

***On temporal constructions involving measurement and counting from anchor points –
semantic and pragmatic issues***

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This paper deals with two closely related subtypes of temporal expressions, which raise interesting semantic and pragmatic issues. English and Portuguese are the object languages, although French and German are also taken into account occasionally. The formal framework for analysis is the Discourse Representation Theory (cf. Kamp & Reyle 1993).

The first class of temporal expressions analysed in this paper consists of **time-denoting phrases** which define intervals by a measurement of time from an anchor point. These include phrases headed by *ago*, in English, and *há*, in Portuguese (the latter being an inflected verb form, comparable to French *il y a*, that optionally co-occurs with the adverbial form *atrás* [= *behind*]):

- (1) Paulo left the room *three hours ago*.
O Paulo saiu do sala *há três horas (atrás)*.

I start by discussing a possibility that, according to my knowledge, has not been mentioned or elaborated upon in the literature on these expressions (cf. e.g. Bras 1990 or Asher *et al.* 1995), viz. that phrases headed by the same connectives may also define intervals by **counting** (again, from an anchor point) **temporally ordered entities** (intervals, events or even common objects), as illustrated below:

- (2) Paulo was in the Alps *three weekends ago*.
O Paulo esteve nos Alpes *há três fins-de-semana (atrás)*.
- (3) The teacher started to analyse Goethe's work *three lectures ago*.
O professor começou a analisar a obra de Goethe *há três aulas (atrás)*.
- (4) Paulo is smoking cigarettes one after the other. *Three cigarettes ago* he started to cough.
O Paulo está a fumar cigarros uns atrás dos outros. *Há três cigarros (atrás)* começou a tossir.

Temporal expressions like those in (2)-(4) seem to have a more limited distribution than those in (1), part of the restrictions being – as I try to show – essentially pragmatic in nature. I explore, in particular, the restrictions on the combination of these expressions with the prepositions *since* (in English) and *desde* (in Portuguese):

- (5) Paulo hasn't been to the church *since three Sundays ago*.
O Paulo não vai à igreja *desde há três domingos*.

In this example, it can easily be seen that the felicity of the construction crucially depends on the pragmatic relevance of the mentioned intervals (cf. the effect of substituting *Mondays* for *Sundays*). In this connection, the oddity of the combination of *since...ago* with predicates of amounts of time (*since three weeks ago* vs. *until three weeks ago*) is also considered.

The second class of expressions discussed in this paper consists of temporal phrases semantically close to the ones mentioned above (and lexically similar as well, in Portuguese) which entail iteration of the eventualities described in the main clause. They can be categorised as **adverbs of temporal quantification**, in the terminology of Kamp & Reyle 1993. These include, among others, expressions headed by *for*, in English, and (again) *há*, in Portuguese, like the following:

- (6) Paulo hasn't been to the church *for three Sundays* (now).
O Paulo não vai à igreja *há três domingos*.
- (7) Paulo hasn't drunk wine *for three meals* (now).
O Paulo não bebe vinho *há três refeições*.

These temporal phrases are compared with those of sentences (2)-(5) above. The differences in meaning and the pragmatic restrictions on the use of each category are discussed. Note, in particular, the difference between (5) and (6), which involves, among other things: (i) the irrelevance of the periods in-between the mentioned three Sundays in (6), but not in (5); (ii) the fact that, when (5) is uttered on a Sunday, this "Sunday of utterance" does not count as one of the three that are being counted, whereas in (6) it may (though need not) count, depending on whether the utterance takes place before or after the expected presence of Paulo in the church.

References

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