



# “TOPIC-SUBJECT” CONSTRUCTIONS IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE AND MINIMALITY WITHIN THE AGREE MODEL<sup>1</sup>

CONSTRUÇÕES DE “TÓPICO SUJEITO” EM PORTUGUÊS  
BRASILEIRO E MINIMALIDADE NO MODELO DE *AGREE*

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**Abstract:** “Topic-subject” constructions have received considerable attention in the literature on Brazilian Portuguese (BP), as topics appear to be grammaticalized as subjects, triggering verb agreement. Chomsky’s (2000, 2001, 2008) Agree-based model seems to provide the necessary theoretical ingredients to analyze such constructions, as it takes C (a left periphery head generally associated with the mapping from syntax to discourse) to act jointly with T in determining verb agreement and licensing nominative Case. This paper discusses three representative analyses of “topic-subject” constructions developed within the Agree model (AVELAR; GALVES, 2011, 2020; and MUNHOZ; NAVES, 2012) and argues that approaches that attempt to analyze “topic-subjects” in terms of special properties ascribed to the C-T connection in BP are bound to face minimality problems. Following Kato and Ordóñez (2019) in taking the emergence of “topic-subject” constructions in BP to be related to changes within its *v*P<sub>s</sub> and DP<sub>s</sub> and assuming with Nunes and Kato (forthcoming) that these changes have led to a pervasive use of inherent Case in BP, I show that inherent Case provides the key factor in the derivation of “topic-subject” constructions, as it bleeds minimality computations (see NUNES, 2017).

Keywords: “Topic-subject” constructions; Brazilian Portuguese; Minimality; Inherent Case.

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**Resumo:** Construções de “tópico sujeito” têm recebido bastante atenção na literatura sobre o português brasileiro (PB), dado que tópicos parecem se gramaticalizar como sujeitos, desencadeando concordância verbal. O modelo de Agree de Chomsky (2000, 2001, 2008) parece dispor dos ingredientes teóricos necessários para uma análise adequada dessas construções na medida em que C (um núcleo funcional da periferia esquerda geralmente associado ao mapeamento da sintaxe para o discurso) é tido como responsável, ao lado de T, por determinar concordância verbal e licenciar Caso nominativo. Este artigo discute três análises de construções de “tópico-sujeito” representativas dos tipos de abordagens disponibilizadas pelo modelo de Agree (AVELAR; GALVES, 2011, 2020; e MUNHOZ; NAVES, 2012) e argumenta que análises que tentam derivar “tópicos-sujeitos” com base em propriedades especiais da conexão C-T em PB estão fadadas a enfrentar problemas de minimalidade. Seguindo a proposta de Kato e Ordóñez (2019) de que a emergência de construções de “tópico sujeito” em PB está associada a mudanças em seus vP e DPs e assumindo com Nunes e Kato (no prelo) que essas mudanças levaram a um uso generalizado de Caso inerente em PB, o artigo mostra que Caso inerente provê o fator chave para a derivação de construções de “tópico sujeito” ao tornar ambientes opacos em ambientes transparentes para efeito de movimento-A (cf. NUNES, 2017).

Palavras-chave: Construções de “tópico-sujeito”; Português brasileiro; Minimalidade; Caso inerente.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the influential work by Pontes (1987), the so-called “topic-subject” constructions in Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth, BP), illustrated in (1) below, have received a lot of attention in the literature (see e.g. GALVES, 1987, 1998; KATO, 1989; LUNGUINHO, 2006; AVELAR; GALVES, 2011, 2020; MUNHOZ; NAVES, 2012; ANDRADE; GALVES, 2014; NUNES, 2016, 2017; KATO; ORDÓÑEZ, 2019; NUNES; KATO, forthcoming). Typologically, these constructions seem quite exotic within the Romance family. In particular, they are completely ungrammatical in European Portuguese (see e.g. GONÇALVES; MIGUEL, 2019). From a grammatical point of view, these constructions are also intriguing in that they appear to involve instances of topics triggering subject-verb agreement (hence the name *topic-subject constructions*). Finally, given that BP is no longer a prototypical prodrop language and that its verbal agreement system is considerably weak, constructions such as (1) have been interpreted as indicating that BP is on its way to become a “topic prominent” or “discourse oriented” language (see e.g. PONTES, 1987; KATO, 1989; GALVES, 1998;

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NEGRÃO, 1999; MODESTO, 2008; DUARTE; KATO, 2008 for relevant discussion).

(1) a. [Os relógios] quebraram o ponteiro.

the watches broke-3PL the arm

'The arms of the watches broke.'

b. [Essas gavetas] cabem muita coisa.

these drawers fit-3PL many thing

'Many things can fit in these drawers.'

The apparent connection between the weakening of subject-verb agreement and the activation of some sort of topic agreement seems to suggest that whatever is ultimately responsible for the emergence of constructions such as (1) in BP, it should relate to the upper part of the clausal structure, where notions such as *subject* and *topic* are specially relevant. In this regard, Chomsky's (2008) version of the Agree-based model becomes specially attractive. In the previous Agree-based models (CHOMSKY, 2000, 2001), C was taken to be a left periphery head associated with the mapping from syntax to discourse, whereas T was taken to be responsible for licensing nominative Case and mediating the agreement between the subject and the verb. By proposing that C is also involved in subject-verb agreement, Chomsky (2008) seems to provide the precise theoretical ingredients required for a sound analysis of "topic-subject" constructions like (1), as it connects verbal agreement with discourse information. It was thus only natural that analyses of "topic-subject" constructions were explored within Chomsky's (2008) model and interesting proposals were in fact developed (see e.g. AVELAR; GALVES, 2011, 2020; MUNHOZ; NAVES, 2012).

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Despite their initial appeal, we will see below that C-T connection approaches to “topic-subject” constructions face serious challenges, as the movement operations they postulate violate minimality. Following work by Kato and Ordóñez (2019) and Nunes and Kato (forthcoming), I show that the emergence of “topic-subject” constructions in BP is a byproduct of changes affecting its *v*P and DP, rather than its C-T domain.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 1, I discuss three representative approaches to “topic-subject” constructions that explore specific properties of the C-T domain, namely, Munhoz and Naves (2012), Avelar and Galves (2011), and Avelar and Galves (2020). I argue that although these proposals make interesting use of the C-T connection to provide an appropriate position for “topic-subjects”, the derivations they propose are bound to face minimality problems once more complex “topic-subject” constructions are considered. In section 2, I review work by Kato and Ordóñez (2019) and Nunes and Kato (forthcoming), showing that changes affecting its *v*P and DP phases have led BP to make a pervasive use of inherent Case and that inherent Case makes it possible to account for “topic-subject” constructions without incurring in the minimality violations discussed in section 1 (see NUNES, 2017). Finally, in my concluding remarks I show that the outputs of changes in *v*P and DP levels and changes in the C-T domain may nonetheless interact, yielding more complex structures, namely, “topic-subject” constructions with a hyper-raised subject (see NUNES, 2016).

## 1 MINIMALITY CHALLENGES TO C-T APPROACHES TO “TOPIC-SUBJECT” CONSTRUCTIONS

Within Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) Agree-based model, nominative Case assignment involves an agreement relation between the uninterpretable  $\phi$ -features of T (the probe) and the interpretable  $\phi$  features of a DP in its c-



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Case assigner. On the other hand, if  $\alpha$  inherits the features from C, it may attract any DP in its search domain to its specifier as it is not a Case assigner. According to them, “topic-subject” constructions are derived when C transmits its features to  $\alpha$  rather than T.

Let us consider the details of two crucial aspects of Munhoz and Naves’s (2012) analysis. The first one relates to Case. If  $\alpha$  is not a Case-assigner, the question is how the “topic-subject” has its Case licensed. The authors propose that in “topic-subject” constructions, the two relevant DPs (say, *os relógios* ‘the watches’ and *o ponteiro* ‘the arm’ in (1a), for instance) enter the derivation without Case and are later marked with default Case in the morphological component. The issue is not that simple, though, for default Case is generally assumed to be only available in some designated nonargumental positions (see e.g. SCHÜTZE, 2001). So, whereas the “topic-subject” should in principle be able to receive default nominative in [Spec,  $\alpha$ P] (a nonargumental position), it is not obvious that the postverbal argument sits in a position compatible with default Case.

But the most problematic aspect of Munhoz and Naves’s analysis concerns the attraction of the “topic-subject” by  $\alpha$ . Take the well-formed sentences in (3) and (4) below, for instance. Given the thematic parallel in each pair of sentences,  $\alpha$  would in principle be required to attract the locative across the theme *muita coisa* ‘many things’ in (3b) and the possessor from within the DP that contains it in (4b), apparently violating minimality in both cases.

- (3) a. [<sub>VP</sub> Cabe- [<sub>VP</sub> [muita coisa] *t*<sub>cabe</sub> [nessas gavetas]]]  
fit-3SG many thing in-these drawers
- b. [Essas gavetas]<sub>i</sub> cabem [<sub>VP</sub> [muita coisa] *t*<sub>cabem t<sub>i</sub></sub>]  
these drawers fit-3PL many thing  
‘Many things can fit in these drawers.’

- (4) a. Quebrou [DP<sub>2</sub> O    ponteiro d[DP<sub>1</sub> OS    relógios]]  
       broke-3SG    the arm        of        the watches
- b. [DP<sub>1</sub> OS relógios]<sub>i</sub> quebraram [DP<sub>2</sub> O    ponteiro t<sub>i</sub>]  
       the watches broke-3PL        the arm  
       ‘The arms of the watches broke.’

Munhoz and Naves circumvent this problem by assuming that the possessor and locative phrases in “topic-subject” constructions “have a different status” (p. 251). More specifically, they assume that the relevant arguments are hierarchically reversed in “topic-subject” constructions. (3b), for example, should be assigned the underlying VP structure in (5a) below and (4b), the structure in (5b) (following LUNGUINHO, 2006).

- (5) a. [VP [Essas gavetas] cabe- [muita coisa]]  
       these drawers fit        many thing
- b. [VP quebra- [DP<sub>2</sub> [DP<sub>1</sub> OS relógios] [D' O    ponteiro]]]  
       break                    the watches        the arm

This proposal raises a couple of issues, though. The first one is that no independent evidence to support a different thematic organization between the two relevant DPs in “topic-subject” constructions is adduced. Given the apparent thematic identity between the sentences of (3) and (4), the null hypothesis (under Baker’s (1988) UTAH, for instance) is that they should share a common underlying thematic structure. The second issue regards internal coherence. If the “topic-subject” constructions in (3b) and (4b) were based on the structures in (5), there would be no need to appeal to special properties in the C-T domain. In particular, there is no need to invoke  $\alpha$ P to generate “topic-subject” constructions, for the DP *essas gavetas* ‘these drawers’ in (5a) and the DP *os relógios* ‘the watches’ in (5b) could simply agree with T, receive nominative, and move to

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[Spec,TP]. Crucially, the authors assume that the DP that remains inside VP is assigned default Case, as seen above. In other words, if Munhoz and Naves's analysis were on the right track, the source of "topic-subject" constructions in BP should be found at the *vP* level, for additional assumptions regarding the C-T domain would not be necessary.

Although I concur with this general conclusion, there is empirical evidence to show that "topic-subject" constructions cannot be derived from structures along the lines of (5). Nunes (2017) has pointed out that BP also allows "mixed" cases of "topic-subject" constructions such as (6a) below, where the "topic-subject" is interpreted as a possessor associated with a possessee internal to the locative, as indicated by its alternative version in (6b), as well as extra-long "topic-subject" constructions such as (7a), which should be compared with (7b).

(6) a. [Esses porta-malas] cabem muita coisa na lateral.

these car.trunks fit-3PL many thing in-the lateral

b. Cabe muita coisa na lateral desses porta-malas.

fit-3SG many thing in-the lateral of-these car.trunks

'Many things can fit on the side of these trunks.'

(7) a. [Esses barcos] diminuíram o tamanho da hélice do motor.

these boats diminished-3PL the size of-the fan of-the engine

b. Diminuiu o tamanho da hélice do motor desses barcos.

diminished-3SG the size of-the fan of-the engine of-these boats

'These boats had the size of the fans of their engine reduced.'

Observe that if the DP *esses porta-malas* 'these car trunks' in (6a) were to be generated in the Spec of *caber* 'fit', like *essas gavetas* 'these drawers' in (5a), there would be no room within VP to accommodate both the theme *muita coisa* 'many things' and the locative *na lateral* 'on the side'. In turn, if *esses barcos* 'these boats'



in (7a) were to be generated in the Spec of the highest DP in the complement position, like *os relógios* ‘the watches’ in (5b), one would expect a predicative relation between *esses barcos* ‘these boats’ and *tamanho* ‘size’. However, as the translation of (7a) and its alternative version in (7b) show, one is talking about the size of the boat’s engine’s fan and not about the boat’s size.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Similar reservations apply to Andrade and Galves’s (2014) proposal, according to which “topic-subject” constructions such as (ia) and (iia) below are launched from the structures in (ib) and (iib), respectively, where R is a relator in the sense of den Dikken (2006) and P is a null preposition that gets incorporated into R.

ANDRADE; GALVES, 2014:

(i) a. A mesa quebrou o pé.  
the table break-PAST-3SG the foot

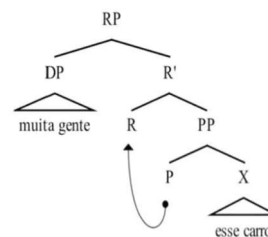
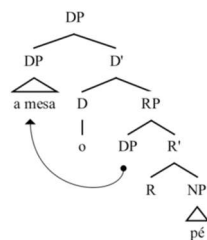
(ii) a. Esse carro cabe muita gente.  
this car fit-3SG many people

‘The table leg broke.’

‘Many people fit in this car.’

b.

b.



Take (7a), for instance. As in the case of Munhoz and Naves (2012), it does not make sense to derive it from the structure in (iii) below, for it is not the size of the boats that is under discussion. On the other hand, if we start with (iv), thus accounting for the relevant part-whole interpretation between *esses barcos* and *motor*, it is not clear how *esses barcos* can cross the intervening nominal expressions in (7a) as it moves to [Spec,TP], without inducing a minimality violation.

(iii) [RP [esses barcos] R [tamanho da hélice do motor]]  
these boats size of-the fan of-the engine

(iv) [[esses barcos] R [motor]]  
these boats engine

As for (iib), Andrade and Galves (2014) propose that P incorporation “frees” movement of X but do not discuss how such movement is able to circumvent the intervention induced by the DP *muita gente* ‘many people’ in [Spec,RP]. One could think that movement of P to R would extend the domain of P, rendering *muita gente* and *esse carro* ‘this car’ equidistant (see CHOMSKY, 1993). However, such a solution cannot account for (6a). In order for the relevant relation between *esses porta-malas* ‘these car trunks’ and *lateral* ‘side’ in (6a) to be captured under Andrade and Galves’s analysis, the structure before movement to [Spec,TP] should be along the lines of (v) below. Given that there is no P-incorporation in (v), there is no domain extension and the question arises of how *esses porta-malas* can cross *muita coisa* in the upper RP without violating minimality.



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locative cross the theme in “topic-subject” constructions like (3b) without inducing a minimality violation? Avelar and Galves only discuss (i), but at first sight their answer could also be extended to account for (ii). They propose that a Case parameter distinguishes languages whose DPs always have a Case to be valued from languages whose DPs may or may not have such a feature. For them, BP is a language of the second type, and sentences such as (4b) can be ruled in if DP<sub>2</sub> in (8) enters the derivation without a Case to be valued, thus allowing T to agree with the possessor. That being so, it could be the case that the theme in (3b) did not have Case and this would be the reason for it not to induce an intervention effect for the movement of the locative in (3b).

Although this proposal may provide a unifying answer for the questions (i) and (ii) above, it massively overgenerates when applied to other domains (see NUNES, 2016). Sentences such as those in (9), for instance, should be perfectly fine under derivations where the subject of the infinitival in (9a) and the internal argument in (9b) exercise their option of entering the derivation without a Case feature to be valued.

- (9) a. \*Parece [<sub>TP</sub> **os meninos** gostar de matemática]  
seems the boys like of math  
'It seems that the boys like math.'
- b. \*A Maria gosta **você**.  
the Maria likes you  
'Maria likes you.'

By taking [Spec,TP] in BP to be an A'-position, Avelar and Galves's (2011) proposal also fails to account for a series of differences between agreeing subjects and nonagreeing topics. For instance, there does not appear to be room for an account of Galves's (1998) observation that a topic can be associated with a resumptive pronoun, but a “topic-subject” can't, as shown in (10).

- (10) a. [Os relógios], quebrou o ponteiro **deles**.  
 the watches broke-3SG the arm of-**them**
- b. \*[Os relógios] quebraram o ponteiro **deles**.  
 the watches broke-3PL the arm of-**them**  
 ‘The arms of the watches broke.’

If *os relógios* sits in an A'-position in both (10a) and (10b), why is the resumptive pronoun excluded in (10b)? If the EPP-feature on T is taken to be  $\phi$ -independent in BP, nothing should prevent *os relógios* from satisfying the EPP in (10b) via merge and agreeing with C later, regardless of the presence of a resumptive pronoun. An appeal to Principle B effects in the case of (10b) is of no avail either. First, it would tacitly take the “topic-subject” in (10b) to be in an A-position, given that Principle B is regulated by A-binding. And second, the unacceptability due to the presence of the resumptive remains even if the resumptive is deeply embedded, as illustrated in (11).

- (11) [Esses barcos] diminuiram o tamanho da hélice do motor  
 these boats diminished-3PL the size of-the fan of-the engine  
 (\***deles**).  
 of-**them**  
 ‘These boats had the size of the fans of their engine reduced.’

Similar problems arise with hyper-raising constructions (see NUNES, 2016), which Ferreira (2000, 2009), Martins and Nunes (2005, 2010) and Nunes (2020) argue involves A-movement to [Spec,TP]. For instance, idiom chunks can undergo hyper-raising, but not movement to a *bona fide* A'-position, as shown in (12), and a hyper-raised DP may induce a Principle C effect with respect to an

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embedded epithet, but not a *bona fide* topic, as illustrated in (13) (see MARTINS; NUNES, 2005, 2010).

(12) a. [<sub>TP</sub> [O pau]<sub>i</sub> parece que [<sub>TP</sub> *t*<sub>i</sub> comeu feio]]

the stick seems that ate ugly

‘It seems that there was a big fight.’

b. \*O pau, o João disse que (ele) comeu feio.

the stick the João said that it ate ugly

‘João said that there was a big fight.’

(13) a. \*[Esses senadores]<sub>i</sub> parecem que [<sub>TopP</sub> *t*<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> [os idiotas]<sub>i</sub> vão ser reeleitos]]

these senators seem-3PL that the idiots go be re-elected

b. [Esses senadores]<sub>i</sub>, *pro<sub>expl</sub>* parece que [os idiotas]<sub>i</sub> vão ser reeleitos.

these senators seem-3SG that the idiots go be re-elected

‘As for these senators, it seems that the idiots are going to be re-elected.’

In a follow-up paper, Avelar and Galves (2020) give up on their previous approach regarding Case and following Pesetsky and Torrego (2004), they propose an alternative account according to which Case checking involves feature sharing and nominative Case checking, in particular, involves checking an uninterpretable Tense-feature internal to the DP. According to them, the derivations of the sentences in (14a) and (15a) involve the steps (14b) and (15b), respectively (AVELAR; GALVES, 2020: (9) and (18), with the addition of glosses and translation).

(14) a. As crianças nasceram o dentinho.

the children were.born the tooth-DIMIN

‘The children are teething.’

b. [<sub>DP1:K[X]</sub> [<sub>D</sub> o [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>N</sub> dentinho ] [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>DP2:K[X]</sub> as crianças]]]]]]

- (15) a. Algumas folhas apareceram uma mancha amarelada.  
 Some leaves appeared a stain yellowish  
 ‘Some leaves had a yellowish stain.’
- b. [VP [VP aparece- [DP<sub>1</sub>:K[X] uma mancha amarelada]] [DP<sub>2</sub>:K[X] algumas folhas]]

In (14b), after DP<sub>2</sub> adjoins to the NP *dentinho* and DP<sub>1</sub> is formed, DP<sub>1</sub> and DP<sub>2</sub> share their Case feature (annotated as K[X]). DP<sub>2</sub> then moves to [Spec,TP] where it checks its Case and by doing so, the Case associated with DP<sub>1</sub> gets automatically checked, as well. Similarly, the locative DP<sub>2</sub> in (15b), which is adjoined to VP, shares its Case feature with the argument DP<sub>1</sub>; after DP<sub>2</sub> moves to [Spec,TP] and checks its Case against T, DP<sub>1</sub> gets its Case licensed, too.

This amendment does not face problems with respect to sentences like (9), but the locality/minimality issues raised by (6a) and (7a) remain equally problematic. As shown in (16) below, it is not at all obvious how DP<sub>1</sub> can share its Case with DP<sub>2</sub>, given the intervention of DP<sub>3</sub> and PP in (16a) and DP<sub>3</sub> and DP<sub>4</sub> in (16b), or how DP<sub>1</sub> can move to [Spec,TP] crossing the intervening DPs.

- (16) a. [DP<sub>1</sub> Esses porta-malas]<sub>i</sub> cabem [DP<sub>3</sub> muita coisa] [PP n[DP<sub>2</sub> a lateral t<sub>i</sub>]]  
 these car.trunks fit-3PL many thing in the lateral  
 ‘Many things can fit on the side of the trunk of these cars.’
- b. [DP<sub>1</sub> Esses barcos]<sub>i</sub> diminuíram [DP<sub>4</sub> o tamanho d[DP<sub>3</sub> a hélice  
 these boats diminished-3PL the size of the fan  
 d[DP<sub>2</sub> o motor t<sub>i</sub>]]  
 of the engine  
 ‘These boats had the size of the fans of their engine reduced.’

Avelar and Galves’s (2020) amendment also has new problems of its own. The first one is recognized by the authors. As they point out, if nothing else is

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added, a sentence such as (17a) below should be incorrectly ruled in if the larger DP<sub>1</sub> in (14b) moves to [Spec,TP]. They propose that DP<sub>2</sub> in (14b) does indeed check nominative under feature sharing, but the configuration internal to DP<sub>1</sub> is such that it triggers the insertion of a dissociated morpheme in the morphological component (the preposition *de*) and the sentence surfaces as (17b).

- (17) a. \*O dentinho as crianças nasceu.  
the tooth-DIMIN the children was.born  
b. O dentinho das crianças nasceu.  
the tooth-DIMIN of-the children was.born  
'The children are teething.'

However, the same type of problem arises with the sentence in (18) below, where there is no configuration for *de*-insertion. If DP<sub>1</sub> and DP<sub>2</sub> share their Case-feature in (15b), DP<sub>1</sub> could move to [Spec,TP] and as it checks its Case, it should also license the Case of the locative DP<sub>2</sub>. Thus, even if we put the minimality issue aside, the sentence in (18) is predicted to be acceptable, contrary to fact.

- (18) \*Uma mancha amarelada apareceu algumas folhas.  
a stain yellowish appeared some leaves  
'Some leaves had a yellowish stain.'

The discussion in this section shows that an analysis of "topic-subject" constructions that is grounded on idiosyncrasies at the C-T domain is bound to fail. However, it should be pointed out that the Case and minimality issues that were raised regarding Munhoz and Naves (2012), Avelar and Galves (2011, 2020), and Andrade and Galves (2014) (see fn. 3) actually present challenges to any analysis of "topic-subject" constructions. Let us then approach these challenges

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from below, starting with a discussion of some diachronic changes in the grammar of BP that have made room for “topic-subject” constructions to arise.

## 2 CHANGES IN THE LOWER LEVEL AND CIRCUMVENTION OF MINIMALITY

Kato and Ordóñez (2019) have made a very revealing observation by comparing BP and Dominican Spanish. Although the two languages behave in a similar way with respect to the loss of the prodrop property, Dominican Spanish has not developed “topic-subject” constructions. Analogous constructions in Dominican Spanish actually involve dative clitics, as illustrated in (19) below, and as is well known, BP has lost its third person clitics and third person possessive pronouns. These facts led Kato and Ordóñez to conclude that the emergence of “topic-subject” constructions in BP is related not to changes associated with prodrop, but to changes affecting the licensing of arguments within *v*P and DP.

(19) DOMINICAN SPANISH (KATO; ORDÓÑEZ, 2019: (30) and (28))

- a. A este reloj se le rompió la aguja.  
to this clock REFL DAT.3SG broke.3SG the needle  
'The clock's hand broke.'
- b. A estos bosques les llueve mucho.  
to these forests DAT.PL rain.3SG a.lot  
'In these forests, it rains a lot.'

Exploring Kato and Ordóñez (2019) insight, Nunes and Kato (forthcoming) propose that with the loss of some instances of structural Case licensing within *v*P and DP, BP came to make a pervasive use of inherent Case.



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This in turn has made room for a considerable expansion of chopping relative clauses in the sense of Tarallo (1983), as well as the change affecting directional verbs, which came to select the preposition *em* ‘in’, rather than *a* ‘to’ (see WIEDEMER, 2013). Under Nunes and Kato’s (forthcoming) view, in chopping relative clauses such as (20) the null argument in object position (*pro*) is licensed with inherent Case (see KATO; NUNES, 2009 for detailed discussion) and *em* in the sentences in (21) is the realization of the inherent Case assigned by the directional verb.

- (20) a. O estudante [que eu conversei *pro*<sub>inherent Case</sub> ontem] viajou.  
the student that I talked yesterday travelled  
‘The student who I talked with yesterday travelled.’
- b. O amigo [que eu dei um presente *pro*<sub>inherent Case</sub>] me telefonou.  
the friend that I gave a present me called  
‘The friend that I gave a present to called me.’
- c. O candidato [que eu mais confiava *pro*<sub>inherent Case</sub>] me decepcionou.  
the candidate that I more trusted me disappointed  
‘The candidate that I trusted more disappointed me.’
- (21) a. O João foi no mercado.  
the João went in-the market  
‘João went to the market.’
- b. A Maria já chegou em casa.  
the Maria already arrived in house  
‘Maria has already arrived home.’
- c. O Pedro veio na festa.  
the Pedro came in-the party  
‘Pedro came to the party.’

- d. A Maria levou o filho **no** cinema hoje.  
 the Maria took the son in-the movies today  
 ‘Maria took her son to the movies today.’

What is relevant for the current discussion is how inherent Case is computed with respect to A-minimality. In order to account for the Principle C effect induced by the pronoun in data such as (22a) below in English, Chomsky (1995) suggests that *to* in (22a) is not a true preposition, but just a realization of inherent Case, which does not interfere with the c-command relation established by the pronoun. Moreover, (22b) indicates that a DP marked with inherent Case does not block A-movement across it.

- (22) a. \*[Mary seems to **him**<sub>k</sub> [*t* to like **John**<sub>k</sub>]]  
 b. [**Mary**<sub>i</sub> seems to him [*t*<sub>i</sub> to be nice]]

Extending this proposal to “topic-subject” constructions in BP, Nunes (2016, 2017) argues that the minimality problems discussed in section 1 dissolve, if the intervening elements are assigned inherent Case. Consider the data in (23) and (24), for example.

- (23) a. Quebrou o ponteiro **dos** relógios.  
 broke the arm of-the watches  
 ‘The arms of the watches broke.’

a'. [TP *pro*<sub>expl</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> V [<sub>VP</sub> quebrou [DP<sub>2</sub> O [NP ponteiro [DP<sub>1</sub> os relógios]]]]]]

| \_\_\_\_\_ ↑inherent Case    | \_\_\_\_\_ ↑inherent Case

- b. [Os relógios] quebraram **o** ponteiro.  
 the watches broke-3PL the arm  
 ‘The arms of the watches broke.’

b'. [TP [DP<sub>1</sub> os relógios]<sub>i</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> V [<sub>VP</sub> quebraram [DP<sub>2</sub> O [NP ponteiro *t*<sub>i</sub>]]]]]]

| \_\_\_\_\_ ↑ inherent Case

(24) a. Cabe muita coisa **nessas** gavetas.

fit many thing in-these drawers

‘Many things can fit in these drawers.’

a'. [TP *pro*<sub>expl</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> [DP<sub>2</sub> muita coisa] [cabe [DP<sub>1</sub> essas gavetas]]]]]

inherent Case ↑ \_\_\_\_\_ | | \_\_\_\_\_ ↑ inherent Case

b. [Essas gavetas] cabem **muita** coisa.

these drawers fit-3PL many thing

‘Many things can fit in these drawers.’

b'. [TP [DP<sub>1</sub> essas gavetas]<sub>i</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> [DP<sub>2</sub> muita coisa] cabem *t<sub>i</sub>*]]]

inherent Case ↑ \_\_\_\_\_ |

(23a) and (24a) are standard impersonal constructions with a null expletive occupying the subject position and triggering third person singular agreement. In (23a), both the verb and the noun *ponteiro* ‘arm’ assign inherent Case to their complements, as sketched in (23a’). The Case assigned by the verb does not have overt manifestation, but the Case assigned by the noun is realized as the preposition *de*. In turn, in (24a) the verb *cabem* ‘fit’ assigns inherent Case to both of its arguments and the inherent Case assigned to its complement is realized as the preposition *em*. Given that inherent Case assignment is generally optional, it may happen that not all potential instances of inherent Case assignment are indeed executed. This is what happens in (23b’) and (24b’): in (23b’) the noun did not assign its Case and in (24b’), the verb assigned only one of its inherent Cases. The Caseless DPs then move to the subject position, where they trigger verbal agreement and are licensed with nominative Case. Crucially, the crossed DPs in (23b’) and (24b’) are marked with inherent Case and are as transparent for the

movement of the Caseless DP as the experiencer in (22b) for the movement of the embedded subject.

It is worth emphasizing that Nunes's (2016, 2017) proposal does not make any especial assumptions regarding the C-T domain or prodrop properties, thus being in consonance with Kato and Ordóñez's (2019) insight that "topic-subject" constructions in BP are related to changes affecting Case licensing within its *v*P and DP. Nor does this proposal assign distinct thematic configurations to the relevant arguments when "topic-subject" constructions are at stake. "Topic-subject" constructions have the same thematic architecture as their impersonal counterparts. The only relevant difference between them concerns the potential instances of inherent Case assignment that are actually realized. In fact, it seems that the analyses reviewed in section 1 also require some similar assumption in order to account for the presence or absence of the preposition *de* in (23) and the preposition *em* in (24).

The pervasive use of inherent Case in BP, exemplified by sentences such as (20) and (21) in unrelated domains, renders opaque domains transparent for the purposes of A-movement, allowing both mixed cases of "topic-subject" constructions such as (16a) and extralong A-movement in constructions like (16b), repeated below in (25a) and (26a), which we saw posed serious problems to approached based on C-T interactions. Under Nunes's (2016, 2017) proposal, these sentences are derived along the lines of (25b) and (26b), where all the DPs that are crossed by the DP that moves to the subject position have become transparent after receiving inherent Case.

- (25) a. [DP<sub>1</sub> Esses porta-malas]<sub>i</sub> cabem [DP<sub>3</sub> muita coisa] [PP n[DP<sub>2</sub> a lateral t<sub>i</sub>]  
           these car.trunks    fit-3PL    many thing    in    the lateral  
           'Many things can fit on the side of the trunk of these cars.'
- b. [[DP<sub>1</sub> Esses porta-malas]<sub>i</sub> cabem [VP [DP<sub>3</sub> muita coisa] [*v* t<sub>cabem</sub> [DP<sub>2</sub> a lateral t<sub>i</sub>]]]]

- (26) a. [[<sub>DP1</sub> Esses barcos]<sub>i</sub> diminuíram [<sub>DP4</sub> o tamanho **d** [<sub>DP3</sub> a hélice  
 these boats diminished-3PL the size of the fan  
**d** [<sub>DP2</sub> o motor *t<sub>i</sub>*]]]]  
 of the engine  
 ‘These boats had the size of the fans of their engine reduced.’
- b. [[<sub>DP1</sub> Esses barcos]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> diminuíram [<sub>DP4</sub> o tamanho [<sub>DP3</sub> a hélice [<sub>DP2</sub> o motor *t<sub>i</sub>*]]]]]]  
 | \_\_\_\_\_ ↑ inherent Case | \_\_\_\_\_ ↑ inherent Case | \_\_\_\_\_ ↑ inherent Case

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In section 2, we saw that an inherent Case approach is able to account for “topic-subject” constructions in BP without incurring into minimality violations induced by the movement of the element that ultimately occupies the subject position. One could then raise the question of whether this approach should not be combined with approaches based on the C-T relation to capture the intuition that BP is allegedly becoming a “topic prominent” language.

There are two reasons for not pursuing this route, though. The first one is standard Occam’s razor reasoning. If the inherent Case approach suffices to account for the phenomena without problems of overgeneration or undergeneration, one should shy away from additional postulations. The second reason is that “topic-subject constructions” is actually a misnomer (hence the square quotes around the expression throughout the paper), for they are not intrinsically tied to topics. Nunes and Kato (forthcoming) show that any type of focus can also be used in the same frame, as illustrated in (27) below. In other words, the constructions examined in this paper are oblivious of the informational content of the element that occupies the subject position (see

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LACERDA, 2020 for relevant discussion), which again points to the conclusion that properties of the C-T domain are not directly relevant for their licensing and that the putative connection with being a “topic prominent” seems to be misguided.

(27) (NUNES; KATO, forthcoming)

a. Só esses relógios quebraram o ponteiro. (focus with *só* ‘only’)

only these watches broke-3PL the arm

‘Only these watches had their arms broken.’

b. OS RELÓGIOS acabaram a bateria. (contrastive focus)

the watches finished-3PL the battery

‘The batteries of THE WATCHES are dead.’

d. (aggressively non-D-linked *wh*-constituents)

Que diabo de carro vai fundir o motor depois de passar pela

what devil of car goes melt the engine after of pass through-the  
revisão?

inspection

‘What kind of car has its engine stopped soon after it leaves the garage?’

e. A: – Que cidades chovem muito no verão? (D-linked *wh*-constituents)

which cities rain-3PL much in-the Summer

‘In which cities does it rain a lot during Summer?’

B: – Rio e São Paulo chovem muito no verão. (information focus)

Rio and São Paulo rain-3PL much in-the Summer

‘It rains a lot in Rio and São Paulo during Summer.’

Finally, note that the conclusion here is that the constructions discussed in this paper can be derived without resorting to properties of the C-T domain. This does not mean that independent properties of the C-T domain cannot interact

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with properties of *v*P and DP domains. For instance, Ferreira (2000, 2009) has proposed that CPs in BP may be  $\phi$ -complete or  $\phi$ -incomplete and that a  $\phi$ -incomplete CP allows A-movement across it. This being so, the prediction is that a “topic-subject” should undergo additional A-movement to be Case-licensed if it finds itself within a  $\phi$ -incomplete CP. The existence of hyper-raising constructions involving “subject-topics”, as discussed in Nunes (2016) and illustrated in (28), shows that this prediction is correct and that interactions between properties of *v*P and DP, on the one hand, and C-T, on the other, may indeed occur (see NUNES, 2021 for further discussion).

- (28) a. [Os carros]<sub>i</sub> parecem que *t<sub>i</sub>* furaram o pneu *t<sub>i</sub>*.  
the cars seem-3PL that punctured-3PL the tire  
‘The cars seem to have a flat tire.’
- b. [Essas gavetas]<sub>i</sub> parecem que *t<sub>i</sub>* cabem muita coisa *t<sub>i</sub>*.  
these drawers seem-3PL that fit-3PL many thing  
‘It seems that many things can fit in these drawers.’

In sum, despite the fact that properties of the C-T domain in BP may interact with properties of “topic-subject” constructions, the latter do not follow from the former.

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