

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES IN ADJECTIVAL FUNCTION

Mônica R. Nobre

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – Brasil

The prepositional phrases with the *de* preposition in Brazilian Portuguese in adjectival function. There are suggested fifteen different ways of adjectivation according to different functions that are postulated to that preposition.

Keywords: adjectives; prepositions; function; prepositional phrases

One of the lines of investigation that has revealed itself the most productive in the last ten years is the one that deals with the internal structure of the phrases. The organization of the constituents, for instance, can show a structural complexity that is too near from a whole phrase. There are many significant analogies in the internal syntax of these constituents which corroborate the idea that there are few general principles that regulate lexical categorical expansions. In fact, the study of the Prepositional Phrases is one of the studies that has received many contributions from these studies.

One of the goals of this paper is to suggest some criteria that can organize some of the ideas we have about the Prepositional Phrases Functions. We present fifteen different functions for Prepositional Phrases that can make an adjectivation possible in standard Portuguese. We will try to show, also, how these fifteen ways can be synthesized, proposing a kind of “fossilization” of the preposition *de* in Portuguese (somewhat equivalent to the preposition *of* in standard English). We do not adopt here one straight and inflexible theoretical position. Each problem that is found during the research is solved with the help of other theories and postulates, mainly related to Functionalism. Consequently, we know that if we adopt one solution, other explanations may be denied. At least, we hope that the sistematization and the basic ideas presentend here can sustain the more controversial aspects.

One of our main ideas is that semantics plays a big influence on syntactical affairs. So, the problem here is not only a matter of function, but also, a syntactic-semantic one. In this way, we have to deal with ambiguities and metaphors (figurative processess). In standard Portuguese, a construction like O BURRO DO JOÃO (The stupid John) is ambiguous. The expression can have two interpretations in Portuguese: John has a donkey; or, the metaphoric extension – John is stupid (since, the word “burro” In Portuguese means donkey). There are also some cases where there is no ambiguity – A SUBIDA DOS PREÇOS and A SUBIDA DOS TRABALHADORES (The prices raise and The workers ascension). It is a very frequent situation, and we say there is no ambiguity because of the status of the Noun – in the first case, A SUBIDA DOS PREÇOS (The prices raise) PREÇOS (prices) is the patient, and in the other case – A SUBIDA DOS TRABALHADORES (The workers ascension), the NP the WORKERS (trabalhadores) is the agent. So, what we postulate is a variety of functions to the **de** preposition in Portuguese, which can lead the interpretation of the NP that follows as adjectival as a whole.

It's now time to stop a little bit and try to develop the notion of **nucleus**. The **nucleus** is the central core of a unit that determines many of its formal characteristics, and can also determine syntactic and semantic restrictions to the complements. So, the Prepositional Phrases we study here can limit, or settle the boundaries to the entities to which the nucleus refer to. In the following example COPO DE PLÁSTICO (a glass made of plastic), the Prepositional Phrase DE PLÁSTICO makes the restrictions to COPO (glass), and making the restrictions, the Prepositional Phrase qualifies or determines what kind of COPO (glass) it is **not**.

There are recent studies in Brazilian Portuguese (Almeida, 1996) that analyze diachronically and synchronically the **de** preposition. The studies show us that this preposition indicates mainly **point of departure**. In addition the corpus analysis let us postulate two basic functions: the temporal and the spatial one, and five more other functions that go from the concrete to the abstract sense:

1. SPACE : Chegou **de** São Paulo. (He came **from** São Paulo)
2. TIME : Esperei **de** quatro às dez. (I waited **from** four to ten)
3. ORIGIN : mesa **de** madeira. (Table **made of** wood)
4. FUNCTION : máquina **de** lavar. (Washing machine)

It is interesting to observe that in this last example there is a “real” adjectival function embedded in the construction WASHING MACHINE, which corresponds to MÁQUINA **DE** LAVAR in Brazilian Portuguese, that corroborates our main idea that there is in fact an adjectival function in Brazilian Portuguese Prepositional Phrases.

5. MANNER : problema **de** assustar. (A problem that frightens)
6. FINALITY : quarto **de** brincar. (A room to play with toys)
7. OWNERSHIP : colar **de** Maria. (Maria's necklace)

We can see that the **de** preposition in Brazilian Portuguese indicates origin, dependence, primitive state, quality. When we say mesa **de** madeira (a table made **of** wood), we want to

say that it is made of wood and no other possible material; the Prepositional Phrase specifies the material so that no other interpretation of origin is possible.

All these examples lead us to the construction of a basic metaphor which orientates this research – QUALITY IS THE ORIGIN. This means that if a Prepositional Phrase with the preposition **de** corresponds to quality, and quality means origin, QUALITY **IS** THE ORIGIN.

We try to postulate here that all the possible functions to the **de** preposition in Portuguese can be summarized in just one – the qualifying function.

Studying 205 (two hundred and five) prepositional phrases collected from Editorials of two big newspapers in Rio de Janeiro (Jornal do Brasil and O Globo), we have postulated in the beginning of the research 15 (fifteen) ways to make adjectivations which are presented here:

- a) AGENT : invenção de Santos Dumont (S. Dumont's invention)
- b) CHARACTERISTIC : chave de fenda (screwdriver)
- c) CAUSE : ruído das ferraduras (horseshoe noise)
- d) CONTENT : copo de água (glass of water)
- e) DESCRIPTION : mulher de vestido azul (woman in blue dress)
- f) GOAL : chave da porta (door key)
- g) SPACE : bar da esquina (the bar at the corner)
- h) INSTRUMENT : corte de faca (knife's cut)
- i) MATERIAL : colar de ouro (gold necklace)
- j) WAY OF BEING : pessoa de respeito (respectful person)
- k) PATIENT : invenção do avião (airplane invention)
- l) PART OF THE WHOLE : plantação de uvas (grapes plantation)
- m) OWNERSHIP : casa de Pedro (Pedro's house)
- n) QUANTITY : multidão de pretendentes (crowd of candidates)
- o) TIME : noivado de cinco anos (five-year engagement)

We can see a lot of semantic cases for the **de** preposition in Portuguese. But what we postulate here, is that there is a false diversity and heterogeneity in all these cases. We might ask here if it is possible to find some criteria that can easily organize and classify in a more operative way all the cases presented above.

Here is the proposal:

1. NOUNS DERIVED FROM VERBS OF PROCESS OR RESULT

DECLARAÇÃO (declaration)

A DECLARAÇÃO DAS TESTEMUNHAS DEMOROU DUAS HORAS.

(The witnessess' declaration lasted two hours) - process

MINHA DECLARAÇÃO DE BENS ESTÁ CORRETA.

(My capital assets declaration is right)

2. AGENT NOMINALIZATIONS

ANTÔNIO É O TRADUTOR DOS POEMAS

(Antônio is the translator of the poems)

3. RELATIONSHIP NOUNS

Nouns that make reference to people, expressing their relations. There are some prototypes in that category: son/daughter, father/mother, brother/sister - they have the necessary relations that define the parenthood. Other items like friend, schoolmate, colleague also establish relations, in this case, friendship relations. These are cases of clear semantic dependence, since we can identify an entity by the relations that are established one with the others.

4. REPRESENTATION NOUNS

Some nouns like photo, picture, book, article, also establish a semantic subordination, like the following examples:

A FOTOGRAFIA DA CASA ESTÁ NÍTIDA

(The photo of the house is clear)

5. NOUNS DERIVED FROM ADJECTIVES

These nouns refer to the entity that is predicated in by means of the correspondent Prepositional Phrase.

A BELEZA DA ATRIZ NÃO É ADEQUADA AO PERSONAGEM

(The actress beauty does not fit the character)

6. AMBIGUITIES

There are some cases like

A CONDENAÇÃO DO JUIZ

(The judge's condemnation) that only the real situation can help us interpretate the statement as active or passive. They are different from cases like

PAI DO JOÃO

(João's father) that we call **not transferrable possession**. This fact points to the not accidental feature of the relation, which is different from the previous example.

7. TRANSFERRABLE POSSESSION

This is one of the most frequent constructions and we have the following examples:

O JARDIM DE MARIA.
(Maria's garden)

O BISCOITO DA CRIANÇA.
(The child's cookie)

These are relations of possession. But when we say O METRÔ DO FRANCISCO (Francisco's subway), the possession is not the preferred interpretation, since it is difficult for someone to own a subway... The default interpretation will always be the one that best fits the participants expectations .

When the owner is not a human being, the preferred interpretation is the LOCATIVE one, like the following examples :

LIVROS DA BIBLIOTECA.
(The library books) (or, the books that are in the library).

8. ATTRIBUTIVE RELATIONS

These kinds of relations are typical from Portuguese and they are interpreted semantically, since they have a straight attributive interpretation.

O INÚTIL DO COMPUTADOR
(The useless computer)

O CRETINO DO ENCANADOR
(The plumber is an idiot)

All the phenomena postulated here lead us to the idea of **nucleus** we have just mentioned before – the **nucleus** is the central core of a unit that determines many of its formal characteristics, and can also determine syntactic and semantic restrictions to the complements. What we are trying to prove with this research is that the preposition, besides indicating a Prepositional Phrase, points out a **function mark**.

According to Port-Royal, the dicotomy **extension** / **comprehension** would help us understand those (almost) infinite functions; the **extension** could be applied to all objects that are related to an idea, whereas the **comprehension** could be related to all the ideas that are determined by an entity, and that should not be taken away, otherwise the main idea would be sacrificed. For this research, the **extension** is applied to the **Noun**; the **comprehension**, consequently, is applied to the **Prepositional Phrase** that carries the adjectival function. What we really want to mean is that it is this adjectival function that gives the real “hint” to understand the exact extent of a Noun. When we say COPO DE ÁGUA (glass of water), the element DE ÁGUA (of water) gives us the exact boundaries of a Noun; on the other hand, we deny all other possibilities of content of the glass. We believe all this explanation is able to testify Fauconnier's idea that grammar is the visible link between cognition and apparent behavior of human thinking organisms; expressions of language do not in themselves represent or code

the construction. Language “just” gives us minimal, but sufficient clues for finding the domains and principles appropriate for building in a given situation.

We are able, now, to summarize our main ideas in three basic points:

- a) meaning is a mental construction;
- b) the linguistic forms are poor;
- c) language (or the syntactic constructions) gives the clues to meaning.

REFERENCES

- Almeida, Ma.L. A gramaticalização das representações espaço-temporais em português: o caso das preposições, advérbios e conjunções. Relatório parcial de atividades. Rio de Janeiro, 1996.
- Fauconnier, G. Mental spaces: Aspects of meaning construction in natural language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Lakoff, G. The contemporary theory of metaphor. In: ORTONY A. (ed.) Metaphor and thought. 2. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 202-251.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. Metaphors we live by. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Lakoff, G. Women, fire and dangerous things. What categories reveal about the mind. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Langacker, R. Foundations of cognitive linguistics. Vol. I. California: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Lyons, J. Semantics. 2. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Ortony, A. (ed.). Metaphor and thought. 2. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Ortony, A. Metaphor, language and thought. In: Metaphor and thought. Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Sweetser, E. From etymology to pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Traugott, E. & König, E. The semantics – pragmatics of grammaticalization revisited. In: Traugott, E. & Heine, B. Approaches to grammaticalization, vol. II, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1991.
- Ullmann, S. Semântica. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1964.