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DIALOGICAL OCCURRENCES OF *BEM* IN EUROPEAN PORTU-GUESE. ENUNCIATIVE STABILITY AND DEFORMABILITY

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In this paper I intend to describe the plurality of values that the linguistic unit *bem* can assume in dialogical contexts in European Portuguese.

Concerning the problem of the relation between linguistic signification and the construction of referential values, it is evident that there is a relevant dependence between the variability of sense affected to a unit and the linguistic and discourse context. The linguistic units change its meaning depending on the linguistic sequence in which they occur. Sometimes the modification of a single element of the linguistic context is enough to change, radically or imperceptibly, the semantic value assigned by a linguistic unit. For instance, in Portuguese, the order in which *bem* occurs in the utterances *eu vi-te bem* and *eu bem te vi* is a condition not only to its semantic values but also to each utterance's meaning as a whole.

In addition to this reciprocal dependence between any linguistic units that integrates the utterance and its linguistic context, each utterance acquires a meaning through its construction in reference to a situation, namely to a situational context. In other words, each utterance's meaning is generated through those contextual features which are pertinent to its interpretation and which can be verbally explicit or not.

Simultaneously, each utterance determines its occurrence's situational context. We can consider, as in Franckel's suggested formulation (see, for instance 2006), that the situational context isn't defined only exteriorly in considering the utterance (as we notice in the pragmatic theoretical proposals); the situational context is the very condition itself for the interpretation of the utterance. Therefore, the situational context is also a construction.

This fact seems evident given that each utterance is absolutely singular and strictly connected to a prosodic expression and to a certain contextualization. Besides, before the necessity to make explicit the difference between two sequences with an apparently close sense (A and B), it is common to resort to a contextual contrast ("we say A when... and B when..."). Sometimes this contextualization is even essential to give an account on the intrinsic difference of sense.

Returning back to both sequences *eu vi-te bem* and *eu bem te vi*, we can say that the speaker produces an utterance as *eu vi-te bem* when he intends to signify the way in which he views the interlocutor, "clearly", "well seen" (even if, with a particular prosodic modulation, it may include a rectifying value). The speaker produces an utterance as *eu bem te vi* to introduce an adversative, a contrary sense, or, with a strongly marked prosody, for intensifying the linguistic event, the "seeing you".

In its most frequent occurrences, *bem* expresses a circumstance of mood. In the sequences 1 and 2 it functions exactly as a modal adverb[1].

> 1. *A Sara expressou-se **bem***
>   (Sara expressed herself well)
>
> 2. *Eles fizeram **bem** os trabalhos de casa*
>   (They did their homework well)

Yet, the modal adverb's syntactic behaviour in each of these sequences is different. In 1, *bem* corresponds to a phrasal constituent. It is included in the phrase's structure. As a phrasal complement – thus, non-optional – it takes part in the expressed propositional content. The impossibility of the modal adverb suppression is a good test to prove that *bem* is subcategorized by the verb[2]. In the sequence 2, the suppression of *bem* doesn't bring about any un-grammaticalness. The adverb has an optional nature and, thus, it corresponds to a VP adjunction.

In a semantic perspective, *bem* can be paraphrased in both utterances by "in an appropriate way", "in a satisfactory way", or even, "in an expected way". These glosses allow us to identify a particular "enunciative" value in terms of modality, more specifically, an appreciative value[3].

The appreciative value is a conformity value: the specified value is considered as a speaker's desirable value, and it can eventually correspond to an expected value. Thus, considering the theoretical presupposition that every relation is a complex relation, we can localize the linguistic occurrence as constructed in relation to another term – a pre-constructed one, a term which corresponds with a subjective origin. There is, therefore, a comparison of an occurrence in relation to the previously and subjectively constructed reference.

The occurrence *pi* is not primary distinguishable from the other occurrences which set up *P*. But, because an occurrence is constructed in reference to an enunciative situation, *pi* is located in relation to the referential situation, namely, to a subject's "previously fixed standard". This relation is an identification. There is an identification or a conformity between the occurrence *pi* and the previously subjective construction as a reference point. So, the values affecting *bem* are the result of some operations, *bem* being its linguistic marker. When *bem* has an appreciative value, it marks two meta-linguistic operations: the course through the different occurrences *p, p'* and the identification of *pi* in relation to *p* (see Péroz, 1992: 40ss).

In the next examples, *bem* is exchangeable with *muito* and hasn't an appreciative value.

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[1] See Costa (2008), about the adverb in European Portuguese.
[2] In Lopes (2004), some other syntactical tests are proposed, confirming the functioning of *bem* in sentences as 1 and 2.
[3] It was Antoine Culioli who proposed the classification of this kind of modality as an appreciative one ("modalité appréciative", 1968: 112). It is characterized by the construction of a "[...] um juízo de valor, [...] uma apreciação sobre uma relação predicativa já constituída e validada (ou validável)" (Campos & Xavier 1991: 341).

3. *Ele é **bem** alto*
   (He is **very** tall)

4. *Eles são **bem** capazes de faltar*
   (They are **really** capable of missing the lesson)

It functions as an intensifier, as the traditionally classified quantifier of degree (see Lopes, 2004: 439). Consequently, the sequences modified by *bem* with an intensive value are interpreted in terms of a scalar propriety.

Therefore, *bem* only assumes an intensifying value when co-occurring with qualifying adjectives, and not with relational adjectives (**Este sistema é bem digital* – "This system is very digital"). When *bem* modifies a deverbal adjective, it carries an appreciative value (*Esta parede está bem pintada* – "This wall is well painted"). There seems to be some restrictions in terms of the category of the processes which are compatible with the intensive value of *bem*: they correspond always to proprieties.

The correspondence of an appreciative or an intensive value to *bem* depends on the way the notional domain to which the process is associated is structured. In the case of the appreciative value, the notional domain is organized in reference to a type or pattern occurrence, with the course through a class of discretive occurrences. In the case of the intensive value, the notional domain is organized in reference to the attractor centre, with the course through the different degrees of the propriety ordered through a gradient which begins in the attractor centre and finishes on the boundary of the notional domain (see Péroz, 1992: 71).

But in certain occurrence contexts, in which *bem* doesn't integrate the predicative syntactic domain, it displays a wide spectrum of semantic and pragmatic values.

These linguistic contexts are, mainly, question / answer adjacent pairs, integrated in a colloquial conversation. But we can also have monologue examples. For the purposes of this paper – the identification of dialogical values of *bem* in European Portuguese –, a corpus of spoken and colloquial conversations, including a corpus of literary occurrences, is to be analysed. Most of the sample occurrences belong to the Davies, Ferreira Corpus of the European Portuguese[4] , but we considered also a more restricted set of examples, collected in different communication situations.

Let's start by the next two examples:

5. – *Então, posso concluir que só te deram o emprego porque falas alemão...*
   – ***Bem**, eu também tenho bons conhecimentos de gestão e de informática...*
   (– So, I can conclude that you got the job because you speak German...
   – **well**, I also have some management and computer knowledge)

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6. *Aquele foi um dia importante para mim.* **Bem**, *só no dia seguinte é que
as coisas se definiram e se soube quem iria integrar a equipa.*
(That was an important day for me. **Well**, only in the day after things
were defined that it was known who would integrate the team.)

We can recognize a rectifying function in these utterances and the consequent reformulation or change of an element of the previous intervention (5) or period (6). The linguistic forms *também* ("also") (5) and *só* ("only") (6) mark, through its semantics, this "revision" of the previous propositional content – in 5, through the enlargement of the extent of the reference; in 6, through its restriction.

In a dialogical context, in which the interlocutor is the responsible for the previous intervention (5), *bem* introduces a retort that implies a certain disagreement with respect to the propositional content proposed by the co-enunciator. *Bem* marks a non-conformity value (in contrast to what we saw in relation to the examples 1 and 2 to whose appreciative value corresponds to a conformity value). This non-conformity value is simultaneously a concessive value. An evidence of this is the frequency of utterances with *bem* preceding the adversative conjunction *mas* ("but"). See the example 7:

7. – *Eu nunca faria aquilo de que me acusam. Até tenho pena desse senhor... Acha que eu lhe faria mal, que eu ía mandar matá-lo?*
– **Bem, mas** *há várias provas documentais de que ele trabalhou para si
e de que terá participado em situações que o comprometem.*
(– I would never do what you are accusing me of. I even have pity for
that man... Do you think I would issue orders to hurt him?
– **Well**, but there are several documentary proofs that he worked for
you and that he participated in situations that compromise you.)

Mas introduces an anti-orientation argument which expresses a speaker's reticence or discordance, towards the forward intervention's propositional content. But the co-occurrence of *bem*, as a linguistic resource that serves to attenuate such a disagreement (here as in the example 5), has an evident pragmatic effect that lessens the confrontation that comes upon that installed disagreement and the subsequent rectification. It is a mark of positive courtesy, a linguistic form that confirms the cooperation between the enunciator and the speaker and the interlocutor. It serves to reinforce the speaker's positive image, protecting the interlocutor's (negative) image.

This kind of utterances starts with an agreement which is typically a dialogical feature, as pragmatic category, for expressing something non-compromising, i.e., a disagreement. As Borderia's affirmation of similar linguistic contexts in Spanish, in these cases, "agreement is part of an argumentative move to express a hedged disagreement" (2003: 222). In this hedging operation, we have some modal determination operations. *Bem* hedges the previous propositional content by lowering the speaker's epistemic compromise with it.

Bem can occur with another associated value. Once again, this value is clearly constructed in reference to the speaker. This value is, therefore, a modal one. Take a look at the follow examples:

> 8. – *Professora, não fiz os trabalhos de casa.*
>   – **Bem**. *Temos que conversar*
>   (– Teacher, I didn't do my homework
>   – **Well**, we must talk)

> 9. – *Sabes quem vem connosco? O João.*
>   – **Bem**! *Que alegria*!
>   (– Do you know who's coming with us? John!
>   – **Well**! What an unspeakable joy!)

This is a meta-discourse value, which signals the reception of the message, but can associate a negative appreciative value (adjacent pair 8) or a positive appreciative value (adjacent pair 9). The enunciator expresses himself relative to the bad or good, unfavourable or favourable character of the last sequence's propositional content.

The construction of these values – negative or positive appreciation – depends above all on the prosodic characteristics which are less easily formally tractable[5] . The first value with which it is associated is a certain disenchantment (in the adjacent pair 8), which is marked by an intonation characterized by a voice tone that maintains the low levels. The second value (in the adjacent pair 9) is marked by an intonation characterized by an ascent of the voice tone in the production of *bem*, followed by a decrease that finishes in a suspension. In both cases, we have a very close usage of *bem* to that one when *bem* introduces a conclusive sequence (see after).

We can also admit that a usage of *bem* through which the speaker introduces an intensifying value with the possibility of an ironical interpretation that entails a construction of the positive appreciative value. Here, once again, we have an ascendant intonation and a syllabic enlargement. See the example 10:

> 10. – *O João é mesmo simpático*
>   – **Bem**!
>   (– John is a really nice person.
>   – **Well**!)

In another type and very frequent contexts, *bem* is used in association with question/answer contexts, introducing the answer to a question, and, as a consequence, pragmatically assigning it.

> 11. – *Está satisfeito com os serviços prestados pela impresa X*?
>   – **Bem**, *não*.
>   (– Are you satisfied with the enterprise X services?
>   – **Well**, no.)

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[5] The recognition of the prosodic features which characterize each utterance is essential to the description of its determination values. We subscribe the idea expressed in Campos (1998: 39): "[...] ao visar uma análise exaustiva da significação, a linguística não dará conta do fenómeno modal se não puder distinguir os esquemas de entoação específicos de cada valor, relacionando-os com os marcadores sintácticos com que esses esquemas se combinam".

12. – *Então, como é que é? Vens almoçar connosco*?
– **Bem**, *sim*.
(– So, are you coming to lunch with us?
– **Well**, yes.)

In interviews and inquiries (11), as well as in colloquial conversation, this using of *bem* has to do with the fact that the total interrogative pre-supposes a validation of the speaker's pre-constructed propositional content. In other words, it anticipates a yes-or-no answer. Because of the impossibility of corresponding in that way, the speaker doesn't answer categorically, expressing hesitation in the first moment. Thus, in the examples 11 and 12 it comes to be again very evident the *bem*'s concessive value and the fact of *bem* being orientated towards a hedged agreement (11) or acceptance (12).

Sequences such as *bem, sim / não* are usually uttered with a pause between *bem* and *não / sim*. And we have, in fact, two moments in terms of modal determination. In this sequence the speaker constructs what is called a "modal slide" (Campos, 1997: 155). *Bem* corresponds, in the first moment, to a hesitation, falling upon the propositional content. *Sim / não*, in the second moment, marks the assumption of the speaker of the previous propositional content validation, with an affirmative or a negative value. Thus, we have a modal phenomenon of "remodalization" (*idem*), through which two modal values result from two different modal operations: non-assumption and assumption of the propositional content validation. In this case the second operation always deconstructs the value constructed in the first operation.

Through this use of *bem* – introducing an answer whose question the speaker, thus, denounces orientated in a different sense of what himself preconizes – the speaker can also express a greater complexity associated to the question's topic. With this sense, in the following contexts, *bem* introduces a sort of a divergent answer, and its value results from the speaker's attempt not to impose his opinion.

13. – *Há muitos professores que, com metade dessa idade, se reformavam, se pudessem. Trata-se de um caso de coragem e de resistência às agruras da profissão?*
– **Bem**, *por um lado, as pessoas são diferentes umas das outras. Por outro, como sabe, tenho estado a dar aulas com licença especial.*
(– There are several teachers who, being half as old as you, would retire, if they could. In your case, is it courage or a resistance?
– **Well**, in one side, people are all different. On the other side, I have been teaching with a special licence.)

14. – *Que geração era a sua? Como classifica a família ideológica que a envolvia e inspirava*?
– **Bem**, *era confuso. Éramos uma geração muito anarquista. Cada um ia ao supermercado e abastecia-se daquilo de que gostava.*
(– Which generation is yours? How do you classify the family ideology that inspired you?
– **Well**, it was confused. We were a very anarchist generation. Each one used to go to the supermarket and provided himself with what he liked.)

15. – *Para além da concepção havia alguma ideia sobre quem faria a mon-*
tagem e o delinear do aspecto gráfico?
– **Bem**, *nós tínhamos a sensação de que a Revista com a missão que lhe*
tinha sido atribuída, foi fundada para não ser mais daquilo que ela é...
(– Beyond the conceptualisation, was there some idea about who
would do the setting and would outline the graphic image?
– **Well**, we had the feeling that the Magazine, with the kind of mis-
sion it had, was founded not to be more than what it was...)

This way, *bem* occurs in utterances that constitute what pragmatically are reactive in-
terventions and whose speaker refers the antecedent intervention's propositional con-
tent and comment on it. See the next adjacent pair:

16. – *O maior, o maciço apoio que a Renamo recebeu, de facto, foi o da*
própria população de Moçambique. Apoio interno! Em que moldes esse
apoio se traduziu?
 – **Bem**, *a Renamo expressava a revolta da própria população moçam-*
bicana.
(– In fact, the major support that Renamo received was that of the
Mozambican population. Domestic support! How was this support
in concrete terms?
– **Well**, Renamo expressed the Mozambican population's indignation.)

In a great majority of the contexts in which *bem* marks a discourse value in an answer
to a question, it precedes a subjective verb that marks the construction of an "un-
certain" epistemic value – for instance *crer* ("to believe"), *achar*, *pensar* ("to think"),
presumir ("to presume"), *supor* ("to suppose"). Less frequent is the co-occurrence of a
verb like *saber* (to know), which marks the construction of a "certain" epistemic value.

17. – *O que é bonito é ela ter alma, não é?*
– **Bem, suponho** *que sim.*
(– The beauty about this is the fact that she has a soul, isn't it?
– **Well**, I suppose yes.)

In 17, the co-occurrence of two linguistic forms with a role in the modal determina-
tion of the utterance configures an "overmodalization" operation (see Campos, 1997:
151). Belonging to different categories, both linguistic forms (*bem* and *suponho*) co-
occur marking the same modal value.

Let's examine another type of occurrence context and another kind of values that
affect *bem*, namely, the meta-discourse values. The meta-discourse values very fre-
quently affect *bem*. They are associated with the way in which the discourse is struc-
tured at an informational level and make part of a wide set of available procedure that
the speaker uses in order to build up the subjective adjustment which is a cross dimen-
sion to all the linguistic expression, but much more evident in the conversation. The
occurrence of *bem* corresponds in these cases to a linguistic marker of an inter-
subjective regulation effort. It is a determinative for the informational structure of the
dialogical exchange.

Thus, as a discourse marker and, more specifically, a conversational marker, *bem* can also signal the opening of a conversation, as it is illustrated in the next examples:

> 18. – (the doctor to the patient) **Bem**, *vamos lá a ver o que temos aqui*
>   (**Well**, let's see what we have here)

> 19. – (an adult to children, even not knowing them) **Bem**, *meninos, acabou a bricadeira*
>   (**Well**, children, the game is over)

Bem is always a reactive linguistic form which opens the conversation as seen in both examples. It signals the acceptance of the use of the word, introducing, in each of these sequences, cordial nuances.

In the following examples, *bem* marks firstly the reception of the message and, secondly, the turn change associated with the theme change. Again, introducing cordial nuances, it signals a cooperation effort with the interlocutor.

> 20. – *Cheguei também a escrever que a terra deveria ser nacionalizada e entregue – sem indemnização! – aos trabalhadores*
>   – **Bem**, *então o que o separava da esquerda?*
>   (– It happened to me being writing that the land should be nationalized and given – without any indemnification! – to the workers.
>   – **Well**, so, what separated you from the left?)

> 21. – *Mas a sua embaixada aqui em Lisboa era favorável a uma situação revolucionária em Portugal.*
>   – **Bem**... *para voltar à sua questão sobre a nossa derrota, devo dizer-lhe que os militares também 'borregaram'*
>   (– But your embassy here in Lisbon was in favour of a revolutionary situation in Portugal.
>   – **Well**... coming back to your question about our defeat, I shall tell you that the military also renounced to a token decision)

Preceding a theme change, *bem* marks a sequential rupture, often introducing the "pre-conclusion" of the conversation.

> 22. *Tive contactos directos com ele e percebi que não tinha capacidade para estar à frente de coisíssima nenhuma!* **Bem**, *para finalmente lhe responder, perante o impasse criado pelo recuo do PC e as reticências dos militares [...], houve uma reunião no Palácio Foz*
>   (I had direct contact with him and I understood that he had no ability to lead whatever it was! **Well**, finally, in answering you, before the impasse created through the PC's retreat and the military hesitation [...], there was a meeting in the Palácio Foz)

> 23. [...] *para além dos 'velhos do Restelo' que diziam que nós não éramos capazes de fazer e manter uma revista, a 'nossa revista' afinal tinha sido e continua a ser um sucesso.* **Bem, em resumo, esta era a ideia inicial do Ministro...**
>   ([...] beyond the "Velhos do Restelo" saying that we weren't able to make and to maintain the magazine, finally, 'our magazine' had been

and continues to be a success. **Well**, in short, this was the Minister's initial idea.)

Very often this pre-conclusion anticipates a farewell.

> 24. – *Atão! Já anda para aí muita caloirada.*
> – ***Bem****, ainda ficas?*
> (– So, there is already a lot of "caloirada" around
> – **Well**, do you still remain?)

> 25. – ***Bem****, a ver se nos encontramos para conversar mais.*
> (– **Well**, we'll meet again to talk more)

> 26. – ***Bem****, vou-me embora.*
> (– **Well**, I'm going)

> 27. – ***Bem****, adeus, até ao meu regresso.*
> (**Well**, goodbye, till my return.)

As a meta-discourse marker, *bem* can establish a thematic continuity instead of a rupture. It serves the conversation progress when it processes the information, introducing a synthesis, a resume (28) or a systematization (29).

> 28. – *"Last but not least", o sector financeiro.*
> – *Sim, com o Banco Totta e a companhia de seguros Império. **Bem**... no essencial, em 74 era isso.*
> (– Last but not least, the financial sector.
> – Yes, with the Totta Bank and the insurance enterprise Império. **Well**... essentially, in 74 it was like this.)

> 29. – *...e tresleu?*
> – ***Bem****, há duas coisas: a primeira foi tudo o que lhe acabei de dizer sobre África* [...]
> (– ... and did you read backwards?
> – **Well**, there are two things: the first was everything I just told you about Africa; the second [...])

When *bem* establishes the thematic continuity through the information accumulation, it can introduce sequences that, in a discourse perspective, allow the recapture of the central theme (30) or, in contrast, that are in some respect a digression (31).

> 30. *Ia com eles, atenta ao caminho e com pouca atenção ao que se passava ao nosso redor. **Bem**, o certo é que eles julgaram tê-lo visto...*
> (– I was with them, attentive to the road and not paying attention to what was happening around. **Well**, the fact is that they thought they saw him...)

> 31. ***Bem****, para nós isso não interessava nada, o importante era competir...*
> (*Well*, for us it has no importance, the most important was to contest).

The introduction of a sequence which is, at a discourse level, digressive or lateral in relation to the preceding sequence can include a more precise expression. Therefore, we can consider that *bem* shares some functional properties with other "reformulators".

Besides, this function and the one (already mentioned) that indicates the thematic continuity coincide because both introduce in the communicative context a sequence which the speaker considers more adequate.

> 32. *Recordo-me que as palavras do meu tio me fazia sentir... **bem**, me fez*
>   *sentir algumas vezes que seria capaz de superar aquele fracasso...*
>   (I remember that my uncle's words used to make me feel... **well**, made
>   me feel once that I should be able to excel beyond [...])

In the example 33, *bem* marks the recapture of previously introduced theme, after some side remarks or digression:

> 33. *Havia de tudo na vila: uma bela biblioteca, uma sala de espectáculos...*
>   *Todas as semanas assistia a um concerto, uma performance... Como eu*
>   *gostava. **Bem**. Tomar era o sítio ideal para se viver.*
>   (There was everything in that small town: a good library, an audito-
>   rium... I used to go to a concert or a performance on a weekly basis
>   ... How nice it was. **Well**, Tomar was the ideal place to live.)

Before the conclusion, I would like to make reference to the fact that the discourse marker *bem* can occur in duplication (*bem, bem*) and accepts a gradation (*muito bem* "very well"). In this case it implies a modal appreciation of the sequence it affects. This possibility comes from the appreciative value that the homonymous adverb marks (see sequences 1 and 2).

The proposed description allows us to conclude that there is a strict relation between the discourse functions of *bem* and the variability of its semantic values, namely its modal values. Every time that *bem*, as a reactive form, expresses a cooperation strategy between the interlocutors and every time that it expresses the non-acceptance of a preceding sequence (contributing, thus, to the conversation progress and structure), the different values that *bem* assumes are constructed either in reference to the speaker either in reference to the discourse sequence, defining its degree of validation and its discourse orientation.

In a theoretical level, these descriptive observations allow us to conceive a semantic approach about the meaning of the linguistic units:

1. The linguistic units meaning is not exclusively inherent; it is constructed in and through the linguistic context, at the same time, it determines the signification of the entire sequence. In other words, the meaning of a linguistic unit doesn't exist by itself; but it is defined via the several ways in which it is related to the linguistic context.

2. The identity of a linguistic unit doesn't correspond to any basic sense; it has to do with the specific role it plays in the interactions that constitutes the general meaning of the linguistic sequences. In other words, the sense of a linguistic unit is not apprehensible as the sense of the unit itself, but through the variation of the outcome of such interactions.

3. A linguistic unit does not possess proper sense and figurative sense. We have, consequently, the hypothesis of a multidimensional organization of sense.

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