

# INTRODUCING INDIRECT ARGUMENTS: THE LOCUS OF A DIACHRONIC CHANGE IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

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**Abstract:** *The goal of this paper is to propose an explanation for ditransitive constructions in Brazilian Portuguese (BP) taking into consideration a change in the realization of its prepositional phrase. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, BP has initiated a reanalysis of the possible strategies to head indirect arguments by generalizing the use of the prepositions ‘a’(to) and ‘para’ (to) in the context of ditransitive sentences. Alongside with this change, the morphological notation for the dative argument – the 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitic ‘lhe(s)’ – was also replaced by other strategies, such as 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns preceded by full prepositions – ‘para/a ele(s),ela(s)’ (to him, her, them). Therefore, I assume that these facts are evidence that BP has shifted from the type of language with morphological dative case to one with only structural oblique Case.*

**Keywords:** *ditransitive sentences, indirect arguments, prepositional phrases*

## 1. The empirical problem

The aim of this paper is to discuss a diachronic change in the expression of indirect arguments in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). In this variety, the prepositions which introduce indirect objects (IO) of ditransitive sentences have undergone a categorical change throughout time. In the contexts of verbs of movement and transfer – such as *dar* ‘give’ and *enviar* ‘send’, the indirect argument can be introduced by either prepositions *a* or *para* and, also, it does not alternate with the dative clitic *lhe(s)*. Hence, to substitute the IOs, Brazilian speakers use the third person pronouns preceded by the full prepositions *para* or *a* – *para/a ele(s)/ela(s)* ‘to him/ her/ them’, as in example (1)<sup>1</sup> below:

(BP)

- (1) Maria enviou    uma carta    *para/ a* o João / ele.  
      Maria sent     a letter     P *para (to)/a(to)* the João.OBL / him.3SG

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<sup>1</sup> Following the works on ditransitive constructions of other Romance languages, as Spanish (see Cuervo 2003), Romanian (see Diaconescu and Rivero 2007) and European Portuguese (see Torres Morais 2007), in this paper I will focus on the constructions with 3<sup>rd</sup> person arguments in BP. Also, because the relevant change with the dative clitics in this variety is happening with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person one – *lhe(s)*. For more details on the loss of 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitics in BP, see Carvalho and Calindro (in preparation).

On the other hand, the IOs in ditransitive sentences in European Portuguese (EP) are mainly introduced by the preposition *a* and can always alternate with the dative clitic *lhe(s)*, as in (2):

(EP)

- (2) A Maria enviou uma carta ao João /enviou-*lhe* uma carta.  
 The Maria sent a letter P<sub>a(to)</sub> the João. DAT /sent -3SG.DAT a letter

Another remarkable difference between EP and BP is that, with creation verbs – as *preparar* ‘prepare’ – Brazilian speakers only accept the preposition *para* preceding the IO, see (3). In this context, the alternation with *a*, as we saw in (1), is impossible in BP and the substitution with the clitic *lhe(s)* is also ungrammatical. Instead, in EP the IO with creation verbs can always be introduced by the preposition *a* and it alternates with the dative clitic, as in (4):

(BP)

- (3) A Maria preparou o jantar para o João / ele.  
 The Maria prepared the dinner P<sub>para (to)</sub> the João.OBL

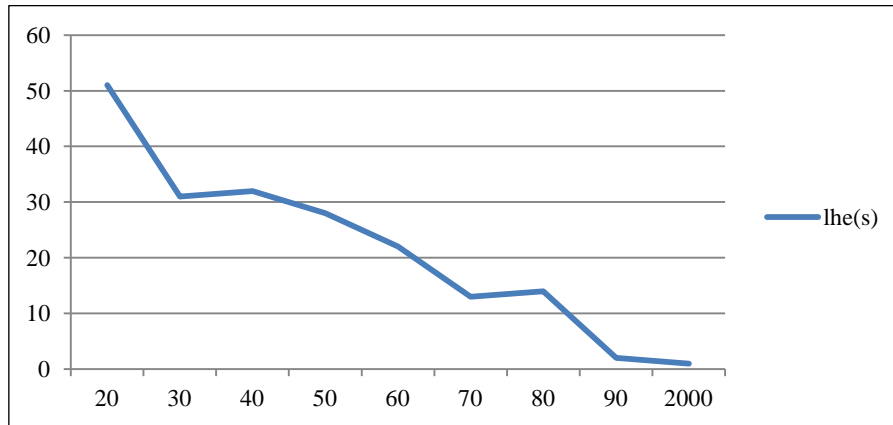
(EP/\*BP)

- (4) A Maria preparou o jantar ao João /preparou-*lhe* o jantar.  
 The Maria prepared the dinner P<sub>a(to)</sub> the João. DAT /prepared -3SG.DAT the dinner

According to the literature, this reanalysis on the expression of the indirect arguments from historical BP to modern BP started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Torres Morais and Berlinck, 2006, 2007, 2015; Torres Morais and Salles 2010). Therefore, in order to make a thorough analysis of this historical change, the empirical support for my proposal are the data collected from a book (2011) which contains the front pages of *Folha de São Paulo* - an important Brazilian newspaper - that spans the 20<sup>th</sup> century with 223 covers from 1920 to 2010. The examination of this *corpus* confirmed that the dative clitic *lhe(s)* is no longer used as a third person dative clitic in BP (see Calindro 2015). In the data collected, there are a total of 51 examples of sentences with *lhe(s)*, as in (5) from 1927:

- (5) (...) a França abriu-*lhe* os braços para dar-*lhe* o nome de filho.  
 the France open- 3SG.DAT the arms to give-3SG.DAT the name of son

As we can see from the graph below, throughout the years, the use of the clitic diminishes significantly, to the extent that there is only one sentence with *lhe* in 2008, example (6).



Graph 1: The incidence of the dative clitic *lhe(s)* throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in BP

- (6) (...) o candidato republicano      vencia      em 16 Estados      o que *lhe*  
the candidate republican      won      in 16 states      what 3SG.DAT  
dava apenas 139 votos.  
give only 139 votes

Bearing these facts in mind, this paper is organized as follows: section 2 defines the theoretical background and focuses on the analysis of dative alternation in Romance, specifically Spanish, Romanian and EP; section 3 analyses in more details the use of both prepositions *a* and *para* in BP; in section 4, I propose a theoretical account of the structure of prepositional phrases in BP; finally, in section 5, the conclusion of this paper is drawn.

## 2. Dative alternation across languages

As we will see in this section, the change in the introduction of IOs in ditransitive sentences in BP sets this language apart from other Romance languages such as Spanish, Romanian and EP. First of all, because all these languages have two types of ditransitive sentences, while BP seems to have only one; second of all, because all of them have morphological dative case for 3<sup>rd</sup> person, whereas BP does not.

The first attempts to account for the two internal arguments in ditransitive sentences were Baker's (1988) incorporation proposal and Larson's (1988) VP shells proposal for the two types of ditransitives in English - namely, the Prepositional Dative Construction (PDC) 'Mary gave a book to John' and the Double Object Construction (DOC) 'Mary gave John a book'. This is the so called *dative alternation* in English. Subsequently, Marantz (1993), following on from studies on Bantu languages (see Alsina & Mchombo 1993), postulated the existence of an applicative head to introduce the indirect argument of a DOC which accounted for the absence of the preposition. Later on, building on Marantz's proposal, Pylkkänen (2002) introduced the concepts of two types of applicatives - the high and the low applicative to explain the difference in the semantics conveyed by the indirect argument in ditransitive sentences.

These ideas were the ground for Cuervo (2003) and Diaconescu and Rivero (2007) to propose that also Spanish and Romanian have *dative alternation*. Therefore, according to the authors, these languages have two types of ditransitives as well. In Spanish and Romanian, the DOC is characterized by a construction in which the IO is accompanied by a preposition which is, actually, a dummy element responsible for assigning dative Case to the argument. This element is also doubled by a clitic which is the head of the applicative phrase, as we can see from the examples and structures below:

- (7) a. Pablo *le* mandó un diccionario *a Gabi*.  
 Pablo 3SG.DAT sent a dictionary to Gabi.DAT
- a'. [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Pablo [<sub>v'</sub> voice [<sub>VP</sub> mandó [<sub>AppIP</sub> a Gabi [<sub>APPL'</sub> *le* [<sub>DP</sub> un diccionario]]]]]]]  
 (Cuervo 2003, 35)

- (8) a. Mihaela *îi* Trimite *Mariei* o scrisoare.  
 Mihaela DAT.CL Sends Mary.DAT a letter
- a'. [<sub>VoiceP</sub> Mihaela [<sub>v'</sub> voice [<sub>VP</sub> trimite [<sub>AppIP</sub> Mariei [<sub>APPL'</sub> *îi* [<sub>DP</sub> o scrisoare]]]]]]]  
 (Diaconescu & Rivero 2007, 2)

As it can be attested from the structures proposed, the dative argument is in SpecAppIP, the DO is licensed as its complement and AppIP is the complement of the verb. Therefore, following Pykkänen (2002), this position below the verbal root accounts for what the author calls *low applicative head* - which is responsible for relating the two DPs in ditransitive sentences, as represented in (7a') and (8a').

According to Torres Morais (2007), EP is also part of the group of languages with *dative alternation*. For instance, sentence (9) is a DOC because the preposition *a* is a dummy element that lexicalizes the applicative head and can always alternate with the dative clitic *lhe* (*s*) - which is the morphological expression of this head, as shown in the representation below<sup>2</sup>:

- (9) a. O João enviou uma carta *à Maria* /enviou-*lhe* uma carta.  
 The João sent a letter *P<sub>a (to)</sub> the Maria. DAT* /sent -3SG.DAT a letter
- a'. [<sub>VP</sub> O João [<sub>v'</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> enviou [<sub>AppIP</sub> *à Maria/lhe* [<sub>APPL'</sub>  $\emptyset$  [<sub>DP</sub> uma carta]]]]]]]  
 (Torres Morais 2007, 175)

As the examples from the Romance languages above indicate, the main element for assuming that these three languages have DOCS is that the dative clitic is the morphological expression of the applicative head; as well as the fact that the preposition which introduces the indirect argument is a dative Case marker, not a lexical element, as the one in a PDC.

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<sup>2</sup> EP also presents structures with clitic doubling. However, these sentences have a contrastive meaning and can only happen with the preposition preceding full pronouns, as in *Eu dei-lhe o livro a ele* 'I gave-3SG.DAT the book to him', meaning that - I gave a book to him, not to her, for example. As this is an optional construction to the DOC in PE, Torres Morais (2007) treats these cases as DOCs as well, in the same fashion represented in (9a').

Thus, in the PDCs, the IO is introduced by a transitive preposition which assigns oblique Case to its complement, consequently it is not doubled by the dative clitic, neither in Spanish nor Romanian, see (10) and (11). Also, in EP, the indirect argument of a PDC does not alternate with the dative clitic, see (12), as it does in the DOC, example (9).

- (10) Pablo Mandó un diccionario *a Gabi* /*a Barcelona*.  
 Pablo Sent a dictionary to Gabi.OBL /to Barcelona.OBL  
 (Cuervo 2003, 36)

- (11) Mihaela trimite *Mariiei* o scrisoare.  
 Mihaela Sends Mary.DAT a letter  
 (Diaconescu & Rivero 2007, 2)

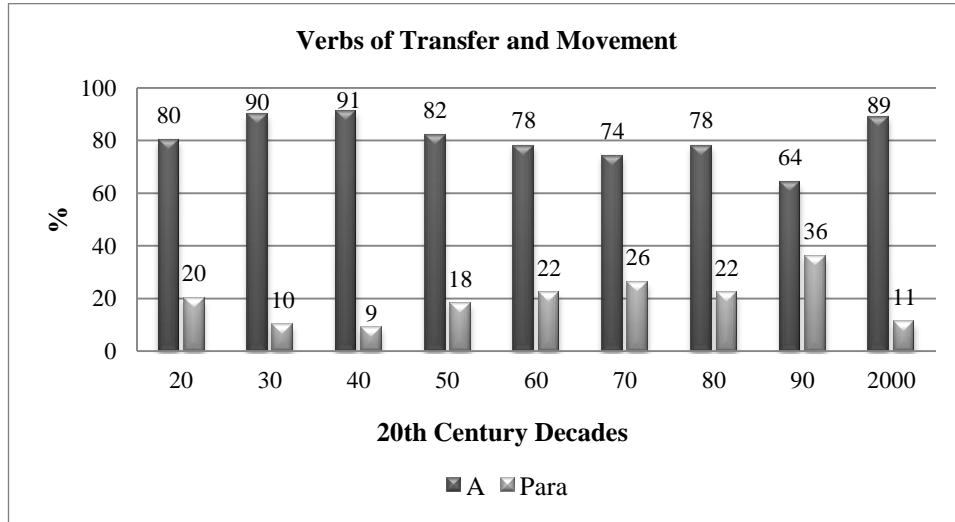
- (12) a. O João enviou (\**lhe*) uma carta *para a Maria* / *Lisboa*.  
 The João sent (3SG. DAT) a letter P<sub>para (to)</sub> Maria.OBL / Lisbon.OBL  
 (Torres Morais 2007, 96)

What is remarkable about the PDCs in EP, is that the IO is always introduced by the preposition *para*, not *a*, as in the DOC, example (9). Semantically, the difference from the sentence in (12) to the sentence in (9) is that the transfer of possession is indirect, i.e., in (9) ‘the letter’ was sent directly to ‘Mary’, while in (12), ‘the letter’ was first sent to somebody else, and then to ‘Mary’. Furthermore, when the IO is a locative, as “Lisbon” in (12), only the preposition *para* can introduce it. Finally, both types of IO in the PDCs exemplified above cannot alternate with the dative clitic *lhe(s)*, as it can in the DOC.

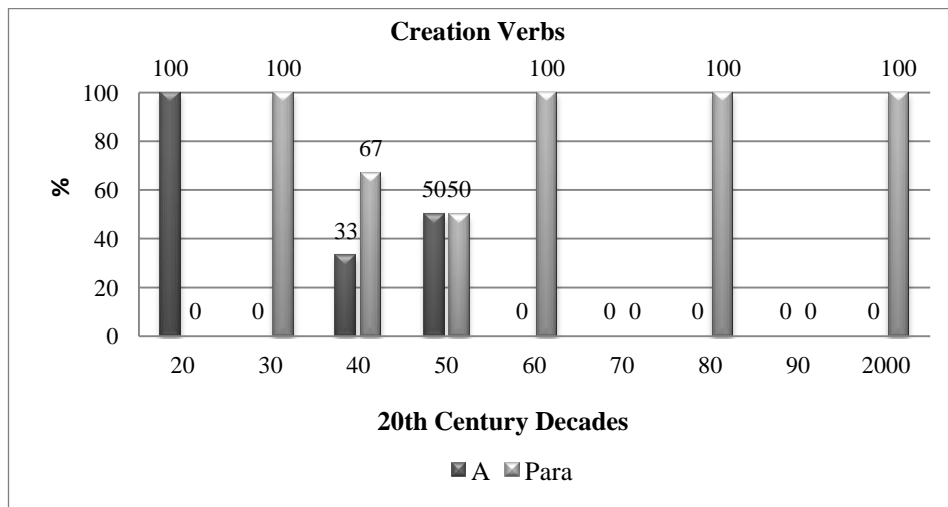
Therefore, I assume that this is the context which was generalized in BP. Specifically, in historical BP the preposition *para* started to be used not only in PDCs, but in DOCs as well, alternating with *a*, as in example (1) from BP. Furthermore, the context of creation verbs seems to be one step ahead in this change, as the preposition *a* was completely substituted by *para*, example (3). Given these facts, I am assuming that BP does not have DOCs in its inventory anymore, only PDCs.

### 3. The case of Brazilian Portuguese

The results from the analysis of the corpus mentioned previously have shown that the prepositions *a* and *para* either alternate, as shown in Graph 2 with the results from the verbs of transfer and movement; or the preposition *para* has substituted *a* completely, as in the context of creation verbs, Graph 3:



Graph 2: preposition *a* and *para* with verbs of transfer and movement in BP



Graph 3: preposition *a* and *para* with creation verbs in BP

Given these results, I assume that in BP, both prepositions *a* and *para* have the same status, i.e., the preposition *a* is no longer a dummy marker that can be introduced in the argument structure by ApplP, as it is the case of EP, exemplified in (9). In BP, both prepositions are transitive elements which assign oblique Case to their complement and should be introduced in the structure by a prepositional phrase. This assumption goes well with Cuervo's (2010) proposal that ditransitive verbs do not require two separate arguments, but, in fact, they select a relation established between the DO and the IO. Hence, according to the author, this relation between the two internal arguments can be

introduced in the argument structure by an applicative head, a small clause or a prepositional phrase.

Therefore, the fact that BP has only transitive prepositions introducing IOs, combined with the fact that BP cannot express the dative case morphologically by using the 3<sup>rd</sup> person clitic anymore, are both evidence that the low applicative head has become inactive in BP. On this basis, I assume that BP prepositions have undergone a general shift from case markers to lexically full prepositions. Consequently, the oblique complement in a ditransitive sentence has to be introduced in the structure by a prepositional phrase.

Thus, BP has shifted from a type of language which has evidence for morphological dative case, as EP, to one where the Case of indirect arguments is assigned via lexical prepositions. Therefore, the IOs in BP are always headed by a lexical preposition and are introduced in the argument structure via a prepositional phrase (pP), which will be explored in the next section.

Importantly, this diachronic change was only possible due to the existence of the lexical preposition *para* in the PDCs in EP, as in (12), which enabled the reanalysis discussed above for BP. Following on from Chomsky (2005), parametric variation emerges from the interaction of an underspecified UG, PLD (primary linguistic data) and Factor 3.

According to Biberauer and Roberts (2015), Factor 3 main manifestations are *Feature Economy* and *Input Generalization*. Hence, I assume that the reanalysis stated above is an example of *Input Generalization*, as the presence of the preposition *para* in the inventory of possibilities to introduce IOs in historical BP and the loss of the dative *lhe(s)*, were the trigger for Brazilian children to generalize the use of transitive prepositions to introduce IOs<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the preposition *a* in BP is no longer a dummy element, as it is in EP, because it is used in all contexts (DOCs and PDCs), so it has the same status as the full preposition *para*, which was (and still is) only present in the PDCs in EP, not in DOCs.

#### 4. The pP hypothesis

The above-mentioned change in BP ditransitives can be modeled if the syntax of prepositional phrases is taken into account.

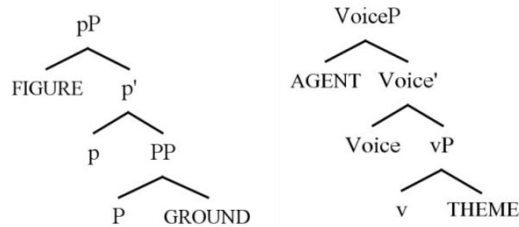
Considering the works of Svenonius (2003, 2004 et seq.) and Wood (2012), it is possible to draw a parallel between the prepositional domain and the verbal domain, in the sense that the prepositional structure involves a 'light preposition' p and a P which mirrors the categories *v* and V<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Theresa Biberauer for drawing my attention to this fact.

<sup>4</sup> Wood (2012) preferred Kratzer's (1996) VoiceP instead of Chomsky's (1995) vP in his representations. I maintained the author's choice, as this is not the main point of the present discussion.

(13)



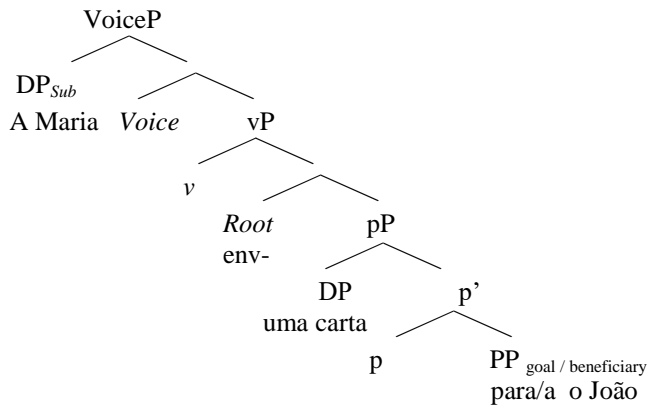
(Wood 2012, 180)

Accordingly, Wood assumes that the DO in the ditransitive structure is equivalent to a Figure argument (see Talmy 1978) which is introduced in the Spec position of the pP projection. Subsequently, the complement of the p head is a Ground argument - namely, the IO, which is introduced by a preposition in PP, as we can see above.

Therefore, the transitive prepositions in BP can also be placed under the PP head because, according to Svenonius (2003), the preposition establishes a close relation with the Ground rather than the Figure, since it applies c-selection restrictions in relation to the Ground (the IO), not the Figure (DO). For instance, the preposition *para*, with verbs of transfer and movement, can only select complements that have a Goal or Beneficiary as a theta-role.

Finally, as *p* is not the higher head capable of introducing arguments in the relevant local domain – as there is *Voice* above to legitimate an agentive relation, this means that *p* can be perfectly responsible for holding a thematic relation between the two internal arguments of ditransitive sentences. Hence, pP can hold the possession relation established between the DO in its specifier position and the PP complement which contains the IO, headed by the transitive prepositions *a* or *para*, as represented in (14), for the ditransitive sentence (1) in BP:

(14)





## 5. Conclusions

The BP data studied here is an interesting example of the interaction between syntax and morphology in diachronic changes. More specifically, it points to a rearrangement of the arguments in a certain domain, due to the loss of morphological case – namely, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person dative clitic *lhe(s)*, as attested in Graph 1. This morphological loss, coupled with the reanalysis of the dummy preposition *a*, as a lexical element in BP, are evidences that this variety does not have *dative alternation*, as other Romance languages do, including EP.

Consequently, BP does not present an applicative head to introduce the internal arguments of ditransitive sentences, once the IOs in these contexts are headed by a lexical preposition. Therefore, the DO and the IO in BP are introduced in the structure via a pP projection, as exemplified in section 4. Given these facts, I assume that the applicative construction (09) in EP was reanalyzed in BP, as represented in structure (14) above.

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