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Article

Flying over *sobre*-x formations in Brazilian Portuguese: formal and semantic-pragmatic aspects

Um sobrevoo pelas formações sobre-x no português do Brasil: aspectos formais e semântico-pragmáticos

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ABSTRACT: This article investigates lexical formations prefixed with *sobre-* in Brazilian Portuguese, aiming to describe how the relationship between form and meaning articulates with recurrent semantic-pragmatic effects in contemporary language use. It is hypothesized that the semantics specific to this prefix is not random, but rather systematically organized by constructional schemas and by cognitive operations anchored in discursive experience. The study adopts Construction Morphology, as proposed by Booij (2010), as its theoretical framework, articulated with assumptions from Cognitive Semantics, especially Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1987), and with Grady's (1997) refinements concerning primary metaphors. Methodologically, the analysis is based on empirical data extracted from the *News on the Web* (NOW) corpus, composed of contemporary journalistic texts and developed by Davies (2016). Only morphologically transparent formations were considered, so as to allow for the direct observation of the semantic contribution of the prefix at the current state of the language. The final corpus gathers occurrences in which *sobre-* attaches to nominal, adjectival, and verbal bases, with nominal formations proving to be the most productive ones. The results indicate that the prefix *sobre-* shows a strong tendency to express excess, understood as the transgression of functional, normative, or socially expected limits. This semantic value is manifested predominantly through the activation of the orientational metaphor "QUANTITY IS VERTICAL," reinterpreted in the evaluative domain as "UP IS EXCESS." It is argued that, unlike its learned counterpart *super-*, the prefix *sobre-* blocks the positive reading associated with the metaphor "UP IS GOOD," favoring negative or problematizing evaluations, as observed in items such as *sobre-endividamento* ('over-indebtedness'), *sobrejornada* ('excessive working hours'), *sobrequalificação* ('overqualification'), and *sobre-exploração* ('overexploitation'). In addition, it is shown that this specific semantic value originates from a broader sense associated with the meaning 'to pass over'/'to go over', exemplified primarily by the verb *sobrevoar* ('to fly over'), whose discursive selection tends to involve referents that are spatially or symbolically negatively marked. The study concludes that the semantic behavior of *sobre-* is guided by recurring interpretive schemas that are

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sensitive to usage and context, which contributes to a more integrated understanding of prefixation in Portuguese by articulating morphology, cognition, and discourse.
KEYWORDS: Prefixation. Construction Morphology. Cognitive Semantics. Conceptual Metaphor. Brazilian Portuguese.

RESUMO: Este artigo investiga formações lexicais prefixadas por sobre- no português do Brasil, com o objetivo de descrever de que modo a relação entre forma e significado se articula a efeitos semântico-pragmáticos recorrentes no uso contemporâneo da língua. Parte-se da hipótese de que a semântica específica a esse prefixo não é aleatória, mas sistematicamente organizada por esquemas construcionais e por operações cognitivas ancoradas na experiência discursiva. O estudo adota como arcabouço teórico a Morfologia Construcional, conforme proposta por Booij (2010), articulada a pressupostos da Semântica Cognitiva, em especial à Teoria da Metáfora Conceitual, de Lakoff e Johnson (1987), e aos refinamentos de Grady (1997) acerca das metáforas primárias. Metodologicamente, a análise baseia-se em dados empíricos extraídos do *corpus* News on the Web (NOW), composto por textos jornalísticos contemporâneos e desenvolvido por Davies (2016). Foram consideradas apenas formações morfologicamente transparentes, de modo a permitir a observação direta da contribuição semântica do prefixo no plano atual da língua. O *corpus* final reúne ocorrências em que sobre-se adjunge a bases nominais, adjetivais e verbais, sendo as formações nominais as mais produtivas. Os resultados indicam que o prefixo sobre- apresenta forte tendência à expressão de excesso, entendida como ultrapassagem de limites funcionais, normativos ou socialmente esperados. Esse valor semântico manifesta-se predominantemente por meio da ativação da metáfora orientacional "QUANTIDADE É VERTICAL", reinterpretada no domínio avaliativo como "PARA CIMA É EXCESSO". Argumenta-se que, diferentemente de sua contraparte erudita super-, o prefixo sobre- bloqueia a leitura positiva associada à metáfora "PARA CIMA É BOM", favorecendo avaliações negativas ou problematizadoras, como se observa em itens como sobre-endividamento, sobrejornada, sobrequalificação e sobre-exploração. Além disso, identifica-se a então descripta semântica específica é originada de uma acepção mais ampla, associada ao sentido de "passar por cima", exemplificada sobretudo pelo verbo sobrevoar, cuja seleção discursiva tende a envolver referentes espacial ou simbolicamente negativizados. Conclui-se que o comportamento semântico de sobre- é orientado por esquemas interpretativos recorrentes, sensíveis ao uso e ao contexto, o que contribui para uma compreensão mais integrada da prefixação no português, articulando morfologia, cognição e discurso.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Prefixação. Morfologia Construcional. Semântica Cognitiva. Metáfora conceptual. Português do Brasil.

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1 Introduction

Prefixation constitutes one of the most productive mechanisms of word formation in Portuguese (Pereira, 2025), playing a central role in lexical expansion and

in the construction of evaluative, aspectual, and discursive meanings (Pereira, 2024). Among the prefixes of contemporary Portuguese, *sobre-* occupies a particularly relevant position, not only because of its frequency of use, but also because of the complexity of its semantic and pragmatic effects, which often go beyond strictly formal or compositional descriptions. Although traditionally associated with locative and quantitative values, this prefix reveals, in present-day usage, recurring evaluative patterns that call for systematic investigation.

Within the linguistic literature, *sobre-* has been described both in terms of its historical and functional relation to the preposition *sobre* and in contrast with its learned counterpart *super-*. Normative and descriptive grammars recognize values such as higher position and excess (Bechara, 2009; Cunha; Cintra, 2013; Rocha Lima, 2008 [1972]), while studies within functional and cognitive linguistics point to a metaphorical extension of these meanings, often associated with discursive evaluations (Nunes, 2011; Rio-Torto, 2016). Even so, the question remains open as to how these values are systematically organized in the lexicon and how the prefix contributes to the construction of predominantly negative meanings in a large portion of contemporary formations, in contrast with the frequently positive evaluative behavior of *super-*.

In this context, the present article investigates lexical formations prefixed with *sobre-* in Brazilian Portuguese, with the aim of describing the relationship between form and meaning in these constructions, identifying patterns of productivity, and making explicit the recurring semantic and pragmatic effects associated with the use of this prefix. It is hypothesized that the polysemy of this linguistic unit is not random, but rather organized by systematic interpretative schemas, anchored in discursive experience and in orientational cognitive metaphors, especially those related to verticality and quantification.

From a theoretical perspective, the study adopts Construction Morphology (Booij, 2010) as a formal model for the representation of morphological schemas and

subschemas, articulating it with contributions from Cognitive Semantics, notably Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff; Johnson, 1987; Grady, 1997). This articulation makes it possible to treat word formation as a pairing between form and meaning that is sensitive to usage, without reducing the analysis to exclusively structural criteria.

In relation to methodology, the research is based on empirical data extracted from the *News on the Web* (NOW) corpus, composed of contemporary journalistic texts. The analytical corpus consists of formations considered morphologically transparent, so as to enable the direct observation of the semantic contribution of the prefix in language use. The data are examined along two complementary axes: (i) the formal aspects of the constructions, including base classes and productivity, and (ii) the discursive-pragmatic aspects, which are responsible for activating specific evaluative values.

The results indicate that *sobre-* shows a strong tendency to express undesirable excess or the transgression of functional or normative limits, systematically activating a negative reading associated with the metaphor "UP IS EXCESS," in contrast with the positive reading frequently associated with *super-*. By making these patterns explicit, the article contributes to the formal and semantic mapping of prefixation in Portuguese and reinforces the importance of integrating morphology, cognition, and discourse in the analysis of word-formation processes.

2 Literature review – grammatical and linguistic perspectives

Bechara (2009) states that the preposition "sobre"[1] has the meaning of "vertical superior" ('upper vertical position'). In addition, he proposes that the grammatical element 'sobre' also functions as a prefix, and adopts a potentially controversial

[1] We take this opportunity to clarify the standardization of the use of quotation marks in our text. Single quotation marks will be used to refer to the linguistic unit either as a preposition or in examples of lexical items that we present; double quotation marks will be used for quotations and/or examples taken directly from the authors cited in the paragraphs. As for prefixes, they will always be presented in italics and followed by a hyphen.

position by establishing that the prefixes *super-* and *supra-* are in fact variants of *sobre-*. This variation, however, occurs only in learned formations, such as "supracitado" ('aforementioned'), "superfície" ('surface') e "superlotado"[2] ('overcrowded'). Furthermore, five meanings are listed: "posição superior" ('upper position'), "saliência" ('salience'), "parte final de um ato ou fenômeno" ('final part of an act or phenomenon'), "em seguida" ('immediately after'), and "excesso" ('excess'), although no examples are provided.

Cunha and Cintra (2013, p. 591) understand that the preposition 'sobre' has three meanings that are recognized through usage. The first meaning corresponds to a "spatial" sense, as in the example "veio a criada e pôs quatro taças sobre a mesa" ('the maid came and placed four glasses on the table'). The second one is of a "temporal" nature, as in "entrementes foi acabando o ano e já era sobre o Natal" ('meanwhile the year was coming to an end and it was already close to Christmas'). The third meaning proposed is that of "notion", exemplified by the sentence "conversaram alegremente sobre os acontecimentos do dia" ('they happily talked about the events of the day').

Furthermore, Cunha and Cintra, similarly to Bechara, claim that the linguistic unit 'sobre' also functions as a prefix. However, it is established that *sobre-* has only one variant, which, in this case, is *super-*. Regarding the meaning of the prefix, they explain that there are only two: "posição em cima" ('position above') and "excesso" ('excess') (p. 100), but once again no examples are provided.

Rocha Lima (2008 [1972], p. 231), with reference to the constituent 'sobre', states that it is a preposition; however, he makes no mention of its meaning and, unlike

[2] The lack of theoretical clarity in the examples proposed by Bechara is potentially problematic, since, in historical etymology, a *learned formation* is defined as a lexical item introduced into Portuguese through a direct learned borrowing from Latin (classical or medieval), preserving its etymological form and not having undergone the phonetic changes characteristic of Vulgar Latin. In this sense, both *superfície* (< Lat. *superficies*) and *supracitado* (< Lat. *supracitatus*) constitute learned formations, typical of the technical and juridical–administrative lexicon. By contrast, *superlotado* has no Latin correlate (*superlōtātus) and results from a productive formation in modern Portuguese (*super-* + *lotado*); it should therefore be classified as a vernacular creation rather than as a learned form.

Bechara and Cunha and Cintra, excludes the possibility that 'sobre' may function as a prefix.

Rio-Torto (2016) establishes that the linguistic unit *sobre-* falls into two prefixal categories: (i) prefixal expression of spatio-temporal location and (ii) prefixal expression of evaluation. In the first case, the linguist explains that its meaning has a locative value and specifies that "algo 'está/é colocado acima de'" ('something is/is placed above') (Rio-Torto, 2016, p. 445), as in the examples "sobrecoser: coser por cima de" ('to sew over'), "sobrevoar: voar por cima de" ('to fly over') [...] (Rio-Torto, 2016, p. 445, author's emphasis).

In addition, the author points out that the sense "por cima de" ('over / on top of') is no longer clearly visible in all lexical items to which *sobre-* attaches. As an example, she mentions the word "sobreviver" ('to survive'), explaining that "this verb does not mean 'to live on top of x', where x denotes something inhabitable, a container. In fact, sobreviver means 'to live above/beyond the minimum conditions and/or adverse conditions, surpassing them, living beyond or over them'" (Rio-Torto, 2016, p. 447). With this explanation, Rio-Torto shows that the notion "acima de" ('above') is still present, even if from a metaphorical perspective, in lexical items formed with *sobre-*.

Concerning the second categorization, Rio-Torto mentions that the linguistic unit *sobre-*, originally bearing a locative sense, can also express an evaluation that presupposes superiority, as in "sobrehumano" ('superhuman'), or excess, as in the lexical items "'sobrealimentar' 'alimentar em excesso' ('to overfeed'); 'sobre-endividar' 'endividar em excesso, para além dos limites do aceitável' ('to over-indebt, to incur debt beyond acceptable limits'); 'sobre-endividamento' 'endividamento excessivo' ('over-indebtedness')" (Rio-Torto, 2016, p. 449, author's emphasis).

Poggio (2002) emphasizes that the constituent 'sobre' derives from 'super', which, in turn, "comes from Indo-European *uper* with a prefixal particle *s-*" (Poggio, 2002, p. 225, author's emphasis). The researcher lists six meanings for the preposition:

(1) spatial sense: "sobre", "em cima de" […] ('over', 'on top of'); (2) temporal sense: "durante" […] ('during'); (3) figurative sense: "em mais de" […] ('in more than'); (4) spatial sense: "sobre" […]; (5) temporal sense: "durante" […]; and (6) figurative sense: "a respeito de", 'sobre' […] ('about', 'concerning') (op. cit., p. 226). In addition, there is no mention of *sobre-* functioning as a prefix.

The linguist Nunes (2011, p. 229) states that the linguistic unit under discussion attaches to nouns, adjectives, verbs, and even adverbs, and that it conveys a notion of evaluative superiority, "being able to express […], in the case of *sobre-*, a positive evaluation (resulting from its meaning of superiority), but also excess, which frequently activates an evaluation with a negative bias." Furthermore, drawing on Martín García (1998a, 1998b), she establishes that this linguistic unit does indeed function as a prefix and that it preserves its original locative sense, which can be paraphrased as "acima de" ('above'), as in the word "sobrevoar". In addition, Nunes (2011) emphasizes that *sobre-* also displays an intensive value, as in "sobrecarga" ('overload').

Nunes (2011, p. 230) highlights, as examples of formations derived from the prefix *sobre-*, the following lexical items[3] and their semantic analyses: "sobre-capitalização: valor nominal de capital empresarial estipulado acima do verdadeiro custo ou valor; [...] sobre-dotado: pessoa que tem capacidades intelectuais acima do que é considerado normal; [...] sobre-carregado: carregado em excesso". These examples are particularly interesting because they display both positive and negative evaluative semantics, both instantiated by a spatial notion of "para cima x" ('upwards / upward').

This intriguing semantic characteristic does not go unnoticed by the author, who points out uses in which "the derived form expresses something that goes beyond what is conventionally regarded as the norm, but the resulting interpretation does not

[3] In this paper, the terms 'word', 'lexical item', 'vocable', and 'lexical unit' are used interchangeably, that is, as a resource of lexical cohesion.

convey the notion of excess. In this way, superiority is seen here as something better" (Nunes, 2011, p. 230-231). However, in other situations, "the derived form expresses something that exceeds, to an excessive degree, the limits of the norm, which […] constitutes an evaluation of a negative nature" (Nunes, 2011, p. 231).

3 Methodology

In this paper, our *corpus* is composed of complex words formed by the adjunction of the prefix *sobre-* to a base word, taking the criterion of transparency into account. In other words, based on our linguistic intuition, we assessed which words could be interpreted as cases in which the affix was in fact forming a derivation at the current stage of the language, as in 'sobrepreço' ('overpricing' / 'overcharge'). However, formations such as 'sobremesa', in which there is no transparency, since the meaning does not arise from the combination of the parts but rather from the holistic configuration of the word, were not considered.

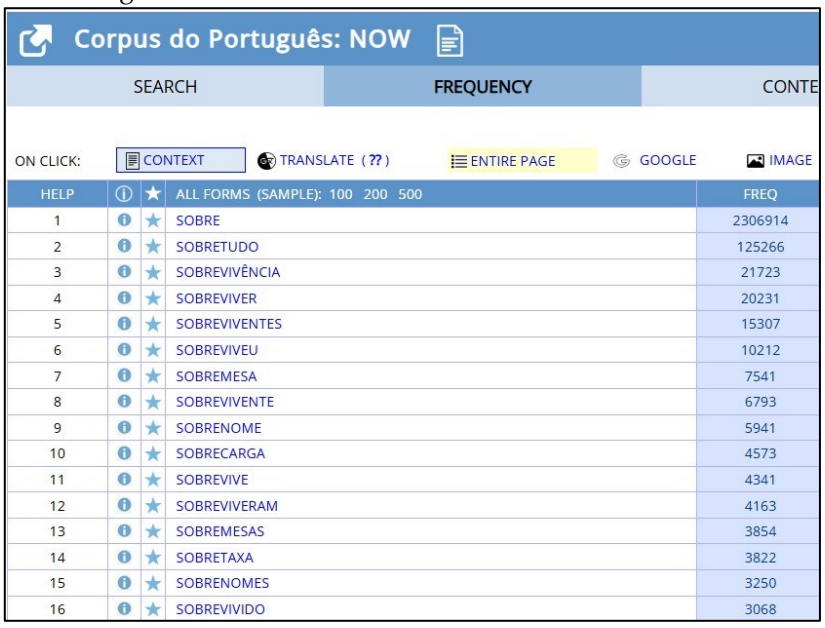
In relation to the criterion of morphological transparency adopted for the selection of the formations analyzed, an effort was made to minimize the subjectivity inherent in this type of judgment through additional verification procedures. Inicialmente, considerou-se como transparente a formação cujo significado pudesse ser interpretado, no uso contemporâneo da língua, como resultante da relação composicional entre o prefixo *sobre-* e a base lexical, excluindo-se, assim, itens lexicalizados e semanticamente opacos. At first, a formation was considered transparent if its meaning could be interpreted, in contemporary language use, as resulting from the compositional relation between the prefix *sobre-* and the lexical base, thus excluding lexicalized and semantically opaque items. As a control strategy for this criterion, a systematic consultation of the electronic version of the *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa* (2009) was carried out in order to verify whether the selected items were listed there as derivatives formed by prefixation. This made it possible to corroborate the proposed morphological analysis and to reduce exclusive

reliance on intuitive judgments. This procedure does not completely eliminate the interpretative dimension involved in identifying transparency, but it contributes to making the process more explicit, replicable, and methodologically controlled.

Another important point is that the data were not collected through introspection. On the contrary, we drew on the "*News On the Web*", also known by the abbreviation *NOW*, which is an electronically searchable, grammatically annotated corpus composed of journalistic texts available on the internet from 2016 to 2019, containing over one billion words in Portuguese. It should also be noted that this corpus was developed within the "*Corpus* do Português" project, led by Mark Davies (2016).

The choice of this *corpus* is justified by the fact that it offers a contemporary sample of the language, which corresponds to our period of interest, and because the texts that compose it display a variety of language with a predominantly denotative function. This allows us to attest to the frequency of *'sobre-x'* formations in current and productive language use, rather than sporadic occurrences resulting from specific stylistic or creative uses. The following figure shows the extraction of the data from this *corpus*:

Figure 1 – Search results screen for sobre- formations.



HELP	ALL FORMS (SAMPLE): 100 200 500	FREQ
1	SOBRE	2306914
2	SOBRETUDO	125266
3	SOBREVIVÊNCIA	21723
4	SOBREVIVER	20231
5	SOBREVIVENTES	15307
6	SOBREVIVEU	10212
7	SOBREMESA	7541
8	SOBREVIVENTE	6793
9	SOBRENOME	5941
10	SOBRECARGA	4573
11	SOBREVIVE	4341
12	SOBREVIVERAM	4163
13	SOBREMESAS	3854
14	SOBRETAXA	3822
15	SOBRENOMES	3250
16	SOBREVIVIDO	3068

Source: Davies (2016).

It should be noted that, in the image above, there are words such as 'sobrenome', 'sobretudo', and 'sobremesa' which, as previously stated, do not constitute objects of our analysis due to their lack of transparency. Nevertheless, the main issue arises with forms such as 'sobreviver' and its analogues, such as 'sobreviventes' and 'sobrevivido'. Here, we acknowledge that there may be discussion concerning the degree of "interpretability" of the transparency of these lexical items; for this reason, we relied on Houaiss (2009) as a kind of 'tie-breaker'.

In any case, what is important to emphasize is that judgments of transparency are not necessarily a simple task, since, depending on the level of education, cultural background, and, above all, life experience, a given word may or may not be interpreted as transparent. For this reason, we sought to be as objective as possible in our assessment and, after this selection process, we established 29 words that composed our corpus of analysis, namely: 'sobrevida'; 'sobrepeso'; 'sobrepreço'; 'sobretaxa'; 'sobrecusto'; 'sobrefaturação'; 'sobrecompensação'; 'sobrepesca'; 'sobre-endividamento'; 'sobrepopulação'; 'sobreoferta'; 'sobrecontratação'; 'sobretaxação'; 'sobre-exploração'; 'sobrecapacidade'; 'sobrejornada'; 'sobredosagem'; 'sobrelucro'; 'sobrefôlego'; 'sobrequalificação'; 'sobrecarregado'; 'sobrelotado'; 'sobrealimentado'; 'sobre-humana'; 'sobrevalorizados'; 'sobrecapitalizado'; 'sobre-endividados'; 'sobrevoar'; 'sobreaquecer'.

We believe that these lexical items, at least in their great majority, are identified as transparent by a considerable portion of present-day speakers of Brazilian Portuguese.

Our analysis is structured around two major sections: (i) formal aspects and (ii) discursive-pragmatic aspects. In the first one, we will investigate the grammatical classes to which the prefix attaches, as well as the meanings that are evoked. In the second one, we will present a set of discursive and pragmatic uses in order to justify the senses established in the first section.

It is important to emphasize that all the contexts analyzed here correspond to real situations of language use, which reinforces our commitment to a functional perspective in linguistic analysis (Pereira, 2021). Moreover, the meanings identified in this study were established after extensive scrutiny of the data, rather than by imposing a priori categories and forcing the data into a classificatory scheme that would inevitably be, to a greater or lesser extent, arbitrary with respect to the empirical reality (Pereira, 2022). We then proceed to data analysis.

4 Discursive-Constructional Analysis of the Prefix *sobre-*

In the present section, the data are examined along two axes. In subsection 4.1, devoted to formal aspects, the behavior of the prefix *sobre-* in the formation of nouns, adjectives, and verbs is described, with emphasis on its greater productivity in the nominal domain, followed by the adjectival and the verbal domains. The syntactic functions of the formations and the general semantics of excess or transgression are addressed, with constructional formalization of the occurrences. In subsection 4.2, focused on discursive-pragmatic aspects, two senses are analyzed: (i) 'passar por cima' ('to pass over'), restricted to 'sobrevoar' and its derivatives, associated with spatial referents and with negatively evaluated events; and (ii) 'instância física ou simbólica acima do esperado' ('a physical or symbolic instance above what is expected'), which is predominant and exemplified by 'sobre-endividado', 'sobrejornada', and 'sobrevida', generally bearing a negative value. These senses will be discussed in the light of the metaphor "QUANTITY IS VERTICAL", considering the hypothesis that *sobre-* blocks the positive reading "UP IS GOOD" and activates "UP IS EXCESS".

4.1 Formal aspects

In the *corpus* analyzed, the prefix *sobre-* operates in the formation of new lexical items in the three main word classes: nouns, adjectives, and verbs. From a syntactic point of view, nominal formations, as observed in our data, may occupy both subject

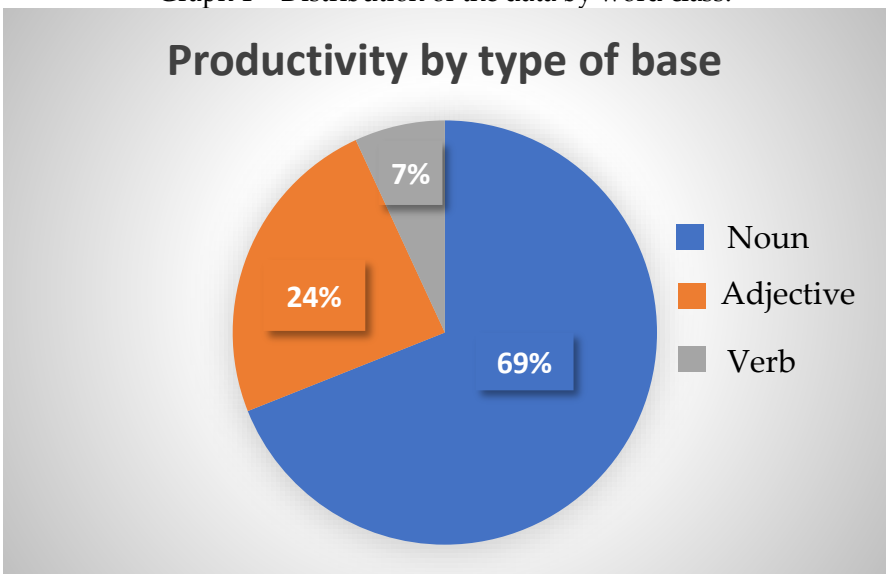
and complement positions, as illustrated in contexts such as 'o sobrepeso infantil atinge cerca de 158 milhões de crianças e adolescentes entre 5 e 19 anos' or 'todo mundo tem problema de sobrepeso, diabetes, colesterol'.

The same applies to adjectival products, which may function as attributive modifiers, nominal complements, or predicatives, as illustrated by uses such as 'casas sobrelotadas' and 'campo de refugiados […] está sobrelotado'. These data indicate that formations with *sobre-* display broad syntactic flexibility, regardless of the class of the base.

With regard to verbs, only two items were identified in the selected *corpus*: 'sobrevoar' and 'sobreaquecer'. Although there are other verbs potentially formed with *sobre-*, such as 'sobretaxar', 'sobrelucrar', and 'sobrefaturar', they did not occur in the first pages of results obtained according to the extraction criteria adopted and, for this reason, were not included in the analysis.

In terms of productivity by word class, the data are distributed as presented below.

Graph 1 – Distribution of the data by word class.



Source: prepared by the authors.

As can be observed, the linguistic unit *sobre-* was most frequently attached to nouns, corresponding to 20 of the 29 occurrences identified in the *corpus* (68.96%).

Adjectives appear in second place, with 7 occurrences (24.13%), followed by verbs, which total 2 occurrences (6.89%). These data confirm the greater productivity of the prefix in the nominal domain, without excluding its operation in the other word classes.

The most relevant aspect of the prefix *sobre-* lies in its semantics, which, although it may at first sight appear transparent, proves to be more complex when examined in contexts of use. In general terms, one observes the activation of a meaning close to that of excess, understood as a quantitative or qualitative elevation that goes beyond a point of balance, a measure considered normal, or a functional expectation. Before formalizing this general semantic value, some representative contexts of use are analyzed below; consider the examples in (i)[4] , (ii)[5] and (iii)[6] :

> (i) Contratos de obras do Trecho Norte do Rodoanel foram alvo de operação da Polícia Federal em junho de 2018. Relatórios do Tribunal de Contas da União (TCU), da Controladoria Geral da União (CGU) e um laudo pericial da Polícia Federal apontam fraude, superfaturamento e **sobrepreço** nos contratos.

> (ii) Os números: cerca de um milhão de todas as espécies do planeta enfrentam a extinção, muitas delas dentro de poucas décadas; à exceção de uma parte muito pequena (7%), todos os grandes *stocks* de pesca do mundo estão em declínio, devido à sua **sobre-exploração**, e se falarmos de florestas, três milhões de hectares (2,9 milhões) perderam-se desde 1990 - nas três últimas décadas -, numa área correspondente à dimensão da Alemanha ou do Vietname.

[4] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2019/01/03/governo-de-sp-quer-extinguir-dersa-assim-que-obras-do-rodoanel-forem-concluidas.ghtml

[5] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://www.dn.pt/vida-e-futuro/interior/perda-de-biodiversidade-e-tao-grave-como-as-alteracoes-climaticas-10862910.html

[6] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://defatoonline.com.br/canais/educacao-e-carreira/vagas/2019/04/02/profissional-experiente-e-empurrado-a-ir-alem-de-diplomas/

(iii) Diploma universitário, pós-graduação, currículo graúdo com passagem por cargos e empresas de alto nível e proficiência em vários idiomas. Se ter uma "**sobrequalificação**" já não é garantia de emprego, em muitos casos pode ser justamente o problema para a contratação quando a vaga exige menos capacitação.

In (i), the context of use concerns a report that points to irregularities in a specific construction contract. This infringing characteristic is materialized, among other factors, by the contractual 'sobrepreço', that is, more was paid than should have been for the execution of the work in question. In this sense, considering the prices usually practiced in this type of contractual relation, inadequacies in pricing were identified insofar as it was excessive, that is, above what was expected and above a standard regarded as appropriate.

In the context of use (ii), the notion of excess in 'sobre-exploração' is once again marked throughout the entire utterance, whether by the more than one million species that face the risk of extinction on a global scale, or by the short time span in which these species may cease to exist, which, according to the text, is within a few decades. This ecological imbalance results from an irresponsible, reckless, and relentless exploitation of natural resources.

The exploitation is so extensive that the text reports the destruction of 2.9 million hectares of forests in an area corresponding to the size of Germany or Vietnam; that is, it is as if one of these countries had simply disappeared. Part of the problem lies in the adoption of the capitalist assumption that supposed industrial development and, consequently, human development can only take place through the exploitation of natural resources, so that a kind of capitalist realism (Fischer, 2020)[7] has been

[7] The presence of a critical reading of a political–discursive nature in this analysis should not be interpreted as a deviation from scientific rigor. As van Dijk (2017) argues in *Discourse and Power*, failing to explicitly assume a political position is, in itself, an equally political choice, although it is often naturalized as neutrality. In this sense, rejecting the illusion of a completely value-free science does not imply abandoning analytical commitment; on the contrary, it makes explicit the epistemological

established, in which it becomes impossible to imagine alternatives to the prevailing system. Within this logic, what is rarely contested is exploitation itself, but rather its excess.

What is therefore denounced is 'sobre-exploração'. This line of reasoning reveals how deeply naturalized the idea has become that exploiting nature is inevitable or even desirable, with the prefix *sobre-* functioning as a linguistic marker of an overflow that is accepted as an exception, when, in fact, it is the very logic of exploitation that should be called into question.

In the context of use (iii), the utterance presents a contemporary labor paradox in which attributes traditionally regarded as positive, such as a university degree, postgraduate training, highly prestigious professional experience, and proficiency in multiple language, not only fail to guarantee access to the job market, but may also come to constitute an obstacle to hiring. Thus, the linguistic marker that encapsulates this paradox is the lexical item 'sobrequalificação', which can be understood as a calque of the English expression '*overqualification*'.

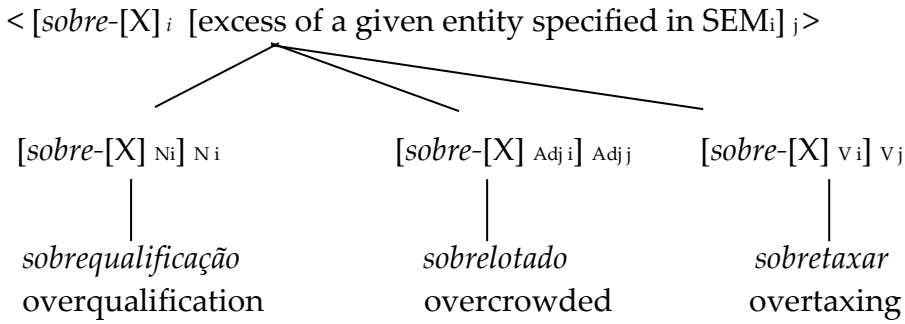
It is worth noting that the prefixal formation with *sobre-* operates here as an indicator of excess, but this excess does not seem to be merely quantitative; rather, it is also of a political and discursive nature, as will be discussed in more detail in the following section. At the level of meaning, the term 'qualificação', commonly associated with competence, preparation, and merit, is negatively resemanticized by the prefix, producing a lexical item in which intensification no longer conveys advantage, but instead signals an undesirable deviation from a tacit norm: that the ideal worker is one who is strictly adjusted to the minimum requirements of the

assumptions that guide the interpretation of the data. In line with this perspective, Moita Lopes and Fabrício (2019) defend the notion of the *embodied researcher*, according to which scientific knowledge is always produced from positions that are historically, socially, and ideologically situated. Thus, making explicit the theoretical and critical stance adopted in this paper constitutes a gesture of intellectual honesty toward the reader, while at the same time maintaining a firm commitment to the systematic analysis of the linguistic facts observed.

position, without exceeding what is functional for the system. We now proceed to the formalization of the lexical formations containing the linguistic unit *sobre-*.

Based on Construction Morphology (Booij, 2010), we arrive at the following schematic representation. In this formalization, SEM corresponds to the frame evoked by the source word. The greater-than and less-than symbols (respectively, < and >) delimit the schema, and the double-headed arrow (↔) relates form and meaning within the schema. The subscripts *i* and *j* indicate the forms that are part of the lexicon.

Model 1 – Specific semantics of excess.



Source: prepared by the authors.

As can be noted, we chose not to indicate the category of the base, since this information corresponds to three different subschemas, as it specifies the position of [X] with detailed information about the class of the source word. This type of representation makes it possible to relate constructs in which the only difference lies in the category of the base (noun, adjective, and verb, respectively). We adopt the strategy of "pulling the meaning upwards" (Soares da Silva, 2006), as this constitutes a way of accommodating the largest possible number of formations.

Constructions are pairings of form and meaning, and Construction Morphology provides the tools to efficiently analyze the formal counterpart of constructions, but it does not delve deeply into issues of a semantic nature. For this reason, it is fully compatible with models that focus precisely on the semantic pole. Thus, in order to examine semantic, pragmatic, and discursive aspects in greater depth, we make use of other models, such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory, for example.

4.2 Discursive-pragmatic aspects

It is in the discursive and pragmatic dimensions that specific semantic values are most easily recognized. More precisely, in the previous section we have already pointed out the specific semantics '(i) physical or symbolic instance above what is expected'. However, we understand that this meaning originates, through metaphor, from a broader semantics of a spatial nature that already conveys, even if in an embryonic way, a vague notion of pejorativity. Thus, the prefix *sobre-* first and foremost licenses a general idea of 'passar por cima' ('to pass over'), while pointing to a referent that is normally negative.

The difficulty in establishing the broader semantics 'passar por cima' lies in the fact that this literal notion was found in only a single lexical item, which, in this case, is the verb 'sobrevoar' and its derivatives, such as the regressive form 'sobrevoo', for example.

Since we are working within a usage-based paradigm, we see no problem or even contradiction in establishing a specific semantics for a single lexical item found in our corpus for two reasons. The first is that our objective is a more in-depth semantic description of the lexical construction; that is, what matters is to establish a category of meaning that best describes the contribution of the affix in a given lexical item.

The second reason is that absence is not proof of non-existence. In other words, the fact that, based on our criteria, we did not find different lexical items with this meaning does not imply that they do not exist, but only that they were not retrieved by the methods we employed. Thus, we now proceed to the analysis of this semantics in the context of use (iv)[8], since there are interesting details to be highlighted there.

[8] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://www.noticiasaominuto.com/politica/1252385/marques-acusa-rangel-de-oportunismo-ao-sobrevoar-a-dor-das-pessoas

(iv) "Ele [Rangel] escolheu **sobrevoar** a dor das pessoas e do território. Desiludiu os que lá esperavam, mesmo com dois anos de atraso, uma palavra, um gesto, um momento para ouvir e compreender", lamentou Pedro Marques.
O cabeça de lista do PSD às europeias, Paulo Rangel, **sobrevoou** hoje, de helicóptero, durante cerca de uma hora, territórios afetados pelos grandes incêndios de 2017, como Pedrógão Grande, Pampilhosa da Serra ou Lousã. [...] "Uns metem as mãos na massa, sujam as mãos. Outros **sobrevoam** as dificuldades, espreitando cada oportunidade de arrebanhar uns votos que parecem fáceis", salientou, acrescentando que lhe dá vontade "de gritar contra políticos superficiais que não conhecem o país e já só conhecem os corredores de Bruxelas".

Based on the context of use (iv), a series of questions arise. We believe that the first and most evident one concerns the principle of no synonymy proposed by Goldberg (1995, 2006), since, if the verb 'voar' already exists, why should there be another verb that denotes an apparently redundant action, such as 'sobrevoar'? Our hypothesis is that the difference between these actions is grounded in a discrepant conceptualization of how these verbs are performed, which is materially manifested in their transitivity patterns.

First of all, we emphasize that 'voar' and 'sobrevoar', although synonymous, are far from exhibiting full synonymy, as they present an important syntactic distinction: 'sobrevoar' is a direct transitive verb (one *sobrevoa* something), whereas 'voar' is intransitive (in fact, it is a verb of motion, which may take the path as a kind of complement, as in *voar de um lugar para outro* 'to fly from one place to another'). Thus, 'voar' is conceptualized as a trajectory, whereas 'sobrevoar' is conceptualized in a more quasi-static way.

In a hypothetical example such as 'o avião sobrevoou a cidade' ('the airplane flew over the city'), there is no implication that the airplane departed from one place and arrived at another. In this way, the two verbs are semantically quite different with respect to how movement is conceptualized. Moreover, there seems to be another important factor underlying their difference: the attention of the experiencer. In

'sobrevoar', the experiencer of the action appears to be attentive to the details of what is being flown over, whether it be a landscape, a catastrophe, among other possibilities. This is not the case with the act of 'voar'.

More specifically, in the case of *voar*, the action takes place in a relatively fast manner when compared to the related verb 'sobrevoar'. Thus, there may be a reference path starting at "A" and ending at "B", but it is also possible that no referential space is required at all. Let us consider examples (a), (b) and (c)[9] taken from the "*Corpus* Brasileiro" (Sardinha; Azevedo, 2008), hosted at Linguateca:

(a) "Eram vidro e gente **voando** para todos os lados", contou Bezerra, que estava sentado na quarta fileira atrás do motorista.

(b) KLM e Lufthansa também **voam** à Turquia.

(c) Os participantes também aprendem a usar brinquedos que **voam**, conhecidos como barangandão, cata-vento e bumerangue.

Note that, in these examples, the action denoted by *voar* does not even require a spatial referent, as in example (c), which refers to the capability of certain toys, or in example (a), which employs the generic spatial reference "para todos os lados" ('in all directions'). Moreover, it is an action that does not extend over time. This is not the case with examples involving the verb 'sobrevoar', which, in addition to denoting an action that unfolds over time, necessarily requires a specified spatial referent, as can be observed in examples (d), (e) and (f)[10] .

[9] For the extraction of the data above, this search syntax was used: "**[lema="voar"& pos="V"]**". It means, in essence, that the *lemma* is used to retrieve all possible inflected forms of the word in quotation marks, which in this case is "voar". The abbreviation "pos" stands for "Part of Speech" and refers to the grammatical category, which, in this case, is a verb, represented by the diacritic "V". We decided to use this corpus for the present illustration because its annotation is much more sophisticated than that found in the corpora hosted in the *Corpus do Português*.

[10] Here, the search syntax used was: "**[lema="sobrevoar"& pos="V"]**". For further details on its application, see the immediately preceding footnote.

(d) O governador da Califórnia, Pete Wilson, **sobrevoou** o sul do Estado quando eclodiram os primeiros incêndios.

(e) O Japão anunciou ontem medidas contra a Coréia do Norte, um dia após o disparo de um míssil norte-coreano que **sobrevoou** território japonês.

(f) O comandante da Força Aérea, general Héctor Fabio Velasco, disse que o avião **sobrevoava** Guaviare, a cerca de 350 km da capital, Bogotá, quando foi interceptado por aviões militares e obrigado a pousar.

In examples (d), (e), and (f), the spatial referents are evident, being, respectively, "o sul do Estado [da Califórnia]" ('the south of the state [of California]'), "território japonês" ('Japanese territory') e "Guaviare". In addition, in all of them there is a notion of temporal extension of the action, rather than a mere passage over the place in question. This feature of duration over time can also be observed in the context of use (iv), when it is stated that Paulo Rangel 'sobrevoou' a given territory affected by the fire "durante cerca de uma hora" ('for about one hour').

It is also important to highlight that 'sobrevoar' is related to calamitous events or to situations involving some kind of conflict. In other words, there is a discursive tendency for the spatial referent, whether concrete or abstract, to be involved in an event that is negatively conceptualized, as in the case of North Korean missiles that 'sobrevoaram' Japanese territory, or in the claim that, according to Pedro Marques, Pedro Rangel 'sobrevoa' the pain and difficulties of people in areas affected by fires in order to garner votes. Before moving on to the justification of the next specific semantic value, we emphasize that, at the end of this subsection, we will propose a hypothesis as to why this negative contextual selection tends to occur between the verb 'sobrevoar' and its spatial referents.

We now turn to a more detailed discussion of the specific semantic value "physical or symbolic instance above what is expected". As the definition itself makes clear, this sense refers to instances of the biophysical and social world that are above

what is expected, usually expressing a loss in quality of life for animate entities or a reduction in useful life for inanimate ones.

What is interesting to emphasize is that this sense is grounded in the orientational cognitive metaphor "MORE IS UP", proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and refined by Grady (1997), who formulates it as "QUANTITY IS VERTICAL ELEVATION", instantiated in everyday utterances such as "a inflação está galopante" ('inflation is skyrocketing'), "os preços não param de subir" ('prices keep rising'), "os juros estão em queda" ('interest rates are falling'), and so forth.

The problem here lies in the following line of reasoning: although quantity is understood in terms of vertical elevation, how can we determine whether a rise or a fall is positive or negative, especially given the existence of such well-established cognitive metaphors as "UP IS GOOD" and "DOWN IS BAD"? If the intention were merely to show that upward verticality is negative, would it be enough to find a series of examples such as "os preços dos alimentos dispararam" ('food prices have soared') and "a temperatura está nas alturas" ('the temperature is extremely high') in order to claim that every increase is negative? And how should we deal with cases such as "este é um produto top de linha" ('this is a top-of-the-line product'), in which there is a clearly positive notion of verticality?

In an attempt to solve this impasse, Radden (2002) proposes that, in such cases, there is a continuum: the more metonymic the construal, the more negative the elevation tends to be; conversely, the more metaphorical it is, the more positive the rise tends to be. However, Farias (2006, p. 94) draws attention to the fact that figurative gradience is very high and that, in many cases, "we cannot say with precision which of these cognitive processes underlies the metaphor. It is not very clear whether we are dealing with a metaphor of metonymic origin or with a metonymy based on metaphor."

Thus, let us now turn to the contexts of use. Nevertheless, we put forward another hypothesis, which will be examined in detail after the analysis of the contexts

of use (v)[11], (vi)[12] and (vii)[13], in order to firmly establish the existence of the specific semantic value under discussion.

(v) A coordenadora do Gabinete de Apoio ao **Sobre-endividado** da Deco, Natália Nunes, explica à jornalista da Antena1 Rosa Azevedo que as famílias pedem para renegociar essas dívidas, e, em muitas situações, fazem-no quando já sofreram o corte da água, do gás ou da eletricidade.

(vi) A **sobrejornada** é um fator importantíssimo para a ocorrência de acidentes, porque toda vez que a gente trabalha cansado a gente está mais desatento, menos propício a observar as regras de segurança.

(vii) Um novo medicamento demonstrou adiar o surgimento de metástase do câncer de próstata, oferecendo mais qualidade de vida ao paciente. Estudos mostram que a apalutamida, desenvolvida pela Janssen, diminuiu em 72% o risco de progressão para metástase ou de morte e proporcionou 40,5 meses de **sobrevida** livre de metástase, o que representa um ganho de dois anos quando comparado ao uso de um medicamento placebo – substância sem propriedades farmacológicas.

In the context of use (v), the use of the prefix *sobre-* in 'sobre-endividado' carries a specific semantic load: it refers to a symbolic and socioeconomic instance that is above what is expected or bearable. The prefix does not merely mark an "extra" in quantitative terms, but rather the transgression of a critical threshold that reconfigures the status of the indebted subject. It is no longer a matter of a person who is simply in

[11] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/desemprego-leva-familias-a-pedir-ajuda-a-deco-para-pagar-contas-da-agua-gas-e-luz_a559927

[12] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://g1.globo.com/sp/ribeirao-preto-franca/noticia/em-6-anos-acidentes-de-trabalho-na-regiao-de-ribeirao-causam-impacto-de-r-2481-milhoes-na-previdencia-aponta-mpt.ghtml

[13] The context of use can be accessed through the following link: https://www.tribunapr.com.br/cacadores-de-noticias/curitiba/pesquisa-perfil-pacientes-cancer-de-prostata-brasil/

debt, but of an individual who, to use a metaphorical expression, is drowning in debt, at a point where the very everyday functionality of life and access to basic rights, such as access to electricity and water, for instance, are compromised.

In the context of use (vi), the lexical item 'sobrejornada' designates a work regime that exceeds the conventional limits of working hours. More specifically, in the utterance, 'sobrejornada' is attributed a determining role in the occurrence of accidents, directly relating the excessive extension of the workday to the worker's state of physical and cognitive exhaustion, which compromises attention and the ability to comply with safety regulations. This clearly establishes the activation of the more specific semantics "physical or symbolic instance above what is expected".

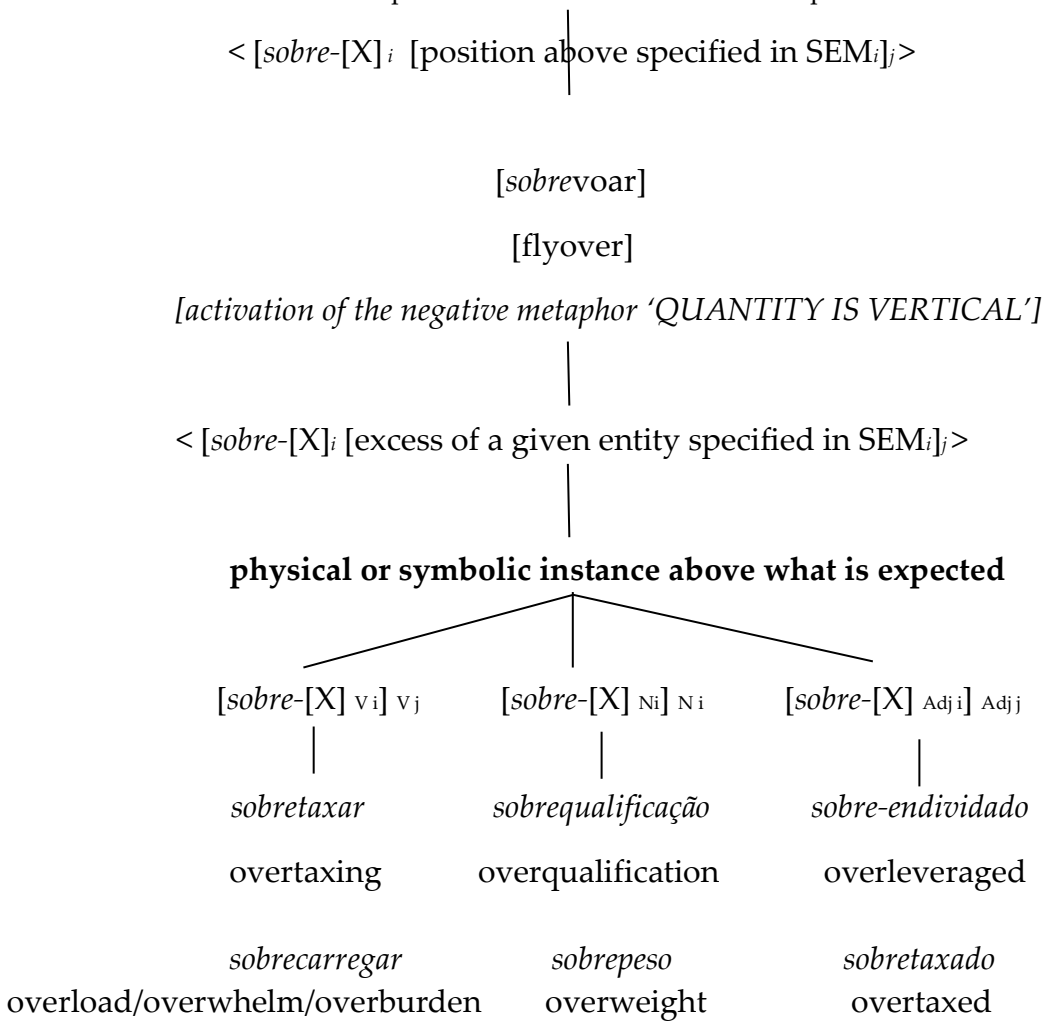
The morphological formation created by prefixing 'jornada' with *sobre-* functions here as a marker of the transgression of a normative physical and symbolic limit. The term 'jornada' by itself already refers to a regulated temporal and spatial measure (daily, weekly), associated with the idea of productivity. By prefixing it with *sobre-*, a lexical item is constructed that indicates surplus and excess, an instance above what is expected, not only in objective terms (number of hours), but above all in the subjective impact that this excess imposes on the worker's body and mind.

In the context of use (vii), the term 'sobrevida' appears in an utterance of a technical and scientific nature, related to oncology, to indicate the prolongation of the lifespan of patients with advanced-stage prostate cancer. The text reports that a medication provided "40.5 months of 'sobrevida' free from metastasis", that is, a measurable postponement of disease progression and, consequently, of death.

This value is compatible with the specific semantics of "physical or symbolic instance above what is expected", since what the term 'sobrevida' designates is a form of life that extends beyond a limit already recognized as terminal. More precisely, death is certain, but postponed. This brief delay is exactly what the prefix *sobre-* marks: a life that is not full; a limited, provisional, and precarious extension that goes beyond the expected threshold of oncological survival.

Thus, the very lexical item that could be taken as counterevidence to the specific semantics we propose, since 'sobrevida' would, in theory, establish an exclusively positive meaning, ends up confirming the specific value we have put forward. This is because the prefix *sobre-*, in this complex word, functions as a marker of a fragile surplus, a kind of "extra time" which, although statistically quantifiable and clinically celebrated, points, from an existential perspective, to the tragic dimension of a life that continues only briefly, already without guarantees of fullness, quality, or autonomy. Accordingly, we arrive at the following schematic representation of the products formed from the linguistic unit *sobre-*:

Model 2 – Complete constructional network of the prefix sobre-.



Source: prepared by the authors.

With regard to polysemy, as explained earlier, the sense 'passar por cima' ('to pass over') is activated, according to our data so far, only in the lexical item 'sobrevoar'. In all other cases, the specific meaning 'physical or symbolic instance above what is expected' is manifested. It is worth noting that, in lexical items formed with this prefix, there is almost always an underlying notion of negativity.

The cognitive metaphor "QUANTITY IS VERTICAL" will thus always indicate a negative increase, as in 'sobrejornada', 'sobrelucro', 'sobrefaturamento', 'sobrelotado', among others. It therefore seems that this linguistic unit blocks the orientational metaphor "UP IS GOOD", which appears to be instantiated by the linguistic unit *super-*, but never by *sobre-*[14] .

Accordingly, forms such as 'super-mercado', 'super-salário', 'super-homem', and adjectival phrases[15] such as 'super bonito' and 'super capaz' point to a positive interpretation and do not have correlates such as 'sobre-mercado', 'sobre-salário', 'sobre-homem', or phrases like 'sobre bonito', 'sobre capaz', and similar constructions.

Hence, our hypothesis is that, in some way, perhaps even as a means of avoiding perfect synonymy with its historical counterpart *super-*, this prefix is directly linked to the activation of the perspective "QUANTITY IS VERTICAL" and establishes the cognitive metaphor "UP IS EXCESS". Thus, it is possible to predict that whenever a lexical item is formed by means of *sobre-*, it will indicate an excessive and undesirable quantity, even if contextually determined, of the base word from which it is derived. In this way, we believe we have resolved the issue that had remained open in Nunes (2011), who, although identifying the disparate evaluative senses, did not fully account

[14] We highlight here the example of 'sobre-dotado' mentioned by Nunes (2011). However, this usage is not current in Brazilian Portuguese, having been replaced by the form 'superdotado'.

[15] The sequences *super bonito* and *super capaz* do not constitute prefixal formations, but rather adjectival phrases in which *super* functions as an intensifying adverb, similar to *muito* ('very'), *extremamente* ('extremely'), or *bastante* ('quite'). Unlike the prefix *super-*, which is a bound morpheme and participates in the formation of lexicalized words (such as *superendividado*, *superestrutura*, or *superpotência*), the intensifying *super* displays prosodic and syntactic autonomy: it can be coordinated, reiterated, and modified (*super, super bonito*; *super mega capaz*). This behavior clearly indicates its status as an independent word rather than as a derivational affix.

for their systematic organization. We now proceed to the table in order to formalize the information gathered about the linguistic unit in question.

Table 1 – Characteristics of the prefix *sobre-*.

Formal and functional characteristics of the linguistic unit *sobre-*	
What type of base does it attach to?	Nouns, adjectives, and verbs.
Which syntactic slots can the forms derived from *sobre-* occupy?	Subject position, complement position, or adjectival phrase position.
Is there polysemy? If so, is it systematic? What are the criteria for the activation of each sense?	No strictly systematic polysemy was found; rather, the impression is that the specific semantics (ii) appears to be overriding (i).
What are the meanings of the linguistic unit *sobre-*?	(i) 'To pass over' and (ii) 'physical or symbolic instance above what is expected'.

Source: prepared by the authors.

5 Final considerations

In this paper, we examined lexical formations prefixed with *sobre-* in Brazilian Portuguese from a discursive-constructional perspective, with emphasis on the relationship between form and meaning, as well as on the pragmatic and metaphorical effects that emerge from the use of this linguistic unit in real contexts.

Based on a methodological approach grounded in morphological transparency and anchored in authentic data extracted from the *NOW corpus*, we found that the prefix *sobre-* operates productively, especially in the formation of nouns and adjectives, although it also occurs in verbal derivation.

Our analysis revealed that the prefix *sobre-* displays a semantic pattern predominantly marked by the idea of excess, transgression, or an instance above what is expected, with a strong negative evaluative load in most cases. Nevertheless, it is important to note that we identified a more general sense of 'passar por cima' ('to pass over'), which acts as a trigger for the activation of the specific semantics under discussion. In this way, the evocation of meaning follows systematic cognitive

principles, among which we highlight the orientational metaphor "QUANTITY IS VERTICAL" (Grady, 1997) and its variation "UP IS EXCESS".

We argue that *sobre-* distinguishes itself from its learned counterpart *super-* precisely by blocking the metaphor "UP IS GOOD" and, instead, reinforcing negative evaluations associated with intensification or with the transgression of a limit. This feature allows us to explain the absence of formations such as 'sobre-homem' or 'sobre-capaz', which would sound semantically incoherent within the system of the language. Thus, we propose that *sobre-* has a discursive orientation that favors the construction of meanings related to crisis, saturation, and functional imbalance, as observed in lexical items such as 'sobre-endividado', 'sobrequalificação', and 'sobre-exploração'.

By articulating Construction Morphology with semantic-cognitive models, we have shown that the meaning of the prefix *sobre-* is guided by recurring interpretative schemas and cannot be adequately understood without considering the role of discursive experience and metaphor in meaning construction. In sum, we argue that the analysis of the unit *sobre-* not only contributes to the formal and semantic mapping of prefixation in Portuguese, but also sheds light on the relationships between language, cognition, and ideology in contemporary lexical production.

Translated into English by: Larissa Carmen Domingues de Freitas

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