

**Language contact and grammatical change:
the diachronic evolution of *wh*- clauses in Brazilian Portuguese**

Contato linguístico e mudança gramatical:
a evolução diacrônica de orações *wh*- no português brasileiro

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Abstract: In this paper, we show how the development of *wh*- interrogative clauses in Brazilian Portuguese was affected by an intense process of interlinguistic contact with African languages. Evidence in favor of this hypothesis comes from socio-historical and linguistic facts. Based on the concept of irregular linguistic transmission (Lucchesi; Baxter, 2009) and on some generative assumptions about how to derive *wh*- questions, our results help to build a broad picture of the diachronic evolution of Brazilian Portuguese. In fact, we reinforce the view that language contact may have been the trigger for the implementation of a series of distinctive characteristics of the contemporary vernacular spoken in Brazil, in contrast both to European Portuguese and older stages of the language.

Keywords: Language contact. Brazilian Portuguese. African languages. Interrogative clauses.

Resumo: Neste artigo, mostramos como o desenvolvimento de orações *wh*- no português brasileiro foi afetado por um intenso processo de contato interlinguístico com línguas africanas. Evidências a favor dessa hipótese vêm de fatos sócio-históricos e linguísticos. Com base no conceito de transmissão linguística irregular (Lucchesi; Baxter, 2009) e em algumas ideias gerativistas sobre como derivar orações interrogativas, nossos resultados ajudam a construir um quadro mais amplo da evolução diacrônica do português brasileiro. De fato, nós reforçamos a ideia de que o contato linguístico pode ter sido o desencadeador para a implementação de uma série de características distintivas do vernáculo contemporâneo falado no Brasil, em contraste tanto ao português europeu quanto ao português de fases passadas.

Palavras-chave: Contato linguístico. Português brasileiro. Línguas africanas. Orações interrogativas.

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Introduction

The goal of this paper is to discuss the evolution of *wh*-interrogative clauses in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). In this language, specifically when there is movement of the question operator to the left periphery, three possible structures are commonly attested, as illustrated in (1). In all of them, subject-verb (SV) word order² is allowed³.

- (1) a. Quem ele **viu** na festa? (non cleft configuration)
b. Quem é que ele **viu** na festa? (inverted cleft)
c. Quem que ele **viu** na festa? (reduced cleft)

The pattern in (1) is different from what is seen in Classical Portuguese (ClP)⁴. For instance, Duarte (1992) and Lopes-Rossi (1993) attest only VS non cleft structures in this earlier stage of BP, as exemplified in (2).

- (2) a. Que **dizeis** vós, Humildade? (16th century)
b. Como **posso** eu caber aí? (17th century)

A point in common with ClP is pointed out by Kato (2019). She shows that, just like in BP, ClP also allows inverted cleft interrogative clauses, as we see in (3).

- (3) e quando é que são relativas? (17th century)

It is worth noting that BP also differs from European Portuguese (EP). In the context of matrix clauses, Mito and Kato (2005) observe that one difference is found in non cleft configurations. This kind of structure is also attested in EP, but with the subject exclusively in post-verbal position (see (4))⁵, contrary to what is seen in BP, where the subject is categorically pre-verbal (see (1)). Here, EP is similar to ClP.

² In what follows, the grammatical subject and the inflected verb of all the examples will be shown underlined and in bold characters, respectively.

³ In BP, verb-subject (VS) word order is allowed only with unaccusative and some other typically mono-argumental verbs (KATO, 2000; PILATI, 2006; PONTES, 1982).

(i) **Chegou** o trem.

(ii) Aqui **estou** eu.

For an overview of *wh*-interrogative clauses in BP, see Oushiro (2011).

⁴ Here, we take ClP as a linguistic period in the history of Portuguese covering texts written by authors born between 1500 and 1700 (GALVES; PAIXÃO DE SOUSA, 2017). A detailed discussion on the periodization of Portuguese is found in Castro (2006).

⁵ If the interrogative operator is a D-linked phrase, SV word order is possible in EP (MIOTO; LOBO, 2016).

(iii) Que livro Joana **leu**?

- (4) a. Como **reagiu** o Adriano?
 b. *Como o Adriano **reagiu**?

Another difference is that, while BP allows reduced cleft sentences, EP disallows this structure completely. A point in common, however, is that EP also allows inverted clefts, as illustrated in (5), just like BP.

- (5) O que foi que Joana **fez**?

In Table 1, we summarize the similarities and differences.

Table 1 - Types of *wh*-interrogative clauses in BP, ClaP and EP.

	Brazilian Portuguese	Classical Portuguese	European Portuguese
Non-cleft	SV word order	VS word order	VS word order
Inverted cleft	X	X	X
Reduced cleft	X		

Source: elaborated by the author.

These facts pose the following questions:

- a) What triggered the changes attested in BP? In other words, why did only BP developed reduced cleft structures and SV word order in non-cleft configurations?
 b) Assuming that both BP and EP have ClaP as the same starting point (Galves; Kroch, 2016), why did BP, in its diachronic evolution, take a different path compared to EP?

Answers to these questions have already been proposed in the literature, as we review in the next section (see, among others, Duarte, 1992; Lopes-Rossi, 1993; Rosemeyer; Van De Velde, 2021). However, despite the different technical implementations, a point in common of all these proposals is that none of them puts into the equation a possible role of language contact as a factor triggering the changes attested in *wh*-clauses (see, however, Oliveira, 2011). This is worth mentioning because it has been argued by several authors that the process of historical formation of BP was influenced by interlinguistic contacts with a wide range of African languages (Lucchesi; Baxter, 2009; Peter, 2009; Castro, 2022). In socio-historical terms, this hypothesis is based on Brazilian slave history, a fact which makes plausible the idea that the diachronic development of BP was marked by an intense contact

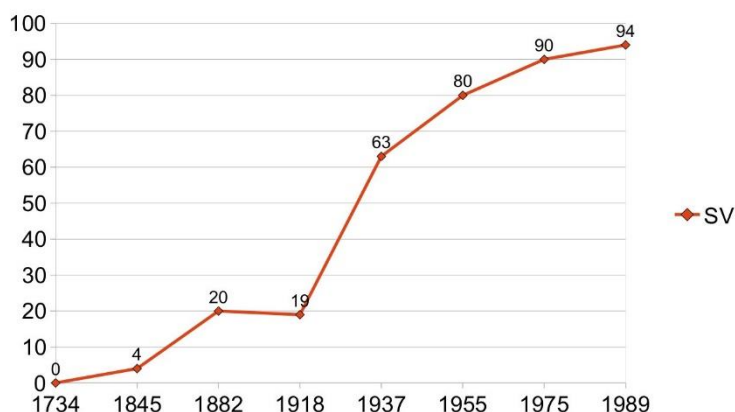
with the languages of millions of Africans who were brought to the American continent⁶. In fact, this idea has been invoked to explain a set of morphosyntactic properties of BP, such as, for example, the simplification of the verb agreement paradigm (Petter, 2008), the emergence of certain impersonal constructions (Negrão; Viotti, 2014) and the systematic use of *ter* (“to have”) as an existential verb (Avelar, 2019). Here, in order to fill this gap, we will investigate the diachrony of *wh*- questions in BP in the light of the hypothesis of interlinguistic contact.

Our paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we review previous studies which focused on the diachronic evolution of *wh*- clauses in BP. Next, we present socio-historical and linguistic evidence in favor of the hypothesis of language contact. In the two following sections, we present some theoretical assumptions and a structured explanation of how the change attested in BP may have occurred. In the last section, we make some final considerations.

Previous studies

Duarte (1992) is one of the first papers to map the diachronic evolution of *wh*-interrogative clauses in BP. She shows that the VS sequence was the dominant syntactic pattern until the beginning of the 20th century, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - SV linear order in matrix *wh*- questions in the history of BP.



Source: adapted from Duarte (1992).

In Duarte's data, extracted from plays, the rise in the use of pre-verbal subjects coincides with the period when *é que* structures are fully established in the language. The author notes that, in 1937, the first time when SV sentences are more used than VS clauses,

⁶ From the 17th up to the end of the 19th century, the amount of Africans and Afro-descendants in Brazilian territory was never less than 50% of the total population (Mussa, 1991).

all examples with pre-verbal subject present *é que*. This fact is taken as an evidence that inverted cleft constructions are the key factor triggering the loss of the VS word order in BP.

A problem with this analysis arises when we look at EP. In fact, as already observed by different authors (Lopes-Rossi, 1996; Kato; Mito, 2005), the appearance of inverted clefts in the European variety does not result in the loss of post-verbal subjects. So, if in EP there is no such causality, why would there be in BP?

Another point against Duarte's analysis comes from Kato (2019). We already mentioned in the introduction that Kato found inverted cleft structures in texts from the 17th century, well before the appearance of the SV word order, as we can see in (3), repeated in (6). Here again, the supposed causality between the use of inverted clefts and the rise of preverbal subjects is empirically unconfirmed.

(6) e quando é que são relativas? (17th century)⁷

Lopes-Rossi (1993) also investigates the syntactic changes affecting *wh*-clauses in BP. For her, the VS word order results from V-movement to the CP-system, as a way of satisfying the *Wh*-Criterion, as schematized in (7)⁸.

(7) a. Que **dizeis vós**, Humildade? (ClaP)

b. [_{CP} Que *dizeis*_i-C⁰ [_{TP} *vós* *t_i* ...]]

Lopes-Rossi understands that the possibility of V-to-C movement is related to the existence of a richly inflected paradigm. Given that BP has experienced a weakening in verbal agreement (DUARTE, 1993), the finite verb would no longer be able to move to C, thus deriving the SV linear sequence, as shown in (8).

(8) a. Quem **ele viu** na festa? (BP)⁹

b. [_{CP} Quem C⁰ [_{TP} *ele viu*-T⁰ ...]]

Concerning the rise of cleft structures, this would be associated with the replacement of the interrogative operator *que* in ClaP by *o que* in BP, as exemplified in (9).

⁷ This example is extracted from *Regras da Língua Portuguesa, espelho da língua latina*. The author, Dom Jeronymo Contador de Argote, was born in 1676. The book is fully available at the Tycho Brahe Parsed Corpus of Historical Portuguese (<https://www.tycho.iel.unicamp.br/corpus/>).

⁸ As formulated in Rizzi (1996, p. 64), the *Wh*-Criterion is stated in the following terms:

A. A *wh*-operator must be in a Spec-head configuration with X⁰_[+wh].

B. An X⁰_[+wh] must be in a Spec-head configuration with a *wh*-operator.

⁹ We just remember that (8a) is ungrammatical in EP.

- (9) a. Pois, primas, [que] dizeis da minha eloquência? (18th century)
b. [O que] você fabrica aqui? (contemporary BP)

According to Lopes-Rossi (1993), *que* is a clitic form that must be cliticized to a visible lexical item positioned in the C head. In ClaP, this phonological requirement is satisfied through V-movement to the CP-system. However, when the verb stops moving to the left periphery, the *wh*-phrase *o que* is used in place of *que*. For the author, this change takes place because *o que* is not a clitic element, thus it does not need a phonological host in C. Lopes-Rossi shows that, in BP, the operator *que* remains possible only in cleft configurations, because in these structures the C head would be filled either by the copula (inverted cleft), as in (10), or by the complementizer (reduced cleft), as in (11). So, the rise of cleft interrogative questions would be a strategy to meet the requirement imposed by the clitic interrogative pronoun *que*. In short, according to Lopes-Rossi, both the loss of post-verbal subjects and the appearance of cleft configurations are the result of a change in the syntax of verb movement.

- (10) a. Que é *que* ele viu na festa? (Inverted cleft, BP)
b. [_{CP} Que é_i-C⁰ [_{TP} ... t_i ...]]

- (11) a. Que *que* ele viu na festa? (Reduced cleft, BP)
b. [_{CP} Que que-C⁰ [_{TP} ele viu-T⁰ ...]]

A first problem for this analysis is that the loss of verbal morphology does not necessarily imply the absence of V-to-C movement. English is a case in point, since, diachronically, it stops allowing null subject structures (that is, a weakening in the verbal morphological paradigm takes place), but the finite verb keeps moving to the left periphery in *wh*- questions (Roberts, 1993), as we can see in (12).

- (12) a. What **did** Peter buy?
b. [_{CP} What did_i-C⁰ [_{TP} Peter t_i ...]]

Another problem is that, if the loss of V-to-C movement is a precondition for the appearance of cleft configurations in BP, why are there inverted clefts in EP (see (13)) even without the loss of verb dislocation to the C-system (see (14))?

- (13) O que é *que* o João leu? (EP: inverted cleft)

- (14) a. Como **reagiu** o Adriano? (EP: VS word order in non cleft structure)
b. [_{CP} Como reagiu_i-C⁰ [_{TP} [o Adriano] *t* ...]]

A more recent analysis is the one developed by Rosemeyer and Van de Velde (2021). The authors propose that the generalized rise of the SV word order triggers the increase of cleft structures in *wh*- questions. In discursive terms, the VS linear sequence would be related to the expression of topic continuity. With the rise of SV structures, this discursive function starts to use cleft configurations as an alternative strategy to communicate topic continuity.

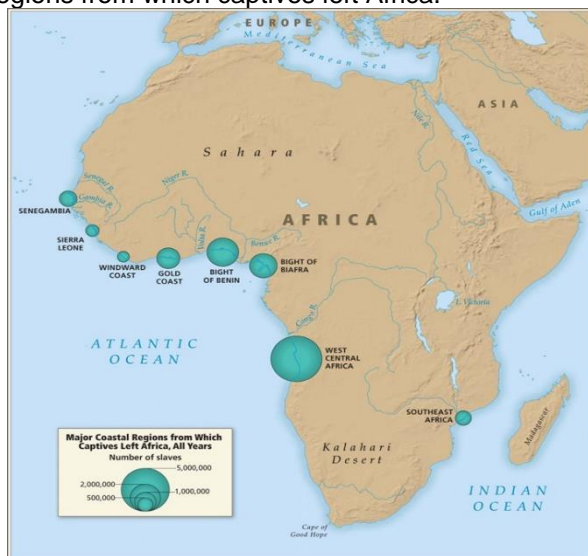
The immediate problem of Rosemeyer and Van de Velde's analysis arises when we again look at the diachronic evolution of EP. In this variant, just like in BP, there is also an increase of interrogative cleft structures (specifically inverted clefts), as shown by Kato and Mito (2005). However, unlike BP, EP did not lose the VS property in non-cleft *wh*- questions. So, if in EP the increase in cleft configurations is not associated with the loss of the VS word order in non cleft *wh*- sentences, why would this association happen in BP?

In sum, these observations show the absence of a systematic study which investigates the diachrony of *wh*-clauses under the light of the hypothesis of language contact. From the next section on, we will try to fill that gap.

Socio-historical facts and linguistic evidence of a language contact process

Brazil's history is intricately tied to the transatlantic slave trade, with millions of Africans forcibly brought to the country between the 16th and 19th centuries. While exact numbers remain uncertain, estimates suggest that around four million people were enslaved during this period (Alencastro, 2000; Castro, 2022). The majority of slaves were from Sub-Saharan Africa, encompassing territories of the Niger-Congo language family. Within this large linguistic group, there were mainly speakers of Bantu and West African languages (Castro, 2022). The Figure 2 shows the major coastal regions from which captives left Africa during the transatlantic slave trade.

Figure 2 - Major coastal regions from which captives left Africa.



Source: <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>.

This strong link between Africa and the American continent had a huge impact on the formation of the Brazilian population. As can be seen in the numbers presented in Table 2, the percentage of Africans and afro descendants between 1798 and 1872 is around 60%, a figure much higher than that of other population groups.

Table 2 - Brazilian population: 1798 and 1872.

	1798		1872	
	N	%	N	%
Europeans	1.010.000	31.1	3.787.000	38.1
Africans and afro descendants	1.988.000	61.1	5.756.000	58.0
Non-slaves	406.000	12.5	4.245.000	42.7
Slaves	1.582.000	48.7	1.511.000	15.2
Indigenous people	252.000	7.8	387.000	3.9
Total	3.250.000	100.0	9.930.000	100.0

Source: adapted from Merrick and Graham (1979, p. 29).

Besides the socio-historical facts, there is also linguistic ones in favor of the hypothesis of language contact as a main source for the development of *wh*-interrogative clauses in BP. This type of evidence comes from primarily a comparison with Bantu and West African languages. For instance, in both linguistic groups, reduced cleft structures are attested, as shown in (15) and (16), in a pattern similar to what is found in BP (see (1c)).

- (15) Reduced cleft structures in Bantu languages:
- a. Naanu *ny-ye* Nafula **a-a-siima-a?** (Lubukusu)
1.who FOC-1 1.Nafula 1.SM-PRS-love-FV
“Who is it that Nafula loves?” (Wasike, 2007)
- b. Ekihi *ky-o* Kambale **alangira?** (Kinande)
7.what 7-FOC 1.Kambale saw
“What did Kambale see?” (Schneider-Zioga, 2009)

- (16) Reduced cleft structures in West African languages:
- a. *été wé* Séná **xíá?** (Gungbe)
what FOC Sena read-PERF
“What did Sena read?” (Aboh, 2004)
- b. *Kíni ní* mo **rà?** (Yoruba)
what FOC I buy
“What am I buying?” (Boretzky, 1983)

Some of these African languages also allow non-cleft SV word order, as exemplified in (17) for Bantu languages and in (18) for West African languages. Again, this pattern is seen in BP as well (see (1a)).

- (17) Non-cleft SV word order in Bantu languages:
- a. Chě mw-ǎn **é-pim-εε?** (Akoose)
what 1-child NSE.1.SM.NEG-throw.out-PRF.IRR
“What didn’t the child throw out?” (Hedinger, 2008)
- b. *kíí* rì-nùní **rí-ηṅṅ** *í* **pùmá?** (Bàsàá)
7.what 13-birds 13.AGR-PRES-build LOC 1.orange.tree
“What do the birds build on the orange tree?” (Hamlaoui; Makasso, 2015)
- (18) Non-cleft SV word order in West African languages:
- a. Ku Ayda **dóór?** (Wolof)
who Ayda hit
“Who did Ayda hit?” (Torrence, 2012)

In the following sections, based on the socio-historical facts and the linguistic evidence presented here, we offer a structured theoretical framework explaining how the development of *wh*-interrogative clauses in BP was affected by an intense contact between Portuguese and African languages.

Some theoretical assumptions

The first assumption we take is that of irregular linguistic transmission. According to Lucchesi and Baxter (2009), this concept describes the historical processes through which languages undergo significant changes due to intense contact between speakers of linguistically diverse backgrounds. Such a phenomenon often occurs as a result of colonialism, where speakers of different languages are compelled to acquire the language of a dominant group. Key components of irregular linguistic transmission include:

- **Forced acquisition:**
Speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds are compelled to acquire the language of the dominant group due to socio-political or economic pressures.

- **Adverse Conditions:**
The acquisition process takes place under adverse conditions, such as limited exposure to the targeted language, varying levels of proficiency, and often a lack of formal education.

- **Interlinguistic Influence:**
The second language (L2) acquired by speakers becomes the input for new generations. The influence of this L2 on subsequent generations' first language (L1) can result in the incorporation of features from both the original L1 and the acquired L2.

- **The formation of creole languages or new historical varieties:**
Depending on the extent of interlinguistic contact and historical context, the outcome may lead to the development of a completely new grammatical system, often termed a creole language, or a new historical variety of the *superstratum* language.

We also assume two general assumptions concerning the derivation of a *wh*- question:

- I. Whenever there is *wh*- movement to the left periphery in interrogative structures, the C head is endowed with a question (Q) feature (Aboh, 2004; Rizzi, 1996, 2001).

- II. The presence of the Q feature in C must be satisfied by a relevant item either through merge or through move. When both options are available, it follows the principle Merge over Move (Chomsky, 1995, 2000), which reflects the idea that the formation of

linguistic structures prefers the operation of merging elements to create new hierarchical structures rather than moving existing constituents to different positions in a sentence.

Explaining the differences

For ClaP and EP, we propose that, in both systems, the Q feature is always satisfied through move. In non cleft configurations, there is V-movement to the C-system. This accounts for the VS word order, as presented earlier in (2) and (4), respectively, and shown again in (19) and (20).

(19) a. Que **dizeis** vós, Humildade? (ClaP)

b. [_{CP} Que *dizeis*_i-C⁰ [_{TP} *vós* *t_i* ...]]

(20) a. Como **reagiu** o Adriano? (EP)

b. [_{CP} Como *reagiu*_i-C⁰ [_{TP} [*o Adriano*] *t_i* ...]]

In inverted cleft structures, possible in ClaP and EP, the copula also moves to C. As an illustration, in (21), we present the structural representation of an inverted cleft *wh*- clause in ClaP.

(21) a. e quando é que são relativas? (ClaP)

b. [_{CP} quando *é*_i-C⁰ [_{TP} ... *t_i* ...]]

Regarding contemporary BP, we propose that the Q feature is always satisfied through merge. The checking operation can be done either by directly merging into C a null question marker, as is the case in non cleft configurations (see (22)) or inverted clefts (see (23)), or inserting into C the complementizer itself, as is the case in reduced clefts (see(24)).

(22) a. Quem ele **viu** na festa?

b. [_{CP} Quem \emptyset -C⁰ [_{TP} *ele* *viu*-T⁰ ...]]

(23) a. Quem é *que* ele **viu** na festa?

b. [_{CP} Quem \emptyset -C⁰ [_{TP} ... *é*-T⁰ ...]]

(24) a. Quem *que* ele **viu** na festa?

b. [_{CP} Quem *que*-C⁰ [_{TP} *ele* *viu*-T⁰ ...]]

Differently from our analysis, as already mentioned earlier, Lopes-Rossi (1993) assumes that inverted clefts in BP show movement of the copula to the C head, in a way similar to what we propose for inverted clefts in ClaP and EP. However, the example (25), fully acceptable in BP, is a problem for her proposal. Basically, in this sentence there is a complementizer itself preceding the copula. If the copula moves to C, where would the complementizer be landed, considering that the C head is the standard position for this type of conjunction?

(25) O que [que] é *que* ele **comprou**?

A way to solve this challenge is to understand that the copula remains in T, with the complementizer occupying the head of the CP category, as represented in (26).

(26) [_{CP} [O que] que-C⁰ [_{TP} é-T⁰ ...]]

We look now at the diachronic change from ClaP to BP. Based on the socio-historical facts presented before, we propose that speakers of different African languages brought to Brazil were forced to acquire Portuguese as their L2. In this process of language acquisition, it is reasonable to assume that the resulting L2 incorporates syntactic features of the native languages, such as non-clefts and reduced clefts with SV word order, both structures well attested in Bantu and West African languages. This is exactly what happens in several Portuguese-based creoles of West Africa, as shown in (27) and (28).

(27) Xabo **fala**? (non-cleft with SV word order; Annobonese)
thing 2SG speak
“What do you say?” (POST, 1995)

(28) Kònte k’ bo **kre**? (reduced cleft with SV word order; Kabuverdianu)
how.much FOC 2SG want
“How much do you want?” (Cardoso, 1989)

In the process of learning Portuguese as an L1, the following generations will have as their primary linguistic data (PLD) the output of the L2 acquired by earlier generations. This PLD will present “cues” (in the sense of Lightfoot (1999)) pointing to the possibility of satisfying the Q feature in C through merge, as it seems to be the case in Bantu and West African languages. It is reasonable to think that the L2 serving as input for the new generations also had examples of *wh*- questions that could be analyzed as structures with V-to-C movement,

just like the standard grammar of ClAP. In fact, this L2 acquired under adverse conditions probably conveyed syntactic features both from ClAP and from the different African languages in contact, as is the case in situations of irregular linguistic transmission. In the process of setting how the Q feature in C is checked, the new generations will follow the principle Merge over Move (Chomsky, 1995, 2000). Thus, the grammar that emerges is one in which the Q feature is systematically satisfied through merge.

As already shown in the literature, a lot of distinctive characteristics of BP are also attested in Portuguese varieties spoken in Africa (Avelar, 2019; Petter, 2009). This is also what we see concerning *wh*-interrogative clauses, as exemplified in (29) for Guinean Portuguese, which is in contact with West African languages, and in (30) for Angolan Portuguese, which is spoken in a region of Bantu languages.

- (29) a. Guinean Portuguese (Santos; Silva, 2019)
b. Como você **soube** disso? (non-cleft with SV word order)
- (30) a. Angolan Portuguese (Santos; Oliveira, 2011)
b. donde que a Teté **veio** encaminhada? (reduced cleft with SV word order)

Having in mind that these African vernaculars emerge from a situation of language contact between Portuguese and an African *substratum*, the similarities with BP could be understood as an indication that the Brazilian variety may have gone through a similar process of formation.

Note that, in our analysis, reduced cleft and inverted clefts are not diachronically related. This proposal goes against the hypothesis of some authors who understand that reduced cleft structures are an evolution from the inverted ones (Braga; Kato; Mito, 2009; Kato; Raposo, 1996). Basically, these authors assume that such a change derives from the deletion of the copula.

- (31) Quem (é) que ele viu?

However, there is some evidence against this type of proposal. For instance, yes/no questions in BP show a sort of inverted cleft, with the copula immediately preceding the complementizer (Antonelli, 2022). This pattern is illustrated in (32).

- (32) *Será que* o João viu a Maria na festa?

If reduced cleft structures were a diachronic evolution from inverted clefts, we would expect that, in yes/no questions, there would also be some type of reduced cleft configuration, just like in *wh*- clauses. As (33) shows, however, this is not possible.

(33) **Que* o João viu a Maria na festa?

Another point concerns the supposed invariability of the copula in inverted clefts, as the contrast between (34a) and (34b) shows. For Braga, Kato and Mito (2009), this is one of the reasons why the copula can be deleted, thus supporting the view that reduced clefts evolve from inverted structures.

(34) a. Quais crianças é que chegaram?
b. *Quais crianças são que chegaram?

It is important to note, however, that this invariability only affects the morphosyntactic feature of person. Guessier (2015) shows that the copula is not fully invariable, since it can show a variation in terms of a tense feature, as we see in (35).

(35) a. Quem **é** que telefonou?
b. Quem **foi** que telefonou?

Bearing in mind the broader debate on the formation of BP, which places on one side the hypothesis of linguistic drift (Naro; Scherre, 2007; Tarallo, 1993), and on the other the hypothesis of language contact (Castro, 2022; Petter, 2009), perhaps it can be said that the diachronic evolution of *wh*- interrogative questions in BP reflects these two mechanisms of language change. We could say that the most visible face of the linguistic drift is the incorporation and expansion of inverted clefts, if we consider that this structure was in fact already possible in previous stages of Portuguese. So, concerning this specific syntactic configuration, BP and EP followed the same path. Assuming that reduced cleft interrogatives are formed independently of inverted cleft ones, the genesis of reduced structures in BP would be the result of an intense language contact between Portuguese and African vernaculars. So, considering the different socio-historical events that took place in the Iberian peninsula, with a much smaller presence of slaves than in Brazil¹⁰, it follows why EP did not develop reduced cleft *wh*- questions.

¹⁰ Although significant, the number of enslaved individuals in Portugal seems to have never exceeded 10% of the population (Fonseca, 1997; Lahon, 1999).

Final remarks

In this paper, we tried to show how the development of *wh*-interrogative clauses in BP was affected by a process of interlinguistic contact with African languages. Evidence in favor of this hypothesis comes from socio-historical and linguistic facts. Our results help to build a broader picture of the diachronic formation of BP. In fact, we reinforce the view that language contact may have been the trigger for the implementation of a series of distinctive characteristics of Portuguese spoken in Brazil.

Of course, many questions remain open. One of them is the following: assuming the generative view that a single parametric change can impact different morphosyntactic structures (ROBERTS, 2007), in which other linguistic phenomena is it possible to see the effects of the change involving *wh*-clauses? This and other possible questions will be the starting point for future investigations.

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