Polarity, expression of degree and negation: the vernacular form caraças

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Abstract
This paper presents the vernacular form caraças which, in European Portuguese (EP) is associated to multiple contexts, different from its use as a feminine common noun. The data I will present shows that caraças behaves as a polarity item, without referential interpretation. On the one hand, caraças behaves as a minimizer, a subtype of Negative Polarity Item (NPI), being associated to the lowest point of a scale of value. On the other hand, it also behaves as a Positive Polarity Item (PPI), expressing maximal degree, therefore being a maximizer. The fact that caraças occurs simultaneously as a NPI and a PPI could indicate we are in the presence of a bipolar element, as described by van der Wouden (1997). Nevertheless, data suggests that there are two distinct items caraças, one of them being a NPI and the other a PPI.
The form caraças is also associated to other contexts of use, namely as a metalinguistic negation marker and in evaluative constructions such as N-of-an-N constructions. We also find it functioning as an interjection in exclamatory sentences. Although the feminine common noun caraça (augmentative of cara ‘face’) remains in the lexicon as synonym of masca, the polarity item caraças does not result from a process of grammaticalization of the common noun, as documented for other polarity items. In this paper I will put forth the idea that caraças, in its masculine singular form, appeared as a euphemistic variant of cunhalho ‘dick’, a highly offensive taboo term, used to designate the masculine sexual organ.

Keywords
polarity items; taboo terms; degree; negation

Contents
1. Introduction. 2. The common noun caraça and the form caraças. 3. Caraças as a polarity item. 4. A bipolar item or two different items? 5. Other uses of caraças. 6. The origin of the non-nominal uses of caraças. 7. Conclusion.

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1. Introduction

According to Israel (2001), words denoting minimal degrees are usually used as negative polarity items (NPIs), while words denoting maximal degrees give rise to positive polarity items (PPIs). It is, therefore, unexpected that one same item can be used both as a PPI and a NPI, expressing minimal and maximal degree, simultaneously. This is, apparently, the case of the European Portuguese (EP) item caraças.

In this paper I will investigate the item caraças, which is used in EP both as a PPI and a NPI and I will try to understand whether we are in the presence of a single item with mixed behavior or, alternatively, two independent items with the same lexical form. I will also show that the form caraças is associated to other contexts of use, such as evaluative constructions, as an interjection and associated to metalinguistic negation (Horn 1989). Finally, I will put forth a possible explanation for the emergence of caraças, in its multiple uses in colloquial language, as a replacement for another item considered offensive, i.e. caralho (slang word for ‘penis’).

2. The common noun caraça and the form caraças

In Portuguese, the word caraça is dictionarized as a feminine common noun meaning ‘mask’. It is also registered as being the augmentative form of the noun cara ‘face’ and it can be used depreciatively to refer to an ugly face. Below we reproduce the corresponding lexical entry:

Caraça. s. f.
Máscara de papelão; carranca 2. Fig. Cara larga e cheia: “era um figurão baixo, reboludo, de pancinha soprada, caraça balofa com manchas vermelhas” (José Gomes Ferreira, O Mundo dos Outros, pág. 177) 3. V. carantonha. •S. m. 4. Boi ou cavalo com malha branca no focinho.¹

(Ferreira 1986: 346)

Its use as a common noun can be tracked back as early as the 17th century², as illustrated in (1), where it appears with the meaning of mask, and (2), where it is used to refer to an unattractive face.

1. Caraça. s. f.: Cardboard mask; frown 2. Fig. Large and full face. 3. See ugly face. 4. Ox or horse with a white stain in the nose.
2. The Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa indicates a much later date for the first attestation, namely 1771.
(1) E afirmo a VM que me não parecem isto biocos nem caraças, mas que hão de ser obras.

‘And I tell you that this do not look like veils nor masks to me but they must be deeds.’

(Post Scriptum, PSCR1418, 1600-1603)

(2) Brites: Se da minha fermusura/ tu tens raiva, minha Páscoa,/ tem pasciência, que assim como eu sou tão fermosa o poderias ser tu/ e eu ter essa caraça.

‘Brites: If my beauty makes you angry, my dear, be patient, because, just like I am beautiful, you could be too and I could have that ugly face instead.’

(Teatro de autores portugueses do Séc. xvii – Base de datos textual: Anónimo, O Pai Ambrósio)

In both examples, caraça is a common noun and displays feminine gender. In (1) it appears in its plural form, while in (2) it is singular. Contemporary examples such as (3) and (4) illustrate, however, a use of the form caraças which is different from the ones presented before. In both cases the interpretation of the item does not correspond to any of the meanings listed in the dictionary entry above³.

(3) Aquilo demonstra uma preparação física do caraças.

‘That reveals a hell of a physical preparation.’

(Corpus CetemPublico, par=ext1066477-clt-92a-2)

(4) «Teste amanhã e ainda não estudei um caraças.»

‘Test tomorrow and I have not studied a thing yet.’

(Twitter, 21/05/2018)

3. Since there is absolutely no relation between the item caraças and the common noun caraça in terms of meaning, and, therefore, there is no translation available, I have decided to use the form of the item itself in the glosses. Whenever we are in the presence of the common noun the gloss will be “mask”.
The first piece of evidence that clearly shows that *caraças* in (3) and (4) does not correspond to the plural form of the common noun *caraça* is the lack of referential meaning. None of the sentences admits a referential reading of the item, as we conclude by the awkwardness of sentences (5) and (6) in which the item *caraças* was replaced by the synonym common noun *máscara* ‘mask’.

(5) #Aquilo demonstra uma preparação física da máscara

‘That reveals a physical preparation of the mask’

(6) #Teste amanhã e ainda não estudei uma máscara.

‘Test tomorrow and I have not studied a mask.’

The presence of *máscara* in (5) and (6) produces a sentence with a different interpretation from the ones in (3) and (4). Additionally, in example (4), the reading of *um caraças* as a Direct Object (DO) of the verb *estudar* ‘study’ is optional, while in (6), when interpreted as synonym of *máscara* ‘mask’, it is mandatory. Sentence (4) corresponds to a context of optionally transitive verb, allowing for the interpretation of *um caraças* as a DO or as a negation reinforcement particle (about optionally transitive verbs and negation see Willis 2010, 2012; Parry 2013, a.o.), this last reading not being available for the common noun *máscara*.

A second observation that indicates that *caraças* is independent from the common noun is related to its θ-features. While in (1) and (2) the common noun *caraça* displays feminine morphology and it agrees with the feminine possessive determiner *essa* ‘that’ in (2), that is not the case in examples (3) and (4). Here we find *caraças* occurring with the definite determiner *a* ‘the’, as in (3), and with the indefinite determiner *um* ‘a’, as in (4), both in the masculine. The replacement of the masculine determiners by their feminine counterparts would render the sentences ungrammatical, as we can see in (7), where we find the feminine definite determiner *a* ‘the’ and in (8), with de indefinite feminine determiner *uma* ‘a’:

(7) *Aquilo demonstra uma preparação física da caraças.

(8) *Teste amanhã e ainda não estudei uma caraças.

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Similarly, both sentences (3) and (4) present an apparent plural form of the noun *caraça* due to the presence of the final *<s>*. Nevertheless, there is no number agreement between the item and the determiners preceding it, since both determiners occur in the singular. Once again, replacing the singular determiners by their plural counterparts would render the sentences ungrammatical, as illustrated in (9) and (10). This indicates that *caraças* displays plural morphology (visible in the final *<s>* ) but singular number.

(9) *Aquilo demonstra uma preparação física dos caraças.*
    that Shows. 3sg a preparation physical of.the MASC.PL CARAÇAS

(10) *Teste amanhã e ainda não estudei uns caraças.*
    test tomorrow and yet NEG studied. 1SG a. MASC.PL CARAÇAS.

In fact, *caraças* in (3) and (4) is neutral as far as gender and number are concerned (there is singular masculine agreement by default), precisely due to its non-nominal nature.

At this point, it can be stated that the contemporary use of *caraças* illustrated in (3) and (4) does not correspond to the common noun *caraça* but it is actually a polarity item. Later on, in section 6, I will discuss the etymology of *caraças*, whose origin will become clear after its behavior as a polarity item (and associated uses) is thoroughly described.

### 3. Caraças as a polarity item

As we have seen in the previous section, there seems to be two different items with the form *caraça(s)*: one which is a common noun and another which is not. In the present section I will try to show that the non-nominal item *caraças* is actually a polarity item.

Languages display certain lexical items that can only appear in environments associated with a particular grammatical polarity: these items are known as polarity items and are usually divided into positive polarity items (PPI) and negative polarity items (NPI). Following Giannakidou (2011:74), “AFFIRMATIVE PIS,

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4. There are some NPIs that alternate between a form with a similar final *<s>* and another without it. One example of this alternation is the NPI *népia*, which can also occur under the form *népias*, which does not correspond to a plural form.

5. A third category needs also to be considered – modal polarity items (MPI’s) – in the sense of Bosque (1996). Some authors also recognize the existence of bipolar items (cf. van der Wouden 1997 and Spector 2012).
or POSITIVE PIS (PPIS) are expressions that are ‘repelled’ by negation and tend to escape its scope”. On the other hand, according to Horn (1989: 49), NPIs are “expressions which can only appear felicitously within the scope of negation (or a semantically related operator)”.

Examples from (11) to (13) present the common noun caraça and the polarity item caraças in three sentences with different polarity: affirmative assertive, modal and negative, accordingly.

(11)  a. O Pedro comprou uma caraça para o Carnaval.  
the Pedro bought a_FEM.SG mask for the Carnival  
‘Pedro bought a mask for Carnival.’

b. Este livro é do caraças.  
this book is of.the_MASC.SG CARAÇAS  
‘This book is awesome.’

(12)  a. Se tivesse aquela caraça não saía à rua.  
if had.1SG that_FEM.SG mask NEG go.out.1SG to.the street  
‘If I had that face, I would not go out on the street.’

b. Se fizesse um caraças não estarias aborrecido.  
if did.2SG a_MASC.SG CARAÇAS NEG would.be.2SG bored  
‘If you did anything, you would not be bored.’

(13)  a. Na loja não havia uma caraça que fosse assustadora  
in.the store NEG there.was a_FEM.SG mask that was.3SG scary  
‘There was not one scary mask at the store.’

b. Este livro não vale um caraças.  
this book NEG be.worth a_MASC.SG CARAÇAS  
‘This book is not worth anything.’

As it becomes clear from the comparison between the sentences in a. and b. from (11) to (13), only the common noun in a. maintains the referential meaning of mask or ugly face, regardless of the sentence in which it occurs. On the other hand, caraças as a polarity item in b. acquires different meaning depending on the polar context in which it occurs. In an affirmative assertive sentence such as (11b), caraças has positive interpretation, expressing a very positive evaluation of the book. Its presence in the sentence can be considered equivalent to saying that the book was very good. When in
the scope of a modal operator, such as in (12b), where it occurs within a conditional clause, caraças is a NPI with positive reading (existential reading), equivalent to anything. Finally in (13b) it appears in the scope of the negative operator não and has negative interpretation, similar to nothing.

A closer observation of the sentences in b., with the polarity item caraças, makes clear that the item has scalar properties. In the affirmative sentence (11b), caraças actually expresses a maximal degree. Saying that the film was do caraças is equivalent to saying that it was good in a very high degree. On the other hand, in (13b) caraças is used to reinforce a negative degree. If one says that the film was not worth um caraças that means it was not worth the most minimal amount, and, therefore, it is worthless. In (11b) we find caraças being used as a maximizer, while in (13) it is a minimizer. I will consider that maximizers are a subtype of Positive Polarity Items (PPI) that refer to maximal degrees, while minimizers are a subtype of Negative Polarity Items (NPI) which refer to minimal units of size or value (cf. Hoeksema 2001).

The fact that, apparently, caraças can occur in sentences with affirmative, modal and negative polarity brings an issue to the discussion. As stated before, PPIs are repelled by negation, the same way NPIs are not possible in affirmative assertive sentences. How is it, then, that the item caraças is legitimated in both contexts, presenting itself simultaneously as a PPI and a NPI? Two possibilities arise: one is to consider that caraças is what van der Wouden (1997) called a bipolar element; the other is to assume that there are two items caraças (apart from the common noun caraça), one being a PPI and another a NPI. Nevertheless, before addressing this question, let us take a brief look at the internal structure of the maximizer and minimizer expressions that include caraças, since this will prove relevant to determine its classification as a single polarity item or, instead, two distinct polarity items.

When we look at example (11b) on the one hand, and examples (12b) and (13b), on the other, we realize there is a difference regarding the internal structure of the polarity expressions. In (11b), where caraças is a maximizer (and, therefore, a PPI), it appears as the nominal head of a definite Determiner Phrase (DP) which is, by its

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6. An anonymous reviewer draws attention to the fact that the evaluation conveyed by caraças may not be positive at all times. In fact, the function of caraças as a PPI is to express maximal degree, and this can be associated to a negative evaluation, as in example (i). Nevertheless, the possibility of emphasizing a negative characteristic does not affect its PPI status.

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(i) Apenas a vizinha do 5.º andar é uma chata do caraças

Only the neighbour of the fifth floor is a boring of the caras

‘Only the neighbor from the fifth floor is as boring as hell.’

Corpus do Português: (Web/Dialects)
A different scenario is observed in examples (12b) and (13b) where *caraças* is a minimizer (and, therefore, a NPI) and appears as a nominal head of an indefinite DP (*um caraças*). The relevant fact here is that the minimizer cannot occur as the DP complement of a PP but the maximizer must occur in this configuration. Examples from (14) to (16) illustrate these restrictions.

(14)  
   a. [PP d [DP o caraças]]
   Este livro é [PP of [DP theDefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]]
   this book is

   b. *[DP o caraças]
   [DP theDefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]

   c. *[DP um caraças]
   [DP aIndefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]

(15)  
   a. [DP um caraças]
   [DP aIndefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]
   Se fizesses
   if did:2SG
   b. *[PP d [DP o caraças]]  não estarias aborrecido
   [PP of [DP theDefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]] neg would.be:2SG bored
   c. *[DP o caraças]
   [DP theDefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]

(16)  
   a. [DP um caraças]
   [DP aIndefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]
   Este livro não vale
   this book neg be.worth
   b. *[PP d [DP o caraças]]
   [PP of [DP theDefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]]
   c. *[DP o caraças]
   [DP theDefMASC.SG CARAÇAS]

The ungrammaticality of the examples in b. and c. clearly shows that the PPI maximizer must assume the form (*d)o caraças and appear as the complement of a PP. On the other hand, the NPI minimizer is always the indefinite DP *um caraças*.

7. For the intended discussion of the data it is not crucial to elaborate on a more fine-grained internal structure of the DP containing the item *caraças. For sake of simplicity we will also refer to *um and *o in *um caraças and *o caraças as corresponding to the definite and the indefinite determiners, respectively. Nevertheless, the classification of *um as a cardinal number (cf. Tubau 2016) is not discarded by our option.
4. A bipolar item or two different items?

The term *bipolar element* was used by van der Wouden (1997) to classify items that display mixed behavior between PPIs and NPIs. The author considers that a bipolar element is a negative polarity item (of the weakest type) which is only licensed in a monotone decreasing context and in antimorphic contexts. On the other hand, it is a (weak) positive polarity item in causing ungrammaticality in antimorphic contexts, that is to say, under the scope of direct negation.

According to van der Wouden (1997) a bipolar item may occur in a monotone decreasing (downward entailing) context. Monotone decreasing contexts allow inferences from a set to a subset, as illustrated in (17) with *do caraças* and (18) with *um caraças*.

(17)  
\begin{align*}
a. & \text{ Duvido que o Luís tenha comprado um livro.}  
\text{doubt}_{1SG} \text{ that the Luís has bought a book}  
\text{‘I doubt Luís has bought a book.}  
b. & \text{ Duvido que o Luís tenha comprado um livro do } \text{caraças}  
\text{doubt}_{1SG} \text{ that the Luís has bought a book of the MASC.SG CARAÇAS}  
\text{‘I doubt Luís has bought an awesome book.’}
\end{align*}

(18)  
\begin{align*}
a. & \text{ Duvido que o Luís tenha dormido.}  
\text{doubt}_{1SG} \text{ that the Luís has slept}  
\text{‘I doubt Luís has slept.’}  
b. & \text{ Duvido que o Luís tenha dormido um } \text{caraças.}  
\text{doubt}_{1SG} \text{ that the Luís has slept a MASC.SG CARAÇAS}  
\text{‘I doubt Luís has slept a thing.’}
\end{align*}

In both cases, we can infer that, if what is stated in the first sentence (sentence \(a\)) is true, then the proposition of the second sentence (sentence \(b\)) is also true. Nevertheless, if we reverse the order of the sentences, creating a monotone increasing context (or upward entailing), only the pair in (18) can be inferred. In (18), if I say that Luís did not sleep, it is implicit that he did not sleep a thing. On the other hand, if Luís did not sleep a thing, it is also true that he did not sleep. However, the same logic does not apply in (17). If I doubt that Luís bought a book, it is true that I also doubt that he bought an awesome book. But if I doubt that he bought an awesome book, one cannot infer that I doubt he bought a book (I may believe that he bought a very bad book).
Additionally, bipolar items are said to be ruled out from antimorphic contexts, under the scope of direct negation. Compare examples (19) and (20).

(19) #O CR7 não é um jogador do caraças.
the CR7 NEG is a player of the MASC.SG caraças
‘CR7 is not an awesome player.’

(20) O CR7 não joga um caraças.
the CR7 NEG is a MASC.SG caraças
‘CR7 does not play a thing.’

While the scope of negation is the most frequent licensing context for um caraças, and, therefore, the sentence is grammatical, the occurrence of do caraças in the direct scope of a negative operator renders the sentence unnatural. These contrasts clearly indicate that um caraças behaves like a NPI, while do caraças behaves like a PPI. Further evidence is given in examples (21) to (23).

The observation of examples below shows that the two polarity expressions including caraças cannot occur in the same contexts. In (21) the PPI, but not the NPI, can occur in affirmative assertive sentences, while only the NPI is adequate in a negative context like (22). They are both possible in a modal context such as (23), in the protasis of a conditional sentence, since both PPIs and weak NPIs are legitimated in such environments.

(21) a. *O filme vale um caraças!
the film is.worth a MASC.SG caraças
‘The film is worth a thing’. (minimizer reading intended)

b. O filme é do caraças!
the film is of the MASC.SG caraças
‘The film is awesome.’

(22) a. O filme não vale um caraças!
the film NEG is worth a MASC.SG caraças
‘The film is not worth a thing.’

b. #O filme não é do caraças!
the film NEG is of the MASC.SG caraças
‘The film is not awesome’
Another argument in favor of the existence of two different items sharing the same form is illustrated by metalinguistic negation contexts. Metalinguistic negation (Horn 1989) is a type of negation which depends on a specific discursive context and does not imply the truth or falsity of the propositions being denied. It is based on the notion of assertability of an utterance and, therefore, it does not constitute an instance of logical negation. In negative concord languages, such as Portuguese, metalinguistic negation does not trigger negative concord phenomena, therefore being incompatible with NPIs, but licensing PPIs under its scope. Examples (24) and (25) below illustrate the compatibility or incompatibility of the NPI *um caraças* and the PPI *(d)* *o caraças* in metalinguistic negation contexts.

As mentioned before, metalinguistic negation differs from regular negation. Most instances of metalinguistic negation are reinterpreted as such only in the presence of a corrective statement that usually follows the negative sentence. These statements are what Horn calls garden-path utterances and their function is to clarify the reason why the speaker rejects a certain fact by means of metalinguistic negation. This means that most cases of metalinguistic negation are only interpreted as such after the garden-path utterance is produced. If no garden-path utterance is present (or somehow understood), then the negative sentence will be interpreted as regular negation.

In (24), the presence of the NPI is incompatible with the interpretation of the sentence as metalinguistic negation, which becomes clear after the garden-path utterance is introduced. Since in this case the negative sentence does not express regular negation, it does not trigger negative concord and, therefore, it does not legitimate the presence of the NPI.

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8. This does not apply when we have unambiguous metalinguistic negation markers.
(24) Este filme não vale um caraças. É o melhor filme de sempre.

‘This film is not worth a thing. It is the best film ever.’

On the other hand, PPIs are allowed in metalinguistic negation contexts such as (25), precisely because we are not in the presence of regular negation (which would be incompatible with PPIs).

(25) Este filme não é do caraças. É o melhor filme de sempre.

‘This film is not awesome. It is the best film ever.’

We have seen so far that, not only caraças is not a single element with mixed behaviour, falling under the category of van der Wouden (1997)’s bipolar elements, but also that both the PPI (d)o caraças and the NPI um caraças assume rigid forms.9.

As expected, the NPI can only occur in negative and modal contexts, being ruled out from affirmative assertive sentences. It is always an indefinite DP that seems to occur with most verbs. Differently, the PPI is licensed in affirmative assertive and modal contexts but it cannot occur in the scope of negation. It assumes the form of a definite DP, but it must be the complement of a PP introduced by the preposition de ‘of’. The only exception is when it occurs in comparative sentences with como ‘as’ (apparently a comparative of equality), as in (26). It can appear with adjectives, as in (26), but also with a verbal form (27) or, eventually, with a noun (28)10.

9. An anonymous reviewer argues in favour of a polysemic status of the item caraças. I consider that all the uses described for caraças are built upon the common noun and emerge due to its strong emphatic meaning. Nevertheless, both the NPI and the PPI are syntactically independent items and seem to function as indivisible units (it is not possible to insert lexical material such as an adjective between the two units forming the NPI um caraças, as in *um só caraças) 10. Data from corpora shows a use of caraças that seems to correspond to a PPI but assuming a bare form and selected by a PP introduced by the preposition para ‘for’, as in (i):

(i) É lento pra caraças.

‘It is as slow as hell’

Corpus do Português (Web/Dialects)
Polarity, expression of degree and negation: the vernacular form caraças

(26) Ele fala alto como o caraças.

‘He talks as loud as hell’

(27) Choveu como o caraças, ontem.

‘It rained as hell, yesterday.’

(28) Vi pessoas como o caraças na rua.

‘I saw a hell of people in the street.’

The PPI also presents a much stricter group of contexts in which it may appear. Excluding comparative sentences like (26) to (28), its use is circumscribed to predicative contexts, mainly with verbs *ser* and *estar* ‘to be’ 11 (29) or directly modifying a DP as in (30). The DP can be indefinite as in (30), definite as in (31), or assume the form of a bare noun as illustrated in (32).

(29) Este bolo é / está do caraças.

‘This cake is awesome.’

(30) O Pedro tem uma força do caraças.

‘Pedro is fucking strong.’

(31) Vê a sorte do caraças que o Rui teve!

‘Look at the hell of a luck Rui had!’

(32) Há dias do caraças!

‘There are awesome days.’

11. It can also occur with other predicate verbs such as *parecer* ‘to seem’, *ficar* ‘to remain’.

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5. Other uses of caraças

Caraças is a very productive item in colloquial oral speech. As we have seen in the previous sections, it can still occur as a common noun and it is used both as a PPI maximizer and a NPI minimizer. Despite these contexts, caraças can also be found occurring with other independent uses, such as that of a metalinguistic negation marker, under the form of the definite DP o caraças. I have previously introduced the notion of metalinguistic negation to test the possibility of the NPI um caraças and the PPI (d)o caraças appear in such contexts. Here I will focus on the use of caraças as an unambiguous metalinguistic negation marker, comparing it to other similar markers available in EP.

The term metalinguistic negation was used by Horn (1989) to refer to contexts as the one illustrated in (33), in which the negative sentence does not imply the falsity of the fact under statement but is related to the assertability of the utterance.

(33) I didn’t manage to trap two mongeese – I managed to trap two mongooses.

(Horn 1989: 371)

In Horn’s own words, metalinguistic negation is

a device for objecting to a previous utterance on any grounds whatever, including the conventional or conversational implicata it potentially induces, its morphology, its style or register, or its phonetic realization.

(Horn 1989: 377)

In EP, metalinguistic negation can be conveyed by sentences equivalent to the one in (33), as shown in (34), but EP also exhibits unambiguous metalinguistic negation markers.

(34) Eles não têm três filhos. Têm quatro!

They neg have three sons Have.3PL four

"They do not have three kids. They have four!"

12. Blogs and personal websites are said to present an informal register similar to colloquial oral speech. It is not surprising, therefore, that caraças is frequent in this type of source and its occurrence is registered in all the contexts described in this paper. A search in the Web/Dialects subpart of Corpus do Português returns 1875 occurrences of caraças, most of which do not correspond to the original nominal use.
One of the features proposed by Horn (1989) to distinguish regular negation from metalinguistic negation is related to its compatibility with PPIs and NPIs. As we have seen in the previous section, metalinguistic negation is compatible with PPIs but does not legitimate NPIs, since it does not trigger negative concord. In (35) and (36) I illustrate the occurrence of the metalinguistic negation marker o caraças with the PPI dos diabos (lit. ‘of the devils’) and the NPI nem morta (lit. ‘not even dead’), respectively.

(35) A: O paciente teve uma sorte dos diabos.
the patient had a luck of the devils
A: ‘The patient had a hell of a luck.’
B: Teve uma sorte dos diabos, o caraças. Ia morrendo.
had a luck of the devils the caraças went dying.
B: He had a hell of a luck, my butt. He almost died.

(36) A: Hoje cozinhas tu!
today cook you!
A: ‘You’re cooking today!’
B: *Cozinho, o caraças nem morta.
cook the caraças not even dead
B: ‘The hell I’m cooking, not even dead’

As expected, o caraças is compatible with the PPI dos diabos in (35) but not with the NPI nem morta in (36). It also requests the presence of a previous discursive background to which the speakers can object to.

According to Martins (2010, 2012) metalinguistic negation markers can be internal, such as lá (lit. ‘there’) and cá (lit. ‘here’), or peripheral, as agora (lit. ‘now’) and nada (lit. ‘nothing’) (for this last one see Pinto 2010). In the group of peripheral markers we also find idiomatic expressions such as uma ova (lit. ‘a fish egg’). I will try to show that caraças behaves as a peripheral idiomatic metalinguistic negation marker.

A characteristic feature of peripheral metalinguistic negation markers is that they can co-occur with regular negation in the same sentence. As example (37) illustrates, o caraças behaves as a peripheral idiomatic metalinguistic negation marker in respect to this point, having scope over the negative sentence.
(37) «Tom, não esquento»

Tom NEG heat

«Não esquento, o caraças! Não saio daqui sem saber.

NEG heat,1SG the_MASC,SG CARAÇAS NEG leave,1SG of.here without know

‘Don’t overreact, my butt! I will not leave here without knowing.’

(Santos 2005: 520)

A similar context with internal markers would be ruled out, as illustrated by example (38), where the negative sentence can only be rejected by means of a peripheral marker such as o caraças or uma ova, but not with lá/cá.

(38) A: Nunca mais faltei às aulas.

never more missed,1SG to.the classes.

A: ’I never missed classes again.’

B: Nunca mais faltaste às aulas, *cá/lá

never more missed,2SG to.the classes here/there

uma oval nada o caraças

a_FEM,SG nothing/ the_MASC,SG CARAÇAS

B: ’You never missed classes again, my butt/ ass.

The marker o caraças is also compatible with the emphatic adverb sempre (‘always’) (cf. Gonzaga 1997), just as verified for other peripheral markers (cf. Pinto 2010), but contrary to what happens with internal markers. Please observe examples (38) and (39), which illustrate both phenomena.

(39) A: Afinal sempre choveu.

after.all always rained

A: ’It did rain after all.’

B: Sempre choveu, *cá/lá uma oval nada o caraças

always rained, here/there a_FEM,SG ova nothing the_MASC,SG CARAÇAS

B: ’It did rain after all, my butt/ ass.
Furthermore, peripheral markers are said to be able to occur alone or with nominal fragments, contrary to internal markers which return ungrammatical results in these contexts (cf. Martins 2012). Examples below show that *o caraças* presents similar behavior to the peripheral markers *uma ova* and *nada*, but differently from the internal ones *câllá*, being able to occur both with nominal fragments (40) and alone (41).

(40) É que embirrou que queria ter o vidro aberto fresh air - dizia! Fresh air o caraças

*The thing is that (s)he insisted (s)he wanted the window open – fresh air – (s)he said! Fresh air, my butt/ass. (Corpus do Português: Web/Dialects)*

(41) Ah e tal mas é tão bom sentir o frio e usar cachecóis quentinhos e a lareira acesa e o frio e nhénhénhé. O caraças!

*Oh, and come on, it is so nice to feel the cold and wear warm scarfs and the fireplace burning and the cold and bla bla bla. My butt/ass! (Corpus do Português: Web/Dialects)*

From the examples above we can conclude that *o caraças* is a metalinguistic negation marker in EP, belonging to the set of peripheral markers. It is, nevertheless, associated to a very colloquial register and metalinguistic negation involving *o caraças* may be considered rude and offensive.

Under the form of a definite DP, *caraças* is also used as what is usually referred in the literature as a N-of-an-N construction (cf. Kayne 1994; Bennis et al. 1998). This use is illustrated in (42):

13. In Brito (2003), these constructions are referred to as *qualitative expressions.*
N-of-an-N constructions are composed by a sequence of a Noun followed by a preposition (in some languages the preposition does not exist) and a second Noun.

Among the main features of this construction are the fact that the first Noun cannot be set apart from the rest of the construction (that is to say, the PP), as illustrated in (43). Additionally, it is never the real direct object of the sentence, as highlighted in (44a). Only the second noun of the sequence can be interpreted as the DO, fulfilling the selection criteria imposed by the verb, as in (44b).

For these (and many other) reasons, the first Noun is considered to be semi-functional. The nature of the nouns participating in the construction, as well as its internal structure are ongoing topics of research, but outscope the purpose of this paper (see Alexiadou et al. 2007 and references therein for an overall discussion). Nevertheless, what I want to highlight here is the fact that, according to Matushansky (2001), the nouns that appear before the preposition are scalar. This means that *caraças* exhibits scalar properties in other uses beyond those as PPI and NPI.

Finally, *caraças* can also appear as an interjection in exclamations14, appearing in its bare form (45), as a definite DP (46) or an indefinite DP (47)15:

14. *Caraças* seems to be very productive in this particular context, although I lack statistical data to confirm this intuition. A statistical analysis of the distribution of *caraças* in its several contexts of occurrence is a topic worth future work.

15. An anonymous reviewer calls attention to the occurrence of *caraças* in exclamations, associated to a wh-element, as in (i).
Polarity, expression of degree and negation: the vernacular form caraças

(46) Ai o caraças! a senhora Ieltsin voltou a correr para o telefone.

‘Oh, damn! – lady Ieltsin came back running to the phone.’

(47) C’ um caraças! Aquela explosão foi enorme!

‘Holly crap! That explosion was huge!’

In all the examples, the use of caraças is highly expressive and conveys surprise, fright or shock regarding a certain unexpected event, such as in (47), or it may express the dislike of the speaker when facing a particular unpleasant situation, as in (45) and (46).

6. The origin of the non-nominal uses of caraças

It is usually assumed that the great majority of minimizers and maximizers originate from a common noun with relevant semantic/scalar interpretation. In the case of maximizers, the common noun usually refers to something of great size or importance, while in the case of minimizers it refers to things of little size or value. The common noun would progressively lose its nominal properties until it grammaticalized into a (semi)-functional item. Given the existence of a common noun with the form caraça, we might expect to find an evolution path from the common noun to a polarity item, but that does not seem to be the case, since there was never a semantic relation between both uses to start with. The semantics associated to the noun caraça does not seem to directly or indirectly relate to neither the PPI interpretation nor the NPI interpretation.

Wh-elements may establish a close relation to degree expression, particularly in their ability to encode discursive values (cf. Dikken & Giannakidou 2002; and also Amaral 2009 for Portuguese data)
In this section I claim that the several uses of the form caraças are actually only orthographically related to the common noun caraça. The form caraças, in its multiple uses, has emerged as a very colloquial term in replacement of a taboo term considered extremely offensive – the swear word caralho ‘dick’ – which is frequently used as an intensifier.

According to Rhee (2016), intensifiers “share the function of marking the speaker’s stance of emphasis” and they are related to degree expression (cf. Quirk et al. 1985). Taboo/swear words are considered productive sources of intensifiers, according to Napoli and Hoeksema (2009), and they may correspond to lexical items which only receive such interpretation when they are not used with their literal meaning, or they may be interpreted as taboo words at all times. That is the case of the root ‘fuck’, as Napoli and Hoeksema (2009) point out, which is a taboo at all times, as can be illustrated with sentences (48) and (49):

(48) I don’t give a fuck.
(49) This is fucking awesome.

Both expressions – *a fuck* and *fucking* – are taboo terms that clearly serve as intensifiers, one intensifies negation in (48), and the other intensifies the positive degree of the adjective *awesome* in (49). Taboo and swear words are usually linked to specific lexical areas. Napoli and Hoeksema (2009) identify four main sources: religion, health, sex and bodily excretions. Due to their social inadequacy and offensive nature, a great number of these items developed euphemistic variants, socially more acceptable. That is the case of examples in (50) and (51) which illustrate the replacement of a term considered taboo for another socially more acceptable.

(50) doodly-squat (EN) < doodly-shit
(51) blooming < bloody < blessed

(Vachek 1990: 29)

According to Vachek (1990), the adjective *blessed* had itself been a replacement of another offensive term and was latter replaced by *bloody* and then again by *blooming*. In other cases, the taboo terms are phonologically changed, constituting what Napoli and Hoeksema (2009) call ‘phonological tamperings’. This strategy may consist of vowel change (as in *shit* > *shoot*), consonant changes (as in *fuck* > *fugde*) or insertion of a polite <r> in addition to consonant change (as in *damn* > *darn*).

Parallel to the aforementioned examples, I argue that the item caraças is a replacement of the taboo and swear word caralho, a term considered highly offensive and obscene which designates the masculine sexual organ. Although its origin is uncertain (cf. Machado 1967, a.o. for etymological explanations), the word caralho is found
very early in the language and already with a vulgar and obscene interpretation. One of the earliest attestations of *caralho* is found in Galician-Portuguese Medieval Songs, as the one illustrated in (52).

(52) E nun *caralho* grande que comprou, |oonte ao será[o] o and in a dick big that bought yesterday in the evening it esfolou, |e outra pissa ten ja amormada. skinned and other dick has already sick ‘And yesterday evening she skinned a big dick she bought and made sick another dick.’ (TMILG, song by Pero Garcia Burgalês)

The example in (52) is extracted from a satirical song by Pero Garcia Burgalês concerning a woman named Maria Negra. It is considered one of the most obscene songs and it was written during the 13th century. The word *caralho* appears directly referring to the masculine sexual organ but with a very rude connotation that is maintained until nowadays.

The term *caraças* presents itself as a good candidate to be a more acceptable replacement of the offensive term *caralho* since it shares the same initial syllabic sequence *cara*- . Other terms also usually found as replacements for *caralho* are *carago*, which also shares the same syllabic beginning *cara*- , but also *cacete*, which only shares the first syllable. The term *caralho* is associated to slang and its use is socially reprehensible. Nevertheless, it is highly expressive and occurs in all the contexts described before for *caraças*. Examples from (53) to (57) bellow illustrate the occurrence of *caralho* and *caraças* in the exact same contexts with equivalent meaning, but with *caraças* being less offensive.

(53) Esta noite não dormi um *caraças*/*caralho*. this night NEG sleep a MASC.SG CARAÇAS/ dick. ‘I did not sleep a fuck tonight.’

(54) A geladaria tem uns gelados do *caraças*/*caralho*. the ice cream shop has some ice creams of the MASC.SG CARAÇAS/ dick. ‘The ice cream shop has some hell of an ice cream.’

16. The status of *caraças* as a swear word varies according to the speakers. For sake of simplicity I have used the same translation for both terms, but in an example such as (55), *caraças* probably corresponds to the English *my butt* and *caralho* to *my ass*. Similarly, in (57) *caraças* would correspond to *crap* and *caralho* to *shit*. DOI http://dx.doi.org/10.15304/olg.12.0053 © 2020 Estudos de Lingüística Galega 12: 115-139
(55) A Podemos dar ao Rui uma viagem a Paris.
Can give to.the Rui a trip to Paris
A: We can offer Rui a trip to Paris.

B: Viagem a Paris o caraças/ caralho. Sabes quanto
trip to Paris the MASC.SG CARAÇAS/ dick know2SG how.much
isso custa
that costs?
B: ‘Trip do Paris, my butt. Do you know how much that costs?’

(56) O caraças/ caralho do cão ainda não parou de ladrar.
The MASC.SG CARAÇAS/ dick of.the dog yet NEG stopped of bark.
‘The fucking dog has not stopped barking yet.’

(57) C’ um caraças/ caralho. Isso é que foi sorte!
with a MASC.SG CARAÇAS/ dick That is that was luck!
Holly crap! That is what I call luck!

As we can see, both items can occur as PPIs, NPIs, metalinguistic negation markers, in N-of-an-N structures and interjections. In any of the cases, the use of both items is clearly a marked strategy to highlight the speaker’s point of view concerning a given situation. It can be used to strongly express likes, dislikes or beliefs, by means of degree intensification.

All the contexts of occurrence described for caraças/ caralho correspond to the uses described by Napoli and Hoeksema (2009) for taboo terms and swear words and they may serve as an argument in favor of the enormous versatility of these linguistic items, which have received very little attention in the literature.

7. Conclusion

In this article I have investigated the existence of an item caraças in EP which is independent from the common noun caraça meaning mask. I have come to the conclusion that caraças appears associated to different constructions. It is part of the PPI (d)o caraças and the NPI um caraças, but it also occurs as a metalinguistic negation marker, under the form o caraças. It participates in N-of-an-N constructions and in exclamations. All these contexts are somewhat related to its scalar properties and to the strong emphatic value associated to it, probably due to its taboo-like status. It oc-
curs mainly in pragmatic contexts expressing the speaker’s evaluative point of view (as a PPI, NPI, a metalinguistic negation marker, but also in N-of-an-N constructions and exclamations).

The idea that polarity items may be sensitive to a kind of scalar inferencing and not necessarily to negation itself was put forth by Israel (2001) while drawing a parallelism between polarity items and quantification properties of superlative constructions. Data presented here suggests that, along with scalarity, caraças’s emphatic force (which is largely given by its offensive interpretation) may be responsible for its occurrence in multiple contexts, all of them involving the expression of the speaker’s point of view. This is a topic that deserves being deepened in future work.

I have also proposed that the emergence of caraças in all the mentioned contexts was motivated by a need to replace a term considered offensive and socially inadequate – caralho. This seems to be a frequent strategy in different languages and highlights the fact that taboo terms are extremely rich linguistic items that need further study from a more theoretical perspective.

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Polarity, expression of degree and negation: the vernacular form caraças


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