Abstract

Brazilian Portuguese exhibits three strategies of clausal negation. This work analyzes and interprets these strategies in the framework of Functional Linguistics. The analysis is based on a corpus of written and spoken material produced by students from different levels of schooling. The negative patterns are in variation, performing the same general discourse function of denying. It is assumed that variation reflects a linguistic change in progress. The study reveals the interaction of two competing motivations, one in the direction of restoring iconicity and the other leading to a decrease of iconicity, in a movement towards economy.

Keywords: Grammaticalization; Iconicity; Semantic bleaching; Negation; Linguistic change; Brazilian Portuguese

1. Introduction

Spoken Brazilian Portuguese exhibits three strategies of clausal negation:

(a) the standard preverbal negative \textit{não + VP}:

(1) as muriçocas só paravam de aperrear a gente, de encher o saco, quando a gente deixava a luz acesa. só que com a luz acesa a gente \textit{não conseguia} dormir.¹ (Speech)

sleep:INF

¹ All the examples in this paper were taken from Furtado da Cunha (1998). The transcription system I am using is adapted from Du Bois et al. (1993). Below is a list of the transcription symbols used here:
'The mosquitoes only stopped bothering us, annoying us when we left the light on. But with the light on we couldn’t sleep'.

(b) the double negative não + VP + não:

(2) aí ela disse: <Q> ei, num tirei. aí Cristiane: ei, eu num tirei foto não. then she said hey NEG took then Cristiane hey I NEG take:PRF picture NEG pode dar outro beijo. <Q> (Speech) can give other kiss

‘Then she said: hey, I didn’t take [the picture]. Then Cristiane [said]: hey, I didn’t take a picture. You can give him another kiss’.

(c) the postverbal negative VP + não:

(3) tudo eu faço, sabe? tem isso comigo não. quer dizer, eu num posso everything I do DM have:PRS this with me NEG DM I NEG can dizer assim: eu sou só secretária. eu sou tudo: secretária, faxineira. (Speech) say so I am only secretary I am all secretary cleaner

‘I do it all, you know? It’s not a big deal to me. I mean, I can’t say like this: I’m only the secretary. I am everything, the secretary, the cleaner’.

This work analyzes and interprets these strategies from the viewpoints of iconicity (Givón, 1990; Haiman, 1985) and grammaticalization (Hopper and Traugott, 1993; Traugott and Heine, 1991); it is based on functionally grounded explanations. I follow the assumption that the grammar of a natural language is never static and complete: taken synchronically, the grammar of every language exhibits, at the same time, regular patterns as well as patterns that are not completely fixed, but fluid. In this sense, language is conceived of as a malleable structure, since it is subjected to the pressures of use and consists of a non-entirely arbitrary code (Hopper, 1987; Du Bois, 1985). Taken as a whole, the morphosyntactic coding results from the use of language.

The database for this study is the Corpus Discurso & Gramática (Furtado da Cunha, 1998). This corpus does not represent spontaneous conversation, but recorded speech as produced by the informants; turntaking by the interlocutor was limited to stimulating the speaker or changing the subject. It is, nevertheless, interactional, in that there is turntaking, although the narrator holds the floor much of the time.

The corpus consists of written and spoken material produced by students who were homogeneously distributed across the social variables level of schooling, sex, and kind of school (public or private). Each informant was asked to produce five spoken texts and, based on those, five written texts, as follows: personal experience narratives, retold narratives, descriptions, procedural discourse, and opinion discourse. The subjects were four students each of the following grades: 8th (from 13 to 16 years old), 12th (from 18 to 20 years old) and university seniors (above 23 years old). Their social class is controlled by the kind of school (public and private) they attend. The spoken material consists of 136,312 words, while the written sample consists of 20,300 words; total wordage is 156,612.
The central question I am concerned with is:

(a) how can we explain the coexistence of different strategies of negation in Brazilian Portuguese?
This question is related to the following, more specific ones:
(b) in which aspects do written and spoken language differ regarding the use of the strategies of negation?
(c) is there any correlation between the speaker’s level of schooling/age and the use of different mechanisms of negation?

The variation attested in present-day Brazilian Portuguese between preverbal negation (não V),
double negation (não V não), and postverbal negation (não V) represents a common universal
process which has been known as the “Jespersen cycle”: “the original negative adverb is first
weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional
word, and this in its turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in course of time be subject
to the same development as the original word.” (Jespersen, 1917:4).

The most common position for negative in SVO languages is between the S and the V, yielding a
S NEG V O order (see Dryer, 1989; Dahl, 1979). The NEG V order is the most common one,
presumably because it is the easiest to process, since the scope of the negative marker is, in general,
the V. In the Romance languages, however, negation is often expressed by two simultaneous
negative morphemes, one preceding and the other following the verb, the so-called ‘double
negation’. This tendency is usually explained as motivated by the heavy communicative load of the
negative morpheme, which carries an important part of the message. Thus, there would be a pairing
between morphological and semantic or pragmatic marking. Dryer (1989) claims that the use of
double negative provides an easy path for change in negative position if the once obligatory marker
later becomes optional, as it is happening to the preverbal negative ne in French.

In the case of negation in Brazilian Portuguese it seems that we have a linguistic change in
progress. Thus, the preverbal, postverbal and double negatives are in variation, assuming that varia-
tion is a necessary consequence of the gradualness of language change (see Lichtenberk, 1991).
These three forms originated at different times in the past: the preverbal negative is the oldest one,
followed by the double negative and finally the postverbal negative (see Jespersen, 1917; Horn,

Being inherited from Latin, the preverbal negative is the only one attested in written texts from
the 13th to the 15th century, to the period of Old Portuguese. The double negative, on the other
hand, can only be found in written texts from the second half of the 16th century, specifically in
Gil Vicente’s plays.2

It should be noted that the negator num (as in example (2)) is an unstressed, weakened spoken
form of não; it only occurs preverbally. Etymologically, it is the same as não; it arose via the
phonological erosion of the diphthong in não/näw/.3

2. The use of negative patterns in speech and writing

The negative sentences in my database are distributed as shown in Table 1:

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2 For further discussion, see Furtado da Cunha (2000).
3 For a discussion, see Nascentes (1922) and Amaral (1920) who state that the negator não is pronounced num when it is
placed before the verb.
As can be seen from Table 1, speech and writing differ with respect to the occurrence of negative patterns. While all three strategies are present in spoken discourse, only the standard preverbal negative occurs in written texts. This distribution reflects the trajectory of grammaticalization of double and postverbal negatives, as first manifested in spoken discourse. The more formal register (the written language) avoids the new patterns. As expected, the newer forms are associated with innovative sociolinguistic factors, such as younger speakers’ usage, oral speech, and colloquial style. It is worth noting that in my dataset negation in general is a little more frequent in speech (an average frequency of 10.7 per 1000 words) than in writing (an average frequency of 9.06 per 1000 words). These figures have to do with the characteristics of the corpus analyzed in this work, in that the written text, in addition to being produced by the same person, corresponds to the spoken material in terms of genre. This correspondence reduces the difference between both kinds of material as far as the degree of formality is concerned.

Other works on negation similarly attest a much higher occurrence of negatives in oral communication, when compared to written texts. They suggest that the larger presence of negation in spoken communication has to do with the fact that rejections and explicit denials are typical of speech, but do not seem acceptable in written communication. Given the characteristic functions of negation, the interactive nature of speech would account for the massive occurrence of negative clauses in this register compared to written texts. It is worth noticing, however, that these studies usually compare quite informal spoken texts, as spontaneous conversation, to rather formal written texts, as expository prose; that is, texts which are polar opposites on the cline of formality.

The examination of other kinds of written material, however, attests the use of double and even postverbal negation, as follows. Notice that, although (4) and (5) were collected in written texts, they nevertheless represent a dialogue between characters:

(4) – Mas francamente, você não tem vergonha de acompanhar essa besteira de novela? but frankly you NEG have shame of follow this foolishness of soap opera

(5) – Não sou eu não, são as crianças. (Writing. Braga, 1978) NEG be:PRS I NEG are the children

‘– But frankly, are you not ashamed of following these foolish soap operas?
– It’s not me, but the children.’

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(5) – Não sou eu não, são as crianças. (Writing. Braga, 1978)

See Tottie (1991) for a detailed discussion of the higher frequency of negation in speech as compared to writing. The examples were found in the following texts: chronicle—Braga (1978) and Sabino (1983), magazine—Bundas (2000).
(5) – Preso, eu? – o motorista recuou, estorrecido:
     arrested I the driver stepped.back frightened
     what is that I did
– Que é que eu fiz?
– Não fuge não – e o guarda o segurou pelo braço. (Writing. Sabino, 1983)
     NEG run:IMP and the policeman him held by.the arm
‘– Arrested, me? – the driver stepped back, frightened: – what did I do?
– Don’t run away – and the policeman held him by the arm.’

(6) Não são dúvidas simples, acredite. Experimente consultar os seus alfarraúbios
NEG are doubts simple believe try consult the your old.books
futebolísticos atrás de uma resposta satisfatória para a última dúvida.
of.football after of an answer satisfactory for the last doubt
Não experimente não, é inútil. (Writing. Bundas, 2000)
NEG try:IMP NEG is useless
‘They are not simple problems, believe me. Try to consult your old books on football for
a satisfactory answer to the last problem. Don’t try, it’s useless.’

The occurrences of postverbal negative in this written material are restricted to the clause
sei não (‘know NEG’), as the following example found in the magazine Bundas (2000):

(7) ‘Ihhhhh, dois bracinhos na cintura! ... Sei não, sei não.’ (Writing)
     ah, two little.arms on.the waist know:PRS NEG know:PRS NEG
‘Ah, two little arms on the waist! ... I don’t know, I don’t know.’

These examples show that the double and postverbal negatives may occur in written texts,
although they did not occur in my written dataset.

If we indeed have here an ongoing linguistic change, it is not surprising to find some
differences in the occurrence of the three variants between the older and younger speakers.
Table 2 shows the relative frequency of negatives in the spoken data according to the speaker’s
level of schooling.

Notice that in the spoken data, the higher the speaker’s level of schooling, the lower the
occurrence of double and postverbal negatives. Thus, there seems to be a correlation between
level of schooling (and consequently, age) and the use of the different strategies of negation.
The absence of both double and postverbal negatives in the written texts can also be blamed
on the pressure of the normative teaching of Portuguese, which attempts to exclude
constructions that are used mainly in more informal or colloquial situations, from the written
register.

The low frequency of postverbal negatives seems to be related to the way data were
collected for this work. As said before, the corpus does not represent natural conversation, but

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>não + VP</th>
<th>não + VP + não</th>
<th>VP + não</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>293 (80.2%)</td>
<td>67 (18.3%)</td>
<td>05 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>508 (90.3%)</td>
<td>52 (9.2%)</td>
<td>02 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ.</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>497 (92.3%)</td>
<td>39 (7.2%)</td>
<td>02 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
semi-planned discourse. The empirical observation of spoken Northeastern Brazilian Portuguese reveals that postverbal negation predominantly occurs in replies to direct questions. In example (8), below, the speaker (S) talks with his interlocutor (I) about the movie *An American Werewolf in London*:

(8) I: e a namorada dele sabia, todo tempo, e queria ficar com ele?

and the the girlfriend of.his knew all time and wanted stay with him

S: sabia não. ela veio saber já no último né, bem dizer, nas

know:IMPF NEG she came know already in.the last DM well say in.the

últimas consequência, que foi, que foi o médico que ligou pra ela, e disse

last consequence that was that was the doctor that called to she and said

que é ele que era o lobisomem.

that is he that was the werewolf (Speech)

‘I: And did his girlfriend know all the time [that he was the werewolf] and still wanted to stay with him?

S: She didn’t know. She only came to know at the end, right, that is, at the last moment, when the doctor called her and told her that it was he who was the werewolf.’

When we compare the results from the *Corpus Discurso & Gramática* (D&G) to a sample of natural conversation, we have the following figures in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>não + VP</th>
<th>não + VP + não</th>
<th>VP + não</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;G</td>
<td>1298 (88.6%)</td>
<td>158 (10.7%)</td>
<td>9 (0.6%)</td>
<td>1465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversacional</td>
<td>308 (66%)</td>
<td>96 (20.6%)</td>
<td>62 (13.3%)</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Banco Conversacional (in preparation) is a sample of natural conversation between speakers from Natal.
communication, she makes a comment about the words of the hymn, abandoning, temporarily, the referent Agraphos:

(9) o Grupo Agraphos dirigiu a música, o cântico oficial, né, do congresso que falava sobre o tema, né, falava sobre a bíblia e dirigia, não which told about the theme DM told about the Bible and conducted NEG vou falar agora a letra do cântico não que é muito difícil, mas o go:PRES tell now the word of.the hymn NEG because is very difficult but the Grupo Agraphos né, da igreja de Santarém e Jordão, eles dirigiam esse Group Agraphos DM of.the church of Santarém and Jordão they conducted this cântico. (Speech)

‘The Agraphos group led the singing, the official hymn of the Congress, which was about the theme, you know, about the Bible, and they led it . . . I’m not going to say the words of the hymn now because it is very difficult. But the Agraphos group, you know, from the church of Santarém and Jordão, they led the singing of this hymn’.

In (10) below, the speaker narrates the movie Pet Sematary (based on Stephen King’s novel of the same title), as told by his brother. The main referent of this stretch is represented by the kids in whose home the central events took place. They decided to visit the cemetery. The double negative occurs as supportive material in which the speaker details the central communication, suspending the referent (the kids), which is taken up again immediately after the negative clause:

(10) aí tentaram sair do cemitério, num acharam mais a saída, ficaram muito then tried get.out of.the cemetery NEG found more the exit got very assustados e voltaram pra casa. conseguiram sair de lá e voltaram pra scared and got.back to house managed get.out of there and got.back to casa, num sei como. meu irmão disse que também num entendeu não house NEG know how my brother said that also NEG understand:PRF NEG como eles conseguiram voltar em casa. (Speech) how they managed come.back to house

‘Then [the kids] tried to get out of the cemetery. They couldn’t find the exit any more. They got very scared and went back home. They managed to get out of there and went back home. I don’t know how. My brother said that he didn’t understand either how they managed to go back home.’

Other occurrences of double negative appear in stretches which represent reported speech,7 as in example (11), where the speaker reproduces the words of someone else on the theme of religion. Notice the use of the absolute negator não at the beginning of the clause, as if it were an answer to a direct question:

7 Wallace Chafe (personal communication) has suggested that the double negative may represent a more emotional pattern vis à vis the preverbal negative since it tends to occur in contexts of direct speech. According to him (Chafe, 1994:217), “by far the most common motivation for direct speech is to introduce evaluative information associated with an earlier speech event. (…) Direct speech can thus be seen as a way of expressing involvement” and “may also convey an instruction, advice, demonstration or explanation.” (See the double negative with direct speech in (11), where it introduces an explanation, and in (12), where it describes an advice).
elas dizem que acreditam, que acreditam na bíblia, mas a minha dúvida é que se they say that believe that believe in the Bible but the my doubt is that if acreditassema na bíblia, né, elas tinham alguma mudança de vida nisso, nosso believed in the Bible DM they had some change of life in this our mundo seria talvez bem melhor, né, se elas realmente acreditassema na world would be perhaps much better DM if they really believed in the bíblia. mesmo essas pessoas que dizem que não acreditam, por exemplo, <Q> não, Bible even those people who say that NEG believe for instance, no eu não acredito em religião não. <Q> <Q> mas você crê em Deus? <Q> I NEG believePRS in religion NEG but you believe in God <Q> creio, creio em Deus. <Q> <Q> você acredita que a palavra de Deus é believe believe in God you believe that the word of God is verdade? acredita que realmente tudo que tem na bíblia é verdade? <Q> truth believe that really everything which has in the Bible is truth <Q> acredito, não é? <Q> mas não procuram ler, não procuram estudar, believe DM but NEG try read NEG try study não procuram entender, né? (Speech) NEG try understand DM
‘They say that they believe, that they believe in the Bible, but my problem is that if they believed in the Bible, you know, they would have some change in their lives because of this. Perhaps our world would be much better, you know, if they really believed in the Bible. Even these people who say that they don’t believe, for instance: “No, I don’t believe in religion.” “But do you believe in God?” “I do. I believe in God.” “Do you believe that the word of God is true? Do you believe that really everything in the Bible is true?” “I do, don’t I?” But they don’t try to read, they don’t try to study, they don’t try to understand, do they?’

The realization of reported speech (with 1st and 2nd person subjects) in a stretch anchored in the 3rd person also represents a kind of aside. Thus, in example (11), the speaker conveys the information as a background circumstance which provides evidence for her argument, thus producing a break in the referent tracking.

In the next example, the speaker repeats his doctor’s speech, changing the subject eu (‘I’) into você (‘you’) in the double negative clause, thereby interrupting the referent tracking. He makes use of this device to explain what caused his moving and how it influenced his behavior.

então eu era um cara super fechado assim, um/num falava com ninguém, num so I was a guy very closed like that a NEG spoke with nobody NEG abria os/num abria os olhos pra ver o mundo. foi ai que eu fui a.o, opened the NEG opened the eyes to see the world was then that I went to the a um alergista. aí ele disse: <Q> ah, você tem que se mudar d.o to an allergist then he said ah you have to yourself move from the ambiente que você tá, que passa muito ônibus, é muito poluído. mude environment that you are because run many buses is very pollute move pra um ambiente mais limpo porque sua rinite num tá muito boa to an environment more clean because your rhinitis NEG be:PRS very good não. <Q> aí manhã procurou, passou, seis meses procurando n.os classificados NEG then mom looked for spent six months looking for in the classifieds
algum lugar que fosse mais adequado pra, pra tratar d.a minha alergia. (Speech) some place which was more adequate to to treat of.the my allergy
‘So I was a very reserved guy, like that, a . . . I didn’t speak to anybody. I didn’t open the, I didn’t open my eyes to see the world. It was then that I went to see the, I went to see an allergist. Then he said: “Ah, you have to move from the environment you are in because many buses run there, it is very polluted. Move to a cleaner environment because your rhinitis isn’t very good.’” Then mom looked for, she spent six months looking in the classifieds for a place which was more adequate for dealing with my allergy’.

The instances of double negation in my data suggest that this pattern is favored in contexts which correspond to a thematic pause, that is, stretches where there are a suspension or interruption of, or digression from, the main referent tracking.

Let us now turn to the issue of the placement of the postverbal negator. Dahl (1979), among others, claims that in languages with double negative particles, the two particles appear each on one side of the V, while the postverbal negator tends to be located as close to the V as possible. In spoken Brazilian Portuguese, however, the postverbal não can be placed either in clause-final (example 2, 9) or in sentence-final position, as in the following examples:

(13) a melhor coisa que poderia ter acontecido, foi eu ter me mudado do the best thing that could have happened was I have myself moved of.the ambiente que eu tava lá, que era um ambiente, num era environment which I was there because was an environment NEG be:IMPF muito próprio pra, pra uma pessoa passar uma infância não. (Speech) very appropriate [for for a person spend:INF a childhood] NEG ‘The best thing that could have happened was my moving from the environment in which I lived, because it was an environment, it wasn’t a very appropriate environment for a person to spend his childhood’.

(14) ele ficava assustado, mas não tinha medo assim de, de, de, de sair he got scared but NEG have:IMPF fear like [of of of of get.out da cama correndo não. (Speech) of.the bed [run:GER]] NEG ‘He got scared but he wasn’t afraid of getting out of bed in a hurry’.

In (13) and (14), even though the second negative morpheme is placed at the end of the sentence, the speakers are able to interpret its scope (i.e. the V of the main clause) because of the position of the first negator, immediately before this V. Notice that in (13), there is an intervening clause between the negated V and its second negative marker; in (14), we have two intervening clauses.

3. Negation, iconicity and economy

Recent research results on iconicity and grammaticalization may be applied in the analysis of negative sentences in Brazilian Portuguese. The notion of iconicity comprises principles which govern natural form-function correlations. I will argue in the following that the double negative construction gives strong evidence for the iconic quantity principle (Givón, 1990), according to which the more relevant and unpredictable the information, the larger the chunk of coding. From
a psychological viewpoint, it is more fundamental to assert a fact than to deny or contradict it. Negation adds cognitive complexity, which is reflected in an increase of grammatical or morphological complexity.

First, we can observe that in the standard negative the preverbal negator is undergoing a process of phonological reduction. In rapid spoken discourse, the stressed não [nāw] is weakened to unstressed num [nu], or even to a simple nasalization [~]. Table 4 displays the figures for the realization of preverbal não in standard and double negatives produced by 12th grade students.

The double negative functions as a cue provided by the speaker for the interlocutor to be able to correctly interpret the negative utterance. Lest the hearer fails to listen to the preverbal negator and, consequently, perceive the negative intent of the message, that is, the contradiction of an (the listener’s) expectation, the speaker adds a second negative particle não at the end of the clause, “to make the sense perfectly clear to the hearer” (Jespersen, 1917:5). This postverbal negator can be viewed as a strategy for reinforcing a negation which may have been less perceptible to the listener due to the weakened stress (phonological erosion) of preverbal não; doing this, one avoids the possibility that the hearer misinterprets or even misses the negative content of the utterance. Thus, the double negative construction has as one of its side effects the restoration of the iconicity between form and meaning: since the preverbal não is phonetically weakened, it becomes necessary to add a second não after the V to guarantee that the hearer perceives the negative communicative intent of the clause.

The weakening of the preverbal não, along with the potential misinterpretation of the negative content of the utterance, seems to support what has been called a ‘coevolution of meaning and form’; in Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca’s (1994:20) words, there seems to be “a direct, and even causal, link between semantic and phonetic reduction in the evolution of grammatical material”.8

As is well known, the decay and eventual loss of morphology through phonological erosion is a common occurrence, especially in monomorphemic lexemes (see Hopper, 1994 and Bybee, 1988). As Hopper (1994:37) points out, “by far the most basic event in linguistic change is the simple erosion of phonological material.” The routine use of a linguistic form leads to its phonological reduction and loss of its semantic content. On the one hand, there is a tendency to reduce the spoken sign in rapid discourse. On the other, if a form is frequently repeated, it loses expressive value. One recurrent strategy for recovering phonological material is reinforcement, whereby a construction that has been weakened semantically is restored through the addition of a second morpheme. As a result, there turns up a construction that covers much of the functional domain of the old form before its reduction and weakening. The new form typically begins as a variant used sporadically, its frequency increases as time passes, and in the end it may come to replace the old form.

A phonological change seems to be indeed central to the emergence of double and postverbal negatives in Brazilian Portuguese. Plausibly, the double negative arises in response to the

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8 Interestingly, this reinforcement is postverbal rather than preverbal. One plausible explanation is that the postverbal position of the second negative morpheme conforms with the usual position of adverbs in Brazilian Portuguese.
speaker’s goal of reinforcing a relation that already exists but has decayed. The phonological
duction of preverbal não reflects the effect of repetition on meaning. The frequent use of the
unstressed preverbal negator creates a potential for losing information. The double negative is
triggered by ‘discourse pressure’ – the need to improve informativeness.

The low frequency of the double negative in writing supports its interactional origin. In written
texts, the preverbal não does not undergo reduction and, therefore, there is no pragmatic need for
a new reinforcing negative particle, typical of speech.

Further evidence for weakening of preverbal não comes from the postverbal negative
construction VP + não. Here, presumably, the reduction of não would have reached its final
stage: loss or complete deletion. Notice, though, that there is another negative pattern in Brazilian
Portuguese, in which preverbal não, which used to be obligatory before the verb, may be
routinely dropped such that the only negative marker left is the pronoun nada (=nothing). The
resulting construction is parallel to the English negative with nothing, where the verb is in the
affirmative:

(15) no dia que eu soube que ele tinha me colocado [chifre], não fiz nada, sabe?
on. the day that I knew that he had me put [horn] NEG did nothing DM
fui cobrar nada dele. (Speech)
go:PRF ask:INF nothing of. he
The day I got to know he had cheated on me, I didn’t do anything, you know?
[lit. I did nothing] I didn’t ask anything of him’ [lit I asked nothing of him]

(16) I: num pegou catapora não?
NEG caught chicken.pox NEG
S: peguei nada. (Speech)
catch:PRF nothing
‘I: You didn’t catch chicken . pox, did you?
S: I didn’t catch anything.’ [lit. I caught nothing]

Cases like these seem to confirm the hypothesis of phonological weakening and, as a result, the
elimination of preverbal não. The general tendency to reduce the markers which express the same
grammatical function accounts for the possibility of preverbal não no longer being categorically
used as the obligatory negative marker. Since the change seems to be unidirectional, one might
expect that, if the weakening process of preverbal não advances, there will be a tendency towards
increased use of both double and postverbal negatives. The repeated use of these constructions
turns them into a regular pattern, which then is incorporated in the grammar of Brazilian
Portuguese.

4. Negation and grammaticalization

The framework of grammaticalization includes a number of principles for explaining a special
type of linguistic variation and change. It aims at accounting for the genesis and development of
grammatical patterns in terms of pragmatic and cognitive manipulation, by which concepts and
structures, as a result of conversational implicatures, receive more grammatical interpretations in
specific contexts. In this sense, new grammatical structures may emerge despite the fact that there
may have been another functionally equivalent category in the same language. According to this
viewpoint, grammars shape discourse and discourse, in turn, shapes grammars.

Once grammar is seen as a malleable, emergent structure, the concept of grammaticalization
may be further developed within a functional–theoretical framework. Here, grammaticalization
refers to a process of transition whereby a structure advances from pragmatics to syntax. In this sense, the process of grammaticalization involves the reanalysis of a pattern from the domain of language use to the domain of linguistic structure, that is, the reanalysis of a discourse pattern into a syntactic pattern. The evolution of morphological and syntactic structures takes place, then, through the fixing of discourse strategies. In Du Bois’ (1985:363) words, “grammars code best what speakers do most”.

Two kinds of change are often linked to grammaticalization: phonological reduction and semantic bleaching. In the case of Brazilian Portuguese negation the two go together. Frequency of occurrence seems to be the motivating force for both phonological reduction and semantic weakening of a form. The negation cycle in Brazilian Portuguese can be interpreted as the result of a process which aims at the solution of a problem of informativeness; the double negative is motivated by a communicative need. This new grammatical device arises in spite of the existing, functionally equivalent standard preverbal negative. We have seen that in spoken language, preverbal negatives alternates with double negatives in contexts which represent an aside. It is the recurrence of the pattern \( \text{na} \text{\~n}o + V P + \text{na} \text{\~n}o \) in spoken discourse that reveals its potential for grammaticalization and, therefore, the possibility of linguistic change in the mechanisms of negation.

The strategies of negation in Brazilian Portuguese reveal some of the most salient characteristics of grammaticalization, such as: (a) overlap, which refers to the coexistence of several layers of one and the same grammatical phenomenon; (b) phonological and semantic weakening of a form, triggering the emergence of a new functionally equivalent form; (c) morphosyntactic processes leading towards iconicity; (d) reanalysis, by which an originally optional marker is now used as a regular marker.

Iconicity in negation is closely related to the directionality of grammaticalization. This trajectory begins with the reduction of \( \text{na} \text{\~n}o \) in standard preverbal negatives. Subsequently, the pragmatic need for strengthening the negative meaning of the clause gives rise to the negative with double negators.

The facts discussed so far support the trajectory of change implied in the synchronic variation of negation strategies in Brazilian Portuguese. First, the older, grammaticalized preverbal negative is the most frequent, both in speech and in writing. Second, both double and postverbal negatives are used in restricted contexts in speech; it is expected that these contexts will gradually extend as the negations are grammaticalized. Third, double as well as postverbal negatives are rare in written discourse. Fourth and finally, double and postverbal negatives are more frequent in the speech of younger speakers. It should be noted that the use of double negatives is spread all over Brazil, while postverbal negatives seem to be restricted to Northeastern speakers and to some states of the Southeast. Since we can attest the (intermediate) double negation everywhere in Brazil, the emergence of the postverbal negative in other regions would not be surprising.

5. Conclusions

Several studies have focused on the process of reinforcement, or redundant marking, in negation as a commonplace issue in the history of many languages (see Schwegler, 1988; Croft,

\[ \text{I am following Bybee’s (2003:147) claim, according to which “A grammaticalizing construction’s frequency of use increases dramatically as it develops. One source of the increased frequency is an increase in the types of contexts in which the new construction is possible”}. \]
The introduction of emphatic elements in negation is often explained by the fact that negative utterances almost always presuppose the counterpart positive utterance in the context, either explicitly or implicitly (cf. Givón, 1979). The negative assertion contrasts with the positive presupposition and therefore induces an emphasis on the negative assertion. Thus, the emphatic negators fit into the negative system as indicators of the emphatic denial of the hearer’s explicit or implicit belief. Via reanalysis, the former emphatic negator then becomes a regular negator and the once obligatory negative marker is dropped.

The evolution of the French negative particle *pas* is a well-known instance of the ‘negation cycle’ (Jespersen, 1917). In French informal speech *pas*, originally meaning *step* and used optionally to emphasize verbs of motion, has extended its syntactic contexts so that in modern colloquial French it functions as the primary and only negative marker. The omission of the preverbal particle *ne* brings about a negative construction which exhibits only the postverbal negative marker *pas*, an unusual feature in a SVO language like French. According to Jespersen, the postverbal position of *not* in English can be accounted for in a similar way: the original preverbal particle *ne* in Old English was first reinforced by the postverbal *nawiht*, which, after the loss of *ne*, evolved to *not*.

The emergence of the strategies of negation in Brazilian Portuguese outlined here parallel the process observed in French. In the case of the Portuguese double negative, negation is also redundantly marked: the second *não* reinforces the denial conveyed by the first *não*, which has been phonologically eroded. Moreover, we have seen that the distribution of double negative is related to both the speaker’s level of schooling and to register: in my dataset, this kind of negative construction occurs predominantly in younger speakers’ speech. As to the postverbal negative, its occurrence is also conditioned by pragmatic factors, since its typical context of use is that of replies to direct questions. Thus, as in the case of French *ne*, the Brazilian Portuguese emergent negative constructions are likewise conditioned by the grammatical, pragmatic, and social factors characterizing the process of grammaticalization. In French, the grammaticalization of *pas* led to the deletion of *ne*; in Portuguese, the the grammaticalization of postverbal *não* may result in the omission of preverbal *não* and, ultimately, in the increased use of postverbal negatives. The two processes differ in that in French, the second negative marker *pas* is not an originally negative item, but a noun which took over a grammatical function, whereas in Portuguese, the second negator is the same as the original, ordinary negative marker. Another difference is that both the preverbal and the postverbal negative marker in Brazilian Portuguese are identical to the absolute negator *não* (*non* in French and *no* in English) occurring at the beginning of a negative answer (cf. (11), above).  

The similarities between the negation cycle in French and Brazilian Portuguese support the interpretation of the double negative in Portuguese as a transitional stage in the process of grammaticalization. After a period of relative stability of this pattern, it is possible that the preverbal *não* drops out in speech, yielding the pattern **VP + não**, which, in turn, undergoes the process of grammaticalization, as it apparently happens in French.

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10 Notice, however, that there are other languages (both Romance and Germanic) with double negation where the second negative element is formally identical to the first one, as in Brazilian Portuguese. Such is the case of Palenquero (*mu ... mu*), Chocó Spanish (*no ... no*), and Afrikaans (*nie ... nie*).  

(For a detailed discussion of Palenquero and Chocó Spanish, see Schwegler, 1988). For Afrikaans, see den Besten, 1985).
It seems plausible to assume that the postverbal negative marker in Brazilian Portuguese was formerly brought into the sentence as an emphatic element. The fact that in written texts, it is usually separated from the rest of the standard negative sentence by a comma, supports this assumption, as the comma indicates the pause between the negative sentence and the second negator that occurs in oral discourse. As the frequency of occurrence of this pattern increases, the postverbal \( \text{não} \) loses its emphatic nature and is reinterpreted as part of the negative sentence itself, with elimination of the pause. Thus, we can posit successive stages of reanalysis for the negative constructions, in a continuous process of change in the attribution of boundaries or rebracketing (for a discussion, see Hopper and Traugott, 1993).

The phonological reduction of preverbal \( \text{não} \) has two related consequences. First, the emphatic postverbal negator is reanalyzed as a constituent of the negative sentence. Second, the preverbal negator itself is reinterpreted as an optional element, leading to the emergence of the VP + \( \text{não} \) construction, as follows:

\[
(17) \quad [\text{não} + \text{VP}] \text{não} > [\text{não} + \text{VP} + \text{não}] > \text{não} [\text{VP} + \text{não}] > [\text{VP} + \text{não}]
\]

The picture outlined here for Brazilian Portuguese negation does not represent an isolated case. Schwegler (1991) points out that, on the one hand, restructuring of negation patterns is a common phenomenon in the world’s languages and, on the other, half of all Romance vernaculars have introduced a second negative marker preceding the loss of the earlier negative marker, thus favoring postverbal over preverbal constructions. Brazilian Portuguese differs from the other Romance languages in that all three strategies still coexist.

The analysis of the emergent strategies of negation in Brazilian Portuguese reveals the interaction of two external competing motivations (see Du Bois, 1985; Haiman, 1983). The apparent arbitrariness of postverbal negatives can be interpreted as the result of a conflict between iconic and economic motivations. On one hand, the need to maintain communicative clarity leads to the emergence of the double negative, in a movement towards iconicity; on the other hand, the demand for economy motivates the development of postverbal negative, in a movement away from iconicity. The omission of preverbal \( \text{não} \) does not correlate to the issue of relevance in the sense that negation signals counterexpectation and hence relevant information. In other words, the linguistic dimension of placement of the negative marker does not correspond to the conceptual dimension of relevance of information. The loss of message transparency is compensated for by the gain of processing speed. Thus, discourse economy overrides semantic transparency in motivating the emergence of the postverbal negative; and in this conflict with iconicity, economy wins out. With respect to the Brazilian Portuguese negative marker, the double negative is iconic, while the postverbal negative is economic. My data reveal a very familiar, though complex picture (see Croft, 1991): a sequence of patterns is involved; these patterns overlap in time; and some patterns are more frequent and stable. The sequencing is not absolute, since the presumed change of negation strategy in Brazilian Portuguese operates along a continuum and not in discrete units.

The framework of grammaticalization not only provides an account of the genesis but also of the synchronic behavior and further development of negative constructions in Brazilian Portuguese.

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11 In five out of seven double negatives found in Gil Vicente (first half of the 16th century [1980]), there is a comma separating the VP from the second morpheme \( \text{não} \).
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