

## The Generic *Freguesia* as an Administrative Division in Portugal and Brazil: Synchronic Perspective Study<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*Freguesia* is a generic that refers to one administrative division which involves social contexts, primarily in the scope of Portugal's official (Catholic) church. The term had the same meaning in Brazil during Portuguese colonization. These countries have the same language, but their administrative divisions, history and culture are different. They also have some generics with the same linguistic structure as the aforementioned generic, which reflects linguistic phenomena today related to key changes in social structures. This paper will provide support for understanding the meaning of this concept and data for the *Atlas Toponímico de Portugal* (Toponymic Atlas of Portugal) developed at Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil), showing the use of *freguesia* as a generic term in São Paulo (Brazil) and in Braga (Portugal). Although the focus is not directly on Braga in this paper, interest in it is justified because the Master's level research we are carrying out examines the role of the *freguesia* and its related toponyms in Braga, a city that is evidently important to established Portuguese nationality. These names can display the semantic status of a term that has been in existence since Portugal's inception, as well as its social and historical changes and diachronic transformations, which may contribute to understanding the colonization process in Brazil from another perspective, by analyzing the linguistic status of *freguesia* in São Paulo in the present day.

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### 1. Introduction

It is in Portugal where Brazil's territorial history begins (Lima, 2002, 13). Physically separated by the Atlantic Ocean, these two places are brought together by their official language, Portuguese, while being different due to their historical and cultural aspects; other converging and diverging matters are directly related to the administrative division of land. Because *freguesia* forms toponymic phrases<sup>2</sup> found in both countries, it is worthwhile to note this presence from the point of view of toponymy,<sup>3</sup> with the goal of assessing the current semantic situation of the use of the term as an administrative division.

The study proposed is therefore based on findings in relation to toponymy as a scientific discipline, its study in Portugal and in Brazil and a discussion of the generic in the toponymic phrase. After reflecting on theoretical support, methodological directions were found for use and application. This resulted in philological and semantic retrieval of the generic *freguesia*. Then there is a short historical summary of topographic data that could provide a look at the use of *freguesia* in the early history of Portugal and in São Paulo, Brazil. Lastly, the final conclusions are discussed, parallel to information reached as a means of observing the current use of the generic.

The intention was not to exhaustively study any of the aspects covered, but rather to offer a brief overview of data collected for the purpose set forth.

<sup>1</sup> Translated into English by Sarah Jeanne Johnson and proofread by Joyce Mattos.

<sup>2</sup> *Sintagma toponímico* ('toponymic phrase) is a term created by Dick in 1980 to define the toponym in Portuguese structure: generic + name itself (Dick, 1990a, 24-25).

<sup>3</sup> In Brazil, *Toponymy* is used to define both the scientific discipline and the geographic nomenclature. Here, the term is used with both these meanings.

## 2. Toponymy: considerations on studies in Portugal and in Brazil

Just as territorial borders in Brazil were influenced by the Portuguese, the same therefore occurs in toponymy. Although language is a common thread, inherent singularities are also reflected in place names and their analysis due to the function they exercise over time, giving them unique traits.

Bearing the essence of the language and the people (Castro, 1988, 184-196), the toponym is the part of the lexicon that is best preserved from outside interference, shaped by those who employed it and by the need to particularize a place using a name. Regarding linguistic analysis (Carvalhinhos, 2010, 71-91), it is worth noting the contribution made by philology to the study of place names, since it works as a primordial tool by making it possible to investigate phenomena through the philological method, with the toponymy being able to aid philology by virtue of its interdisciplinary articulation.

Because of the common thread of Portuguese language, there are many contributions and particularities in Portuguese and Brazilian toponymy evident in linguistic, extralinguistic and chronological factors. Considering the breadth of the issue and focusing on the linguistic contributions made by different strata of population, Portuguese toponymy (Vasconcelos, 1931, 139) contains Pre-Roman, Roman, Germanic and Arabic place names as well as place names of varied origin and Portuguese place names per se. In this sense, Brazilian toponymy shows indigenous, Portuguese and African contributions in its historical origin, as well as foreign contributions in its post-colonial period (Dick, 1990b, 81).

Concerning current studies in Portugal (Carvalhinhos, 2010, 76) “[...] é comum recolher artigos dispersos e monografias locais que tratam de toponímia (quase sempre, monografias históricas, com enfoque histórico) [...]”.<sup>4</sup> Active production took place until 1950 with exponential works completed by Vasconcelos. There is a unified project currently being outlined in Brazil (Carvalhinhos, 2008a, 15; Departamento de Letras Clássicas e Vernáculas, 2011), the *Atlas Toponímico de Portugal* (Toponymic Atlas of Portugal), alongside the offering of a graduate program course, both at Universidade de São Paulo (Universidade de São Paulo, 2011).

In Brazil, the study of toponymy has been concerned not only with linguistic retrieval, but has also covered the resulting study of languages in contact. After 1990, Universidade de São Paulo presented a new approach to it, more linguistically oriented. Various language courses came together for a panoramic examination of the toponym, taking it into account in a critical manner in relation to the namer and to physical, cultural, and temporal space. Ongoing projects and research can be placed into two groups. In the first group, which is governmental in nature, there is a project at the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (‘Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics’) and at other organizations: the *Banco de Nomes Geográficos do Brasil e Nomes Geográficos do Estado do Paraná* (Data Base of Geographical Names in Brazil<sup>5</sup> and Standardization of Geographical Names in the State of Paraná),<sup>6</sup> which includes creation of a *Rede de Toponímia* (‘Toponymy Network’). In the second group, and from an academic perspective, the studies of Professor Maria Vicentina de Paula do Amaral Dick on *variantes regionais do Atlas Toponímico do Brasil* (local variants in the Toponymic Atlas of Brazil)<sup>7</sup> are worth noting. This work includes regional atlases

<sup>4</sup> “[...] it is common to find loose articles and local papers dealing with toponymy (almost always, historical papers, with a historical focus) [...]”.

<sup>5</sup> (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/docs/25th-gegn-docs/wp%20papers/wp40-database-brazil.pdf> Consulted on 28 Nov. 2011).

<sup>6</sup> (<http://www.lagf.org/2011/proceeding/Claudio%20Joao.pdf>, consulted on 28 Nov. 2011).

<sup>7</sup> (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/docs/25th-gegn-docs/wp%20papers/wp42-wgtopony-brazil.pdf> Consulted on 28 Nov. 2011).

created by state governments and other projects in development in their initial phases, such as the *Memória Toponímica de São Paulo, bairro a bairro* ('Toponymic Memory of São Paulo, neighborhood by neighborhood'), coordinated by Professor Patricia Carvalhinhos (Carvalhinhos, 2008a, 11-16).

From this succinct reflection we can infer that the Portuguese language binds Portuguese and Brazilian toponymy; however, these studies differ because of the social context in which they occur. This and other factors are present today in place names due to the singular nature of the sign that functions as toponym, employed by man to identify and particularize the environment in which he lives.

### 2.1. *The generic: studies and characteristics*

The same issues of complexity involving the toponym can themselves, however, be extended to the generic.

Because toponymy is transdisciplinary by nature and its objects of study can be subject to many different analyses with regard to this and to the rest of the lexicon, the generic element may offer important data on language itself and the namer. Therefore, terminology is posited as an auxiliary science (Carvalhinhos, 2008b, 1-6). Thus, representation of an amorphous content substance can be analyzed by means of terminological and, therefore, expressive metalanguage (Dick, 1999, 1-2).

By naming the geographic element, whether in its physical or human nature, the generic, like the toponymic phrase, may synchronically and diatopically vary and therefore suffer semantic bleaching. These transformations lead to other processes studied by toponymy (Carvalhinhos, 2009, 1-4). Nevertheless, because the syntactic structure of Portuguese is one of juxtaposition "[...] os termos genéricos da nomenclatura geográfica permanecem por mais tempo no vocabulário ativo dos usuários [...]"<sup>8</sup> (Dick, 1999, 7).

Based on the conservative nature of the toponym, a study of the generic may semantically provide data on language, culture and the namer (Carvalhinhos, 2008c, 1). Therefore, it is understood that, by being preserved from changes that occur through time, a generic such as *freguesia* requires analyses adequate to this complex structure.

### 3. Methodology and analysis

The methodology for this study follows criteria established by the *Atlas Toponímico de Portugal*, which in turn is based on other projects developed in Brazil (Carvalhinhos, 2009, 1-3). The process of philological and semantic retrieval is employed (Carvalhinhos, 2010, 77-82), since after the toponym is established and with the passage of time, it undergoes semantic bleaching in the act of decoding, appearing to be semantically bleached. This procedure allows linguistic traits to be accessed from the time when the toponym was established, when the sign is complete. To reach this result, it is necessary to search for records on the generic and also on the semantic context inside linguistic and extralinguistic documents. Although traits may be maintained, they are subject to opacity and semantic bleaching brought about by the dynamism of the language and the shifting of referents. Thus, data was gathered on both the semantic evolution, the implementation of *freguesia* in Brazil and the current context to validate the semantic process observed synchronically.

A survey of the generic *freguesia* in Portugal was done considering the current hierarchical *divisão administrativa* ('administrative division') in continental Portugal (Instituto Nacional de Estatística – Portugal, 2011a), divided into *distrito* ('district'),

<sup>8</sup> '[...] the generic terms of the geographic nomenclature remain in the active vocabulary of users for longer [...]'.

*concelho* or *município* ('council' or 'municipality')<sup>9</sup> and *freguesia* ('parish').<sup>10</sup> Four thousand and fifty *freguesias* were found (Instituto Nacional de Estatística - Portugal, 2011c). In the *concelho* of Braga, located in the *distrito* of the same name, there are 62 occurrences (Instituto Nacional de Estatística – Portugal, 2011d).

In Brazil, a search for the generic *freguesia* was carried out, considering the current political and administrative division of territory with a *distrito federal* ('capital district'), formed hierarchically by *estados* ('states') and *municípios* ('municipalities') (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2011a); no occurrence was found in the country (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2011b, c). Regarding municipal divisions that are made up of administrative units, there was one occurrence of the generic *freguesia* in *Freguesia do Ó distrito* was found (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2011d). As to the presence of the same generic in another smaller division on the same location, Carvalhinhos (2011, personal communication, September 08) has noted that *Freguesia do Ó* is a toponym which names both the *distrito* ('district') and the *bairro* ('neighborhood'). Although this is an official division, this use by people is fluid. It means people never agree on where the boundaries of the neighborhood start or end and even people from the same neighborhood use the same toponym for it. This is a phenomenon that takes place throughout the city. The *Memória Toponímica de São Paulo, bairro a bairro* tries to add a new dimension to this discussion.

To philologically retrieve the term surveyed, not considering other variants found in Galician documents, two records of 13<sup>th</sup> century documents, found in an etymological source, were taken into account (Machado, 1977, 89): “[...] s. De *freguês*. Em 1262: «Prenda con cello de III *freeguesias*», *Leges*, p. 704; em 1280: «...que auemos en évora na *ffréguisia* de sancta Maria...», *Portel*, doc. N.º 153, p. 98. [...]”.

Following these notes, the philological method is applied (Carvalhinhos, 2010, 77-83) because it works as a secure tool, since it enables meaning to be reestablished and also enables the investigation of phenomena such as semantic bleaching. The lexeme *freguesia* is chosen from a paradigm by the namer, changing into a word-occurrence with the purpose of particularizing an element (human settlement). This choice is concurrent with the establishment of the generic functioning as a toponym and is in accordance with the discourse at the time of utterance.

The etymological search for references to reconstruct the generic using the philological method provides us with the original form of the term, which makes it possible to contextualize the form derived semantically at the time of bestowal in Portugal.

Thus, the original form *freguês* is found, possibility originating from Latin (Machado, 1977, 88-89). Therefore, a document is used from a historical point of view, with forms and observations on the semantic status of the word in early times (Afonso, 1974, 57-58):

“[...] do desmembramento das «vilas» romanas resultou a formação do tipo geral da *pequena propriedade*.

À medida que as «vilas» se desagregam, os lavradores que vivem na área do antigo prédio romano começam a agregar-se em volta das pequenas igrejas rurais, sob a direcção espiritual do presbítero, sendo denominados filhos da igreja – *fili ecclesiae*–*filigreses*–*fregueses*– e

<sup>9</sup> The change from *concelho* to *município* dates from 2006 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística – Portugal, 2011b). For this paper, the two terms were considered to be equal.

<sup>10</sup> *Parish* (plural: ‘*parishes*’) may not a good translation, since it is usually associated with the Portuguese word *paróquia*, and *paróquia* or *freguesia* are not the same institutional concept.

assim nascem as *freguesias rurais* (1), que serão as moléculas do futuro concelho.”<sup>11</sup> (Author’s italics.)

In (1), the author states that “A freguesia, antes de ser uma unidade territorial, era a comunidade dos fiéis dependentes de uma igreja paroquial. [...]”<sup>12</sup> (Afonso, 1974, 58). Having posed my considerations concerning the origin of *freguesia* and the factors that conditioned its employment, I then go on to the issues related to the semantics of the findings.

It is understood that the term *freguesia* was employed as a generic to designate a type of human settlement that was religious in nature. From this perspective, its members, workers called *fregueses*, were bound by ties of dependence that were mediated by the head of the unit, the priest. This meaning is supported by the suffix *-ia*, which, when used in a derivative form (Cunha, 2007, 418), may refer to the notion of title and place where an activity is carried out. It is then understood that the origin of *freguesia* refers to the time of the German Christians, 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Saraiva, 1993, 42-46). Therefore and regarding the use of the word *freguesia* in Portugal, I have observed that it has to do with a “[...] termo que, pouco a pouco, foi designando as novas unidades de povoamento e vizinhança [...]”<sup>13</sup> (Saraiva, 1993, 48). Also referring to the medieval period, and corroborating the data gathered, is the additional information (Barros, 1945, 335): “[...] se já então havia uma organização paroquial (1),<sup>14</sup> a palavra *feliglesiis* ou *felegresiis* no sentido de moradores da paróquia ou colação, só muito mais tarde se começa a empregar.”<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, regarding the scope of *freguesia* in Portugal (Afonso, 1974, 58, footnote 1), consider that “[...] Na época da Reconquista essa comunidade religiosa (*paróquia*) correspondia naturalmente a uma vila, mas, segundo o P.<sup>e</sup> Miguel de Oliveira, ela abrangia, às vezes, duas ou mais pequenas vilas [...]”<sup>16</sup> As in Afonso (1974, 58, footnote 1), in Oliveira (1950, 121) *freguesia* corresponds to “a congregação dos habitantes de uma vila, ou grupo de vilas, em torno da igreja-mãe”.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the semantic conditions of the application of *freguesia* as a generic in Brazil, there are the following historical notes (Bomtempo, 2004, 58):

“É que, sobre a particular significação para o catolicismo, freguesias, a exemplo do que ocorria em Portugal, tinham aqui sentido mais abrangente. Por sua natureza conservavam-se no âmbito eclesiástico, mas revestiam simultânea feição estatal àquele tempo, quando se *unia a espada dos Constantinos às chaves de São Pedro*, amalgamados os interesses da Religião com os interesses do Estado, as *duas bases da sociedade cristã*, na manifestação de um velho padre súdito da Monarquia.

<sup>11</sup> “[...] the breaking up of the Roman «villages» resulted in the formation of a general kind of *small property*. Insofar as the «villages» disintegrated, the workers living in the area of the old Roman building began to settle around the small rural churches, under the spiritual guidance of the elder and were called the children of the church – *filii ecclesiae-filigreses-fregueses* - and that is how the *rural freguesias* were born (1), which will be the molecules of the future *council*’.

<sup>12</sup> ‘the *freguesia*, prior to being a territorial unit, was a community of believers dependent on a parochial church. [...]’.

<sup>13</sup> ‘[...] term that, little by little, began to name the new units of settlement and neighborhoods [...]’.

<sup>14</sup> In a footnote, the author underscores that: “Os mais antigos documentos da Reconquista, que se lhe referem, empregam de preferência a expressão *collacio* ou *collacione* (Vide *Rev. Port. de Hist.*, t. I, pág. 82 e segs.)”. “The oldest documents from the Reconquest that refer to it preferably use the expression *collacio* or *collacione* (See *Rev. Port. de Hist.*, t. I, pág. 82 e segs.)’.

<sup>15</sup> ‘[...] if there was already a parochial organization then (1), the word *feliglesiis* or *felegresiis* in the sense of inhabitants of a parish or *colação* would only begin to be used much later.’

<sup>16</sup> ‘[...] at the time of the Reconquest this religious community (*parish*) naturally corresponded to a village; yet, according to Father Miguel de Oliveira, it at times included two or more small villages [...]’.

<sup>17</sup> ‘the congregation of inhabitants of a village, or group of villages, around a mother church.’

As freguesias, divisões das dioceses, eram ainda como que divisões das vilas, correspondentes estas a municipalidades (não raro uma vila toda continha uma só freguesia), bivalência resultante da união da Igreja com o Estado, particularmente em face do Padroado (*ius patronatus*) concedido à Coroa, consubstanciado no direito de assunção de determinados setores da jurisdição eclesiástica, provimento de certos cargos religiosos, fundação de igrejas, criação de dioceses e paróquias ou freguesias, atribuída ao Estado, em contrapartida, a função de executar decisões da Igreja como seu Braço Secular em algumas circunstâncias, manter o culto e defender a Fé.”<sup>18</sup> (Author’s italics.)

The term was used in Brazil pursuant to the Portuguese context for dividing lands which, at the same time, belonged to the Church and the State due to the merging of interests of these institutions during that period. The *freguesias* stood out because they were a means to organize and control space; therefore, they served as the foundation of the system and made up a preliminary stage of the Brazilian process of municipal division (Bomtempo, 2004, 60-64). For its part, the semantic retrieval allows for observation of the current status of the term *freguesia* in both countries and phenomena related to the moment of decoding of the term.

After Portugal became a Republic, Religion was separated from the civil sphere in 1911 (Marques, 1991, 495-497). As seen during the survey of the term in the country, *freguesia* is a unit of *divisão administrativa* that is in effect, subdividing the *concelho* (Instituto Nacional de Estatística - Portugal, 2011e), and consequently its meaning is found to be crystallized at the time of establishment of the toponymic phrase.

In Brazil, the separation between Church and State occurred in 1890, also under a Republican regime. With this, the ecclesiastic division and interference in the civil sphere ended (Bomtempo, 2004, 69). In the toponyms used in São Paulo, there is a vestige resulting from this organization in *Freguesia do Ó*, with the generic crystallized (Carvalhinhos, 2008c, 11). As noted, this toponym currently refers to a district where there is a smaller division of the same name; in both cases the etymological core that both had at the time when they were created is not present synchronically.

#### 4. Final considerations

The application of the methodology used to look for the current semantic status of the generic *freguesia* in toponymic phrases in Portugal and in Brazil allows general considerations to be outlined in relation to the use of the term as an administrative division. This presence produces linguistic phenomena at the time of decoding, a factor which drove this research from a toponymic point of view.

The considerations listed show that the term *freguesia*, synchronically (and in Portugal) as a current unit of *divisão administrativa* of civil continental territory, bears crystallized semantic traits of settlement in its original form (the phenomenon of crystallization is seen). In Braga, the presence of *freguesias* as a division of territory in its crystallized status are in

<sup>18</sup> ‘Regarding the particular meaning for Catholicism, the freguesias, following the example of Portugal, had a broader meaning here. By nature they were conserved in the ecclesiastical environment, but at the same time they took on a governmental feature at that time, when the *sword of the Constantines joined the keys of São Pedro*, fusing the interests of Religion with the interests of the State, the *two bases of Christian society*, in the manifestation of an old priest and subject of the Monarchy.

The freguesias, divisions of dioceses, were still like divisions of villages, corresponding to municipalities (it was not rare for a whole village to have just one freguesia), a bivalence resulting from the union of the Church and State, especially in the face of the Patronage (*ius patronatus*) granted to the Crown, embodied in the right to assume certain sectors of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, in the provision of certain religious positions, in the founding of churches, in the creation of dioceses and parishes or freguesias; these were attributed to the State which in return was responsible for carrying out Church decisions as its Secular Arm in some circumstances, maintaining worship and defending the Faith.’

line with the historical and ecclesiastical past of this location, which continues to be one of the important centers of northern Portugal (Poeira and Soares, 1997, 143).

In Brazil, the term no longer represents a territorial division as it did at the time of name bestowal (colonial period); however, the crystallization of the toponym in São Paulo maintains the features of the type of structure implemented in the country, which remained in effect until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In São Paulo, the specific terms given to *freguesias* remain, in part, through the continued use of *distritos de paz* or *distritos* ('peace districts' or 'districts') as substitutes of a secular nature. In this case, the toponym *Freguesia do Ó* is the only one that maintains this generic in its syntagmatic structure. These are the civil remains of the bygone division employed in the *município* of São Paulo (Bomtempo, 2004, 69).<sup>19</sup>

In relation to the objective proposed, this approach may aid in understanding the study of the term *freguesia* synchronically in both countries by considering the linguistic, etymological, historical, and social phenomena that surround the issue from the point of view of the toponym. Obviously, this reflection does not end with this paper, especially regarding the presence of *freguesias* in Braga and in Portugal as a whole, since this is the topic of my ongoing Master's dissertation.

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<sup>19</sup> Based on its geographic location and the development of the city, the region of *Freguesia do Ó* continued to grow at an isolated pace until 1930. A local distilled sugar cane liquor (*cachaça*) called *Caninha do Ó* was produced there, connecting it to the farming of sugar cane from that time in which the remote population was established until the start of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The product was a reference for inhabitants of the city in relation to the region (Barro, 1977, 57-76). This location currently preserves past features and traditional festivals around the *Nossa Senhora do Ó* (Our Lady of the Ó) Church (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2011).

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