

WHY DO THE CHINESE LEARNERS PRODUCE THE EXPRESSION “DE FATO” IN PORTUGUESE SO FREQUENTLY? POR QUE OS APRENDIZES CHINESES FALAM TANTO A EXPRESSÃO “DE FATO” EM PORTUGUÊS?

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ABSTRACT: The present paper aims to investigate why Brazilian teachers may have the impression that Chinese exchange students frequently produce the expression “de fato”¹ (“in fact” or “actually” in English), which is not so commonly used among Brazilian speakers. The study was developed in four stages: 1) an analysis of the entries of “de fato” from Portuguese, Portuguese-English and Portuguese-Chinese dictionaries, and a review of previous linguistic studies on these words; 2) a compilation of two corpora in Portuguese, consisting of academic texts written by Brazilians and Chinese students; 3) a classification of “de fato” from a pragmatic point of view; 4) a contrastive analysis of the pragmatic strategy for using the expression in the two corpora. The results show that although Chinese learners more frequently produce the expression “de fato” in their academic texts, the different pragmatic strategies used in contextual communications may be the main reason for drawing the attention of native Portuguese speakers.

KEYWORDS: de fato, corpus linguistics, pragmatic classification, Portuguese as an additional language, academic texts.

RESUMO: O presente artigo visa investigar por que os professores brasileiros têm a impressão de que os intercambistas chineses produzem, com uma alta frequência, a expressão “de fato” (“in fact” ou “actually” em inglês), que não é tão comumente usado pelos falantes brasileiros. O trabalho foi desenvolvido em quatro etapas: 1) análise de verbetes do termo “de fato” nos dicionários de português, português-inglês e português-chinês, e uma revisão dos estudos anteriores sobre essas palavras; 2) compilação de dois corpora em português, que consistem em textos acadêmicos escritos por alunos brasileiros e chineses; 3) classificação de “de fato” a partir do ponto de vista pragmático; 4) análise contrastiva das estratégias pragmáticas do uso da expressão entre os dois corpora. O resultado mostra que embora os aprendizes chineses produzam, com mais frequência, a expressão “de fato” nos textos acadêmicos, a diferença das estratégias pragmáticas do uso nas comunicações contextuais talvez seja o fator principal que chamou a atenção dos falantes nativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: de fato, linguística de corpus, classificação pragmática, português como a língua adicional, textos acadêmicos.

1. Introduction

The interest in learning Portuguese as an additional language has increased rapidly around China. Over the past seven years (2005/1-2013/1), the number of Portuguese programs in Chinese universities has increased from 3 to 17. At the same time, the number of the students enrolled in undergraduate courses in Portuguese increased by about 898%. Almost half of these universities have mobility programs, through which students, after a two-year studyprogram of Portuguese in China, can spend an academic year studying in Brazil. Overall, these students have two additional languages: English as the first with intermediate proficiency, and Portuguese as the second with basic or intermediate proficiency. As studying Portuguese is still something new in China, few textbooks and pedagogical resources can be found in the market. Most of the materials, textbooks or audiovisual products, which are used in class, are imported from Portugal, Brazil and Macau, with the main focus on the European Portuguese register.

Due to the lack of input and the limitations of the teaching system, the Chinese students may perform a different register of Portuguese, which draws the attention of Brazilian speakers. One of the examples is the use of the word “de fato”. According to Brazilian teachers of

¹ Here, “de fato” is the Brazilian Portuguese spelling. In European Portuguese, the correct spelling is “de facto”.

Portuguese, Chinese learners who study at the Pontifical Catholic University of Brazil (PUCRS) more frequently produce the expression “de fato” (“in fact” or “actually” in English) in their spoken and written discourse, which is not commonly used among Brazilian speakers. Therefore, the present study aims to discover whether this phenomenon also occurs in the academic texts written by Chinese students. If so, we then intend to investigate why it happens; if not, why do Brazilian teachers have this impression.

In this paper, all the examples come from the corpora we compiled, since corpus-based approaches can enable us to uncover patterns and regularities of use that are otherwise not easily perceived. Moreover, corpus data are “not only a useful basis for establishing categories, but also provide a good means of testing existing classification systems” (Kaltenböck, Mihatschand Schneider, 2010: 2).

As the object of this research is the use of “de fato” in academic texts, the occurrences investigated in this study can only be interpreted in their formal contexts and not in day-to-day language. That is, we cannot generalize that the results shown in this study is the only explanation for why Brazilian professors have the impression that Chinese learners overuse this expression. Furthermore, all the collected texts –published articles and Bachelor theses – have been previously corrected by reviewers or by the students’ supervisors. Therefore, no occurrence of grammatically inappropriate use was found in the Chinese corpus. In some ways, the corrected texts may sidestep some linguistic aspect of language use; it facilitates our understanding of the speakers’ discourse strategy and reduces the risk of misinterpreting the term produced by Chinese learners. In the following section, an analysis of the entries of “de fato” from the language dictionaries will be presented, followed by a review of previous linguistic studies on these words.

2. “De fato”: definition and linguistic studies

2.1 “de fato” in the language dictionaries

The most used resource in learning an additional language is the dictionary. Sometimes it plays a more important role than textbooks in language learning. Since no study on the term “de fato” was found in linguistic studies of Portuguese, our research begins with the investigation of the entries of the expression in language dictionaries. In this section, we will analyze three types, from six dictionaries that the Chinese students in this study mostly use in their language learning:

a) Portuguese dictionaries:

To date, there is still no Portuguese dictionary for foreigners. Below are the two dictionaries most commonly used by Brazilian speakers and Chinese learners at PUCRS.

In dictionary *Houaiss* (2008), the definition is:

DE FATO:

1. realmente; com efeito
really; with effect
actually; in fact
2. que existe, que é efetivo, independente de registro legal: sociedade de fato.
which exists, which is effective, independent of legal register: real/legal society

In the *Aurelio* (2009) dictionary, the definition is:

DE FATO:

1. Com efeito; realmente; efetivamente; de feito.
With effect; really; effectively; done
In fact; actually; actually/really; as a (matter of) fact
2. Na realidade; na verdade; realmente; verdadeiramente; de feito: “O amante ideal de fino tato, / é o que, na mágoa ou no prazer, / Nunca se mostra o que é, de fato, / Mas sim o que de vera ser.” (Martins Fontes, Vulcão, p.24)
In reality; actually; really; truly; as a (matter of) fact: “The tactful ideal lover, / is who he is, in pain or in pleasure, / He never shows who he really is, / But who he should be.”
(Martins Fontes, Vulcão, p.24)

We have seen that instead of definitions and explanations of word use, there are just synonyms of the expression. Moreover, there is just one example in each dictionary, which makes it impossible for learners to grasp its contextual meaning. The first example is a noun phrase “sociedade de fato” (real society) and the second one is a classic poem written in 1926. Perhaps these settings can be appropriate for native speakers, but are very abstract and insufficient for learners of Portuguese.

b) Portuguese-Chinese dictionaries:

In *Dicionário português-chinês* (2005), the definition is:

DE FACTO:

1. 事实上, 实际上; 的确, 确实: De facto, a tua casa é melhor. 你的房子的确好些。

In fact, in fact/actually; truly, indeed: In fact, your house is better.

2. 果然, 果真

really, indeed

In *Dicionário Conciso português-chinês* (2007), the definition is:

DE FACTO:

其实, 实际上, 事实上

Actually, in fact, in fact

c) Portuguese-English dictionaries:

In *Dicionário de Português-Inglês* (Porto Editora, 2011), the definition is:

DE FACTO: in fact

In *Michaelis Moderno Dicionário Inglês & Português* (2010), the definition is:

DE FATO: actually, in fact. Estevelá de fato? / Were you there indeed?

As we can see, both Portuguese-Chinese and Portuguese-English dictionaries address only the possible translations of the expression in each language, when, in fact, not all the possibilities have been raised. The only example found in the Chinese dictionary was “de fato, a tua casa é melhor” (*in fact, your house is better* or *your house is better indeed*) is decontextualized, which can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the context. Moreover, in the only example “estevelá de fato” of the two Portuguese-English dictionaries, the translation of “de fato” was not mentioned in its previous definition, thus it can cause confusion in language understanding and learning.

Although there is no concrete and complete definition found in any of the dictionaries, the translations proposed by them may help us to search in previous studies for the same type of expression in other languages.

2.2 A review of previous linguistic studies on “actually” and “in fact”/ “其实” and “事实上”

Different from the Portuguese situation, there are plenty of studies on this type of expression in English and Chinese, but there is some disagreement among researchers regarding their meanings and functions. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify English conjunctions in four categories: additive, adversative, causal and temporal. They regard “actually” and “in fact” as an adversative type of conjunction to introduce a proposition, which is “contrary to expectation” (1976: 253). In contrast to these authors, Martin (1992) argues that “contrast” is not the prototypical meaning of the terms. They can make a concessive relation explicit if and only if they come with a contrastive conjunction such as “but”. According to Martin, the function of the terms is to imply that the original formulation of a textual meaning was not quite right, and therefore needs adjusting in order to get it right.

In studies of Mandarin Chinese adverbs, the translations of “de fato” – “其实”, “说实话”, “实际上”, “事实上” – are often seen from a pragmatic view, as discourse markers for constructing cohesion and coherence in conversation. Li and Thompson (1981) analyze the word “其实” as a movable adverb of attitude, which can occur either before or after the subject or the topic of a sentence to denote the speaker’s attitude toward something or his evaluation of the

event expressed by the sentence. A similar view is held by Biber and Finegan (1988), who call the words “in fact”, “actually” and “in reality” *stance adverbials*, which mark a speaker’s attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the message, and can be used as either a topic marker or an elaborative marker. Several recent studies have looked into its use across text types. For example, Wang, Tsai and Yang (2010), found in their study on the use of “其实” and “事实上” in casual conversations and formal TV/Radio interviews that the discourse markers are more prevalent in formal settings, such as TV interviews. Moreover, the development of the two words illustrates not only an increase in (inter)subjectivity but also a shift from propositional meanings based on argument structure at the clause/utterance level to pragmatic procedural meanings at the discourse level.

Moreover, there are studies that aim to compare these discourse markers /pragmatic markers, which apparently have the same meaning. Focusing on the differences as well as the similarities between “actually” and “in fact” in their distribution and use in spoken and written American English, Oh (2000) suggests a common core meaning for “actually” and “in fact”, namely “unexpectedness”. However, “actually” tends to mean to “go against the expectation”, which “amounts to the denial of an assertion” (2000:266); whereas “in fact” is more likely to mean to “go against some aspects of the expectation”, resulting in a strengthening of the expectation. Looking at a variety of Chinese discourse markers, Feng (2008) in his article “Pragmatic markers in Chinese”, defines words such as “事实上”, “其实”, as syntactically dispensable and truth-conditionally irrelevant expressions operating on the propositional content of the sentence to which they are attached. The author makes a distinction between “其实” and “事实上”, and argues that “其实” can be used to mark the speaker’s affirmation of, or emphasis on, the factuality of the proposition, while “事实上” can highlight the speaker’s commitment to the actuality of the proposition to affirm what is said as a matter of fact.

As can be seen above, the translations of “de fato” have been addressed in many ways in linguistic studies and have been labeled with different names. Some of them are compatible, and others are not; some assume that there is no difference between the synonyms (e.g. “actually” and “in fact”), and others try to verify their potential differences. These previous studies can illustrate our understanding of this type of expression and research methodology, but they cannot explain the use of “de fato” in Brazilian Portuguese. For this reason, in the next section, we discuss the pragmatic use of “de fato” in Portuguese, based on real data, and try to find a way to incorporate all the meanings and concepts mentioned above.

3. Method:

3.1 The compilation of corpora and overall distribution pattern of “de fato”

The study is based on two corpora. Both contain 61 academic texts produced by undergraduate students. The Brazilian corpus, with about 669,000 words, consists of articles published by students from the Schools of Communication, Psychology, Languages and Business at PUCRS, during 2009 and 2011. The Chinese corpus, which has 266,000 words, consists of Bachelor theses of students from the Language School in Portuguese at CUC, CUCN, TFSU, HNU and UM², during 2009 and 2012. All these papers can be found in their university libraries in Brazil and China.

After tackling the task of building a corpus, which includes corpus cleaning and file saving, we compare the frequency of the use of “de fato” between the two corpora. In the Brazilian corpus, the term appears 73 times. Excluding 13 citations and one example in a poorly structured sentence, the frequency of the expression was 0.088 ‰. As for the Chinese corpus, the number of occurrences of the term was 37, whose frequency was 0.139 ‰, with a higher rate than in the Brazilian corpus. This comparison process shows, in fact, that Chinese learners actually produce the term “de fato” at a higher rate in academic texts. However, to verify if the difference in frequency explains why Brazilian professors at PUCRS have the impression that Chinese learners

² Communication University of China, Communication University of China-Nanjing, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Harbin Normal University and University of Macau, respectively.

overuse the expression, we propose a pragmatic classification of “de fato” based on the Brazilian corpus in order to compare the pragmatic strategies used between the two groups of speakers. The classification is presented in the next section.

3.2 Classification of “de fato”

Based on the Brazilian corpus data, the expression “de fato” has been classified in three main categories, in which the second one can be divided into five subcategories:

1) “De fato”, whose meaning is “truly”, “indeed” or “per se”.

The expression is considered a semantic intensifier, whose function is to emphasize the event directly described by it.

i. “A percepção da marca, e até mesmo a decisão de compra seriam inconscientes, influenciando no plano motor de efetuar a compra *de fato*.”

The awareness of the brand, and even the purchase decision would be unconscious, influencing on the physical level to make the purchase per se.

ii. Edward Said revela que a representação “ocidental” do que é o “oriente” tinha pouco a ver com as culturas e os povos que *de fatoviviam* naqueles locais; eram mais uma busca de diferenciação e uma tentativa de justificação do poder colonial do Ocidente sobre o Oriente.

Edward Said reveals that the "Western" representation of what is the "East" had little to do with the cultures and people who actually lived in those places. They were more a search for differentiation and an attempt to justify the colonial power of the West over the East.

In example i, “a compra de fato” can be translated as “the real purchase” or “the purchase per se”; and in ii, “os povos que *de fatoviviam* naqueles locais” are “the people who actually lived in those places”. In these two statements, the term “de fato” is associated more closely with the noun or verb phrase where it is located rather than with other phrases.

2) “De fato”, which establishes a logical relationship between utterances that come before and after.

In this category, the term assumes a conjunctive function that connects the two statements and establishes five types of relationships between them.

(1) Contrastive relationship: the expression is followed by an utterance, which prototypically contrasts with and is often in opposition to the utterances that come before it, for example:

iii. Para ele, existem dois tipos de erros possíveis: inferir uma infidelidade do companheiro quando, *de fato*, nenhuma ainda aconteceu, ou errar em acreditar que o parceiro lhe é eternamente fiel, quando na verdade, ele é apaixonado por outra pessoa.

For him, there are two types of possible errors: infer a partner's infidelity when, in fact, nothing happened yet, or err in believing that the partner is eternally faithful, when in fact he or she is in love with someone else.

(2) Explanatory relationship: the expression is followed by an utterance, whose function is to paraphrase the utterances that come before it, as shown in example iv:

iv. Conforme citado no referencial teórico a respeito da metodologia para estudos dos controles internos, utilizamos nesta auditoria, o método de questionamento através de questionários *de fato* é um papel de trabalho de auditoria.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework regarding the methodology for studies of internal controls, we used in this audit, the questionnaire method, which is actually a part of the job of auditing.

(3) Progressive relationship: the expression is followed by an utterance, which emphasizes, supplements or repeats the utterances that come before it, as seen in example v.

v. Porém, não são apenas os casos da Dove e da Nike que possuem características em comum. *De fato*, todos os casos até agora apresentados corroboram duas teses.

However, not only the cases of Dove and Nike have characteristics in common.

In fact, *all cases presented so far corroborate two theses.*

- (4) Causal and causative relationship: the expression is followed by an utterance, which justifies the cause or the effect of the utterances that come before, as seen in the following example:

- vi. “Se o New York Times decide não publicar alguma matéria, pelo menos um dos inúmeros sites da Internet, os radialistas ou os partidários de algum grupo darão a informação” (KOVACH & ROSENSTIEL, 2004, p. 40).

De fato, a tecnologia de geração de conhecimentos, de comunicação de símbolos e de processamento da informação é tão fundamental que chega a ser percebida, por Castells (1999), como a principal fonte de produtividade de um novo modo de desenvolvimento: o informacionalismo.

"If the New York Times decides not to publish any material, at least one of the many Internet sites, radio hosts or supporters of any group will give information" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2004, p. 40).

In fact, *the technology of knowledge generation, communication of symbols and information processing is so fundamental that it is perceived by Castells (1999) to be the main source of productivity of a new means of development: informationalism.*

- (5) Conclusive relationship: the expression is followed by an utterance, which concludes the facts listed before, for example:

- vii. Na obra “A imagem da cidade”, Kevin Lynch (2006) estudou três cidades diferentes nos Estados Unidos (Boston, Los Angeles e Jersey City) e, através de entrevistas com seus usuários, descobriu que as pessoas, no geral, entendem a cidade ao seu redor de maneira consistente e previsível, formando mapas mentais utilizando-se de cinco elementos principais – vias, limites, bairros, pontos nodais e marcos.

De fato, a partir dessa categorização é possível perceber que o elemento estruturador das cidades tanto física quanto perceptivamente é o sistema viário...

In the book "The image of the city", Kevin Lynch (2006) studied three different cities in the United States (Boston, Los Angeles and Jersey City) and, through interviews with users, he found that people, in general, understand the city around them in consistent and predictable ways, forming mental maps with five main elements - paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks.

In fact, *from this categorization, it is possible to perceive that the structuring element of the cities both physically and perceptually is the road system ...*

- 3) “De fato”, which demonstrates a preparatory function in pragmatic uses.

In this category, the expression, which can be seen as a pragmatic marker, demonstrates functions such as changing the topic and making the following arguments more acceptable. These arguments, in most cases, are marked by adversative conjunctions (e.g. but) or explanatory conjunctions (e.g. for). As shown in vii, “de fato” follows a preparatory statement in order to raise a question marked by “however”.

- viii. *De fato*, conforme o autor, a imagem é percebida de maneira quase imediata; ela se faz totalmente clara em 1/5 de segundo, enquanto que o prazo de exploração (grifo do autor) de um cartaz se dá em 1 a 2 segundos. Aqui, porém, cabe um questionamento: considerando que Moles publicou a obra “O cartaz” pela primeira vez no ano de 1969, é possível afirmar...

In fact, according to the author, the image is perceived almost immediately; it becomes totally clear in 1/5 of a second, while the exploration period (emphasis added) of a poster occurs in 1 to 2 seconds. Here, however, there is a question: since Moles published the book “O Cartaz” for the first time in 1969, it is clear that...

It should be mentioned that frequently, the expression does not have a single function in discourse. Here a classification was made based on their predominant function.

4. Distributions across categories and analysis of data

According to the classification made in previous section, we compare the pragmatic strategies used for "de fato" between the Chinese and Brazilian corpus:

Chinese Corpus			Brazilian Corpus		
Categories	Tokens	Frequency	Categories	Tokens	Frequency
truly/per se	2	5.41%	truly/per se	24	40.68%
Contrastive	9	24.3%	Contrastive	1	1.7%
Explanatory	4	10.8%	Explanatory	5	8.5%
Progressive	5	13.5%	Progressive	10	16.9%
Causal and causative	6	16.2%	Causal and causative	1	1.7%
Conclusive	1	2.7%	Conclusive	12	20.3%
Preparatory	10	27.03%	Preparatory	6	10.17%

We observe that there is a big difference in the pragmatic use of the expression, between Brazilians and Chinese. In the first category, where the term presents the largest difference in use, the frequency of "de fato" in the Brazilian corpus is 7.5 times that of the Chinese corpus. In the second category, although both corpora represent the highest use frequency, the application of each subcategory is still quite distinct. On the one hand, the two subcategories mostly used by Chinese learners are the contrastive (24.3%) and causal and causative ones (16.2%); while these two subcategories are the least frequently (1.7%) used by Brazilian speakers. On the other hand, the subcategory mostly present in the Brazilian Corpus is its conclusive function, whose frequency is 20.3%, which is the least frequently (2.7%) used by Chinese learners. In the third category, the two corpora also make a major difference. The production of preparatory "de fato" in the Chinese corpus is twice as frequent as in the Brazilian corpus. Therefore, this difference in language use may be the main factor that draws the attention of Brazilian speakers.

Furthermore, if the expression is addressed from a syntactic-pragmatic point of view, the position of "de fato" in all three categories may have different levels of the phatic function of language. In the first category, where the expression has the function of intensifying the truth value of a proposition, its meaning is closely linked with the noun or verb phrase. That is, the meaning of "de fato" depends more on where it is located in the sentence than on the larger context. In the second category, where "de fato" plays a role of conjunction as its predominant function, it interacts with two sentences. The interpretation of the term requires more effort on the part of the hearer and, as a matter of fact, has a greater phatic function. As for the preparatory category, the function of "de fato" is exactly to draw the attention of the hearer, so it has the greatest phatic function among the three categories. As shown in the table above, the use of "de fato" in descending order of frequency in Chinese corpus is: (1) "de fato" as a pragmatic marker, (2) "de fato" as a conjunction and (3) "de fato" as a semantic intensifier. This order is just the opposite of how the term is presented in the Brazilian corpus. In this sense, we can conclude that somehow, the expression "de fato" used by Chinese speakers has a more phatic function than the one used by Brazilians, and is therefore much more likely to call the listeners' attention in discourse.

5. Conclusion

The paper attempts to answer the question of why Chinese learners frequently produce the expression "de fato" in Portuguese. We collected 122 academic texts in Portuguese - 61 produced

by Brazilians and 61 Chinese. After a pragmatic classification of the expression, based on a Brazilian corpus, we made a comparison between the two corpora. The results show that Chinese learners are much more likely to produce the expression “de fato” in their academic texts, but with different pragmatic strategies in contextual communications, and it may be the main reason for drawing the Brazilian speakers’ attention. For future research, we intend to analyze the same type of pragmatic markers in Chinese, English and Portuguese used by Chinese learners of English and Portuguese, and discuss the acquisition of pragmatics as L3 by Chinese learners of Portuguese;

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Date received: 31/10/2014

Date revised: 13/12/2014

Date accepted: 29/12/2014