

## Impersonal constructions in Brazilian Portuguese

This talk presents an investigation of some lexical-syntactic characteristics of Brazilian Portuguese related to a particular type of impersonal constructions, which distinguish it from European Portuguese and other Indo-European languages. The analysis exploits the possibility that these characteristics might be due to the contact that the Portuguese people who came to Brazil in the colonial years had with African people, their culture and their languages. If African languages have indeed influenced the grammar of Brazilian Portuguese, this influence is atypical, in the sense that it is not related to direct borrowings of lexical items and construction patterns. It seems to be more related to the prototypical way in which we conceptualize events, construing them in a way remarkably different from the one used by the Portuguese, choosing different viewing arrangements and different figure-ground relations to attribute prominence to event participants. The idea is that the lexicon and the grammatical patterns of the language used in Brazil had to adapt to this new tendency, giving rise to some of the most important structural differences between the variants of Portuguese currently spoken in Europe and in America. Some examples of the data to be discussed are:

- 1) **Esta casa está construindo** desde que o vovô morreu.  
This house is building since grandpa died.
- 2) A gente pode almoçar enquanto **o xerox fica fazendo.**  
We can have lunch while the xerox copies stay making.
- 3) **O programa** que eu precisava não **instalou.**  
The program that I needed (did) not install.

The verbs in these constructions are in their active form, but their agentive argument is missing. The patient or resultative argument surfaces in subject position.