Sluicing and The Distribution of the Brazilian Portuguese Null Copula
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Introduction: Generally lacking a null copula (ø-copula), Brazilian Portuguese (BP) allows optional omission of the copula in specificalional questions with the wh-pronoun quali‘which’ (1). In this talk, I show that an analysis correlating BP copula omission with sluicing (constituent interrogative TP ellipsis) is more parsimonious than a zero hypothesis taking ø-copulas to be phonetically null verbs (akin to the Russian ø-copula).

Parallels between the BP ø-copula construction & sluicing: The sluicing hypothesis automatically accounts for several properties correlated with copula omission without stipulation. I highlight four such properties here (more parallels are discussed in the talk). 1. Restrictions on adverbial modification: When the copula is null, TP & VP adverbs are ungrammatical, whereas when the copula is overt, TP & VP adverbs are possible (2). TP & VP adverbs are also impossible under sluicing (3a) since sluicing is the ellipsis of the TP complement of the interrogative complementizer (C) (Merchant 2001 inter alia) and TP & VP adverbs are contained in the elided TP (3b). 2. Wh-movement locality restrictions: Wh-movement is clause bound in BP ø-copula constructions and the Wh-phrase must be linearly adjacent to the ø-copula, whereas if the copula is overt, unbounded raising is licit (4). In Sluicing, remnants must be adjacent to the ellipsis site (5) (no partial sluicing, Merchant 2001). The adjacency requirement between the Wh-XP quali and the null copula automatically follows if the ø-copula marks a TP ellipsis site. 3. Wh-movement required: BP uses both Wh-in-situ and Wh-movement questioning strategies, though copula omission is only possible when coinciding with Wh-movement. Example (6) illustrates an ‘in-situ’ specificalional question and the impossibility of copula drop associated with this word order. The availability of sluicing is likewise dependent on Wh-movement of the remnant (Ross 1969, Merchant 2001, Van Craenenbroeck 2004). If the ø-copula is the signature of TP ellipsis, its correlation with Wh-movement of quali is expected. 4. ø-COMP effects: BP is not subject to the Doubly-filled-COMP filter; the complementizer que ‘that’ is fully compatible with Wh-movement (7a). However, in ø-copula constructions C is obligatorily null (a ‘ø-COMP’ effect) (7b). In sluicing, C is also obligatorily null, even in languages not subject to the Doubly-filled-COMP filter, including BP (7c) (Merchant 2001’s Sluicing-COMP generalization). The ø-COMP effect in BP ø-copula constructions follows from Merchant’s Sluicing-COMP generalization if the BP ø-copula is the signature of sluicing.

Comparative case study-the ø-copula in Russian: As an illustration of non-elliptical ø-copula phenomena, I highlight the properties of ø-copulas in Russian, a paradigmatic ø-copula language. Russian ø-copula constructions are shown to behave differently in every respect. Russian ø-copulas are compatible with VP adverbs (8), are not sensitive to the force of the clause (i.e. they are compatible with non-interrogatives) (9), and are compatible with Wh-phrases in unbounded dependency constructions (10).

Specificalional clauses in BP: I argue that the post-copular non-Wh element can escape ellipsis because it functions as a Topic (Mikkelsen 2004) and therefore can move to a TP-external TopicP. I illustrate that there is independent motivation for this movement in BP specificalional clauses and not other copula clause types.

Conclusion: The sluicing analysis explains why the BP ø-copula has such a limited distribution. BP lacks a null copula construction; the omission of the copula can be independently accounted for by a (multiple-remnant) sluicing analysis. The parallels highlighted between sluicing and the BP ø-copula construction can be seen collectively as a diagnostic for ø-copula constructions; the application of these diagnostics to Russian supports the consensus that the Russian ø-copula is not correlated with sluicing. This analysis contributes both to work on sluicing and on copula drop.
1) Quais (são) os melhores jogadores de futebol Brasileiro?
Which (are) the best players of soccer Brazilian
Who/Which are the best Brazilian soccer players?

2) Qual sempre *(foi) seu maior problema perdendo peso?
Which always *(was) your biggest problem losing weight
What has always been your biggest problem losing weight?

3a) Someone’s always late, but I don’t know who1 [TP t1 is always late] /*who always.

3b) Qual1 [TP t1 sempre foi] seu maior problema perdendo peso (cf. 2)
Which1 [TP t1 always was] your biggest problem losing weight
What has always been your biggest problem losing weight?

4) Qual você acha que t1 *(é) seu defeito na aparenca?
Which you think C t1 is your defect in-the appearance
What do you think is your ugliest feature?

5) Speaker A: I think Sally likes someone.
B: *Can you tell me who you think [TP she likes]? cf. Can you tell me who?

6) O melhor jogador de futebol Brasileiro *(é) qual?
The best player of soccer Brazilian *(is) which?
Who’s the best Brazilian soccer player?

7a) Qual (que) é a populacão dos states? cf. (7b) Qual (*que) a populacão dos states?
Which (C) is the population of the states
What’s the population of the U.S.?

7b) Maria gosta de alguem mas eu não sei quem (*que) [TP ela gosta].
Maria likes of someone but I not know who (*C she likes
Maria likes someone but I don’t know who.

8) kto vsegda krasivii?
WHO always beautiful
Who always beautiful?

9) Moskva gorod
Moscow city
Moscow is a city.

10) kto tî dumesh krasivii?
Who do you think is beautiful

References:
Mikkelsen ’04. ‘Specifying Who’. PhD UCSC
Merchant ‘01. ‘The Syntax of Silence’ OUP
V. Craenenbroeck ’04. ‘Ellipsis in Dutch Dialects’. LOT Dissertation Series nº 96. Utrecht: LOT