

## Variation in Portuguese: Exploring the case of ditransitive verbs with Nanosyntax

### *Variação em português: explorando o caso dos verbos bitransitivos na perspectiva da Nanossintaxe*

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a very introductory analysis of variation in the expression of the Dative case and in constructions with ditransitive verbs across different varieties of Portuguese. To do so, it employs a novel theoretical framework for handling this type of data: Nanosyntax. The article begins by justifying the interest in the Dative case and by introducing the origins and contexts in which the different varieties of Portuguese examined here arise and are used. Both for data collection and for the construction of the theoretical framework, exploratory and bibliographic research methodologies are used. Thus, nanosyntactic proposals that deal with the representation of morphological cases and prepositions in different languages are revisited, and the data that will serve as the basis for the initial analyses are presented. The *corpus* of analysis includes, specifically, five varieties of Portuguese: European Portuguese, Angolan Portuguese, Mozambican Portuguese, Standard Brazilian Portuguese, and Popular/Afro-Brazilian Portuguese. As a result of this preliminary research, some possible generalizations are proposed regarding the distribution of the Double Object Construction (DOC) and the different prepositions that express the Dative in Portuguese. The paper concludes by raising a few questions that remain unanswered and pointing to possible developments for future work.

**Keywords:** Variation. Dative. DOC. Prepositions. Nanosyntax.

**Resumo:** Este texto expõe, de forma bastante introdutória, uma análise da variação na expressão do Dativo e nas construções com verbos bitransitivos, em diferentes variedades da língua portuguesa. Para tal, é utilizada uma teoria inédita no tratamento deste tipo de dados: a Nanossintaxe. O artigo se inicia justificando o interesse pelo caso Dativo e apresentando as origens e contextos em que as diferentes variedades do português aqui analisadas surgem e são usadas. Tanto para o levantamento dos dados, como para a construção do referencial teórico, é utilizada a metodologia de pesquisa exploratória e bibliográfica. Assim, são revisitadas propostas nanossintáticas que lidaram com a representação dos casos morfológicos e preposições em diferentes línguas, e são apresentados os dados que servirão de base para as primeiras análises. Fazem parte do *corpus* de análise, especificamente, cinco variedades do português: o português europeu, o português angolano, o português moçambicano, o português brasileiro padrão e o português popular/afro-brasileiro. Como resultado desta pesquisa preliminar, são levantadas algumas possíveis generalizações sobre a distribuição da Construção de Duplo Objeto (CDO) e das diferentes preposições que expressam o Dativo em português. Conclui-se levantando algumas questões que ainda carecem de respostas e apontando possíveis desdobramentos para este trabalho.

**Palavras-chave:** Variação. Dativo. CDO. Preposições. Nanossintaxe.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present a small portion of a broader research project whose goal is to examine the cross-linguistic variation in the expression of the Dative case and, in particular, in constructions involving ditransitive verbs in different varieties of the Portuguese language, based on the nanosyntactic theoretical framework (Ramchand, 2008; Starke, 2009; Baunaz *et al.*, 2018; Ferreira; Rammé; Wachowicz, 2021; among others). To this end, some initial hypotheses will be presented regarding how the description of this variation can be approached from a formal perspective such as Nanosyntax.

Verbs, prepositions, and the different syntactic configurations used to express the Dative case are especially interesting because they display great diversity from one variety of Portuguese to another and because, at this particular point, all African and American varieties of Portuguese appear to differ from European Portuguese (EP). In addition, and possibly for this reason as well, research from a wide range of theoretical perspectives has sought to describe and explain dative constructions in different languages (such as Coleman, 2020; Newson; Szécsényi, 2020; Efremov, 2020; Lee, 2022; to mention some more recent studies). In Portuguese specifically, this field of research is also quite productive. For illustrative purposes, we may refer to the works of Brito (2014), Barros (2018), Gonçalves (2020), and Gonçalves, Duarte and Hagemeyer (2022), among many others. The contribution of the present research thus lies in proposing a nanosyntactic analysis for this object of investigation.

Thus, before focusing on Portuguese, it is important to highlight the potential of Nanosyntactic Theory to describe and explain variation both within a single language and cross-linguistically. One of the foundational claims of Nanosyntax is that the variation observed between languages or between dialects of the same language derives directly from the submorphemic nature of syntactic structure. That is, Nanosyntax assumes that the elements that make up syntactic structure are not lexical items, but rather primitive functional and/or semantic-conceptual features hierarchically organized in a universal functional sequence. Consequently, a lexical item may be associated with a set or a subset of features of the (nano)syntactic structure. Hence, it is understood that “different lexical items may correspond to different amounts of syntactic structure” (Starke, 2009, p. 2).

According to Fábregas (2007), even within a single language, such as Spanish,

[...] we expect some degree of variation in the lexical entry of different vocabulary items, which in this theory is captured by suggesting that lexical items may be tagged with different sets of features in different varieties of the same language while, by assumption, the syntactic structure remains identical (Fábregas, 2008, p. 190).

The core consequence of this hypothesis leads us to a new way of analyzing what nanosyntactic theory has called ‘syncretisms’. In Nanosyntax, syncretism is defined as “a surface conflation of two distinct morphosyntactic structures” (Caha, 2009, p. 6). Thus, for example, in French, the preposition “à” is used both to introduce the Goal (the endpoint) and the Location of a motion event. In this case, we can say that there is a syncretism of the Goal–Place features in that language. By contrast, in English there are two distinct lexical items to express the same concepts: “to” lexicalizes the Goal

feature, while “at” lexicalizes Place. We thus observe that the difference between these two languages does not lie in the (nano)syntactic structure, but in the surface items that each language has in its inventory to express the same set/subset of features. In this sense, research within the nanosyntactic framework has been successful in showing that syncretisms are cross-linguistically constrained by the same universal hierarchy, the functional sequence (*f-seq*).

In the present study, this universal hierarchy and the possibility of associating the same subset of features with different lexical items will allow us to lay the first foundations for a nanosyntactic theory of variation in the expression of the Dative case in Portuguese. What we will see in the analysis presented in Section 4 is that both the contact of Portuguese with other languages and the restrictions imposed by the *f-seq*, combined with a small number of general nanosyntactic principles, seem to be sufficient to explain both the emergence of constructions not recognized in European Portuguese (EP) and the contexts of variation in which the prepositions and verbs involved in these constructions appear.

In order to understand the difference between EP and the other varieties of Portuguese that developed outside the Iberian Peninsula, however, it is necessary to briefly revisit the recent history of the formation of the states in which Portuguese and its different dialects/varieties are currently spoken. Although entities such as the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP, website) speak with a certain complacency about the presence of Portuguese on four continents, the countries in which Portuguese is an official language, with the exception of Portugal, are the result of a violent colonial process (Rezende, 2015; Oliveira, 2019; Ribeiro; Melo, 2019). Thus, over the centuries, this language was learned and transmitted by speakers of different languages and cultures, often forced to coexist in the same space and at the cost of the erasure of other languages. The varieties of Portuguese spoken in the Americas and in Africa are therefore languages that emerged from a colonial, multicultural, multilingual context of intense, turbulent, and extensive language contact, with parallels, of course, but also with many differences.

An outline of the sociolinguistic landscape of these countries also helps us understand the contexts in which Portuguese is spoken, acquired, and transmitted. On the one hand, it is relevant that Brazil became the seat of the Portuguese Empire in 1808, becoming independent from Portugal in 1822. Mozambique and Angola, on the other hand, achieved independence much more recently, in 1975, after long and violent wars. According to Ponso (2008), in Mozambique, a country with a current population of 33 million inhabitants, Portuguese is an L2 for approximately 39% to 50% of the population, although only 9% declared that they used this language on a daily basis in the 1997 General Population and Housing Census (Ponso, 2008, p. 3). According to Pissurno (2018, p. 81), in addition, in the 2007 Census, 10.7% began to declare Portuguese as their L1. According to the same author, however, the vast majority of the population (85.2%) has a Bantu language as L1.

In Angola, whose population is approximately 37 million inhabitants (World Bank Group, website), according to the Observatory of the Portuguese Language (OLP, website), 71.15% of the population speaks Portuguese. However, as in Mozambique, the number of speakers who have Portuguese as a first language is lower: approximately

60% of the population (University of Porto, website). In addition, according to Ponso (2008), the indigenous languages present in Angolan territory have two origins: the Khoisan language family, spoken by a small group in the provinces of Cuando-Cubango and Cunene in the south; and the Niger-Congo language family, especially the Bantu languages, spoken by the majority of the population and present throughout the territory. Ponso (2008) also highlights that

[n]os países da África em que o português é língua da administração, ele convive com dezenas de línguas autóctones — que por sua vez desmembram-se em dezenas de dialetos — e a característica predominante de seus falantes é a alternância entre uma língua e outra de acordo com domínios específicos (Ponso, 2008, p. 152).

In Mozambique, where the vast majority of the population speaks a Bantu language as L1, what occurs “is the simultaneous use of different languages in society, which tends to select the contexts in which each one has greater value” (Pissurno, 2018, p. 79). By contrast, in both Portugal and Brazil, almost the entire population has Portuguese as a mother tongue (University of Porto, website). Even so, there are substantial differences between European Portuguese, spoken in Portugal, and the Portuguese spoken in Brazil. This is because, according to Negrão and Viotti (2014, 2025), Brazilian Portuguese is the result of intense and extensive contact between European Portuguese and African languages, first on the coasts of West Africa and later, over at least the last four centuries, with African languages brought to the American continent by millions of people who were enslaved and trafficked for inhumane exploitation.

It is therefore important to keep in mind the multilingual and multicultural context in which Portuguese was established outside Portugal, the result of prolonged, turbulent, and intense language contact, in order to understand how different perspectives (Naro; Scherre, 1993; Dias, 2007; De Oliveira, 2008; Lucchesi, 2003, 2012; Lucchesi; Mello, 2009; Baxter; Mello; Santana, 2014; among others) point to different ways of understanding the changes undergone by Portuguese in each locality, as well as of explaining the different phenomena of variation currently observed.

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The investigation of the grammatical peculiarities of Brazilian Portuguese led to a search for their origins. Some studies have looked for an explanation for the emergence of Brazilian Portuguese grammar from a language-internal perspective, be it within a generative approach related to parameter resetting (*e.g.*, Roberts; Kato, 1993), or within the Sapirian tradition which sees grammatical changes as the result of a language’s natural drift (*e.g.*, Naro; Scherre, 2007). Differently, other studies have preferred to explain some of the grammatical characteristics of Brazilian Portuguese as a consequence of the overwhelming language contact which took place in the first centuries of Brazilian history (*e.g.*, Lucchesi; Baxter; Ribeiro, 2009; Noll; Dietrich, 2010) (Negrão; Viotti, 2014, p. 136).

At present, however, although this work does not ignore the fact that language contact and the influence of substrate languages may have led to the variation currently observed in the expression of the Dative case in Portuguese, it does not commit itself to any of these perspectives. In fact, the working hypothesis adopted here is that both language-internal mechanisms and language contact play a role in processes of change and variation. This work nevertheless conjectures that interlanguages (Selinker, 1972),

pidgins and creole languages, as well as colonial languages (*i.e.*, varieties that emerged as a result of recent violent colonial processes), are important examples of how the mechanisms of Universal Grammar (UG) operate.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to present an initial nanosyntactic analysis that may lay the groundwork for a semantic and morphosyntactic description of the expression of the Dative case in different varieties of Portuguese, with the main goal of contributing to the expansion of our understanding of the relationship between morphological and structural case, prepositions, the semantic/thematic roles of verbal arguments, and argument structure. As already mentioned, the specific interest in the Dative case is due to the fact that we find great variation in its morphosyntactic expression, both in Portuguese and cross-linguistically.

After briefly contextualizing the emergence of the different varieties of Portuguese and justifying the interest in the study of the Dative case, the text is organized as follows. In the first section, some previous nanosyntactic proposals that analyze morphological case and prepositions in different languages are presented. Next, we review some of the many previous works that have described the expression of the Dative constructions in Portuguese, including its variation. It is important to mention, in this regard, that the data collection methodology for this phase of the research was a literature review. Therefore, much of the empirical variation data analyzed here, as will be referenced, were drawn from these secondary sources. Therefore, in the following section, the data from five varieties of Portuguese are examined in greater detail: EP (European Portuguese), AP (Angolan Portuguese), MP (Mozambican Portuguese), standard BP (Brazilian Portuguese), and PBP (Popular/Afro-Brazilian Portuguese), based on the reviewed works. Based on these data, in the analysis section, initial hypotheses will be proposed for a nanosyntactic description that could account for the variation we find. Finally, some questions that still require answers will be pointed out.

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## 2 BETWEEN MORPHOLOGICAL CASES AND PREPOSITIONS: NANOSYNTACTIC PROPOSALS

This research argues that a deeper understanding of the phenomena that arise in spontaneous contexts of language contact may bring us closer to a clearer picture of the relationship between verbs, prepositions, and their complements cross-linguistically. With respect to linguistic typology, it is widely acknowledged that natural languages could be divided into three groups regarding the syntactic expression of an event involving three participants (Santana, 2019):

- a. a group in which ditransitive verbs do not structurally distinguish their arguments, as in the case of the double object construction (DOC), in which the second and third arguments of the verb are syntactically DPs;
- b. another group in which the Beneficiary argument is structurally distinguished from the Theme, as in the case of the prepositional dative construction (PDC), into which European Portuguese (EP) and Brazilian Portuguese (BP) fit;
- c. and a third group in which ditransitive verbs “distinguish only the theme with respect to the other arguments” (Santana, 2019, p. 40).

The first group includes, for example, the Bantu languages of the Niger-Congo family, which have an applicative construction in which an argument is added to the verbal root through the incorporation of a special morpheme, ‘-i’ or ‘-ir’. Such additional arguments are interpreted as affected by the event and are usually associated with the semantic role of Beneficiary or Instrument. Indeed, the existence of these constructions in the languages that are in contact with Portuguese in the regions where the DOC emerges has been used as an argument to explain this phenomenon. However, since such an explanation lies beyond the scope of the present study, for the purposes of this research it suffices to note that Ramchand (2008) (herself building on Harley, 2002) relies on these constructions to explain, in nanosyntactic terms, the dative alternation in English. We will return to this point later, when discussing Ramchand’s (2008) proposal in Section 4.

For now, however, it is just important to observe that ditransitive verbs lexicalize events that mobilize different semantic primitives. These primitives, in turn, seem to reflect a very general characteristic of human cognition that may be guiding the shape of linguistic change and variation. In this sense, Jackendoff (1983, 1990) presents conceptual hierarchies very similar to those proposed by Nanosyntax, both in the spatial domain and in the domain of events/situations. Moreover, it is noteworthy that ditransitive constructions also employ, across different languages, prepositions that are likewise used to express the Dative case and spatial relations. These prepositions are commonly associated either with features of the Case Hierarchy (Caha, 2009) or with features of the Spatial Hierarchy (Jackendoff, 1983, 1990; Pantcheva, 2011). Therefore, their analysis may also help us understand how these two domains are related.

As can be seen in examples (1) to (5) below, in BP we can use three different prepositions to introduce Goal arguments of motion verbs. In addition, two of them, “*a*” (‘to’) and “*para*” (‘to’), are also employed with dative complements of ditransitive verbs. They are not, however, completely interchangeable, since, as we will see later, they interact in different ways depending on the Portuguese variety, on the semantics of the verb, and on other syntactic configurations. Consequently, the choice of preposition depends not only on the different feature structures that the preposition itself lexicalizes, but also on the features lexicalized by the verb and by the other arguments present in the clause. Variation is thus explained by the syncretisms that these prepositions and verbs may display with respect to specific subsets of the *f-seq*, as we can see with “*a*” (‘to’) and “*para*” (‘to’) below (spontaneous speech data):

- (1) Elisa foi            ao[GOAL]    mercado.  
Elisa go.3SG.PST to-the.MASC supermarket  
“Elisa went to the market”.
- (2) Elisa foi            pro[GOAL]    mercado.  
Elisa go.3SG.PST to-the.MASC supermarket  
“Elisa went to the market”.
- (3) Elisa foi            no[GOAL]    mercado.  
Elisa go.3SG.PST in-the.MASC supermarket  
“Elisa went at (to) the market”.

- (4) Elisa enviou um e-mail ao[DAT] namorado.  
Elisa send.3SG.PST an.MASC e-mail to-the.MASC boyfriend  
“Elisa sent an e-mail to her boyfriend”.
- (5) Elisa enviou um e-mail pro[DAT] namorado.  
Elisa send.3SG.PST an.MASC e-mail to-the.MASC boyfriend  
“Elisa sent an e-mail to her boyfriend”.

As already mentioned, in Nanosyntax there are several studies (Svenonius, 2006, 2008; Fábregas, 2007; Pantcheva, 2011; Rocquet, 2013; Romeu, 2013; Ferreira, 2021a, among others) that propose decompositions of K (Case) and P (Spatial P) into deeply articulated semantic and functional features, including concepts such as Path, Place, and so on. Some examples are briefly reviewed here in order to provide an overview of the proposals developed so far.

We find in Svenonius (2006, 2008) the first works to propose decompositions of P in Nanosyntax. According to this author, spatial prepositions have structures that lexicalize not only Path and Place features, but also the features Axial Part and K (Case). The *f-seq* for the P domain would therefore be as follows:

- (6) Svenonius’s (2006, 2008) hierarchy for the P domain:  
Path > Place > AxPart > K

Expanding on this proposal and on Jackendoff’s (1983, 1990) work, Pantcheva (2011) suggests decomposing the Path feature into Route, Source, Goal, and Place, further arguing that spatial prepositions also carry modifier features such as Scale and Bound:

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- (7) Pantcheva’s (2011) hierarchy for the P domain:  
Scale/Bound > Route > Source > Goal > Place > AxPart > K

Fábregas (2007), in turn, suggests that some of these features are also lexicalized by verbal roots, which would explain cases of false syncretism in Spanish, in which locative prepositions are assigned directional features that are, in fact, being lexicalized by the verb. I myself (Rammé, 2017) proposed something similar to explain the variable use of the preposition “*em*” (‘in’/‘at’) with motion verbs in Portuguese. The central proposal is that there are two classes of motion verbs: one in which the verbal root also lexicalizes Result (Res) or Path, and another in which the root lexicalizes only the verbal features Initiator (Init) and Process (Proc). Thus, verbs that lexicalize Res/Path can combine with locative prepositions, allowing for a directional reading. However, when a verb that does not lexicalize Res/Path combines with a Place preposition, the only available reading is locative (examples from Fábregas (2007) and Rammé (2017)):

- (8) a. Juan subió[INIT-PROC-RES/PATH] a[PLACE] mi casa.  
Juan go-up.3SG.PST at my house  
“Juan went up at my house”.

(Directional reading)

- b. \*Juan bailó a[INIT-PROC] la[PLACE] habitación.  
 Juan dance.3SG.PST at the.FEM room  
 “Juan danced to the room”.  
 (No directional reading possible)

- (9) a. Joana foi[INIT-PROC-RES/PATH] no[PLACE] mercado.  
 Joana go.3SG.PST in.theMASC market  
 “Joana went to the market”.  
 (Directional reading)

- b. Joana dançou[INIT-PROC] no[PLACE] mercado.  
 Joana dance.3SG.PST in-the.MASC market  
 “Joana danced at/in the market”.  
 (Locative reading)

Rocquet (2013) also explored this division of labor between verbal roots and affixes to explain cases of syncretism and false syncretism involved in differential object marking in Hungarian. According to the author, the *f-seq* for the K domain would therefore be:

- (10) Rocquet’s (2013) hierarchy for the K domain:  
 Com > Inst > Dat > Gen > Acc2-DEF > Acc1 > Nom

Similarly, to explain cases of false syncretism in Spanish and the use of directional prepositions in locative contexts, Romeu (2014) proposes that there is no Path feature above Place. The sense of Path would instead result from the decomposition of the Place feature into the Relational and Region features, as well as from their combination with modifiers such as Con-joint, Dis-joint, and Scalar Point. The *f-seq* for the P domain would then be as follows:

- (11) Romeu’s (2014) hierarchy for the P domain:  
 Rel > Axial Part > Reg > Entity

Finally, Ferreira (2021a, 2021b) proposes an articulated hierarchy of features for the spatial domain that interacts with the functional projection P and includes a [Reg] operator, that is, “a nominal modifier that acts as a type-shifter” (Ferreira, 2021b, p. 257) and is responsible for taking an entity with reference in the individual domain — *i.e.*, a nominal — and converting it into the space that the individual occupies, *i.e.*, its region. Thus, “[Reg] would be located just above the DP that serves as the base for the GROUND, but below the architecture of the preposition” (Ferreira, 2021b, p. 257). The *f-seq* for the P domain would therefore be:

- (12) Ferreira’s (2021) hierarchy for the P domain:  
 Bound > Scale > Route > Source > Goal > Deg > Loc > Reg > AxPart > K

As can be observed, some of the proposals discussed above include, in one way or another, the K (Case) feature in the spatial *f-seq*, although they do not commit to

analyzing the relationship between the decomposition of the Spatial Hierarchy and that of the Case Hierarchy. However, as already mentioned, it is a fact that prepositions commonly associated with spatial meanings are not used exclusively to express such relations — they are also regularly used to introduce indirect or oblique objects of ditransitive verbs (data in (13) and (15) from Brito (2008, p. 33) and Chavagne (2005), respectively):

- (13) A Maria deu um livro ao[DAT] João. (EP)  
the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST a.MASC book to-the.MASC João  
“Maria gave a book to João”.
- (14) A Joana deu um livro pro[DAT] Alê. (BP)  
the.FEM Joana give.3SG.PST a.MASC book to-the.MASC Alê  
“Joana gave a book to Alê”.
- (15) [· · ·] deu na[DAT] mãe a outra metade. (AP)  
give.3SG.PST in-the.FEM mother the.FEM other.FEM half  
“[· · ·] gave at (to) the mother the other half”.

In the sentences above, it can be observed that the preposition “*a*”, as well as the prepositions “*para*” and “*em*”, may introduce dative arguments of ditransitive verbs in different varieties of Portuguese. According to Brito (2008), in European Portuguese (EP), the dative marker continues to be exclusively the preposition “*a*”; in Brazilian Portuguese (BP), the preposition “*para*” appears to be replacing “*a*” in this function; in Angolan Portuguese (AP), by contrast, the preposition “*em*” is found performing the same role.

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The preposition “*a*” is, in fact, traditionally considered the canonical marker of Dative case in Romance languages. As previous studies have shown, over the course of their history, these languages lost the rich system of morphological case inherited from Latin and replaced the Latin Dative case with a preposition: “*a*”. Lucchesi and Mello (2009, p. 157) briefly outline the path of this change, which can be visualized in the examples below (examples from Lucchesi; Mello, 2009, p. 157):

- (16) a. Pulcrae puellae rosam dedi. (LAT)  
Beautiful.DAT girl.DAT rose.ACC give.ISG.PST  
“I gave a rose to the beautiful girl”.
- b. Ho datto la rosa ala bella bambina.  
have.ISG.PST give.PART the.FEM rose to-the.FEM beautiful.FEM girl  
(IT)  
“I gave the rose to the beautiful girl”.
- c. Di la rosa a la niña guapa. (ESP)  
give.ISG.PST the.FEM rose to the.FEM girl beautiful.FEM  
“I gave the rose to the beautiful girl”.
- d. J’ai offert la rose à la jolie fille. (FR)  
I.have.PRES give.PST the.FEM rose to the.FEM beautiful.FEM girl

- “I gave the rose to the beautiful girl”.
- e. Dei a rosa à menina bonita. (EP)  
 give.ISG.PST the.FEM rose to-the.FEM girl beautiful.FEM  
 “I gave the rose to the beautiful girl”.

To demonstrate that the preposition “a” is still indeed the Dative marker in European Portuguese, Brito (2008) proposes a test that is also used in the analysis of the dative alternation in English. As shown below, according to Brito (2008), it is acceptable to use the preposition “a” to introduce a dative complement in EP. At the same time, this prepositional phrase (PP) may also be replaced by the dative pronoun “lhe” (examples from Brito, 2008, p. 33):

- (17) European Portuguese
- a. A Maria deu um livro ao(DAT) João.  
 the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST a.MASC book to-the.MASC João  
 “Maria gave a book to João”.
- b. A Maria deu-lhe(DAT) um livro.  
 the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST-3SG.OBL a.MASC book  
 “Maria gave him a book”.

However, when the oblique argument is not Dative but Locative, the use of the preposition “a” becomes ungrammatical (example from Brito, 2008, p. 33):

- (18) \*A Maria enviou um livro a(ALVO) Lisboa. (EP)  
 the.FEM Maria send.3SG.PST a.MASC book to(ALVO) Lisbon  
 Maria sent a book to Lisbon.

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Thus, in EP, “a” is demonstrably the Dative marker, and “lhe” is the objective dative pronoun. In addition, EP also possesses other objective pronouns used to replace Accusative arguments (“o” and “a”), as illustrated in the spontaneous speech data below:

- (19) a. O que a Ana deu ao(DAT) Pedro?  
 the.MASC COMPL the.FEM Ana give.3SG.PST to-the.MASC Pedro  
 “What did Ana give to Pedro?”
- b. Ela deu-lhe(DAT) um livro.  
 she give.3SG.PST-3SG.OBL a.MASC book  
 “She gave him a book”.
- (20) a. Onde está o livro?  
 where be.3SG.PRES the.MASC book  
 “Where is the book?”
- b. A Ana deu-o(ACC) ao Pedro.  
 the.FEM Ana give.3SG.PST-3SG.MASC to-the.MASC Pedro  
 “Ana gave it to Pedro”.

In Brazilian Portuguese, by contrast, we find a different scenario. Research shows that the

preposition “*para*” alternates with “*a*” in the introduction of dative complements (Brito, 2011; Farias, 2006; Kewitz, 2007; Berlinck, 2011; Barros, 2018; among others). This is the same preposition that has been replacing “*a*” in the introduction of directional arguments of motion verbs, suggesting that both may express the same syncretisms. The examples below illustrate this scenario (spontaneous speech data):

- (21) a. A Maria deu um livro ao/pro[DAT] João.  
the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST a.MASC book to-the.MASC João  
“Maria gave a book to João”.
- b. A Maria deu um livro a/para[DAT] ele[NOM].  
the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST a.MASC book to 3SG.MASC  
“Maria gave a book to him”.
- (22) A Maria enviou um livro a/para[GOAL] Lisboa.  
the.FEM Maria send.3SG.PST a.MASC book to Lisbon  
“Maria sent a book to Lisbon”.

In order to help us understand the regularity with which this phenomenon occurs across different languages, Caha (2009) undertook an in-depth study of syncretisms observed in dozens of languages in the morphosyntactic expression of meanings associated with structural cases and prepositions. As a result of this work, this author proposes a Case Hierarchy and observes that, cross-linguistically, prepositions and morphemes (affixes and suffixes) share the task of expressing the different meanings and functions associated with the universal Case *f-seq*. Caha thus arrives at the Case Inventory Principle, reproduced in (23) below, from Caha (2009, p. 30):

- (23) The inventory of case suffixes:
- a. If a given case in the Case sequence is a suffix, all cases to its left (if present in the language) are also suffixed.
- b. The Case sequence: NOM-ACC-GEN-DAT-INS-COM

It is also important to note that Caha (2009, p. 292) observes that the Case sequence in some languages may exhibit morphemes in which the Locative (Loc) case, associated with Place semantics, and the Ablative/Prepositional case, associated with Path semantics, are syncretic with Accusative, Genitive, and Dative. Most interestingly, however, is the predictability of their position in the *f-seq*. The Locative case appears predominantly between Accusative and Genitive, whereas Ablative/Prepositional cases tend to appear systematically between Genitive and Dative. The author does not include these cases in his proposal, however, because “[...] they are in fact an inherent part of the sequence, but their presence in other languages is blurred due to total syncretism” (Caha, 2009, p. 236).

What is particularly worth highlighting at this point is the systematic way in which this variation involves syntactic, semantic, and morphological processes. With this rich and varied scenario in mind, we now turn to the study of the expression of the Dative case in the different varieties of Portuguese mentioned above.

### 3 THE EXPRESSION OF THE DATIVE CASE IN PORTUGUESE: A SNAPSHOT

As previously mentioned, the data presented in this section are the result of an initial exploratory bibliographic survey. For this overview, we selected studies that focus on one or more varieties of the Portuguese language with which we are working. Thus, all the empirical examples analyzed here were drawn from secondary sources — publications that contributed to the composition of this initial **snapshot**. These sources are therefore cited prior to the presentation of each example.

As we have seen above, in Portuguese a ditransitive verb is defined as one that appears in constructions with three arguments: an argument bearing the Agent/Actor role in subject position; a Theme argument in direct object position; and a Dative/Oblique argument in indirect object position, with different possible readings — sometimes Beneficiary, sometimes Source/Goal. As already mentioned, according to Brito (2008), in European Portuguese (EP) only the argument associated with a Beneficiary reading is licensed by the preposition “a” (examples from Brito, 2008, p. 33; our glosses)<sup>1</sup>:

(24) European Portuguese

- a. A Maria deu [um livro]<sub>[DO]</sub> ao<sub>[DAT]</sub>  
 the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST a.MASC book to-the.MASC(DAT)  
 João.<sub>[IO]</sub>(BENEFACTIVE)  
 João  
 “Maria gave a book to João”.
- b. A Maria deu [ao<sub>[DAT]</sub>(BENEFACTIVE)<sub>[IO]</sub> João] um  
 the.FEM Maria give.3SG.PST to-the.MASC(DAT) João a.MASC  
 livro.<sub>[DO]</sub>  
 book  
 “Maria gave to João a book”.
- c. \*A Maria enviou [um livro<sub>[DO]</sub>] a<sub>[GOAL]</sub> Lisboa<sub>[OBLIQUE]/[\*BENEFACTIVE].</sub>  
 the.FEM Maria send.3SG.PST a.MASC book to Lisbon  
 “Maria sent a book to Lisbon”.

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An interesting observation is that, in the prepositional version of the indirect object, word order may vary. Indeed, according to Lucchesi (2003, 2012), the Dative argument, when introduced by a preposition, normally follows the Accusative argument, which lacks additional morphology. However, when the Accusative argument is phonologically heavier than the Dative, the syntactic order may change. This appears to be a fairly common pattern in Portuguese: heavier arguments tend to appear last, as predicted by independently motivated phonological and information-structural principles. This variation is also predicted, as we will see, by Jackendoff (1990).

When we look at other varieties of Portuguese, however, the picture changes drastically. In Angolan Portuguese (AP), for example, different studies (Chavagne, 2005; Brito, 2008, 2009; among others) have observed a general tendency toward the

<sup>1</sup>In the examples (24), DO=direct object and IO=indirect object.

transitivization of verbs that were originally intransitive (data from Chavagne, 2005):

- (25) [· · ·] desrespeitava a [· · ·] mãe que lhe[ACC]  
 disrespect.3SG.PST.IMPF the.FEM mother COMPL 3SG.OBL  
 nascera.  
 birth.3SG.PST.PRF.PFV  
 “[· · ·] [He] disrespected the [· · ·] mother who had given him birth”.

In addition, according to Chavagne (2005) and Brito (2008), the accusative forms of unstressed clitic pronouns (“*o*”, “*a*”) are rare in AP and are replaced by nominative forms. In AP, clitics associated with Dative case are also rare, and the use of nominative or null pronouns in their place is frequent (data in (26)–(39) from Brito, 2008):

- (26) Deixe ele[NOM] falar!  
 let.IMP 3SG speak.INF  
 “Let him speak!”

Moreover, in AP there is a widespread use of the locative preposition “*em*” (‘in’/‘at’) in contexts where the preposition “*a*” would be expected in EP:

- (27) Ela foi no[GOAL] mercado.  
 3SG.FEM go.3SG.PST in-the.MASC supermarket  
 “She went at (to) the supermarket”.
- (28) Daí eles entregaram numa[DAT] moça.  
 then 3PL.MASC deliver.3PL.PST in-a.FEM girl  
 “Then they handed [something] at (to) a girl”.
- (29) [· · ·] telefonar na[DAT] polícia [· · ·]  
 telephone.INF in-the.FEM police  
 “[· · ·] to call at the police [· · ·]”
- (30) [· · ·] deu na[DAT] mãe a outra metade.  
 give.PST in-the.FEM mother the.FEM other.FEM half  
 “[· · ·] gave at (to) the mother the other half”.

Examples (27)–(30) show that, in AP the preposition “*em*” is widely used to introduce arguments of motion or directional verbs, as well as dative complements of verbs with two or three arguments. In Mozambican Portuguese (MP), by contrast, we also find a strong tendency toward the transitivization of prepositional verbs and the use of the dative clitic “*lhe*” in place of accusative forms (Gonçalves, 1990, 1996, 2002, 2004; Brito, 2008; among others):

- (31) Os bandos batiam sempre as pessoas.  
 the.MASC.PL gang.MASC.PL beat.3PL.IMP.PST always the.FEM.PL people  
 “The gangs always beat the people”.

In addition, this variety of Portuguese licenses dative passives, something quite uncommon in Romance languages in general:

- (32) Os jovens[DAT] são dados responsabilidades [· · ·]  
 the.MASC.PL youngsters be.3PL. give.PART.PST responsibilities  
 “The young people are given responsibilities [· · ·]”
- (33) O António tinha um padre que lhe[DAT]  
 the.MASC.SG António have.3SG.PST.IMP a.MASC priest COMP 3SG.OBL  
 educava.  
 educate.3SG.PST.IMP  
 “António had a priest who educated him”.

Finally, MP also innovates by widely licensing Double Object Constructions (DOC), as in the following example:

- (34) Entregou o emissário[DAT] as cartas.  
 hand.3SG.PST the.MASC emissary the.FEM.PL letters  
 “He handed the messenger the letters”.

In Brazil, in turn, we can identify two main varieties (possibly more), which Lucchesi and Mello (2009) refer to as Standard Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and Afro-Brazilian Portuguese (or Popular Portuguese — PPB). In the standard variety, as we have already seen, the preposition “*para*” is systematically occupying the place of the preposition “*a*” in the licensing of dative arguments. Thus, we find the prepositions “*a*” and “*para*” competing to introduce the indirect object of ditransitive verbs. Several studies indicate that the choice of preposition depends mainly on regional factors and level of schooling (*cf.* Brito, 2008), with a stronger tendency toward the use of “*para*”:

- (35) Olha, um conselho que eu dou a[DAT] você [· · ·]  
 look.IMP an.MASC advice COMP 1SG give.ISG.PRES to 2SG  
 “Look, a piece of advice that I give to you [· · ·]”
- (36) Eu ia explicar tudo para[DAT] ela [· · ·]  
 1SG go.ISG.PST.IMP explain.INF everything to 3SG.FEM  
 “I was going to explain everything to her [· · ·]”

At the same time, in Popular Portuguese (PPB), spoken in rural communities in the country area of the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Goiás, and Bahia (where, historically, Black people who escaped from slavery formed closed communities known as quilombos), we find dialects of Portuguese that appear to be closer, in their grammatical configuration, to the Portuguese spoken in Mozambique, where the influence of African languages — especially those of the Niger family — is stronger and Portuguese is spoken by a minority of the population. In these popular and rural varieties, there is a high degree of productivity (Scher, 1996; Gomes, 1998; Lucchesi, 2003; Brito, 2008; among others) of the Double Object Construction (DOC):

- (37) Ele entregou o pai[DAT] um livro.  
3SG hand.3SG.PST the.MASC father a.MASC book  
“He handed his father a book”.
- (38) Desejo você[DAT] um bom dia.  
wish.ISG.PRES 2SG.NOM a.MASC good day  
“I wish you a good morning”.
- (39) Dei ele[DAT] o recado.  
give.ISG.PST 3SG.NOM the.MASC message  
“I gave him the message”.

At the same time, these same studies indicate that accusative and dative oblique pronouns are often replaced by nominative pronouns, while the prepositions “*em*” and “*para*” vary in replacing “*a*” in the introduction of arguments of motion verbs. Having thus outlined, albeit briefly, the panorama of variation in the expression of the Dative case in Portuguese, we now move on to outline some analytical paths within the nanosyntactic framework.

#### 4 EXPLORING VARIATION IN THE EXPRESSION OF THE DATIVE CASE IN PORTUGUESE WITHIN NANOSYNTAX: FIRST STEPS

Before we begin the analysis, it is important to recall that since the proposal of Case Grammar (Fillmore, 1968), numerous studies (Lima, 1982) have sought to determine exactly which cases — and how many — can be associated with verbal arguments. What all these studies share is the assumption that “syntactic structure can be predicted by semantic participants Agentive, Instrumental, Dative, Factitive, Locative, Objective” (Fillmore, 1968, p. 24-25). In addition, it is commonly accepted that the syntactic expression of these participants is deeply constrained by a universal hierarchy. Another essential issue for the present analysis concerns the definition of Dative, which, although it appears with different formulations in subsequent works, was already partially present in this foundational text: Dative is “the case of the animate being affected by the state or action identified by the verb” (Fillmore, 1968, p. 24).

A subsequent proposal that is also relevant to the present study is found in Jackendoff (1990). According to this author, the Thematic Hierarchy is as follows:

- (40) Thematic Hierarchy (Jackendoff, 1990, p. 258)  
Actor/Agent – Patient (AFF–) – Beneficiary (AFF+) – Theme – Location/Source/Goal

It should be noted that, with the exception of the Theme–Locative ordering, this hierarchy closely resembles that proposed by Fillmore. Jackendoff (1990), however, adds an important observation: only arguments in the form of NPs (nominals) are subject to this hierarchy. Arguments in the form of PPs, APs, or others may be freely linked to positions in Conceptual Structure without necessarily appearing in this order in the syntax. Thus, it is allowed the

completely free coindexation between conceptual arguments and non-NP

syntactic arguments. In contrast to the problem of determining the order of NP arguments, which motivated linking theory in the first place, there is no problem with the relative order of AP, PP, and SC arguments. Rather, their relative order is predicted by principles of phrase structure [ · · · ] (Jackendoff, 1990, p. 264).

As pointed out by Jackendoff (1990, p. 134), moreover, the Dative case is associated with the thematic role of Beneficiary, that is, with the position of the second argument of *AFF+* at the Action Tier, which is interpreted as being “positively affected” by the verbal action or process. At the level of Conceptual Structure, in parallel, the Beneficiary role is associated with the position of the second argument of the *GO<sub>poss</sub>* function, that is, the argument that is simultaneously the goal of the movement undergone by the Theme and the entity that ends up possessing the Theme as a result of this movement. This relationship between movement/change and location/possession as complementary notions becomes important in the scenario investigated here.

In this respect, it is worth noting that for Caha (2009), the semantics of the relation between the Dative and Genitive mirrors the relation found between directionals (Goals) and locatives (Places/Locations). This parallelism may suggest that when we say a preposition is specialized for expressing the Dative, it may also be syncretic in the lexicalization of both Dative and Genitive, given that these are adjacent features. To better illustrate this hypothesis, the semantic relations proposed by the author are reproduced below:

- (41) (Caha, 2009, p. 188)  
The semantics of case  
a. genitive: [ possession ]  
b. dative: [ change of [ possession ] ]
- (42) (Caha, 2009, p. 188)  
The semantics of locatives and directionals  
a. locative: [ location ]  
b. (goal) directional: [ TO [ location ] ]

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Indeed, both within Conceptual Semantics and Cognitive Semantics (*e.g.* Langacker, 1995), the relationship between the concepts of possession, location, and existence has been investigated. Such research is motivated by the fact that, across a wide range of languages, we systematically find the same linguistic elements syncretically expressing these different notions. This line of inquiry should therefore be pursued in future stages of the research.

A crucial point for the present study, however, is the prediction derived from the hierarchies proposed by Fillmore and Jackendoff that a Dative/Beneficiary argument will syntactically precede an objective argument (a Theme) when both are realized as nominals (*i.e.* DPs/NPs). That is, when a language allows both internal arguments to be expressed as NPs, the Beneficiary–Theme order will be preferred. This is indeed the scenario found in varieties of Portuguese in which the Double Object Construction (DOC) is present: the first NP is interpreted as the Beneficiary/Goal of transfer or possession (*cf.* examples (32)–(34), (37)–(39)), the second as Theme. On the other hand, most varieties, including

EP, have in their inventories prepositions that may carry a Dative or Goal feature. Thus, it is common to observe that when a preposition introduces the Dative argument, the Accusative–Dative or Theme–Beneficiary order is likely to be conditioned by a general phonological rule: heavier elements tend to occur last.

Finally, it is also necessary to consider that there are languages in which the Dative case can be expressed both through the DOC and through a prepositional dative construction (PDC). Even in such languages, however, the two constructions may not be exactly synonymous. Jackendoff (1990), for example, observes that in alternations involving the DOC and prepositional complements, the restrictions and interpretations of the two constructions are not identical. According to the author, in English the first argument of the DOC is preferentially interpreted semantically as Dative/Beneficiary, whereas in the PDC the PP may introduce either Dative/Beneficiary arguments or Goal arguments. This semantic distinction — already mentioned earlier in the analysis of preposition selection in EP — is reflected in the restriction that arguments which are exclusively Goals of motion cannot appear in the position of the first argument (NP) of the DOC in English (spontaneous speech data):

- (43) a. John sent a book to[DAT] Mary.  
 b. John sent Mary[DAT] a book.  
 c. John sent a book to[GOAL] the Library.  
 d. \*John sent the Library[GOAL] a book.

At the same time, when the Beneficiary of an action is introduced into the verb's argument structure as an adjunct, the preposition licensing this argument is not the Goal preposition *to*, but rather the preposition *for* (examples adapted from Ramchand, 2008, p. 68):

- (44) a. John painted Francine[BEN] a picture.  
 b. John painted a picture for[BEN] Francine.

Finally, there are contexts in which the first argument of the DOC can be interpreted either as a Beneficiary or as a Goal of the verb's action. This ambiguity disappears in the prepositional version (examples adapted from Jackendoff, 1990, p. 199):

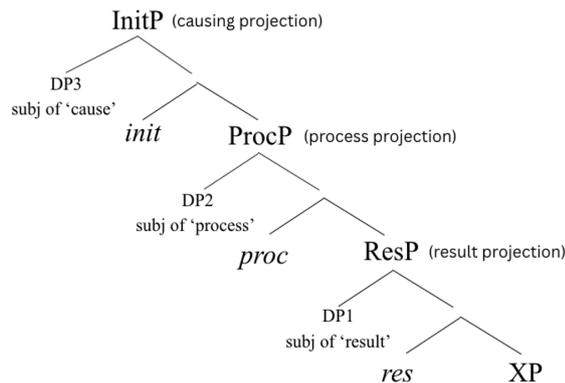
- (45) a. The secretary wrote the boss[GOAL/BEN] a letter.  
 b. The secretary wrote a letter to[GOAL]/for[BEN] the boss.

These examples provide evidence that it is necessary to distinguish the semantics and nanosyntactic structure of an argument associated with Dative/Beneficiary roles from that of Goal arguments, even though in many languages — and this may be the case in Portuguese — there are lexical items that are syncretic in the expression of both. A first proposal that may help us explain this variation within Nanosyntax can be found in the theory known as First Phase Syntax, developed by Ramchand (2008).

Briefly introduced here, Ramchand (2008) proposes that the elements commonly labeled as verbs can be decomposed into subevents that have their own

internal structure, that is, “the event-structure syntax will contain three important subevental components: a causing subevent, a process-denoting subevent and a subevent corresponding to result state” (Ramchand, 2008, p. 39). Thus, when we consider (46) below, the author draws attention to the fact that each of these projections should be understood as verbal projections in essence. Hence, “the notion of verb is always a composite which involves some or all of these elements” (Ramchand, 2008, p. 40). Accordingly, dynamic verbs that express a process and trigger a result state can be represented by the maximal decomposition illustrated here.

(46)



In this proposal, moreover, what we traditionally refer to as thematic roles are understood as semantic entailments of the structural positions that a given event participant occupies. It is also important to highlight that a single argument may occupy more than one of these positions. In a dynamic verb such as “run”, for example, which carries the InitP–ProcP structure, the runner simultaneously occupies the specifier positions of Init and Proc — that is, those of INITIATOR and UNDERGOER — being at once the trigger of the process and the participant affected by it, and thus potentially associated with different thematic roles. According to Ramchand,

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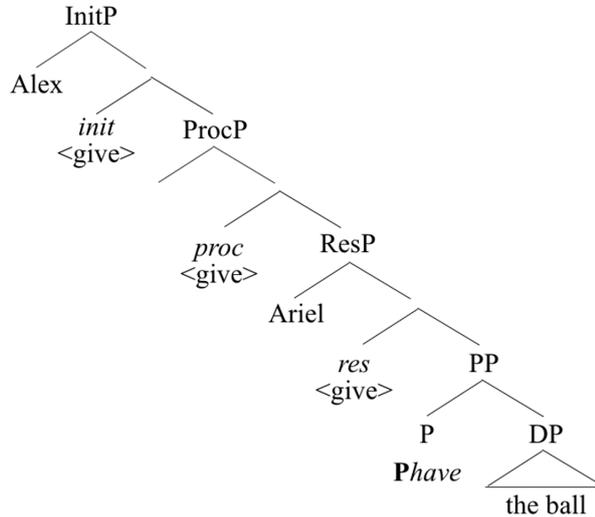
[...] all the projections of the first phase require a filled specifier (in other words, the information about who is the holder of the result state, who is the UNDERGOER of change and who is the initiator need to be specified whenever resP, procP or initP exist, respectively). In this way, the existence of a particular category will force the existence of the relevant specifying participant (Ramchand, 2008, p. 60).

Within this framework, ditransitive verbs carry the maximal structure of a dynamic event — InitP–ProcP–ResP — as decomposed in (46) above, with a PP projected in the complement position of [res]. Thus, the participant that triggers the (change) process is associated with the specifier position of Init or, in nanosyntactic terms, is the “subject of cause”, that is, the INITIATOR. The remaining participants, however, may vary with respect to the position they occupy in this structure.

To account for this variation, Ramchand (2008) adopts the proposal put forward by Harley (2002), according to which a possessive P (*P<sub>have</sub>*) is incorporated into the nanosyntactic structure lexicalized by the verbal root of ditransitive verbs, as illustrated in the representations below (examples from Ramchand, 2008, p. 102–103). According to

Ramchand (2008), Harley (2002) draws on the morphology of applicative verbs found in Bantu languages as evidence for her proposal. Thus, in the *DOC* version, as in (47), the verbal root lexicalizes both Result and the *P<sub>have</sub>* feature in its complement. Nominal arguments are therefore licensed by these projections lexicalized by the verb, in this order (examples (47) and (48) from Ramchand, 2008):

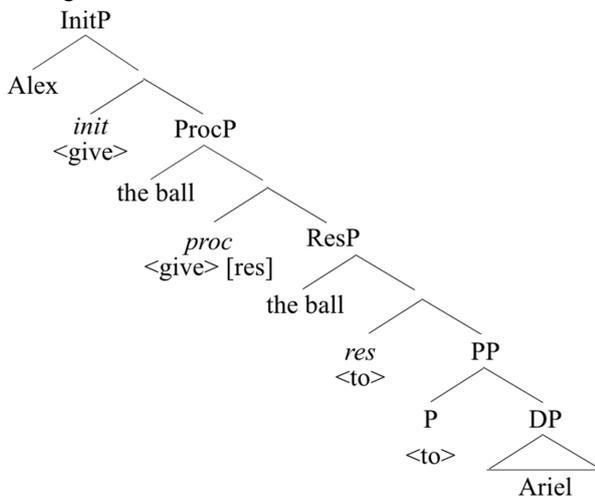
(47) Alex gave Ariel the ball.



Note that in this configuration, Ariel is the specifier of *ResP*, that is, a *RESULTEE*: “the entity that comes to hold the result state” (Ramchand, 2008, p. 40). In this case, the resulting state can be understood semantically as becoming the possessor of the object that occupies the complement position of *P<sub>have</sub>*. Alternatively, in the prepositional version, Ramchand (2008) argues that the work of lexicalizing *Res* and its *PP* complement is taken over by a preposition. According to her, in English both *Res* and the *P* projection are lexicalized by the preposition “to”. The *Res* feature is thus subassociated in the lexical entry of the verb, and the *P* argument is lexicalized by the preposition, as shown in (48):

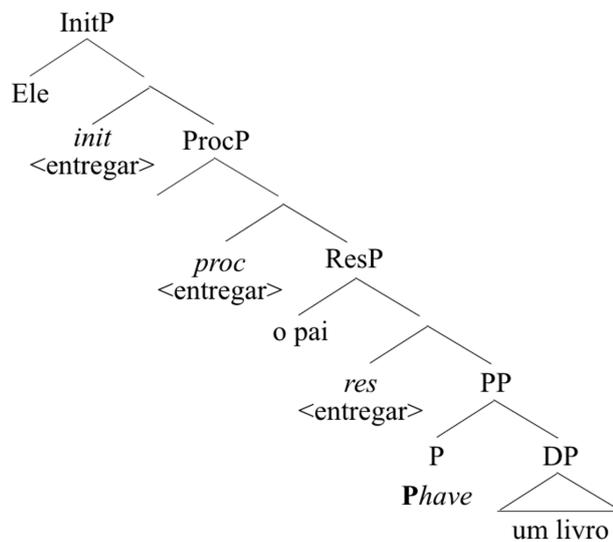
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(48) Alex gave the ball to Ariel.



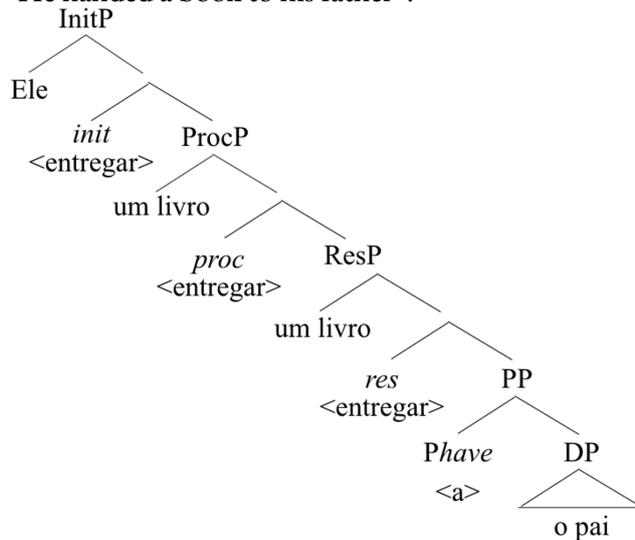
As Ramchand (2008) points out, the semantic difference between the two constructions — which follows naturally from her proposal — is that “the ‘first’ object of the double object version is a RESULTEE but not an UNDERGOER, while the direct object of the dative version is both RESULTEE and UNDERGOER” (Ramchand, 2008, p. 104). Note that these two readings are consistent with the meanings associated with the traditional thematic roles of Beneficiary, who comes to possess the object, and Theme, which is the moving object that changes location as a result of the process. When we apply this proposal to Portuguese data, we arrive at the scenario below. In the examples that follow, different representations of (37), reproduced here as (49), are proposed according to the four syntactic configurations found in the different varieties of Portuguese.

- (49) Ele entregou o pai um livro. (MP)  
 He hand.3SG.PST a.MASC father the.MASC book  
 “He handed his father a book”.

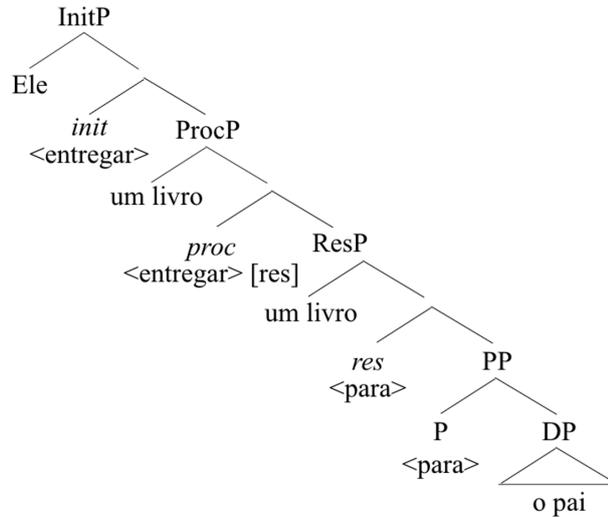


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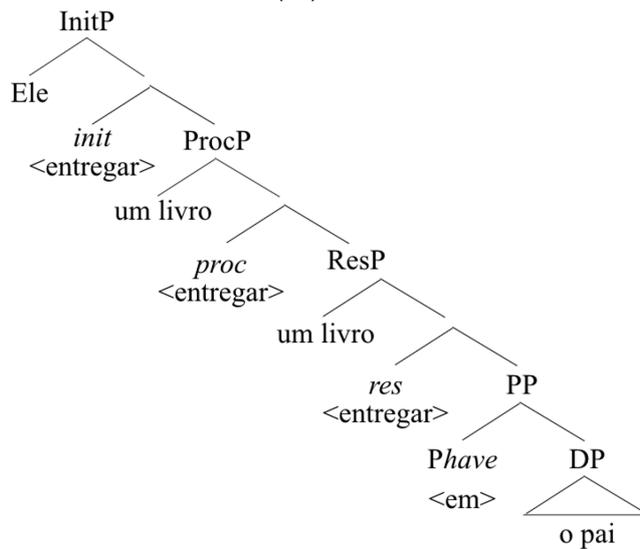
- (50) Ele entregou um livro ao pai. (EP)  
 He hand.3SG.PST a.MASC book to-the.MASC father  
 “He handed a book to his father”.



- (51) Ele entregou um livro para o pai. (BP)  
 He hand.3SG.PST a.MASC book to the.MASC father  
 “He handed a book to his father”.



- (52) Ele entregou um livro no pai (AP).  
 He hand.3SG.PST a.MASC book in-the.MASC father  
 “He handed a book at (to) his father”.



FLP 27(2)

It is possible to observe, in this preliminary analysis, that Portuguese presents a relatively more complex scenario than English. This is because, depending on the variety of Portuguese, a larger set of prepositions may be inserted to lexicalize the PP projection of ditransitive verbs. Several issues thus arise. The first concerns the restriction imposed by the preposition “a” as a Dative marker in European Portuguese. In this variety, we must assume that the preposition “a” lexicalizes *Phave*, which would account for its inability to introduce arguments interpreted as Goals. However, it remains to be investigated whether it should also lexicalize Res. A similar question arises with respect to the preposition “para” in Brazilian Portuguese. Given that this item can license both the Goal argument of the process and the Beneficiary, it is also necessary to ask whether

its structure should include both P and P<sub>have</sub>, and what the relation between these features might be. Finally, in Angolan Portuguese, it would be necessary to assume that the preposition “em” also lexicalizes P and P<sub>have</sub>; however, more empirical data and, potentially, experimental evidence would be required to arrive at a definitive answer.

Another issue that Ramchand’s (2008) proposal does not account for is the fact that P<sub>have</sub> appears to have an interpretation that is very close to the Dative–Genitive relation discussed earlier. One possibility would therefore be to decompose P<sub>have</sub> into a more fine-grained nanosyntactic structure containing Dative and Genitive features below Res. As already mentioned, it would also be necessary to make explicit the systematic relation between the Goal and Beneficiary readings that arise in constructions classified as dative, especially those involving the prepositions “para” and “em”. In nanosyntactic terms, this would require an understanding of the relation between P<sub>have</sub> and the Dative > Genitive feature structures, on the one hand, and the Goal > Place structures, on the other, which may be present in these prepositions.

In this regard, mention should be made of a final nanosyntactic study that points toward a more fine-grained understanding of the role of prepositions in Romance languages with respect to Dative marking. Bárány (2018) observes that, in Spanish, the preposition “a” is syncretic in licensing [+ANIMATE] Accusative arguments and Dative arguments (examples from Bárány, 2018, p. 1), as illustrated below:

- (53) Yo veo el libro[ACC]. / Lo veo.  
 1SG see.1SG.PRES the.MASC book / 3SG.MASC.ACC see.1SG.PRES  
 “I see the book. / I see it.”
- (54) Yo veo a[ACC] la mujer. / La veo.  
 1SG see.1SG.PRES to the.FEM woman / 3SG.FEM.ACC see.1SG.PRES  
 “I see the woman. / I see her.”
- (55) (Yo le) doy el libro a[DAT] la mujer.  
 (1SG 3SG.FEM.OBL/DAT) give.1SG.PRES the.MASC book to the.FEM woman  
 / \*La doy.  
 / 3SG.FEM.ACC give.1SG.PRES  
 “I give the book to the woman. / I give her”.

According to Bárány (2018), these data constitute evidence that Genitive is located above Dative in the universal functional sequence, rather than the other way around. However, although Bárány (2018) proposes the existence of a syncretism between Dative and Accusative features below Genitive, other hierarchies suggest that the Genitive feature is located between Accusative and Dative (as already seen in Caha, 2009). Moreover, if we consider the possibility that Dative is always syncretic with Genitive in the expression of transfer events — sometimes in the verbal root, sometimes in prepositions — the existence of another preposition specialized for Genitive in the language would not invalidate this analysis. It therefore becomes necessary, in the continuation of the present investigation, to analyze the distribution of prepositions that express Dative and those that express Genitive in Portuguese, in order to identify possible (false) syncretisms.

As already mentioned, the existence of syncretism is not a problem for Nanosyntax. In fact, it is a direct consequence of the fundamental principle that the correspondence between morphemes and words, on the one hand, and the semantic–conceptual features that form nanosyntactic structure, on the other, is not one-to-one. However, the definition of which features may appear together in syncretism must be constrained by the Universal Functional Sequence. That is, if the *f-seq* is Nominative–Accusative–Genitive–Dative, we may find syncretisms between Genitive–Dative or Genitive–Accusative, but not between Dative and Accusative to the exclusion of Genitive. For this reason, a central goal of research in Nanosyntax is to determine which features make up the *f-seq* and in what order they are arranged. The present study also aims to contribute to this task. Thus, although the analysis developed in this section cannot be pursued further at this point, it appears to indicate a promising direction for the continuation of this investigation.

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

It is important to note that we reach the end of this paper with more questions than answers, yet with many promising paths to explore. Perhaps the first issue to be addressed is the possible syncretism of Goal and Dative features in Portuguese prepositions. One potential answer may lie in the possibility of decomposing the  $P_{have}$  feature into a more fine-grained structure, while simultaneously investigating its relation with other functional sequences previously proposed for both the P and K domains. In this regard, it would also be relevant to empirically verify the position of the Genitive feature within the *f-seq*.

Another central question concerns the extent to which Locative/Place and Path/Goal features are related to Genitive and Dative cases. Additionally, it is of interest for this investigation to formulate hypotheses about how variation in morphosyntactic structures correlates with the *f-seq* proposed within Nanosyntax, with Conceptual Structure, and with human cognition more broadly. A more comprehensive and systematic nanosyntactic description of the variation found in Portuguese, considering the diverse contexts in which the language is used, may help us achieve a deeper understanding of the architecture of the language faculty and its relation to cognition.

From this preliminary survey of variation in Portuguese regarding the expression of the Dative case, it is also possible to propose some initial hypotheses about the superficial differences among Portuguese varieties. The first stems from the observation that, in varieties where the Double Object Construction (DOC) is available, such as Mozambican Portuguese, there is also a process of loss of the preposition “a” as a possible Dative marker, while no other preposition is replacing it, as well as a trend toward transitivization (Brito, 2011). Consequently, the absence of a preposition that could lexicalize the res/ $P_{have}$  portion leaves DOC as the only syntactic configuration available for a ditransitive verb. In this configuration, moreover, the DAT–ACC argument order tends to be preferred, thus reflecting the *f-seq* proposed by Ramchand (2008) for the verbal domain. On the other hand, in varieties where the DOC is not massively present, the preposition “a” is also in the process of disappearing from the inventory of forms expressing the Dative; however, it is being replaced by other prepositions, specifically

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“*para*” or “*em*” (Brito, 2011). It remains to understand how these prepositions and their nanosyntactic structures relate to verbal structures in First Phase Syntax.

Finally, this study argues that a promising path to answer these questions is to seek a way to articulate the hierarchies of the K (Case) and P (Spatial) domains. This approach may lead to the proposal that the decomposition of K can be understood as a set of aspectual modifiers above a Directional and Locative P. Alternatively, the features of the Case Hierarchy and the Spatial Hierarchy may form a single *f-seq*, lexicalized by prepositions or affixes, depending on the lexical items available in each language. Everything indicates that we are only at the beginning of this investigation.

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