Are topics truly recursive?

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Recursion of topicalization has been widely accepted in the literature (Cinque, 1990; Rizzi, 1997; Zubizarreta, 1998). The same has been said for Portuguese (Duarte, 1987; Ambar, 1996).

Recursivity is possible with any type of sentence – declaratives, interrogatives, exclamatives. However, this doesn’t show the exact place of topics in the structure.

Occurrence of two non-adjacent topics is possible:

(1)[TOP O João], [whP como ofereceu [TOP à Maria] a rosa]?
(2)[TOP À Maria], [whP como ofereceu [TOP a rosa] [FinP o João]]?

to Mary  how  gave   the rose   the John

Examples with more than two topics lack context and are doubtful.

Questions arise:

- what motivates the realization of topics in different positions?
- how many topics can we have in a sentence?
- if we have three left-dislocated elements, what is the discursive value of the third element?

Based on data from Portuguese, we will argue that there are only two topics per sentence with different discursive properties. Those topics must relate to two positions: GTopP (generic topic), STopP (specific topic).

We will defend that topics aren’t truly recursive. There are two topic positions available in the structure and those positions may be filled with a topic.

References


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