

Aspects of Negation in Portuguese

I - 'Dummy double negation' in the Romance languages: an instance of Negative Polarity?

In the past twenty years polarity phenomena have attracted the attention of many researchers, although most of the work in this area has focused on the English language and other Germanic languages.

As far as the Romance languages are concerned, there is L. Rizzi's well-known account of the Italian quantifiers 'nessuno' ('nobody') and 'niente' ('nothing') as Polarity Sensitive Items, with the following distribution and behaviour in negative sentences (Rizzi 82 : 121 - 127): [1]

- i. if in postverbal position at S-structure, the quantifier incorporates sentential negation at Logical Form (LF);
- ii. if in preverbal position at S-structure, the quantifier incorporates the feature [+neg] at S-structure.

The same could be said to hold of the quantifiers 'nada' ('nothing') and 'ninguém' ('nobody') in Portuguese, where we come across patterns like 1.a. and 1.b., the former not involving a reading of double negation:

- 1.
 - a. Ele não disse nada.
He didn't say anything.
 - b. Ninguém falou.
Nobody spoke.

Following Rizzi 82, in 1.a. the negative marker 'não' would co-occur with the quantifier 'nada', as incorporation would only happen at LF; in 1.b. the negative marker 'não' would not appear, as incorporation would already have taken place, i.e. 'ninguém' would be a [+neg] existential quantifier already at S-structure. In either case the quantifiers would fulfill the selectional restriction requiring that in declarative sentences they must appear in a negative context, as is typical of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs). [2]

Among those who have argued for the analysis of expressions of the type of 'nada' and 'ninguém' in terms of Polarity, we could also mention Longobardi and Laka: the former claims a twofold nature for such expressions in Italian, taking them to be negative quantifiers when in preverbal position, and NPIs when in postverbal position, while the latter defends that expressions like 'nadie', 'nada', 'ningún', 'nunca' or 'ni' ('n-words', as she calls them) in Spanish are always polarity items, independently of the position they may occupy in the sentence (Longobardi 87 and Laka 90).

II - 'Dummy double negation' in the Romance languages: an instance of Negative Concord?

In other work on negation in the Romance languages, it has been claimed that negative patterns like the one underlined in 1.a. are instances of negative chains (Zanuttini 89 : 15 - 16) - in the case in hand, the marker of sentential negation 'não' would be taken as the head of the negative chain also including the negative quantifier 'nada'.

But, if 'nada' is taken as a negative quantifier and not as an NPI in 1.a., the fact that 'não' and 'nada' nevertheless instantiate a reading of single negation has to be accounted for.

To solve the apparent contradiction underlying 'dummy double negation' in this perspective, Zanuttini has based her analysis on the concept of Negative Concord, which she defined in 1989 as 'the co-occurrence of more than one negative element in the same sentence when they do not constitute two instances of negation that logically cancel each other out' (Zanuttini 89 : 4). [3]

Zanuttini has also proposed the following constraint to explain the different behaviour of 'n-words' in preverbal and postverbal position (Zanuttini 91 : 153): [4]

Constraint on the Assignment of Sentential Scope to Negation
Negation can take sentential scope only if it is in a position from which it c-commands both the Tense Phrase and the Agreement Phrase.

This constraint would correctly account for the fact that in 1.a. the negative marker must be inserted, as opposed to 1.b., where the co-occurrence of 'ninguém' and 'não' would lead to true double negation and the cancellation of their respective negative value. [5]

III - Negative Polarity and Negative Concord: two parallel phenomena present in Romance and Germanic languages.

1. The status of 'ninguém'-type quantifiers

The following set of sentences shows that 'ninguém' may translate either into the negative quantifier 'nobody' or the NPI 'anybody'.

2.

a. Não encontraste ninguém?

- * Didn't you meet nobody?
- Didn't you meet anybody?

Ninguém. (And also: Não encontrei ninguém.)

Nobody. (But: * I didn't meet nobody.)

- * Anybody. (But: I didn't meet anybody.)

Even if, given only the question (or the corresponding full answer) in 2., we might still wonder whether 'ninguém' might not function as a polarity sensitive item in the scope of negation, thus behaving similarly to the NPI 'anybody', we cannot help noticing the striking difference between these two quantifiers as revealed in the short answers in 2. : 'ninguém' may occur with unequivocal negative value in an elliptical structure, while 'anybody' may not - this is why we must substitute 'nobody' for 'anybody' in the short answer in English.

Let us now check what happens in a parallel context where the quantifier 'ninguém' appears in clause-initial position.

3.

a. Ninguém protestou?

Nobody complained?

Ninguém. (And also: Ninguém protestou.)

Nobody. (And also: Nobody complained.)

If we compare the elliptical structures in Portuguese in 2. and 3., we see that it is possible to recover the negative value of the two preceding questions in the absence of any scope-assigning negative element. That is, despite the fact that there are clear sentence boundaries separating question and answer, the quantifier 'ninguém' may stand on its own and yet 'echo' the negative value of the preceding question.

Therefore, in this interpretation 'ninguém' should be considered a negative quantifier, regardless of the position it may occupy in the sentence.

A possible counter-argument comes to mind at this point: we could assume that in the short answer in 2. there is an instance of negative incorporation in Portuguese similar to that defended in Rizzi 82 for preverbal occurrences of 'nessuno'.

This would entail that in 2. and 3. the only difference between Portuguese and English would be that S-structure incorporation would be visible in the latter but not in the former. To make this point more evident 2. is reproduced below as 2'. with the adequate correspondences between Portuguese and English:

2'.

- a. Não encontraste ninguém?
Didn't you meet anybody?

Ninguém. (And also: Não encontrei ninguém.)
Nobody. (And also: I didn't meet anybody.)

In the light of this interpretation, in the elliptical structures in 2./2'. 'ninguém' and 'nobody' would result from incorporation of [+neg] into the polarity sensitive items 'ninguém' and 'anybody', respectively, paralleling what happens in subject position, as exemplified in 3. throughout.

2. Negative Chains

The co-occurrence restrictions between the negative marker 'não' and the quantifier 'ninguém' stand out in the next set of sentences.

4.

- a. Não chegou ninguém. (But: * Chegou ninguém.)
* There didn't arrive nobody. (But: There arrived nobody.)
There didn't arrive anybody. (But: * There arrived anybody.)
- b. Ninguém chegou (But: * Ninguém não chegou.)
Nobody arrived. (But: * Nobody didn't arrive.)

Basically, there is no difference in meaning between 4.a. and 4.b., and yet in 4.a. 'não' must be present, while in 4.b. it may not occur: given an unaccusative verb like 'chegar', if the quantifier appears on the right of the verb, the negative marker must be lexicalized; if the quantifier raises, the negative marker may not be lexicalized. In the English translation, on the other hand, once more polarity sensitive 'anybody' patterns with negation, as opposed to 'nobody', which behaves as an inherently negative quantifier.

So far we have only discussed sentences with one occurrence of 'ninguém' or 'nada'. The set of sentences below exemplifies what happens when these quantifiers co-occur.

5.

- a. Ninguém disse nada.
Nobody said anything.
- b. Ninguém disse nada a ninguém.
Nobody said anything to anybody.
- c. Nunca ninguém disse nada a ninguém.
Nobody ever said anything to anybody.

The negative marker 'não' may not be lexicalized in 5.a., 5.b. or 5.c. - similarly, 'did not' may not occur in the corresponding translations into English. But, while 'nobody', followed by one or several NPIs ('ever', 'anybody', 'anything'),

is the only inherently negative element in the three sentences above, it seems unjustified to claim that subject 'ninguém' has a different status in 5.a./5.b. and in 5.c., so as to account for a reading of single negation in all three cases.

The validity of the distinction between preverbal and postverbal position may be questioned given the behaviour of 'n-word' sequences on the left of the verb.

If we assume that 'n-words' in preverbal position incorporate a [+neg] feature, or activate a [+no] feature, as claimed in Rizzi 82 and Longobardi 87, respectively, a sentence like 5.c. should express double negation in Portuguese, which, however, it does not.

Sentences with two or more 'n-words' on the left of the verb turn out to be particularly problematic for proposals where their correct interpretation is based on different distribution patterns.

Accordingly, it appears more adequate to postulate that 'n-words' are either polarity or intrinsically negative items, as Laka and Zanuttini have done, and, starting from that assumption, try to justify the characteristics they display in terms of syntactic behaviour and semantic interpretation.

3. A matter of polarity or concord

But what if there is evidence in Portuguese and in English which indicates that Negative Polarity and Negative Concord may at times overlap but should nevertheless be regarded as two distinct ways of expressing negation in the language? To try to answer this question let us examine the next set of sentences.

6.

- a. Nobody loves nobody.
Ninguém gosta de ninguém.
- b. A professor introduced nobody to nobody.
Um professor não apresentou ninguém a ninguém.

The English examples in 6. appear in May 89 in his discussion of resumptive quantification and (in the independent interpretation) mean 'there are no individuals standing in the lover-lovee relationship' and 'there is no pair of individuals such that some professor introduced them' (May 89 : 403,405). [6] These are the only possible readings for the corresponding sentences in Portuguese.

Unless we acknowledge that in 6.a. and in 6.b. we may have instances of Negative Concord in English, we will have to consider the possibility of analysing 'nobody' as an NPI. To my knowledge, this is something that has never come up before; on the contrary, several authors have claimed that (at least in some contexts) 'nessuno'-type quantifiers in different Romance languages paralleled NPIs on the assumption that they basically resembled 'any' rather than 'no' and that there was a clear-cut distinction between the syntactic behaviour and semantic interpretation of these two quantifiers in English.

Sentences like those in 6., where co-occurrence of two negative elements does not necessarily result in a reading of double negation, may not be very frequent in English; yet, they do exist and may help to clarify the issue of the ultimate status of 'n-words'.

Alternatively, the readings given above for 6.a. and 6.b. might be expressed by the following sentences in English and in Portuguese.

7.

- a. Nobody loves anybody.
Ninguém gosta de quem quer que seja.
- b. A professor did not introduce anybody to anybody.
Um professor não apresentou ninguém a quem quer que fosse.

Expressions like 'quem quer que seja' and 'quem quer que fosse' behave like NPIs in the scope of negation, but may also function like free-choice 'any' compounds, as can be seen by comparing 7. and 8. .

8.

- a. Quem quer que fosse recusar-se-ia a fazê-lo.
Anybody would refuse to do it.
- b. Ela conversa com quem quer que seja.
She will talk to anybody.

Note also what happens in 9.a., as opposed to 9.b.: in 9.a., 'nada' may not occur on its own in the scope of the NPI trigger 'poucos', and if we add 'não', the only possible reading is one of double negation, as happens with 'few' and 'nothing' in English; in 9.b., however, 'o que quer que fosse' is licensed by 'poucos', as 'anything' by 'few'.

9.

- a.* Poucos fizeram nada.
? Poucos não fizeram nada.
? Few did nothing.
- b. Poucos fizeram o que quer que fosse.
Few did anything.

The natural conclusion to draw from the examples above appears to be that both in Portuguese and in English there are cases of Negative Concord and of Negative Polarity - and also of true double negation, an additional example of which is given below.

10.

- a. Ninguém partiu sem pena.
Nobody left without regret.

The sentences in 10. translate the Italian sentence 'Nessuno é partito senza rammarico', which Zanuttini presented as a straightforward example of true double negation in a Romance language (Zanuttini 89 : 17). The interpretation of 10., where the negative meaning of 'ninguém'/'nobody' and 'sem'/'without' is cancelled out, is 'Everybody regretted leaving'.

What Zanuttini apparently has failed to remark is the existence of Negative Concord in English - examples like 6. may help to substantiate Negative Concord on a par with Negative Polarity.

At this point I would maintain that Negative Polarity does not subsume or invalidate Negative Concord and vice-versa. In the lexicon of Portuguese and English, there are items which may acquire negative meaning in the scope of negative markers or 'n-words', and others which, though intrinsically negative, may combine in such a way that single negation results - among the first would rank 'anybody', 'anything', 'quem quer que seja', 'quem quer que fosse', 'o que quer que fosse', and among the second 'nobody', 'nothing', 'ninguém' and 'nada'.

This does not mean that there is an exact correspondence between these two languages: besides the sequences 'não...ninguém...ninguém' and 'não...ninguém...quem quer que fosse', it would also be possible to have the sequences 'não...quem quer que fosse...ninguém' and 'não...quem quer que fosse...quem quer que fosse' in 6.b./7.b. .

The negative marker 'não' could not be omitted in any of these four alternative sequences; on the other hand, it would not be possible to have 'nobody' following 'did not' under any circumstances. This shows that there are different selectional restrictions governing the co-occurrence of 'n-words' and negative markers in Portuguese and English, but does not rule out the possibility of the existence of Negative Concord and Negative Polarity in either language.

4. A final note on the syntax and semantics of Negative Concord

Zanuttini's analysis of Negative Concord has mainly focused on its syntactic properties, and therefore, the problem of its semantic representation still remains, as she herself acknowledges (Zanuttini 91 : 147).

The semantics of Negative Concord should provide a solution for the apparent contradiction inherent to 'dummy double negation': if each member of a negative chain is given a negative translation, an odd number of negative elements should result in a negative reading of the sentence and an even number of negative elements should result in a positive reading of the sentence (Zanuttini 89 : 16).

As can be seen in the examples presented here, this does not necessarily happen , e.g. in 5.a. we have two negative elements, in 5.b. three and in 5.c. four, and yet in all three cases the sentences have a negative reading in Portuguese. The crucial difference between these three sentences and 10.a., where the sentence has a positive reading, is that the negative elements present in 10.a. do not make up a single negative chain and in 5.a., 5.b. and 5.c. they do.

In her latest work, Zanuttini suggests absorption (in the line of Higginbotham and May 81) plus factorization of the negative component of the quantifiers in the sequence as a working hypothesis to interpret multiple occurrences of 'n-words' yielding a negative reading (Zanuttini 91 : 144 - 147). The relationship between absorbed and resumptive quantifiers might also be considered in this perspective: as was pointed out above, there are cases of resumptive quantification involving Negative Concord (cf. 6.). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Negative Concord always involves some form of 'resumption' of a preceding negation, even if the identity condition of standard resumptive quantification is not met.

But Negative Concord does not only involve negative quantifiers: it also applies in cases where the negative marker and one or more negative quantifiers appear on the right of the verb. The presence of the negative marker in these cases may be attributed to a syntactic criterion of well-formedness: it might be said that the negative marker functions similarly to case-markers in nominal structures, as its presence is compulsory and

yet the negative status of the quantifiers in its scope is not altered.

Compare the ungrammatical status of 11.a. and 11.c. with the grammatical status of 11.b. and 11.d.:

- a.* Ofereceram o Luís um novo emprego.
They offered Luís a new job.
- b. Ofereceram ao Luís um novo emprego.
They offered a new job to Luís.
- c.* O Luís disse nada.
Luís said nothing.
- d. O Luís não disse nada.
Luís didn't say anything.

Taking 'a' to be a case-marker and not a full-fledged preposition in 11.b. implies that both 'o Luís' and 'ao Luís' are NPs; similarly, despite the presence of dummy 'não', 'nada' would remain negative in 11.d. .

Following an opposite line of thought, it could be argued that the negative marker functions like an unselective negative operator binding several variables, simultaneously neutralizing the original negative meaning of the quantifiers in its scope. Since Lewis introduced in 75 the notion of 'unselective quantifiers', several authors have developed and adapted his original proposal to treat phenomena like indefinites (Heim 82), wh-movement (Pesetsky 87) or singular constructions with arbitrary readings (Hernanz 89). Analysing Negative Concord from this perspective could prove worth researching into.

Another aspect that might shed some light on the interrelation of polarity and concord is linguistic evolution.

Puzzling evidence of the overlap of Negative Concord and Negative Polarity may be found in current varieties of Portuguese. For instance, in present-day colloquial Brazilian Portuguese we come across patterns like the ones in 12. .

12.

- a. Sei não.
(Know-not)
I don't know.
- b. Vi ninguém não.
(saw-nobody-not)
I didn't see anybody.
- c. Ninguém veio não.
(nobody-came-not)
Nobody came.

If the negative marker appears in 12.b. and 12.c. merely for emphasis (not very likely, given 12.a.), 'ninguém' behaves as a negative quantifier, whether preceding or following the verb; but, if the negative marker is not redundant, 'ninguém' appears to behave like an NPI, 'inheriting' its negative value from 'não', both in preverbal and postverbal position. [7]

To sum up, to confirm any of the hypotheses suggested here (or others), it is necessary to analyse more data in the light of the syntactic and semantic properties of NPIs and negative quantifiers - at this point it would be premature to draw any final conclusions on the interplay of Negative Polarity and Negative Concord in Portuguese. This lies outside the scope of this brief sketch of the problem and will be left to future research.

NOTES

[1] The basis for Rizzi's proposal regarding the incorporation of the feature [+neg] into preverbal 'nessuno' was Klima's original proposal deriving 'nobody' from 'neg+anybody' (Klima 64 : 274 and Rizzi 82 : 124).

[2] Different criteria have been proposed to account for the distribution and behaviour of NPIs, some of which are indicated below:

- NPIs must occur in the scope of downward-entailing expressions (Ladusaw 79 : 112-113);
- NPIs must occur in a negative context (Linebarger 81 : 1);
- NPIs must occur in the immediate scope of negation at Logical Form (Linebarger 87 : 338, 346);
- an NPI must be the argument of a function with appropriate licensing properties (Zwarts 90 in Szabolcsi and Zwarts 91 : 26).

[3] Apparently, 'Negative Concord' had been discussed before in the literature on negation - Zanuttini herself includes a paper by W. Labov called 'Negative Attraction and Negative Concord' (dated 1972) in the bibliography supporting her PhD dissertation.

[4] An earlier formulation of the Constraint on the Assignment of Sentential Scope to Negation appeared in Zanuttini 89. The difference between the earlier version and the one quoted here is that the former explicitly stated that this constraint applied at S-structure, whereas the latter predicts that it may apply either at S-structure or at the level of Logical Form.

[5] More recently, working in collaboration with Liliane Haegeman, and elaborating on Rizzi's WH-Criterion, Zanuttini suggested the following condition on the well-formedness of negative phrases in Romance and some Germanic languages, which may already apply at S-structure or only at the level of Logical Form (Zanuttini 91: 174):

The NEG-criterion

- A. Each negative head must be in a Spec-head relation with a negative phrase.
- B. Each negative phrase must be in a Spec-head relation with a negative head.

[6] Cf also (May 85 : 89) and (May 90 : 126 - 127).

[7] In her dissertation Zanuttini also remarks that more than one of the distribution patterns typical of negative markers in the Romance languages may show up in different synchronic varieties of the same language and refers to the tendency in this language group to go from preverbal to postverbal negative markers through an intermediate stage when both options are available (Zanuttini 91 : 12).

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