

An overview of vocatives in European Portuguese

Ana Sofia Abreu de Carvalho
University of Macau
ascarvalhobk@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT¹⁵

This paper aims to provide a short presentation of the vocative phrase in European Portuguese, to which very little attention has been paid in the literature. The main contribution of this paper is the argument that certain pragmatic markers involved in direct addresses should be considered for their syntactic function within the vocative phrase, rather than being treated as independent interjections. In this respect, the data allow me to draw the reader's attention to the grammaticalization process that produces such pragmatic markers. The presentation of the vocative phrase in European Portuguese is organized according to the way it encodes the pragmatic features of the direct address in this language. As the encoding of the direct address is cross-linguistically diverse, this presentation will allow linguists who work on vocatives in other languages to exploit my European Portuguese data for comparative studies in pragmatics or in morpho-syntax.

Key words: vocatives, Portuguese, particles, direct address

1. What is a vocative?

The definition of vocatives has been formulated in different ways from different perspectives, which are not always uncontroversial. The common thread is that nouns do not count as vocatives unless they are used for direct addresses to an interlocutor (Svennung 1958 a.o.). For example, *John* is a vocative in (1) but not in (2).

- (1) John, you should do your homework.
- (2) John should do his homework.

In this paper, I adopt this definition of vocatives and proceed to a description of vocative phrases in European Portuguese (henceforth, EP). More specifically, I focus on the pragmatics of direct addresses, and try to capture the morpho-syntactic and lexical means by which the pragmatic values are encoded in the grammar of vocative phrases.

2. Vocatives are not subjects

It has been argued in the literature that vocative nouns are not the subjects of imperative verbs (Zanuttini 2008). In EP this can be verified, first, at the intonation level, since the vocative comes as a separate prosodic unit, which is not the case for the subject, included in the prosodic

¹⁵ Parts of this paper are taken from my MA Dissertation (Carvalho 2000). For feedback on my analysis, I am grateful to the audience of the Workshop on *Vocatives!* held in December 2010 at Otto-Friedrich-Universität in Bamberg.

unit of the clause. Syntactically, the distinction between vocatives and subjects can be tested as follows: (i) the test of articles; and (ii) the test of distribution.

The test of articles is illustrated in (3) and (4) and shows that, in EP, the definite article cannot occur with vocative nouns, but it can occur with nouns in subject position, even if they are names.

- (3) (*A) Sofia, traz-me um copo de água.
the Sofia bring-me a glass of water.
'Sofia, bring me a glass of water.'
- (4) A Sofia traz-me um copo de água.
the Sofia bring-me a glass of water.
'Sofia brings me a glass of water.'

Furthermore, the vocative and subject nouns may co-occur, as in (5), which indicates that they do not compete for a syntactic position.

- (5) Sofia, a Sofia/Ana vai sair?
Sofia the Sofia/Ana will leave
'Sofia, is Sofia/Ana going out?'

The test of distribution shows that the subject noun is restricted with respect to its location in clause, whereas the vocative is not. For example, in (6) the subject cannot occur at the end of the sentence, whereas the vocative can, as in (7). Graphically, the use of the noun as a vocative is indicated by a comma that separates it from the rest of the clause. This graphic separation intends to capture the prosodic difference between subjects and vocatives.

- (6) (Você) acha que está tudo a correr bem (*você)?
you think that is all to run well you
'Do you think that everything is going smoothly?'
- (7) (Amílcar), acha que está tudo a correr bem, (Amílcar)?
Amílcar think that is all to run well Amílcar
'Do you think that everything is going smoothly, Amílcar?'

This test indicates that the syntactic conditions required to generate a subject are different from the conditions allowing for the merging of vocatives in the utterance.

3. The distribution of vocatives and the interpersonal relation

In the EP clause, the vocative may surface in clause initial position, as in (8a), inside the clause, as in (8b), and at the end of the clause, as in (8c).

- (8) a. João, o que tu estás a ver é um Matisse!
João that which you are to see is a Matisse

- b. O que tu estás a ver, João, é um Matisse!
that which you are to see João is a Matisse
c. O que tu estás a ver é um Matisse, João!
that which you are to see is a Matisse João
(João) What you are looking at, (João), is a Matisse, (João)!

The variation in the distribution of the vocative does not affect the grammar of the sentence, but its interpretation: in (8a) the vocative is attention drawing; in (8b, c), the interlocutor is already identified and implicated in the scenario (see also the discussion in McCarthy & O'Keeffe 2003). In these examples, the speaker intends to make the interlocutor realize the importance of the exhibit in (8b) or of the event in (8c). It, thus, follows that the location of the vocative encodes certain pieces of information regarding the intention of the speaker in relation to the addressee.

The speaker-addressee relation is further nuanced in EP by the fact that the language distinguishes between the formal and the informal ‘you’ (*tu* / *você*). The two forms are used in various enunciative situations (in terms of Araújo-Carreira 1997), and yield different readings for (in)politeness and for social distancing, as shown in (9) and (10). In (9a), *tu* is familiar but not necessarily condescending, whereas *você* in (9b) is polite and signals formality, but not necessarily social distancing. In (9c), the address in the third person marks deference and politeness, with a recognition of social distancing.

- (9) a. Tu, onde é que vais?
you where is that go
'Where are you going?' **informal/+proximity**

b. Você! onde é que você vai?
you where is that you go
'Where are you going?' **formal/+-proximity**

c. Senhor Rui, onde é que o senhor Rui vai?
mister Rui where is that the mister Rui go
'Mr.Rui, where are you going?' **formal/-proximity**

These examples show that variation in the pragmatic interpretation follows from variation in the encoding of the addressee, either through a 2nd person feature or through a 3rd person feature. For the latter, further distinction may arise from the use of a pronoun instead of a name.

4. Vocative markers

The examples in (3) and (4) showed that vocative nouns cannot be preceded by articles. They can, however, be preceded by specialized markers that are dedicated for the use in direct addresses. This section presents three such particles: *ó*, *pá* and *meu*.

4.1. The marker *ó*

The element *ó* occurs in vocative phrases and must be differentiated from *oh*, which is used in exclamations, not in direct addresses (Hill 2007). This distinction is illustrated in (10): in (10a, c), *ó* is used for a direct address, whereas in (10b, d) *oh* conveys the speaker's feeling without setting up the stage for a dialogue – the utterances can also be monologues.

- (10) a. Dás- me isso, por favor?... Anda lá, ó querida!
 Give me that please come there o darling
 ‘Can you give me that, please? ... Come on, darling?’
- b. Oh! Não tenho interesse nenhum em saber o que se passa!
 Oh no have interest none in know that what REFL happen
 ‘Oh! (Pff!) I have no interest whatsoever in what’s going on!’
- c. Ó Rosa! Porque é que fizeste isso?
 ó Rosa why is that did that
 ‘Ó Rosa!! Why did you do that?’
- d. Oh! Rosa!! Porque é que fizeste isso?
 oh Rosa why is that did that
 ‘Oh! Rosa!! Why did you do that?’

The data from EP confirms that *ó* functions as a sort of modifier for the vocative noun, not as an interjection. More precisely, this element may rarely occur by itself, as in (11a); by default, it is forced to occur next to a vocative with a pragmatic function, predominantly for calling, and forms one prosodic unit with the vocative noun. That is, this particle does not have a free distribution, as it would be expected of interjections, but it is restricted, since it has to be adjacent to a vocative noun that it precedes. This adjacency is shown in (11b, c).

- (11) a. Mas quem é que tu pensas que eu sou, ó?
 but who is that you think that I am ó
 ‘Who do you think I am?’
- b. O que pensa disto, ó D. Zulmira?
 that what think of.this o madam Zulmira
 ‘What do (you) think about this, ó Mrs.Zulmira?’
- c. (*Ó) o que pensa disto, D. Zulmira (*ó)?
 o that what think of.this madam Zulmira o

Thus, I conclude that *ó* has morpho-syntactic properties and marks the vocative noun as being the addressee (i.e., as having a 2nd person feature), as proposed in Hill (2007, 2013).

4.2. The marker *pá*

Pá is the reduced form of *rapaz* ‘boy’ and contributes an exclusively familiar reading to the vocative phrase. In modern EP, *pá* is stripped of semantic features and of gender and number. Its referents can thus be in singular or in plural, in masculine or in feminine. Notably, *pá* has not completely lost its nominal categorial feature. That is why it cannot be used as modifier for another noun (e.g., **pá Sofia*), but it can take *ó* as a vocative marker (e.g., *ó pá!*). When it comes

to its distribution, *pá* may occur in isolation, as in (12a), where it has a calling function; in clause internal or final positions, as in (12b, c); but not in the clause initial position of an address, as shown in (12d).

- (12) a. (Ó) Pá!
‘Dude!’
- b. Deixe lá isso, pá, faça a sua vida.
let there that *pá* do the your life
‘Forget about that, chum/ pal, just go about your business!’
- c. Onde é que vocês vão, pá?
where is that you.PL go *pá*
‘Where are you going, folks?’
- d. *Pá, onde é que vocês vão?
pá where is that you.PL go

These properties of *pá* match the properties listed in Floricic (2011) for truncated vocatives. Hence, I consider *pá* as still being some kind of nominal category, albeit phonologically truncated and semantically impoverished. Thus, *pá* differs from *ó* in its grammatical category and syntactic distribution, while it shares the pragmatic function of qualifying the inter-personal relation between speaker and addressee.

4.3. The markers *meu, minha*

Pronominal adjectives, especially possessives, are an important ingredient of vocative phrases, as they convey information on the personal relation between speaker and addressee. Consider the following examples:

- (13) a. Meu amor!
my.MASC love
‘My love!’
- b. Seu filho da mãe!
your.MASC son of.the mother
‘You son of a bitch!’
- c. Minha estúpida! / Sua estúpida!
my.FEM stupid her stupid
‘You stupid!’

In (13), the change in the person feature brings a change in the interpretation of the interpersonal relation between speaker and addressee: although all these examples are informal and convey condescending addresses, a difference arises regarding the social distancing: the first person is used for peers, friends or persons of one’s family, whereas the third person is used for addressees from which the speaker is distancing herself, the interlocutor being excluded from the speaker’s intimate circle.

Interestingly, only the first person form has been pragmaticized as a vocative marker, and it can occur by itself, without the expected noun:

- (14) a. Anda, meu, traz- me o café!
 come my.MASC bring me the coffee
 ‘Come on, man/ mate/ bro, bring me the coffee!’
- b. O que é que queres, minha?
 that what is that want my.FEM
 ‘What do you want girl/ bitch/ sis?’

Meu is more desemanticized than *minha*, in the sense that it started to be neutral for gender. The general use of *meu* as a vocative, even if it is more recent and more restricted in its use than *pá*, is realized in a way similar to the latter. Its use as a vocative seems to have arisen from the possessive pronouns that appear next to nominal forms with a vocative function, as shown in (13), but it became independent and it is used nowadays with a certain neutralization of its semantic values, being used independently of gender and number of the interlocutor, and also of its connotative values of possession, friendship, intimacy, irony, which are more notable in the use of pronouns next to nominal forms. Nevertheless, its use is not as broad as that of *pá* when it comes to its social range. It is usually circumscribed to the discourse of young people, being connected to a certain image of irreverence, transmitting, nevertheless, some familiarity or closeness. It can often assume values of great hostility, but it may, conversely, also be used to ease tensions.

5. Nominalized adjectives

EP vocatives display many nominalized adjectives and diminutives, which provide another means for the speaker to lexically encode a variety of values for the inter-personal feature. Their values range from condescension to endearment, but are generally limited to the familiar register. Examples are provided in (15).

- (15) a. Traz- me um copo de água, **preguiçoso!**
 bring me a glass of water lazy.one
 ‘Bring me a glass of water, lazybones!’
- b. Traz- me um copo de água, **amorzinho!**
 bring me a glass of water love.DIMIN
 ‘Bring me a glass of water, love!’

This class of vocatives is very productive.

6. Conclusions

The vocatives of EP display the same syntactic distribution and variation in interpretation one would expect to find in most European languages. Although they occur with imperative verbs in the absence of another nominal constituent in subject position, they do not qualify as subjects of imperatives (see the examples in (3), (4) and (5)). Hence, the function of vocative phrases seems to be purely pragmatic, since these phrases are not related to the valence of the verb. However, their distribution in relation to the clause is not free, since a change in location

triggers a change in the interpretation. In particular, the interpretive change concerns the relation between speaker and addressee in terms of the speaker's manipulation of the discourse to achieve certain goals and to define the social terms in which the address takes place (reflected especially through the degree of politeness; see Brown & Levinson 1987).

The contribution of the EP data to the study of vocatives comes mainly from the presence of dedicated pragmatic markers in the language. The particle *ó*, whose etymology is obscure, replicates the properties of vocative markers in many languages (e.g., Latin *o*). However, the other examples provided in this paper show that such markers arise from semantic attrition and grammatical or pragmatic re-analysis of various types of grammatical categories: we saw the noun *rapaz* 'boy' being re-analyzed as the vocative marker *pá*; and the possessive adjective being re-analyzed as the vocative marker *meu*. Although I am not proposing any syntactic analysis of such markers in this paper, my observations indicate, however, that such elements must be dealt with on a principled basis, since they reflect upward re-analysis in the syntactic structure, along the lines proposed in Roberts & Roussou (2003).

References

- Araújo-Carreira, Maria Helena. 1997. *Modalisation Linguistique en Situation D'Interlocution, Proxémique verbale et modalités en Portugais*. Paris: Éditions Peeters.
- Brown, Penelope & Levinson, Stephen. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Carvalho, Ana Sofia. 2000. *O Vocativo em Português: uma abordagem*. MA Dissertation. University of Macau.
- Floricic, Frank. 2011. Le vocatif et la périphérie du système des cas: entre archaïsme et innovation. In Jacques Francois & Sophie Prévost (eds.), *L'évolution grammaticale à travers les langues romanes*. 103-134. Leuven: Peeters Publishers.
- Hill, Virginia. 2007. Vocatives and the pragmatics-syntax interface. *Lingua* 117: 2077-2105.
- Hill, Virginia. 2013. *Vocatives: How syntax meets with pragmatics*. Leiden: Brill.
- McCarthy, Michael & O'Keeffe, Anne. 2003. "What's in a Name": Vocatives in Casual Conversations and Radio Phone-in Calls. In Pepi Leistyna & Charles F. Meyer (eds.), *Corpus Analysis: Language Structure and Language Use*. 153-185. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Roberts, Ian & Anna Roussou. 2003. *Syntactic change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Svennung, Josef. 1958. *Anredeformen. Vergleichende forschungen zur indirekten anrede in der dritten person und zum nominativ für den vokativ*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Boktryckeri AB.
- Zanuttini, Raffaela. 2008. Encoding the Addressee in the syntax: Evidence from English imperative subjects. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 26: 1.185-218.