

**SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN WESTERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES. FROM THE NOUN  
PHRASE TO CLAUSE STRUCTURE<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

This special issue of *Dialectologia* is dedicated to the study of syntactic variation in a range of language varieties spoken in Western Europe. Several aspects of syntactic variation, which affect nominal word units as well as sentence structures, will be examined from different perspectives.

**VARIACIÓN SINTÁCTICA EN LENGUAS DEL OESTE DE EUROPA. DE LA FRASE NOMINAL A LA  
ESTRUCTURA ORACIONAL**

**Resumen**

Este número extraordinario de *Dialectologia* está dedicado al estudio de la variación sintáctica en un conjunto de variedades lingüísticas habladas en el occidente europeo. Desde diferentes perspectivas se abordan aspectos de la variación sintáctica que afectan tanto a las unidades frásticas nominales como a las estructuras oracionales.

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## 1. Context

This special issue of *Dialectologia* is a collection of selected papers from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Wedisyn (Dialectal Syntax in Westmost Europe) meetings, an event that brings together experts on syntactic variation in Portuguese, Galician, Asturian, Spanish, Basque, Catalan and Breton every year. Despite the current enormous popularity of syntactic variation in the field of linguistics, volumes containing studies on topics in such a wide variety of geographically and genetically closely related languages are still rare. The aim of this special issue is twofold: to describe thoroughly several poorly studied or completely new syntactic phenomena in varieties of Western European languages, and to emphasise the need for a concern for methodology in current linguistics, by underlining the importance of the study of dialectal and substandard variation in the analysis and explanation of syntactic phenomena.

## 2. Papers

This special issue's main focus is on syntactic micro-variation in Westernmost European languages, specifically Asturian, Basque, Breton, Galician, Portuguese, Spanish and Catalan. The papers it contains are concerned with two main issues, namely, variation at sentence level and variation within the noun phrase. The former is covered by a detailed analysis of relative infinitives in Asturian (Viejo); the first description of the use of the alleged complementizer *de* before infinitive clauses in Peninsular Spanish (Pato & de Benito); an account of variation in infinitive sentences in causative and perception constructions in European Portuguese (Sandra Pereira); an account of variation between infinitives and gerunds in predicative constructions in European Portuguese varieties (Silvia Pereira); a combined analysis of three phenomena — gerunds, subjunctive forms and possessives — in European Portuguese focused on geographical variation (Carrilho & Lobo); a comparative approach to conditional sentences in language varieties spoken in the western Iberian Peninsula: Galician, Portuguese, Asturian and Western Spanish (Mouzo & Pérez); and a global account of some micro-variation phenomena at the clause level in Romance that

suggest a distinction should be made between two different classes within this language family (Gallego). Many aspects of sentential syntax variation are hence covered in detail, both through comparative approaches and in individual languages.

Several variation phenomena in the noun phrase are dealt with in the second section, mostly but not exclusively related to pronouns and agreement: the first comprehensive approach to the presence of the accusative clitic in intransitive verbs in some varieties of Galician (Álvarez); an account of morphological variation affecting clitics on the border between Galician and Asturian (de Andrés, Álvarez-Balbuena, Cueto, Monteavaro & Suárez); a detailed analysis of allocutive agreement in Basque (Munduate & Lizardi); an overview of the on-going standardisation of second person plural pronouns in Western Andalusia (Lara); a new analysis of the function of the Basque particle *-ki* as a dative agreement prepositional marker instead of an applicative head (Fernández); a full account of impersonal pronouns in Breton (Rezac & Joitteau); and an overview of the dialectal situation of the presence or absence of the article before proper nouns in Galician (Louredo).

One of the volume's strengths is that it provides an overview of the current state of syntactic variation studies in a wide range of both quite similar (Ibero-Romance) and very different (Basque and Breton) languages. Another is that it combines new analyses of well-known phenomena, thanks to new dialectal evidence, with accounts of situations with under-researched variation. Lastly, it brings together reflections on data collection methodology and theoretical tools in order to explain variation.

The volume features 14 articles on specific aspects of Asturian, Basque, Breton, Galician, Portuguese, Spanish or the Romance family as a whole. They cover a wide range of aspects of syntactic variation, such as clitics and subject pronouns, agreement and articles, complementation, impersonal constructions, verbal particles and adverbial clauses. The authors come from nine different European and American universities and work in very different theoretical frameworks, yet an interest in the comprehensive description and analysis of syntactic variation using robust methods runs through all the papers.

The present special issue is distinctive in a number of ways. It contains descriptions of previously undescribed phenomena, such as the presence of object

clitics with intransitive verbs in Galician or peculiarities of infinitive constructions in Asturian. Secondly, it improves on previous descriptions and analyses of some syntactic phenomena by introducing new data concerning, for example, the prepositional infinitive in Spanish, the Basque particles *ba-* and *ki-* or causative and perception constructions in Portuguese. Thirdly, it shows the importance of contrasting geographically or genetically closely related varieties for understanding a syntactic process, as in the case of Basque allocutivity, conditional sentences in Western Ibero-Romance or restrictions on vP and CP in Romance. Many of the studies in this special issue are strongly concerned with aspects of methodology: the distribution of the allomorphs of Asturian clitics is analysed using both classical and horiometric methods; the data for the analysis of allocutive pronouns in Spanish was collected using an original dubbing technique; and several data sources are compared in the study of the distribution of articles in Galician and Portuguese and verb forms in Portuguese. Finally, important theoretical points are made throughout the special issue about the role of syntax in dialect formation as demonstrated in the study of gerunds in Portuguese, or the insight given by dialect data into underlying syntactic structures, such as in the case of impersonal forms in Breton.

The papers in this special issue are likely to stimulate scientific discussion of numerous phenomena, not only in the context of the specific European languages studied but in the wider field of linguistic variation, particularly regarding syntactic variation, still a “hot” but understudied topic. The volume is hence addressed both to specialists in all the languages covered and to sociolinguists, dialectologists and historical linguists in general, given its interesting methodological insights.