

Cerrado and Vereda: A Survey of Portuguese Lexicon for Brazilian Biomes

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Abstract : This paper analyses from a semantic-diachronic viewpoint the change of meanings that two lexical items of Brazilian-Portuguese language have gone through. Cerrado and Vereda designate currently the second largest Brazilian biome and one of its most important subsystems. Nevertheless, these two words have long individual histories that can be traced back to their Latin etymons. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to highlight the process by which meaning instantiated itself in these words' formation and to discuss how semantic change installed subsequently in them. As this paper shows, the aforementioned words have been, in different past, synchronizes, created, and undergone changes of meanings by metaphor and metonymy. Besides, it is argued here that semantic change takes place due to external causes, such as generalization and specialization of meaning. It happens when a specialized use of a lexical item, restricted to a particular linguistic group, is adopted by other groups, having its meaning generalized by them. In these processes, the etymological idea of the word is generally lost, which gains, in the new group, less specific meaning in relation to its etymology, sometimes with no relation to the original idea. As a final point, it is claimed that both the creation of a lexical item and its change of meaning involve pragmatic goals, such as the need the language users have to express a new meaning related to a certain reality in the empirical world.

Keywords : Brazilian biomes, metaphor and metonymy, Portuguese lexicon, semantic change

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