

Phrasal Verbs in Brazilian Portuguese: the expression of directed motion from a typological perspective

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Brazilian Phrasal Verbs

The prescriptivist lesson:

- postpone for put off,
- suppress for fight down,
- inherit for come into,
- reprimand for tell off, and so on (Dixon, 1982:4).

The same situation holds in Brazilian Portuguese:

- *partir* (go away) for *ir embora*, *cair fora* (go away),
- *engolir*, *ingerir* (swallow, gobble) for *mandar [comida ou bebida] pra dentro* (lit. send [food or drink] inside; swallow, gobble up),
- *atacar*, *perseguir* (pursue) for *ir pra cima* (go after).

My intention is to show that there is a rich array of phrasal verbs in less formal varieties of Brazilian Portuguese (BP, henceforth). It doesn't mean, however, that the use of phrasal verbs in BP is as pervasive as it is in English. In many cases, the simple verb is still the colloquial usage:

- *demitir* (lay off),
- *adiar* (put off),
- *decepcionar* (let down, disappoint).

I will try to describe the semantic and pragmatic aspects which condition the use of BP phrasal verbs.

The presentation is organized as follows:

1. Are there real phrasal verbs in BP?
2. The source of BP phrasal verbs: spatial prepositions.
3. The typology of motion events: the difference between Germanic and Romance languages.
4. Intra-typological variation in Romance languages.
5. A tentative explanation of BP phrasal verbs.

1. Are there real phrasal verbs in BP?

A semantic test: the meaning of the phrasal verb cannot be inferred from the meanings of its component words (Dixon, 1982).

BP phrasal verbs are OK for this test:

(1) *cair em cima* (go after, pursue)

fall on up

(2) *saltar fora* (drop out)

jump out

(3) *dar em cima (de alguém)* (court someone)

give on up (of someone)

In addition to idiomatic phrasal verbs, BP has a lot of literal combinations of a simple verb and a spatial preposition. These constructions are called verb-particle constructions (Iacobini & Masini, 2007; Stolova, 2015). A particle can be a preposition or an adverb (Croft et al., 2010; Pederson, 2017).

(4) *pular dentro*

jump in

(5) *cuspir (algo) fora*

Spit (something) out

(6) *saltar fora*

jump out

A syntactic test: left-dislocation

An independent preposition (i.e., one preposition that is not part of a phrasal verb) can be left-dislocated:

(7) Os jogadores correram para fora do campo.

The players ran to out from the field

(The players ran off the field)

(8) Foi para fora do campo que os jogadores correram.

((It)was to out from field that the players ran)

A preposition (or prepositional phrase) which is part of a phrasal verb cannot be left-dislocated:

(9) achou amendoim no carro e nós mandou pra dentro

(someone) found peanuts in the car and we sent (them) to inside

(Peanuts were found in the car and we gobbled up them)

(10) * Foi pra dentro que nós mandamos o amendoim.

((It) was to in that we send the peanuts)

2. The source of BP phrasal verbs: spatial prepositions

BP phrasal verbs are based on a small set of spatial prepositions: *dentro (in)*, *fora (out)*, *pra cima (up)*, *pra baixo (down)*, *em cima (up)*. Spatial prepositions are the source of BP phrasal verbs.

I propose that, from a typological standpoint, idiomatic phrasal verbs are derived from the literal verb-particle constructions. If a language doesn't have verb-particle constructions like (4)-(6), this language doesn't have idiomatic phrasal verbs.

The spatial preposition that allows the verb-particle construction has a specific semantic value. It has a dynamic nature, indicating both a path and a final location (Aske, 1989; Cummins, 1996; Zubizarreta & Oh, 2007). The dynamic nature of the preposition implies a motion event.

Compare the two sentences below. In (11), the preposition is a locative; in (12), the preposition is dynamic, indicating a path and a final location:

(11) Pat is *in* the house.

(12) Pat ran *into* the house

Only dynamic spatial prepositions (like *into*) allow verb-particle constructions (more about that in the next section). And only languages with verb-particle constructions can present idiomatic phrasal verbs. BP is such a language (all prepositions used in BP phrasal verbs are dynamic). French is not (Cummins, 1996; Zubizarreta & Oh, 2007; Troberg, 2011). Consider (13) below:

(13) *Jean a sauté dehors.*

(Jean jumped outside)

The particle *dehors*, in French, has a locative/static meaning. It cannot be interpreted in a dynamic context, implying a motion to a final destination. (13) means that Jean was outside and he jumped there. The lexical inventory of contemporary French does not contain dynamic prepositions or adverbs (Cummings, 1996; Troberg, 2011). Another example is given below:

(14) La balle roule dans le trou.

The ball rolls around in the hole

(14) must be interpreted in the locative/static sense. It cannot be translated as “The ball rolls into the hole”.

As French doesn't have dynamic prepositions, it doesn't have phrasal verbs. There is just a restricted set of phrasal verbs in French (the example is from Porquier, 2001):

(15) Il m'est tombé dessus.

He me-has fallen over

(He has attacked me)

French has directional prepositions, like *vers* (towards) and *jusque* (until) (Cummins, 1996), but they are not dynamic, i.e., they do not denote a transition to a final location. As a consequence, (16) below is ungrammatical, because in French a simple verb must indicate path and *remuer* is a manner verb without a directional path.

(16) * *Le bébé remuait vers les jouets.*

The baby moved towards the toys

(Cummins, 1996)

In French, the grammatical sentence would be (17) below:

(17) *Le bébé s'est allé vers les jouets en remuant.*

The baby went towards the toys moving

A last indication that French lacks dynamic prepositions is that (18) can only receive the locative/static reading:

(18) *Le ballon flote sous le pont.*

The ball floats around under the bridge

The sentence (18) has only a static interpretation. The ball is not assumed to move along a path.

To sum up, French doesn't have dynamic prepositions/adverbs and it has a small number of phrasal verbs.

BP (Brazilian Portuguese) has dynamic prepositions/adverbs and a considerable set of phrasal verbs.

English has dynamic prepositions/adverbs and a huge set of phrasal verbs.

3. The typology of motion events: the difference between Germanic and Romance languages

It has long been noted that Germanic and Romance exhibit different patterns in the expression of motion events.

Vinay & Darbelnet (1958) called this pattern *chassé-croisé* (criss-cross). It is diagrammed in (1) and exemplified in (2) and (3):

- (1) chassé-croisé
blown away
emporté par le vent
-
- (2) Blériot flew across the Channel.
Blériot a traversé la manche en avion.
- (3) She tiptoed down the stairs.
Elle descendit l'escalier sur la pointe des pieds. (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958:105)

The most important element in a motion event is path (Slobin, 1996). "Path must be present in one form or another in the description of a motion event; otherwise there is no motion event at all" (Hijazo-Gascon & Ibarretxe-Antunano, 2013:42).

The question is: In a given language, which part of speech will express path?

In Germanic languages, the path is usually expressed by a particle (preposition/adverb).

(19) The bottle floated into the cave.

In Romance languages, the path is usually expressed by a verb.

(20) *La bottella entró a la cueva flotando.*

The bottle entered towards the cave floating

In Germanic languages, the path is expressed by a prepositional phrase and the verb is free to express another piece of information, such as the manner of motion or cause.

In Romance languages, such as Spanish or French, the verb is usually bound to express path and the manner of motion may be left unexpressed.

These two patterns were called *lexicalization patterns* and they split up two types of languages: *satellite-framed* languages and *verb-framed* languages (Talmy, 1985; 2000; 2007; 2009). When the path is expressed in the verb, the language is termed *verb-framed*; when the path is expressed in a particle/satellite, the language is termed *satellite-framed* (I'm assuming that particle and satellite are a terminological variation).

These lexicalization patterns are a natural consequence of the fact that some languages, such as Spanish or French, lack dynamic prepositions, as we have seen.

If a language doesn't have particles to express path, it is up to the verb to do this.

English and French fit nicely into this *chassé-croisé* (criss-cross).

But BP doesn't.

And Italian too doesn't fit into. They are of a mixed type.

4. Intra-typological variation in Romance languages

Beavers et al. (2010), Croft et al. (2010) and Kopecka (2013) show that a binary typology (verb-framed x satellite-framed) doesn't work in many cases.

Since a language can shift from one type to another, "at any point in time a language might exhibit a 'mixed' type" (Pederson, 2017). This was the case of medieval French (Kopecka, 2013).

I think that BP is a mixed type, in less formal varieties. So far, I've found more than 30 verb-particle constructions in BP, all of which also display more idiomatic meanings (phrasal verbs). See examples below:

(21) *Pulei dentro do ônibus.*

I jumped in the bus

(22) *Pulei dentro desse sambinha.*

I jumped in this samba

(I took part in this samba)

(21) is an example of a literal verb-particle construction (or satellite-framed construction), because the particle (*dentro*, in) carries the information about the path and the verb express the manner of motion. (22) is an idiomatic expression derived from this verb-particle construction.

Romance languages exhibit intra-typological variation (Iacobini & Masini, 2007; Hijazo-Gascon & Ibarretxe-Antunano, 2013; Pederson, 2017). Some Romance languages may present a number of verb-particle constructions.

As far as I know, my research is the first one showing this in BP. Portuguese (spoken in Portugal!) is assumed to be a verb-framed language, with no verb-particle constructions.

On the other hand, Italian is considered to be of a mixed type, i. e., a mixture of verb-framed and satellite-framed types (Koch, 2001; Iacobini & Masini, 2007; Iacobini, 2009; 2010; 2015). Simone (2008: 24) has gone as far as assigning Italian to the satellite-framed type. The verb-particle constructions are called *verbi sintagmatici* in Italian. See examples below:

saltare dentro (jump into)

buttare fuori (throw out)

correre via (run away)

andare sotto (go down)

andare avanti (go ahead)

portare indietro (bring back)

uscire fuori (lit. exit out, exit)

(Iacobini, 2009)

There are also idiomatic uses, such as the following ones:

mandare giù (lit. send down, swallow, gobble)

mettere dentro (lit. put inside, imprison)

metter sotto (lit. put down, keep somebody down)

tirar avanti (survive)

andare dietro a qualcuno (lit. go behind to someone, follow, imitate, court)

Iacobini (2009) attributes the more frequent occurrence of verb-particle constructions in current standard Italian to the particular history of the relationship between dialects and the national language. In fact, other Italian dialects present a large number of phrasal verbs. This is the case in Trentino (Cordin, 2011). In this dialect, phrasal verbs with an aspectual value are very frequent:

lavàr fò (wash out a large container, such as a tub)

contentar via (to please)

dir fora (blab)

basarse su (to kiss repeatedly)

(Cordin, 2011)

To sum up: The genealogically-related Romance languages exhibit important differences in the lexicalization patterns. Some languages are clearly verb-framed (French, Spanish) and others are of a more mixed type (Brazilian Portuguese, Italian, Trentino).

How to explain such variation?

5. A tentative explanation of BP phrasal verbs

Iacobini and Masini (2007: 161-162) have proposed three structural factors that contributed to the development of Italian phrasal verbs:

- (1) “the passage to a more diagrammatic technique of overt locative marking, due to the morphosemantic bleaching of the Latin prefixed motion verbs in the Romance languages”,
- (2) “the weakening of Italian verbal prefixation to express locative meanings”, and
- (3) “the rise of prepositions in Italian [...] related to the loss of the Latin morphological case for the expression of syntactic relations” (pp. 161–162).

However, these conditions apply equally to all Romance languages. In Latin, the prefixes carried path information, but their meaning is bleached in Romance languages. The prefix is incorporated into the verbal root, and it is no more recognizable as an independent morpheme.

uscire (Italian, get out) < *exire* (Latin) lit. *ex-* out *ire-go*, get out

évasion (French, escape, run away) < *evadere* (Latin) lit. *e-*out *vadere-come*, come out

invadir (Portuguese, invade) < *invadere* (Latin) lit. *in-* inside *vadere-come*, invade

The bleaching of prefixes in motion verbs is common to all Romance languages. These prefixes are no more able to express locative meanings.

The same holds for condition (3) above: the rise of prepositions. For instance, Spanish has many spatial prepositions (Aske, 1989). To sum up, all Romance languages present the three conditions above. How to explain that some languages (Brazilian Portuguese, Italian, Trentino) exhibit phrasal verbs and others (French, Spanish) don't?

I suppose that the answer lies in the emergence of a specific kind of spatial prepositions (the dynamic ones) and the type of construction they contribute to forge.

A construction has a bundle of semantic and pragmatic properties.

BP phrasal verbs present two main properties: Condition (i) is a semantic property; Condition (ii) is a pragmatic one.

- i. BP phrasal verbs are used to represent telic events (in fact, complex events with a final result).
- ii. BP phrasal verbs are used in emphatic utterances.

Consider the example below:

(23) *Arranquei o vestido fora e corri peladona.*

I took the dress off and ran naked (completely)

The construction *arrancar fora* implies a completed action. The verb *arranquei* indicates the cause and the dynamic preposition *fora* express the result. The second sentence emphasizes the resultative state.

It is noteworthy that Spanish is said not to have prepositions that express the result of a completed action:

(24) **Juan pateó la pelota al jardín.*

Juan kicked the ball into the garden
(Mateu & Rigau, 2002)

This sentence cannot be read as implying that the ball is in the garden after it had been kicked there.

(25) *Cabelo correu fora.*

(My)hair ran away
(I became bald)



This event is also telic, as you can see.

The second property of BP phrasal verbs is that they are largely emphatic utterances: they imply that the speaker is in an emotional situation.

In BP, there may be two alternative forms to express a same situation: one with a simple verb and another with a phrasal verb. The phrasal verb alternative is seen as more emphatic and indicating more strongly the conclusion of the event:

(26) *Ele saiu do negócio.*

He got out of the business

(27) *Ele saiu fora do negócio.*

He got out of the business

A final question remains:

Why did French and Spanish not follow the same steps as BP and Italian?

The only necessary steps were to enrich the inventory of dynamic prepositions and to use such prepositions to make up phrasal verbs to express telic and emphatic situations.

Maybe the answer can be found in the sociolinguistic situations of these languages.

“The inner diglossia within Romance languages is basically limited to a traditional Fergusonian difference between the spoken and the written language” (Kabatek, 2016: 629).

Italian and BP present a high level of diglossia and French and Spanish a lower level. In other words, the degree of standardization is higher in French and Spanish and lower in Italian and BP (Mattos e Silva, 2004; Pountain, 2016).

Phrasal verbs emerge from oral varieties.

Properties of oral varieties that may favor the production of phrasal verbs are:

- i. Redundancy
- ii. Hyperbolic expressions
- iii. Path salience

“Path descriptions that might be regarded as redundant or even ungrammatical in conceptually written languages are accepted in conceptually oral languages” (Ibarretxe-Antunano, 2009:402).

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