

A unified model for null subjects in Brazilian Portuguese

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Empirical evidence for deriving empty categories through licensing and identification within Narrow Syntax
⇒ Licensing and Identification = the same underlying mechanism = Agree
⇒ Licensing = ϕ -feature valuation through Agree
⇒ Identification = discursive (δ) feature valuation through Agree
⇒ Agree-based intervention is predicted and accounted for

I The problem: a non-uniform distribution of null subjects

⇒ Contrast 1: Matrix (only 1st person) vs. Questions (1st and 2nd person)

Matrix declarative clauses, only 1st person null subjects

- (1) Eu fui no mercado
I went-1S to-the market
'I went to the market'
- (2) Fui no mercado
Went-1S to-the market
'I went to the market'
- (3) Ele/ela/você foi no mercado
He/she/you went-3S to-the market
'He/she/you went to the market'
- (4) *Foi no mercado
Went-3s to-the market
'They went to the market'

In questions, 2nd person null subjects are also licensed

- (5) Você tá fazendo o que?
You be-2S doing DET-M what?
'What are you doing?'
- (6) Tá fazendo o que?
Be-3S doing DET-M what?
'What are you doing?'

⇒ Contrast 2: WH-in situ versus WH-movement

In questions with WH-movement, null subjects are no longer licensed

- (7) *O que tá fazendo?
DET-M what be-3S doing?
'What are you doing?'
- (8) O que você tá fazendo?
DET-M you be doing?
'What are you doing?'

⇒ Contrast 3: Embedded null subjects versus Matrix

In embedded clauses, null subjects are bound and licensed for all persons

- (9) O João acha que vai comprar uma casa
DET-M John think-3S that go-3S buy a house
'John thinks that John will buy a house'

II Research Questions

What is the nature of empty categories?

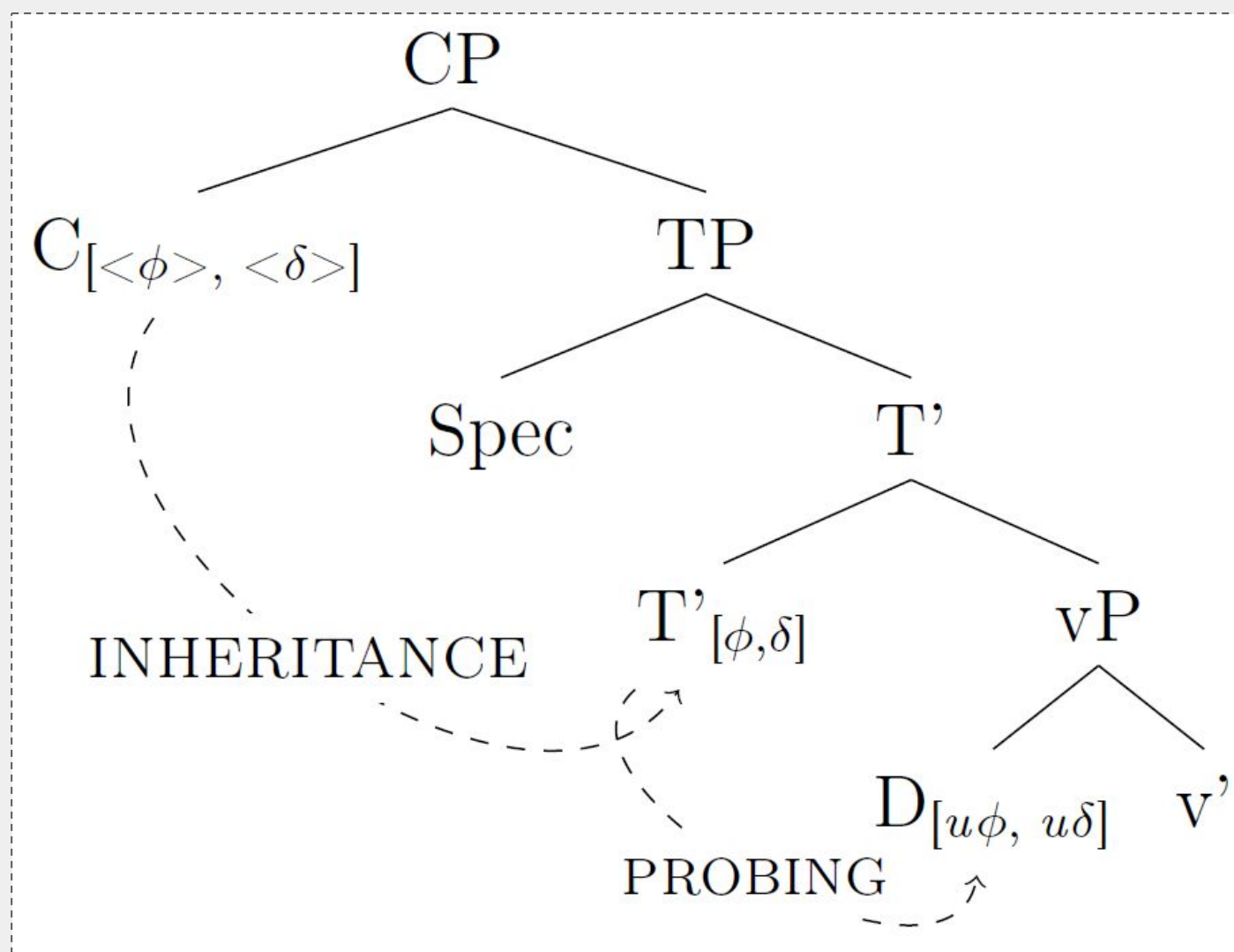
Why do we see a different distribution in matrix/embedded clauses and questions?

How can we account for the WH intervention effects in questions?

III The Model

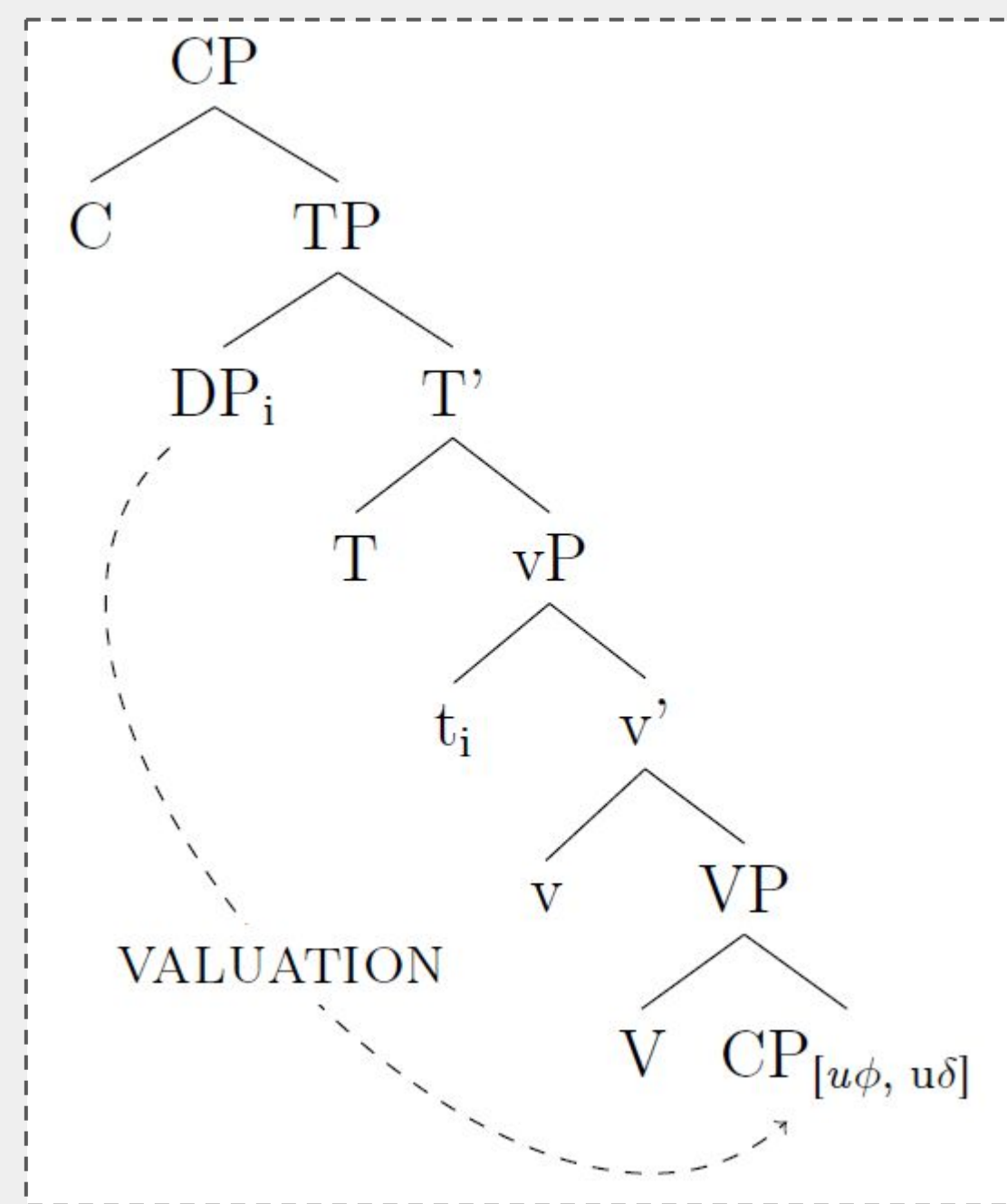
Step 1:

- BP has properties of a **discursive oriented** language (Bantu contact) (Avelar & Galves (2011), thus:
- Two probes active in BP:**
 - ϕ probe (ϕ -features)
 - δ probe (discursive features)
 - Both probes are inherited from C into T (Miyagawa 2009)
- Assumption: null subjects are given and topics, merged with $u\delta$ (unvalued discursive features)**
- A null subject enters the derivation as $D_{u\phi, u\delta}$**
- Null subjects are probed by δ and moved to T



Step 2:

- Embedded null subjects:
 - the ϕ and δ feature bundles projects at the Phase Label of CP
 - These features are available for operation to the higher structure:
 - Identification through δ -Agree**
 - Licensing by ϕ -Agree**
 - What identifies and licenses?**
⇒ The matrix subject
- Matrix null subjects:**
 - the ϕ feature bundle projects at the Phase Label again
 - valuation and identification **at the Syntax-Semantics interface**
 - Instead of Agree, **Feature Transmission** (Heim 2008)
 - Where do the features come from?**
⇒ Speech participants (speaker in declaratives, speaker/hearer in questions)



References

- Heim, I. (2008). Features on bound pronouns. *Phi theory: Phi-features across modules and interfaces*, 35, 56.
- Avelar, J., & Galves, C. (2011). Tópico e concordância em português brasileiro e português europeu. *Textos selecionados-XXVI Encontro da Associação Portuguesa de Linguística*. Lisboa: APL, 69-45.
- Miyagawa, S. (2009). *Why agree? Why move?: Unifying agreement-based and discourse-configurational languages* (Vol. 54). MIT Press.

IV Predictions

- Assumption: WH-phrases are δ marked with the same δ feature as Null Subjects
- So-called 'topic' like subjects are also δ marked with the same feature
- The δ probe may seek only its closest goal
- Thus, if the null subject is higher than the WH-phrase, no WH-movement is available**
- The same holds for topic-like subjects**
- These predictions are borne out**

Embedded T - Intervening null subject - WH-Phrase (No extraction)

*O que_i o João disse para o Pedro que vai comprar t_i
The what the John said-3S to the Peter that will-3S buy t_i
Intended: 'What did John_i said to Peter he_i was buying?'

Matrix T - WH-Phrase - Embedded null subject (Extraction OK)

Pra quem_i João disse t_i que vai comprar um carro?
To whom_i John said-3S t_i that will-3S buy a car?
'To whom did John say John will buy a car?'