

Variation in anaphoric direct object placement in European Portuguese: Frequency and Topicality

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Variation in object clitic placement in Ibero-Romance has been of great interest to current researchers working on Spanish and Portuguese (cf. Andrade 2010a, Andrade 2010b, Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos 2010, Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos 2014, Barnes, González López & Schwenter 2014). Among these, European Portuguese (EP) alone displays generalized postverbal pronominal object clitic placement, with preverbal placement licensed in the presence of proclisis triggers. These triggers include negation, subordinating conjunctions, quantifiers, WH operators, and certain adverbs (Barrie 2000, Cunha & Cintra 2002, Perini 2002, *inter alia*). However, these normatively proclisis environments are loci of considerable variation in clitic placement, as seen below in (1) and (2). Building on the previous body of work on variation in object clitic placement in EP, the present study examines the factors governing the variation in placement of accusative third person objects in the presence of three trigger words—*que* ‘that’, *não* ‘no; sentential negation’, and *talvez* ‘perhaps’—with a focus on non-normative enclisis, as seen in example (2).

(1) *Não o* podia ter esquecido. [UHPVC-Simões]

She couldn’t have forgotten **him**.

(2) *Não* podia deixá-**lo** assim, morto e esquecido de todos. [ANT-Carvalho]

She couldn’t leave **him** like that, dead and forgotten by everyone.

This study focuses exclusively on accusative objects, and specifically third personsingular and plural direct objects: *o*, *a*, *os*, *as*. Using data collected from the *Corpus do Português* (Davies & Ferreira 2006-), I examine tokens following one of the three trigger words using mixed effects regression. The results suggest that complex multi-verb predicates positively correlate with non-normative clitic placement. That is, complex predicates are affected by the frequency of the finite verb: in the presence of complex predicates containing two verbs, highly frequent governing verbs result in normative proclisis and less frequent finite forms result in non-normative enclisis. This contrasts with Myhill’s (1988) and Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos’ (2014, To appear) results for Spanish, which show that more grammaticalized verbal constructions function more like simple predicates. In essence, unlike Spanish, the effect of verbal frequency on EP clitic placement points toward analogical change rather than grammaticalization (cf. Bybee 2011).

Furthermore, discourse factors including referential distance and topic persistence emerge as significant predictors of the variation: higher referential distance and lower topic persistence scores correlate with more non-normative placement, similar to the results found by Schwenter & Torres Cacoullos (To appear) for Mexican Spanish. This result suggests that clitics with lower topicality are the ones most likely to be placed according to the enclisis pattern found elsewhere in the language. This study reaffirms that verbal frequency plays a key role in clitic object placement in EP and adds new evidence for the role of frequency for third person accusative objects. It further contributes to the growing evidence that discourse pragmatic factors affect morphosyntactic variation, and particularly pronominal constituents, across languages.

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