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Anacoluthon and "Double Subject" Sentences

ABSTRACT: This paper examines constructions that portuguese grammarians have studied under the label «anacoluthon». It is argued that they are similar to sentences Li & Thompson call «double subject sentences». They differ from Ross's (1968) topicalizations because it is not possible to say that the SN to the left was raised from any point of the S to the right. They differ also from left dislocated Ss because there is no copy pronoun in the S to the right. It is concluded that anacoluthon can be interpreted by rules of discourse.

Li & Thompson (1976), describing topic-comment sentences in topic-prominent languages, refer to «double subject» constructions as «the clearest cases of topic-comment structures». They say that «all Tp languages have sentences of this type, while no pure Sp languages do as far as we know» (p. 468).

An example of Japanese was:

- (1) Gakkoo-wa buku-ga isogasi-kat-ta «School, I was busy».

I want to show, in this paper, that what is called «double subject» sentences in so-called Tp languages is also found in Portuguese, under the label of «anacoluthon». Consider the following example from oral Portuguese:

- (2) And the lunch, I'll come back earlier. «E o almoço, eu volto mais cedo».

As in other languages, this construction is formed by an initial NP-the topic-followed by a comment S containing subject and predicate. It is not possible to say that the initial NP was moved from any point of the comment S, since it is complete. There is no element missing in it, as in topicalized Ss, nor any copy pronoun left behind, as in left dislocated Ss. Anacoluthons are perfect examples of Ss which depart from syntax. They are discourse-dependent and consequently, an interesting case for pragmatic study.

In order to interpret a construction like (2), we need to know what was said before in the discourse as well as the context of situation. S (2) was said in the following context: the housekeeper was giving instructions to her maid. She said:

- (3) Tina, pode botar a louça na máquina. **E o almoço, eu volto mais cedo.**

Tina, you may put the china in the dishwasher. And the lunch, I'll come back earlier.

She meant that, as for the lunch, she would come back earlier from work and she would prepare it. Out of context, S (2) could be understood as if the speaker was coming back to have her lunch

earlier. But, in the context of situation this does not make sense, and the maid understood it as it should be. This shows how a S has to be understood in the context of situation as well as of the discourse.

I think S (2) illustrates well Grice's (1975) maxim: «be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)». In a very economic way, speaker and hearer understand themselves, not saying what can be supplied by the whole of the discourse and the context of situation.

From the syntactic point of view, these constructions are different from Sp sentences. There is an intonational break between the initial NP and the following S, which is complete. The relation between the initial NP and the following S is a discourse relation, since the following S is always a comment about the initial NP which is the topic. It is the juxtaposition of the NP with the S which creates the semantic link between them.

Keenan-Schieffelin (1976) studied constructions similar to (2) in English under the label of left-dislocation. They describe them as having «the following format: Referent + Proposition. That is, some referent is specified initially and then followed by a proposition relevant in some way to this referent» (p. 240). Although many linguists, following Ross (1967), define left-dislocation as constructions which contain a coreferential pronoun, for Keenan-Schieffelin such constructions may not have a coreferential pronoun, as can be seen in the following example (p. 240):

(4) «The mo-the modern art the twentieth century art, there's about eight books».

I am reserving here the label «anacoluthon» to those constructions which are similar to LD constructions, but do not have a coreferential pronoun, like (3) and (4).

Keenan-Schieffelin (1976) and others (e.g. Prince, 1980) state that LD constructions are typical of spontaneous, or informal, or unplanned discourse. This may be true of English or even Italian, but surely is not true of French, Portuguese, or Classical Greek as attested by traditional grammarians, who study LD under the label of «Pleonasm» and Anacoluthon (see Pontes, 1981, for more information on LD in written Portuguese, French, Spanish). Anacoluthon is described by

Portuguese Grammarians as «putting in the beginning of a clause, without a grammatical link to the rest of the sentence, the object's name after which an assertion follows».

Portuguese grammarians give examples of anacoluthon found in the best writers of our language, from archaic to contemporary Portuguese. I will give here only one example, quoted by Câmara Jr. (1968), from a Brazilian modern poet:

- (5) «Estas estradas, quando novo Eliseu as percorria/as crianças
These roads, when as another Eliseu I crossed them/the children
lançaram-me pedradas».
threw stones at me.

As for the function of Anacoluthon in discourse, Keenan-Schieffelin say that constructions like that introduce a new topic or reintroduce topics. They say that LD constructions «appear most often in (...) an environment in which the referent does not appear in the immediately prior discourse». Its function is to introduce discourse-new referents. They state further, that «Typically, the initial referent is some entity known to or knowable by the hearer from the non-verbal context of the utterance from some prior background experience» (p. 240).

Examples (2-3) tell us that Keenan-Schieffelin are right in one respect: the word «almoço» 'lunch' is introduced by this construction. But I don't think it constitutes a new topic. I think there is, in the conversation, a main topic, which is «kitchen work». The householder and the maid were talking about the work to be done in the kitchen. One was to wash the china, the other was to prepare lunch. Washing the china and preparing lunch are both sub-topics related to the main topic, which is «kitchen work». If one speaks of a 'new' topic in discourse one might be giving the impression that speakers are changing topics entirely as the conversation goes on.

It might be more accurate to speak of a main topic, the discourse-topic, a text-topic and of sub-topics, or sub-text topics. Prince (1980) seems to be thinking along these lines, when she says, about LD, that «Upon hearing a LD sentence, with NPi in leftmost position, infer that the speaker is about to begin a (sub-) text in which some entity is salient and which is judged to be of a certain «bigness» (p. 21).

It is interesting to notice that, although the Anacoluthon is also found in written language, it is not well accepted in formal written language. In this register, what corresponds to Anacoluthon is a construction exactly equal to (2), but beginning with an expression as «quanto a», «in relation to», as far as X is concerned», etc. If we want to transform (2) in a construction well accepted in written formal language, it is sufficient to add «quanto a», before 2:

(6) «Quando ao almoço, eu volto mais cedo»

As for the lunch, I'll come back earlier

This expression, «quanto a», is used, in written formal language, to begin paragraphs, and has the same function, I think, that «anacoluthons» have in other registers. We use «quanto a» in order to call attention to another sub-topic. This sub-topic, usually, is related to some antecedent in the text as a sub-part of a main topic, the text-topic.

Prince (1980) noted that 23% of LD occurrences in a corpus were transcribed as paragraph-initial. Based in McKeon (1980) she observes that a «text-piece meets two criteria: (A) it must be (expected to be) a coherent (sub) text, and (B) it must be big» (p. 17). These two criteria are used by Prince to define LD structures, as can be seen from the quote I mentioned earlier on. I suspect that there is a relation between Anacoluthons and paragraphs. This suspicion is corroborated by an early research a student of mine is doing on connectives. She is finding a correlation between some connectives which we suspect are paragraph-introducers and the occurrence of LDs.

Anacoluthons occur in Portuguese as topic-reintroducers:

(7) A. Não, realmente, João, acho que eu te falei, eu pretendo
Not, really, John, I think that I told you, I intend to
fazer acupuntura em Odontologia. É só aparecer e eu vou...
do acupuncture in Odontology. When it comes up, I'm going
enfiar a cara prá ver se a gente faz um curso diferente.
to... work hard so that we may have a different course.
Um curso de **especialização**, né? A gente clini... fazer
A specialization course, ok? We clini... to do
clínica geral é muito bom, a gente... (a) prende muito
general practice is very good, we... learn a lot
ganha muito, né? O conhecimento não fica muito limitado...
earn a lot, uh? Knowledge ins't very limited...

B. Humm-hum.

A. enquanto que **especialidade**, a gente limita muito o
while in specialization, we narrow down knowledge too much.
conhecimento.

In this example, we see that the speaker began speaking of «specialization», then changed to «general clinic», contrasting the two fields of work in Odontology. After, that, he returned to the first sub-topic: «specialization».

We see a similarity between this example and (2): there is a main topic, more general (kitchen work, odontology) and two sub-topics, two «alternatives», following Keenan-Schiffelin.

I have another instance which also exemplifies well this process:

(7) B. Não fica toda vida? a metralhadora atirando?

Does'nt it stay indefinitely? the machine gun, firing?

A. Não! Não fica toda vida não. Esse negócio de ficar toda
No! It does not stay indefinitely. This business of firing

vida é conversa fiada! Toda vida só arma automática. Se
indefinitely is rubbish. Indefinitely only automatic gun. If

ocê ficar com o dedo ali, se ficar com o dedo ali ela vai
you keep your finger there, if you maintain your finger

e volta e... pá! Vai e volta e... pá!...

there (thegun) it goes and comes back... pá! It goes and comes
back...

B. Feito metralhadora?

Like a machine gun?

A. É. Feito metralhadora. Porque a arma automática quando a

Yes. Like a machine gun. Because the automatic gun when

gente dá um tiro, o cano abre...

we fire it, the... barrel opens up.

The speaker was talking about «automatic gun». The listener interrupted with a question, in which a new word appeared: «machine gun». When the speaker returns to «automatic guns», he uses an Anacoluthon.

Keenan-Schieffelin (1976:246) considered that referents like «speaker» or «hearer» «are less likely to be foregrounded or «topicalized» through constructions like LD. We found some examples of anacoluthon with «speaker» foregrounded:

- (8) Eu agora, cabô desculpa de concurso, né?
Me now, no more excuses about exams, he?
- (9) Cê fuma também? Eu, graças a Deus, é só café.
Do you smoke too? Me, thank God, it's only coffee.
- (10) Eu, Brasília não era a primeira vez.
Me, Brasília it wasn't the first time.

These were examples found in sparse dialogues. But in traditional grammars of Portuguese, examples of Anacoluthon with foregrounding of the speaker are very frequently found. In these cases the anacoluthon occurs when the speaker wants to call attention to himself, while contrasting at the same time his person with another (or others).

To sum up, Anacoluthon differs syntactically from LD and Topicalization because it does not have a resumptive pronoun, neither is it possible to say that some part of the comment-sentence was transformationally transposed to the beginning of the sentence. It is similar to topicalized and LD sentences in the fact that it begins with a referent followed by a comment-sentence. The comment-sentence, as it happens with the so called «double subject sentences» in Chinese or Japanese, is complete, with subject and predicate. The relation between the referent-topic and the comment-sentence, which are juxtaposed, is one of discourse: we establish a link between them based on what Grice describes as maxims of conversation: «Be relevant» and «Be brief» (p. 46).

As Keenan-Schieffelin noted, we link the referent and the proposition «because they follow one another in real speech time and because we assume that speakers normally make their utterances relevant to prior talk, and because it makes sense to link them (given their content and our knowledge of the world» (p. 255). I agree with these authors in the sense that there is a continuum between syntax and discourse.

The distinction Morgan (1982:200) shows between: «Peter burned the look because he didn't like it x Peter burned the look. He didn't like it» — does not hold for anacoluthons. Morgan says that in the first there is a syntactic relation, in the second a discourse relation, since these are independent sentences. But in Anacoluthons there are no independent sentences, and, nevertheless, the relation is one of discourse. As in the second case, the mechanism involved is «our ability to make common sense inference» and «it can be cancelled by contextual factors, in the manner of Grice's (1975) conversational implicatures» (Morgan, 1982: 200).

What Prince says about the function of Topicalization (1981) and LD (1980) apply also to Anacoluthon, although it differs from them syntactically. This construction illustrates well what Green & Morgan (1980: 177) say about the way we interpret language: we use all our world knowledge and we recreate in order for it to make sense.

This construction, we see, is not found only in topic-prominent languages as Li & Thompson believed. Portuguese, as can be seen from studies on frequency of occurrence in texts (see Pontes 1982) is a subject-prominent language, and it has «double-subject» sentences. They are less frequent than subject-predicate sentences, they are «marked», in the sense of Givón (1979). I think it is quite natural that a marked construction like that be used for calling attention to a particular referent, or to mark a change of sub-topic in discourse.

I also think Anacoluthons have a role in the text, in the organization of the sub-topics in relation to the main, general topic. They perform, therefore, the same task expressions like «quanto a» perform in written formal discourse. They occur in oral language as well in some less formal registers of written language. LD constructions are also found in modern poetry, (see Pontes, 1981) which confirms Tannen's assertion: «features which have been identified as characterizing oral discourse are also found in written discourse» (1982:1) and «literary discourse, rather than being most different from ordinary conversations, is, in fact, most similar to it» (p. 2).

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