

## HOW MUCH SYNTAX IS THERE IN METALINGUISTIC NEGATION?

Ana Maria Martins – University of Lisbon (FLUL/CLUL)

The topic of metalinguistic negation (MN) acquired prominence in the literature after the work of Laurence Horn (1985, 1989), who defined MN as “a device for objecting to a previous utterance on any grounds whatever” and illustrated it with sentences like (1):

(1) A: He is meeting a woman this evening.

B: No, he’s not (meeting a woman this evening) – he’s meeting his wife!

Examples like (1) appear to imply that there is nothing specifically syntactic in MN as the sentences display the usual syntax of ordinary negation. Whether MN is a matter of pragmatic ambiguity of the negative marker in the relevant contexts, as proposed by Horn, has been a matter of debate (cf. Carston 1998, 1999). As far as I am aware of, only Drozd (2001) thought of MN as a syntactic issue, attributing the structure in (2) both to the adult English sentence “Like hell Al and Hilary are married” and the child English sentence “No mommy doing”.

(2) [CP {Like hell/No} [IP {Al and Hilary are married/Mommy doing} ] ]

Sentence-peripheral idiomatic expressions such as *like hell*, *my eye*, etc. appear to be cross-linguistically available as a means to express MN. European Portuguese (EP) exhibits a less trivial trait as it displays not only sentence-peripheral MN markers (e.g., *uma ova* ‘a roe’) but also sentence-internal MN markers (like *lá*, originated from the deictic locative ‘there’):

(3) A: Were you a little worried? B: I wasn’t a little worried, I was worried sick. (Horn 89)

(4) A: Estás um pouco preocupado? – ‘Are you a little worried?’ (EP)

B: a. Estou um pouco preocupado *uma ova* ... – ‘I’m not a little worried’ ...  
am a little worried MN-marker-(literally, ‘a roe’)

b. Estou *lá* um pouco preocupado ... – ‘I’m not a little worried’ ...  
am MN-marker a little worried

The EP facts reveal that what has been mainly thought of as a purely discourse/pragmatic construct may after all be a syntactic matter as well. In this talk, it will be demonstrated that: (i) EP *lá* conveys MN, (ii) the opposition between sentence-internal and sentence-peripheral MN markers is a matter of syntax, (iii) MN *lá* moves from the TP domain to the CP domain; besides there is V-to-C movement, (iv) the diachronic development of *lá* from deictic locative to MN marker further supports the view that MN *lá* gets in the CP domain by internal merge.

### 1. *Lá* as a MN marker

All the tests devised by Horn (1989) to distinguish MN from regular negation show that EP *lá* expresses MN: (a) it depends on an appropriate licensing context, so it is excluded from out-of-the-blue sentences (see (5)); (b) it is compatible with strong PPIs, like the expression *do diabo* ‘of the devil’ in (6); (c) it does not license NPIs, like *nem morta* ‘not-even dead’ in (7).

(5) a. Hoje *não* estás com boa cara. O que se passa?  
today not are-2SG with good face. the what is-going-on

b. \*Hoje estás *lá* com boa cara. O que se passa?  
today are-2SG MN-marker with good face. the what is-going-on  
‘You don’t look good today. What’s the matter?’

(6) a. (\*Nã) tiveste uma sorte *do diabo*.  
(\*not) had-2SG a good-luck of-the devil

‘So lucky you were!’ – OK / ‘You were not that lucky.’ – OUT

b. Tive *lá* uma sorte *do diabo*. (as a reply to positive (6a))  
had-1SG NM-marker a good-luck of-the devil – ‘I was not so lucky’...

(7)A: Hoje vais sair comigo.  
today go-2SG go-out with-me – ‘Today we are going out together.’

B: a. Eu *não* saio contigo *nem morta*.  
I not go-out with-you not-even dead – ‘No way I will go out with you.’

b. \*Eu saio *lá* contigo *nem morta*.  
I go-out MN-marker with-you not-even dead – ‘No way I will go out with you.’

## 2. Sentence-internal vs. sentence-peripheral MN markers

Table 1 gives a sketchy description of the distinct behavior of sentence-internal and sentence-peripheral MN markers in EP (examples are not shown here due to space limitations). The important fact to retain is that *lá* is not some type of disguised sentence-peripheral MN marker. If that was the case, it would not differ from *uma ova* in such matters as the ability to take scope over propositional negation, high emphatic adverbs or contrastive foci and full coordinate structures. A ‘disguised’ sentence-peripheral MN marker exists in fact in EP. This is the word *agora* (literally, ‘now’); it may surface in sentence-internal position like *lá* but crucially behaves exactly like *uma ova* with respect to all the other tests listed in table 1.

Table 1: Sentence-internal vs. sentence-peripheral MN markers

	internal (e.g., <i>lá</i> )	peripheral (e.g., <i>uma ova</i> )
Sentence-peripheral placement	-	+
Sentence-internal placement	+	-
Availability in isolation & nominal fragments	-	+
Ability to deny a negative proposition	-	+
Compatibility with emphatic & contrastive high constituents	-	+
Compatibility with idiomatic sentences	-	+
Compatibility with coordinate structures featuring a sequence of events	-	+

## 3. MN *lá* and narrow syntax

MN declaratives will be characterized as ‘reactive/responding assertions’, in the sense of Farkas & Bruce (2010), associated with the ‘relative polarity’ feature [objection] – adding to the features [same] and [reverse] postulated by Farkas & Bruce. This is the edge-feature that drives sentence-internal MN markers to the CP domain and to a certain extent unifies the syntax of the two types of MN markers. Now, if we accept that the facts sketched in section 2. indicate that *lá* (in contrast to sentence-peripheral MN markers) enters the syntactic tree as an internal element (it will be proposed that *lá* is first merged in Spec,TP, a non-subject-position in EP) and we further assume that it later moves to the CP domain, we are faced with the question of how MN *lá* surfaces immediately after the verb (see (7b)). It can be shown that MN declaratives with *lá* involve verb movement to C (with V moving higher than *lá*, under a split CP analysis). Three types of arguments support the V-to-C analysis of MN declaratives with *lá*. First, subject-verb inversion deriving the order VSO is extremely restricted with direct transitive verbs in EP. Nevertheless, MN declaratives with *lá* allow it smoothly. Second, *-ly* adverbs like *frequentemente* ‘frequently’ may regularly appear in postverbal or preverbal position in declarative sentences, adjoining respectively to VP or TP (Costa 1998), but are excluded from the preverbal position in MN declaratives. Third, the EP adverb *bem* ‘well’ is basically a manner adverb that adjoins to VP (Costa 1998), but it may occur in a structurally higher position in which case it is devoid of the manner interpretation displaying instead a modal import. Revealingly, MN declaratives may display the word order [verb-*lá*-subj-*bem*], where *bem* is not a manner adverb. This word order demonstrates that the subject is outside VP. Moreover, since the modal *bem* regularly appears in preverbal position when the verb is in T, the subject must be placed above Spec,TP. Since the verb precedes the subject in the sequence [verb-*lá*-subj-*bem*], it must have moved to C.

## 4. The diachronic path of MN *lá*

Historical evidence reveals that the deictic locative *lá* ‘there’ entered the functional system as a T-related emphatic marker, which later developed into a C-related element associated with rhetorical questions and metalinguistic negation. The diachronic pathway displayed by *lá* follows the type of ‘upward’ integration in the functional system that characterizes *grammaticalization* in the sense of Roberts and Roussou (2003).