



**PRE-VERBAL POSITION IN BP: A REINTERPRETATION OF THE
“AVOID PRONOUN PRINCIPLE”
A POSIÇÃO PREVERBAL NO PB: UMA REINTERPRETAÇÃO DO
PRINCÍPIO “EVITE PRONOME”**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the changes occurring in Brazilian Portuguese, regarding the possibility of null subjects, and suggest the kinds of constraints that explain its present distribution. In this paper, we will propose that the null subject parameter is defined at the interfaces. At the level of Logical Form, a constraint like Chomsky's (1981) *Avoid Pronoun* will be at work for languages that are prototypical null subject languages, like Spanish and Chinese. For languages like BP, a system with a particular distribution of null subjects, the constraint will be more specific: *Avoid non-referential pronouns*. We will also propose that at the other interface, the Phonetic Form, languages have filters regarding their rhythm. To account for the preference for certain forms, a constraint of the form: *Avoid V1* will be proposed. This constraint has nothing to do with an XP constituent in Spec of C, like in V2 languages, but with a phonetic requirement. This means that the initial element can be a head or an XP.

Keywords: Null subjects; Brazilian Portuguese; Referential subjects; Expletive subjects; Semantic constraints; Phonological constraints.

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Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as mudanças ocorridas no português brasileiro (PB) em relação à possibilidade de sujeitos nulos e sugerir os tipos de restrições que explicam sua atual distribuição. Propomos que o parâmetro do sujeito nulo é definido nas interfaces. No nível da Forma Lógica, uma restrição como o Princípio *Evite Pronome* de Chomsky (1981) atua para línguas de sujeito nulo prototípicas, como o espanhol e o chinês. Para línguas como o PB, um sistema com uma distribuição de sujeitos nulos particular, a restrição será ainda mais específica: *Evite pronomes não referenciais*. Vamos também propor que na outra interface, a Forma Fonológica, as línguas têm filtros em relação ao ritmo. Para dar conta da preferência por certas formas, uma restrição como *Evite V1* será proposta. Tal restrição nada tem a ver com a presença de um constituinte XP no especificador de C, como nas línguas V2, mas com um requisito fonético. Isso significa dizer que o elemento inicial pode ser um núcleo ou um XP.

Palavras-chave: Sujeitos nulos; Português brasileiro; Sujeitos referenciais; Sujeitos expletivos; Restrições semânticas; Restrições fonológicas.

Introduction: the Null Subject Parameter (NSP)

The possibility of a null subject (NS) has been a major topic of interest for the Principles and Parameters theory, not only to account for cross-linguistic variation³, but also to account for language change⁴ and for language acquisition.⁵

Rich morphology as a licensing condition has been one of the strongest hypotheses on the subject, with diachronic evidence to support it. However, this hypothesis lost its generality when languages like Chinese and Japanese, well-known for their lack of agreement morphology and with the possibility of null subjects and objects, were taken into account. Huang’s (1984, 1989) seminal works on empty categories in Chinese, both in subject and object position, explain the possibility of null arguments through a generalized control theory: while Italian-like languages have in AGR the accessible subject, the controller for *pro*, in Chinese the domain of control is beyond the clause, or even beyond the sentence. The two different licensing conditions appear merged in Jaeggli and Safir’s (1989) uniform morphological paradigm hypothesis according to which, a language is a NS language (NSL) if it presents a uniform paradigm of inflected forms or a uniform non-inflected paradigm. In the former case, the identification of the subject is achieved through agreement inflection, considered to be [+pronominal], and in the latter case, through co-reference. Rizzi (1986) also proposes this dual mode of identification, splitting the parameter definition, however, into formal licensing and identification conditions. According to his view, unlike referential NSLs, expletive NSLs only require formal licensing.

In the diachronic studies, the analyses proposed by Adams (1987) and Roberts (1993) for

3 See Taraldsen, 1980; Chomsky, 1981; Huang, 1984,1989; Rizzi, 1986; Jaeggli and Safir, 1989, and many others.

4 See Adams, 1987; Roberts, 1993; Duarte,1993; Kato, Cyrino and Correa, 2009, among many others.

5 See, for instance, Hyams, 1986; Rizzi, 1994; Weissenborn, 1992, among many others.

Old French, according to whom the NS was licensed in a position of V-government, will prove to be important in our study.

Though all these proposals have been proved relevant for comparative syntax, in terms of acquisition studies, the formal and identificational parameters do not seem simple enough to provide triggers for grammar selection by the child. Moreover, most of these proposals treat *pro-drop* as a property that distinguishes languages into +/- *pro-drop* and do not deal with the variation found in such languages regarding the type of NS permissible cross-linguistically. This, according to Roberts and Holmberg (2010), would have brought about negative conclusions and a certain skepticism with respect to the Theory of Principles and Parameters. For the authors, the problem is exactly the association of principles that belong to other domains of universal grammar to a certain parameter, and such proliferation of principles cannot be maintained in the context of the Minimalist Program.

Thus, Roberts and Holmberg (2010) list alongside systems that do not admit null subjects⁶ the following types of null subject languages (NSL): **consistent** NSLs, such as Italian, Greek and Turkish, with *rich* inflection, distinguishing in general grammatical persons and verb tenses; **expletive** NSLs, also referred to as *semi pro-drop languages*, which only admit non-referential null subjects, such as German, some varieties of Dutch and Afrikaans and a range of creoles; **radical** NSLs (or discourse pro-drop), such as Chinese, Japanese and Thai, which do not have agreement inflections and allow null subjects and objects under appropriate discursive conditions as we mentioned above; and, finally, **partial** NSLs, which are more difficult to define, according to the authors, which include Finnish, Hebrew, Russian, Icelandic, Marathi (a variety spoken in India) and Brazilian Portuguese. The authors suspect that many languages considered consistent NSLs are, in fact, partial NSLs, a claim that asks for a rigorous investigation in order to reach a generalization about the properties related to the Null Subject Parameter. Besides, the languages included under the label *partial* NSLs exhibit a range of characteristics: non-argumental null expletives, quasi-argumental null expletives and null argumental subjects under very restricted environments, which differ significantly among them, a fact that makes Biberauer (2000) claim that they are too different to constitute only one subtype of NSL.

Cyrino, Duarte and Kato (2000) try to give an account of the intriguing distribution of null pronouns in BP showing that a sort of *referential hierarchy* determines different types of null subject languages, and that this referential hierarchy can also be used by the child in the selection of the right grammar.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the changes occurring in Brazilian Portuguese with regard to the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) and propose the kinds of constraints that explain its present distribution. We will propose that the distribution of null and pronominal subjects is

⁶ Unless in non-neutral sentences, when a null subject can be pragmatically identified, such as English and French.

defined at the interfaces.

The paper is organized as follows: a) the first section presents the State of Art concerning the classic *Avoid pronouns principle* in Chomsky (1981); b) then, contemporary BP is described according to previous studies and hypotheses; c) the following section shows how the NS phenomenon in BP is prosodically constrained. In the Conclusion we will show that a language like BP can not only be constrained by the referentiality of the null pronoun, but also that the presence or absence of the NS can be phonologically determined.

Brazilian Portuguese and the loss of its referential null subjects

With referential pronominal subjects, contemporary Brazilian Portuguese (BP) behaves like English, filling the pronominal subject rather than leaving it empty as in European Portuguese (EP) and other NS languages (Duarte 1995, 2000; Barbosa, Duarte & Kato, 2005):

BP	English	EP
(1) a. <i>Eu falo espanhol</i>	(2) a. <i>I speak Spanish.</i>	(3) a. <i>Falo espanhol</i>
b. <i>Você fala espanhol?</i>	b. <i>Do you speak Spanish?</i>	b. <i>Falas/fala espanhol</i>

Duarte (1999, 2000) shows, however, that, with non-referential subjects, BP behaves like other NSLs as it does not have a lexical expletive.

BP

- (4a) a. *Tem maçãs na geladeira.*
 b. *Parece que está chovendo.*

English

- (4b) a. *There are apples in the fridge*
 b. *It seems that it is raining.*

EP

- (4c) a. *Há maçãs na geladeira.*
 b. *Parece que está a chover.*

BP shows a strong correlation between morphological richness and referentiality. The full insertion of the second person pronoun *você*, as a consequence of the grammaticalization of the former address form *Vossa Mercê* (LOPES, 2002), has contributed to make the agreement paradigm poorer since it requires the third person verb unmarked form. Two other facts have

aggravated the reduction of the inflectional paradigm: (a) the inflectional verb ending - <-s> - used with the conservative second person pronoun *tu*, which has diatopical distribution (see SCHERRE et al. 2015), has also been lost; (b) the grammaticalization of the NP *a gente* as a full first person plural pronoun (LOPES, 2003; LOPES and BROCARDO, 2016), also combining with the unmarked verb form, has outnumbered the conservative *nós*. As a consequence, referential pronouns are not deleted, and the null subject becomes restricted to expletive subjects (DUARTE, 1999) and to the bound null subject pronoun (NEGRÃO and MÜLLER, 1996; NEGRÃO and VIOTTI, 2000; MODESTO, 2000; 2008).

Four hypotheses have been considered to account for the NS phenomenon in BP:

- a) BP is on the way to lose the *pro-drop* properties (DUARTE, 1993 (2018), 1995; DUARTE & REZENDE DOS REIS, 2018);
- b) BP has a different use of *pro* from other *pro-drop* languages (NEGRÃO & MULLER, 1996; NEGRÃO and VIOTTI, 2000, MODESTO, 2000, among others)
- c) the null subject in BP is not a *pro*, but a trace of movement (Ferreira, 2000, Rodrigues, 2004)⁷
- d) *pro-drop* does not define a uniform type of language but a continuum of types in a subset relation (CYRINO, DUARTE & KATO, 2000, CDK henceforth), German constituting the most restrictive, Italian and Spanish the less restrictive and BP in between.

To justify the selective licensing of null subjects in BP, and the different types of NS languages, CDK (2000) proposed a sub-parametrization model taking into consideration the existence of languages that restrict the null pronominal only to non-referential subjects. While the canonical NS languages have the principle *Avoid pronoun*⁸, a subtype of NSLs has a weaker principle *Avoid referentially defective pronouns*.

Type I: languages with only the null expletive (German);

Type II: languages with null generic (exclusive and inclusive) and null expletive pronouns (BP);

Type III: languages with null referential, null generic and null expletive subject pronouns (Spanish, Italian).

CDK further propose that change has to occur from one subtype to its adjacent type, all of them stable systems.

⁷ These two authors work under the assumption that a theta-carrying element can move to a theta-position, in line with Hornstein's (2001) view.

⁸ Kato (1999) proposes that what is avoided in NSLs is the strong pronoun, external to IP, which has a *default* nominative case. In her perspective, all languages try to avoid strong pronouns.

(5) a. Non-NS --> NS-Type I --> (NS-Type II) --> ((NS-Type III))

b. NS-Type III --> Type II --> (Type I)

Their model consists of (i) a Referential Hierarchy and (ii) an Implicational Mapping Hypothesis.

(i) Referential Hierarchy

non-argument proposition [-human]] [+human]

expletive neuter 3 p. 3p. 2 p. 1 p.

[-ref]< -----> [+ref.]

(ii) The Implicational Mapping Hypothesis

a. The more referential, the greater the possibility of a non-null pronoun.

b. A null variant at a specific point on the scale implies null variants to its left in the referential hierarchy.

This analysis explains not only the full possibility of null subjects for EP along the hierarchy, as in (3) and (6), but also the resistance of null non-referential subjects for BP illustrated in (4) as seen in the figure.

The hierarchy proposed allows us to make the following predictions regarding acquisition:

a) if a language-L can delete the most referential pronouns (1st and 2nd persons, inherently human), it can have pronouns of any referential value null; thus, if a child is exposed to a null first person subject, s/he does not need positive evidence to know that s/he can have null subjects all the way down in the hierarchy;

b) likewise, the possibility of deletion of a pronoun at a certain point in the referential hierarchy presupposes deletion of pronoun types below in the hierarchy; but to know whether it is possible to have null subjects in higher points in the hierarchy, positive evidence will be required.

Hyams’s (1986) proposal that the expletive *it* in English is a trigger for a child acquiring English fits in CDK’s theory, as the presence of the lexical expletive leads the child to assume that all other entities in the hierarchy will also have lexically filled pronouns.

The co-existence between null expletives and topic-subjects in BP

The structures presented in the previous section could be interpreted as evidence that BP

is becoming a canonical non-NSL, like English. However, canonical non-NSLs have a more general strategy of filling the non-referential subject position with overt expletives, such as *it* and *there*, a possibility that does not exist in BP⁹. Therefore, CDK's proposal does not give a reason for the variable behavior found with the so-called *impersonal verbs*, where we would expect null subjects. The authors' analysis predicts correctly that constructions such as the ones in (6) are well-formed in BP:

- (6) a. *__me custou sair de casa.*
 CL.1PS cost. 3PS leave the house
 "It took me a long time to leave the house"
- b. *__parece que os homens gostaram da cidade.*
 seems that the men enjoyed. 3PP the city
 "It seems that the men enjoyed the city"
- c. *__tem muita violência na cidade.*
 has much violence in-the downtown
 "There is a lot of violence downtown"

However, along with such impersonal null subject constructions, BP exhibits raising and unusual hyper-raising constructions (7a,b) and the use of personal existential sentences with *ter* begins to increase (7c):

- (7) a. *Eu custei a sair de casa*
 I cost to leave the house
 "I took a long time to leave the house"
- b. *Os homens parecem que (eles) gostaram da cidade*
 the men seem. 3PP that (they) enjoyed.3PP the city.
 "The men seem to have enjoyed the city"
- c. *Você tem muita violência na cidade.*
 you have a lot of violence downtown
 "You have a lot of violence downtown"

9 However, BP shares with English the personal constructions with *have/ter*—*o Brasil tem muitas montanhas* (Brazil has many mountains) and normal raising constructions with *parecer* (seem) — *eles parecem ter gostado da cidade* (they seem to have enjoyed the city). See Kato and Duarte (2014a,b).

Evidence of change towards the implementation of raising structures comes from a **trend study** (Labov, 1994) of Rio de Janeiro with speakers with low and middle levels of formal education, comparing two samples recorded in the early 1980s and in 2000 (Duarte, 2007).

- Former non-raising verbs in (8) are reanalyzed as raising verbs in (9):

custar, demorar, levar – ‘to take (time)’

faltar – ‘to miss’

estar na hora de – ‘to be in time for’

(8) a. *Custou /demorou (pra) ele sair de casa* (EP: *Custou-lhe sair de casa*)¹⁰

Cost. 3PS (for) he to-leave ot-the house

“It took him a long time to leave the house”/ “He took a long time to leave the house”

b. *Só faltava agora eles dizerem que não era culpa deles.*

only missed then they say that not was their fault

“Now the only thing missing was for them to say it was not their fault”

c. *Já tá na hora da gente parar de palhaçada.*

already is in-time for us to-stop this fooling around

“It’s time we stopped this fooling around”

(9) a. *Então, o salário dele custava muito sair. Às vez ele levava um ano para receber.*

so the salary of him cost to come. sometimes he took one year to receive(it)

“So it took him a long time to get his salary. Sometimes it took him one year to get it”

b. *Eles ainda faltavam receber o dinheiro do patrão.*

they still lacked to-receive the money from-the boss

“They still hadn’t received the money from the boss”

c. *O povo tá na hora de reagir.*

the people is in-the time of react

“It’s time for the people to react”

10 For a detailed syntactic analysis of this process see Martins and Nunes (2009)

- d. *Quando olhei no relógio, vi que eu já tava na hora de ir embora.*
 when (I) looked at-the watch, (I) saw that I was in-the time to go away
 “When I looked at my watch, I saw it was time for me to leave”

Table 1 shows that this reanalysis had started before the early 1980s with this type of verb:

Structures	1980	2000
(8) no raising	04 (19%)	04 (19%)
(9) raising	17 (81%)	17 (81%)
Total	21 (100%)	21 (100%)

Table 1: *custar, demorar, levar, faltar, estar na hora de*

Let's turn our attention to the structures with '*parecer*' (to seem)

- Structures with raising verb *parecer* (seem)

The sentences below (with the corresponding number in table 2) show the several structural possibilities with *parecer* (seem):

-no raising

- (10) *Porque __ parece que o Ronaldinho não se sentiu bem.*
 because seems that the Ronaldinho not felt well
 “Because it seems that Ronaldinho was not feeling well”

- standard raising

- (11) *pelo menos até agora ele parece __ ser uma exceção nessa história.*
 at least up-to now he seems to be an exception in-this story'
 “At least, up to now he seems to be an exception in this story”

- dislocated subject

- (12) *Os dias [__ parece [que __ não passam]]*
 the days [seem. 3PS [that not pass
 “The days, it seems they don't pass”

-hyper-raising, with null or filled subject in embedded clause

(13) a. *Tem ocasiões que eu nem pareço que __ sou brasileiro.*

has occasions that I not seem. 1PS that (I) am Brazilian

“Sometimes I don’t seem to be a Brazilian”

b. *E ele disse: “Poxa, David, você parece que __ morreu”.*

and he said: Gosh, David, you seem that (you) died

“And he said: Gosh, David, you seem to have died”

c. *As pessoas pareciam que __ iam cair do brinquedo.*

the people seemed.3PP. that (they)were going to-fall from-the toy

“It seemed the people were going to fall from the toy”

d. *Quando eu brigo, eu pareço que eu vou explodir de raiva.*

when I fight I seem.1PS that I am-going to-explode of anger

“When I’m involved in a discussion, it seems I am going to explode in anger”

e. ...mas você parece que você está se dividindo entre a medicina e o jazz

...but you seem that you are between the medicine and the jazz.

“...but it seems you are uncertain about choosing medicine or jazz”

f. *Ele parece que ele sofreu muito quando era criança.*

he seems that he suffered a lot when (he) was child.

“He seems to have suffered a lot as a child”.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the patterns attested in both samples analyzed:

Structures	1980	2000
(10) no raising	26 (39%)	23 (48%)
(11) standard raising	-	01 (02%)
(12) dislocated subject	01 (02%)	03 (06%)
(13) hyper-raising	14 (34%)	21 (44%)
Total	41 (100%)	48 (100%)

Table 2: Patterns with *parecer* ‘seem’

The results show that standard raising is almost absent in speech, and even in writing, it is

restricted to the presence of a copula in the embedded clause. It is also related to another change in BP, namely the move towards finite complement clauses. The competition is, therefore, between standard raising with a null expletive as in (11) and hyper-raising as in (14). And even though we are dealing with few data, the percentage for the latter pattern reveals significant increasing.

Another competition between a null expletive and a personal structure is the replacement of existential *haver* (there to be) by *ter* (to have), which can appear in first position but usually exhibits a constituent in first position (examples illustrate the results in Table 3)¹¹:

(14) *Acho que no Vasco não tem chutador de córner bom não.*

(I) think that in-the Vasco not has a kicker of corner good

“I think that Vasco doesn’t have a good corner kicker”

(15) a. *Não é como no Rio de Janeiro, que você em cada esquina, você tem um bar pra você lanchar.*¹²

(It) is not like in-the Rio de Janeiro, that you in every corner you have a bar for you to have a snack

“Its not like in Rio de Janeiro, where you can find many bars to hav a snack”

b. *Hoje a gente tem um grupo, uma parte da Igreja que está comprometida.*

Today one has a group, a part of-the church that is engaged

c. *Ah, eu ia pra Itália, que eu tenho muitas coisas pra vê.*

oh, I would-go to Italy, that I have lots of things to see.

“Oh, I would go to Italy, where I have lots of things to see”

d. *Lá, por exemplo, aonde mora a minha sogra, ela mora lá há trinta anos. Ela não tem grade na janela dela.*

there, for instance, where lives my mother-in-law, she lives there for thirty years. She doesn’t have a grating on her window

“There, for instance, where my mother-in-law lives, she’s lived there for thirty years. Her window has no grating / there is no grating on her window.”

(16) *O Brasil não tem nenhum político.*

Brazil not has any politician

“There are no politicians in Brazil.” “Brazil has no politicians.”

11 See also Viotti (1999).

12 See also Callou and Avelar, 2000; Avelar (2003; 2006); Marins (2013).

(17) *Strogonoff tem a receita __ aí.*

Strogonoff has the recipe there.

“There is the recipe of strogonoff there.”

(18) *Isso não tem nem dúvida.*

that not has not-even doubt

“There is no doubt about that.”

Structures	1980	2000
(14) PPs and AdvPs	276/471 (59%)	169/328 (52%)
(15) Personal Pronouns	84/471 (18%)	122/328 (37%)
(16) NPs (time and space)	64/471 (13%)	23/328 (7%)
(17) Topicalized NPs	38/471 (8%)	10/328 (3%)
(18) Merged demonstratives	9/471 (2%)	4/328 (1%)

Table 3: Elements at the left of *ter* in existential sentences

Notice the increasing use of personal pronouns in the second synchrony.

Brazilian Portuguese and phonological fillers in pre-verbal position

This tendency to avoid a null expletive (a verb initial sentence) can be related to two findings:

a. Duarte (1995) observes that a context of resistance to expressed referential subjects is the presence of a “light element” at the left of V, such as negation, clitics or light adverbs:

(19) a. *não sei exatamente se ele tem noção de tempo.*

not know. 1PS exactly if he has notion of time

“I don’t know exactly if he has any notion of time”

b. *só assistiu três vezes?*

only saw.2PS three times?

“Have you seen it only three times?”

b. Kato (2002), on a research Project on spoken BP, concludes that BP rejects the verb in

sentence-initial position, filling it with an adjunct or a discursive element¹³. The phenomenon is analyzed as distinct from the syntactic V2 structures, as any category can fill this position: a syntactic adjunct (whether a head or an XP) or a discursive element. Kato's hypothesis is that the constraint here is rhythmic or prosodic.

- (20) a. *então havia restaurantes que eles serviam assim um pouquinho de cada coisa*
 so had restaurants that they served sort of a little of each thing
 “So, there were restaurants that served sort of a little bit of everything”
- b. *A televisão é horrroso quando eles estão fazendo programa*
 the television. FEM is awful. MASC when they are making program
 “The TV, it is awful when they are preparing a program”

Following Kato's (2002) hypothesis, we propose that grammar is defined at the interfaces. Our problem is solved if we have the constraint *Avoid referentially defective pronouns* at the LF interface, and “Avoid V1” at the PF interface, which is assumed to be a kind of prosodic filter. If the latter is in PF, it falls within stylistic rules and its violation does not result in ungrammaticality.

- (21) a. *Eu falo espanhol* ✓ LF ✓ PF
 I speak Spanish
- b. *Eu pareço que eu vou explodir de raiva.* ✓ LF ✓ PF
 I seem that I am going to explode in anger
- c. *no Vasco não tem chutador de córner bom não.* ✓ LF ✓ PF
 in the Vasco not has a corner kicker good no
- d. *ØParece que eu vou explodir de raiva.* ✓ LF *PF
 seems that I am going to explode in anger

We can conclude our study with Kato's (2002) reflection, according to which at PF BP prefers the pattern XVY, with X being a grammatical element or a discursive one. Also, as stated by the author, we may conjecture that the rhythmic pattern enters as a sort of parameter, just like morphology. As for the syntactic typology, we may adhere to Kato and Duarte (2017), according to whom BP is similar to English regarding referential pronouns and similar to Japanese or Chinese regarding non-referential subjects.

13 In a recent paper Guilherme (2016) uses proclisis in initial position to propose that BP is a sort of V2 language, but with the verb raising only to Io. But see Nunes (1993; 2018) for a different interpretation.

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14 Dinah, que saudades de trabalhar com você!

15 É difícil demais achar as palavras adequadas para homenagear a Dinah! Embora só tenhamos nos encontrado em 1993, é como se a nossa convivência acadêmica e a nossa amizade, que tanto me orgulham, viessem da juventude. Você é exemplo de retidão na vida pessoal e profissional, de dedicação às causas justas, de sinceridade absoluta. Você nos inspira!