies of BP are mostly confirmed in the present *corpus*, namely, with bare *wh* words:

- a) VSO order with transitive verbs and VS order with inergatives are found only in EP:
- (1) a. Que trouxe ele de novo para a construção romanesca? EP
what brought he of new for the romance construction
“what did he bring as novelty for the romance construction?”
- b. De que ri o Diamantino? EP
Of what laughs the Diamantino
“What does Diamantino laugh at?”
- b) VS order with unaccusative verbs is found in both varieties:
- (2) a. Onde estariam forma e teoria? PE
where are+condicional form and theory
“Where would form and theory be?”
- b. Com quem surgiu esse conceito? PB
with whom appeared this concept
“With whom did this concept appear?”
- c) Variable SV/VS order in embedded questions is found in EP and strict SV order is found in BP, except with unaccusative verbs:
- (3) a. perguntou como conseguiram eles -- PIDE -- as informações EP
asked how managed they –PIDE-- the informations
“He asked how they (PDE) managed to get the information”
- b. A TVI não sabe o que Deus quer, EP
the TVI not knows what God wants
“The TV doesn’t know what God wants”
- c. A polícia ainda não sabe como o estudante teve acesso ao carro. BP
the police still not knows how the student had access to the car
“The police still doesn’t know how the student had access to the car”
- d) SV order in cleft interrogatives, with *é que*, is the privileged order in EP, with a few cases of VS, while in BP only SV is found:
- (4) a. O que *é que* ela representa? EP
what is that she represents
“What is it that she represents?”

- b. Mas para que é que serve um Óscar ? EP
 but for what is that serves an Oscar
 “What is an Oscar useful for?”
- c. O que é que o colunista tem contra a orelha da Lilian Wite Fibe? PB
 what is that the journalist has against the ear of the LWF
 “What does the journalist have against LWF’s ears?”
- e) In addition to the cleft *é que* wh-constructions, the cleft question without the copula also appears with SV order in BP, both in root and in embedded clauses:
- (5) a. O que que eu posso fazer? BP
 What that I can do?
 “What can I do?”
- b. aquele que não sabe como que o Notes funciona. BP
 that one that not knows how that the Notes functions
 “The one that doesn't know how the Notes functions”
- f) strict SV order in root clauses without *é que* or *que* is found in BP, except with unaccusative verbs:
- (6) Com quem o senhor prefere disputar? BP
 with whom the sir prefers to compete
 “Who do you, sir, prefer to compete?”
- g) *wh-in-situ* constructions as ordinary questions are found in both varieties, but are much more productive in BP:
- (7) a. Os jovens terão seu bacharelado para quê? EP
 the young will have their BA for what
 “What will the young ones have their BA for?”
- b. Você votou em quem em 1989? BP
 you voted for who in 1989?
 “Who did you vote for in 1989?”

2.2 Unexpected results

- a) the D-linked type, which, according to Ambar (1988) and Lopes Rossi (1996) licensed SV or VS order, exhibited only VS order in EP and variable order in BP, where invariant SV order was expected:
- (8) a. Que vestes excêntricas enverga o Spike? EP
 which clothes eccentric wears the Spike
 “Which eccentric clothes does Spike wear?”

- b. Que importância teve essa sua experiência nos EUA?
 what import had this your experience in the States
 “What import had your experience in the states?”
- b) VS order with bare *wh*-words is not found in root clauses in EP plays. A genre that simulates spoken language exhibits cleft questions instead of inversion, a behavior very similar to what was observed in Brazilian plays in the 18th century, when VS order started to decrease.

3 The interpretation of empirical facts

This work involved data from written *corpus*, where we assumed the presence of strong prescriptive rules interacting with the real I- language of the authors of both varieties. The following criteria were used to interpret the data: a) inexistence of a form in the *corpus* means its inexistence in the I-system; b) marginal in the *corpus* is interpreted as: b.1) licensed in I-language, but still banned by prescriptive rules; b.2) undergoing a grammatical change, but maintained by prescriptive rules; b.3. clear complementary distribution according to the gender of the text shows the competition of a new form *vs* a form in extinction; c) privileged VS order in D-linked *wh*-questions is interpreted as stylistic inversion, a pattern that BP started to lose later than VSX.

4 The theoretical proposal

The proposal is mainly based on Rizzi’s (1991) *wh-criterion*, translated as feature-checking. In matrix *wh*-interrogatives:

- a) In order for CP to be projected, C has to be lexicalized to check the features of the *wh*-element: EP lexicalizes it through V movement to C (9a). BP lost V-to-C and lexicalizes C with the complementizer *que* (9b), which can be erased in PF (9c).

(9) a. [_{CP} De que [_C ri_v [_{IP} Diamantino t_v ...]]] (=1b) EP *BP

b. [_{CP} O que [_C *que*_{wh} [_{IP} eu posso fazer]]] (=5a) BP *EP

c. [_{CP} Com quem [_C ~~que~~ [_{IP} o senhor prefere disputar]]] (=6a) BP *EP

- b) If C is not lexicalized before *spell-out*, CP is not projected and the *wh*-element remains *in-situ*:

(10) [_{IP} esse protesto beneficia a quem] (before *spell-out*)

- c) *Wh*-interrogatives with *é que* derive from cleft sentences with the raising of the copula to C in EP (11b); and with the copula remaining in INFL in BP (11c):

(11) a. O que é que ela representa? (=4a)

b. [CP O que [C é i[IPti [CP que [IP ela representa]]]] EP

c. [CP O que [C ~~que~~[IP é [CP que [IP ela representa]]]] PB

- d) In embedded *wh*-interrogatives: d.1) the CP is necessarily projected in both EP and BP, which explains the impossibility of *wh-in-situ* in this context, in both varieties; d.2) BP has both the *wh*-element and the *que* in CP, pronounced or erased, which explains the obligatory SV order; d.3) EP has both SV and VS in embedded clauses but the latter in this context is not triggered by V-to-C. The two orders are connected to the same triggering condition that yields SV and VS in declaratives, namely, categorical andthetic judgement structures.

The triggering element for the loss of VS in BP is proposed to be the *wh*-complementizer *que*, which is assumed to be the result of the grammaticalization of *é que*. The empirical facts suggest that EP may be starting the same process of change.

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