

On the Semantics of the Structure *Estar para* + infinitive in European Portuguese: From Aspect to Modality

Luís Filipe Cunha 

ABSTRACT

In contrast to most aspectual operators whose meaning remains unchanged regardless of their context of occurrence, the structure *estar para* + infinitive reveals a great deal of variability in this respect. Thus, in addition to the primary prospective aspect value, this construction also conveys modal meanings that can express uncertainty, counterfactuality, or volition/intention. Factors such as the tenses in which the sentence appears (in particular, the *pretérito imperfeito* (past imperfect) and the *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past tense)) and the presence of sentential negation contribute decisively to bringing about this kind of variation. However, there seems to be a shared semantic profile underlying the construction *estar para* + infinitive, namely the presence of a stative predication that induces a prospective projection.

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Faculty of Arts, Center for Linguistics, University of Porto, Portugal.

*Corresponding Author:
e-mail: luisfilipeleitecunha@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

In languages such as European Portuguese (EP), the so-called periphrastic constructions (cf. Barroso, 1994, 1997)—typically made up of a semi-auxiliary, a prepositional-like connective¹ and a main verb—are quite common and express different meanings, covering tense, aspect and modality.

When they function as aspectual operators—such as the progressive *estar a* (literally, ‘be at’), *começar a* (‘begin/start’) or *para de* (‘stop’), their semantic properties are relatively stable across contexts of utterance and their meanings do not change considerably.

Nevertheless, some of these constructions often show a certain variability regarding their semantic properties. For instance, the structure *acabar de* may convey either purely aspectual information, roughly corresponding to the English aspectualiser “finish,” as in (1), or a mainly temporal meaning, leading to an interpretation in which the situation has come about just before the speech time, as the translation of (2) makes clear (cf. Cunha, 1998; Oliveira *et al.*, 2004).

(example taken from <https://relogiodagua.pt/produto/retrato-do-artista-quando-jovem/>).

(1) Joyce acabou de escrever “Retrato do Artista quando Jovem” em 1914, ano de publicação de “Gentes de Dublin.”

Joyce finish.PPERF3SG of write.INF Portrait of the Artist When Young in 1914, the year of publication of People of Dublin

‘Joyce finished writing “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” in 1914, the year “Dublin People” was published.’

(2) A nova coleção de livros que a Divisão Editorial do Instituto Piaget acabou de lançar no mercado é destinada a «leigos e curiosos» dos mais variados universos científicos, desde a explosão demográfica à problemática da insónia, passando pelas dialécticas da inteligência artificial. (Cetem Público, par=ext80279-soc-94b-1)

¹ The precise category to be assigned to this type of element has been the subject of heated debate in syntactic studies, particularly whether they are true prepositions, complementizers or a hybrid category. As this paper is essentially concerned with semantic issues, I will not comment on the question here. In this respect, see, for example, Martins (2000), Oliveira *et al.* (2004), or Magro (2005).

The new collection of books that the Division Editorial of the Institute Piaget finish.PPERF3SG of launch.INF in the market be.PRES3SG aimed at laypeople and curious of the most varied universes scientific, from the explosion demographic to the problematic of the insomnia, pass.ger by the dialectics of the intelligence artificial

‘The new collection of books that the Editorial Division of the Piaget Institute has just launched on the market is aimed at «laypeople and those who are curious» about the most varied scientific universes, from the demographic explosion to the problem of insomnia, including the dialectics of artificial intelligence.’

This semantic diversity also seems to be present in the structure *estar para* (literally ‘be to’) + infinitive, which will be the central topic of analysis in our paper. In fact, although it usually conveys a pre-preparatory state leading to a given event, this construction, depending on its context of occurrence, may be associated with other interpretations, sometimes quite different from the prototypical one.

In effect, linguistic factors such as the tense form with which it is combined, the presence of some temporal adverbials or the embedding under negation play an important role in the several readings ascribed to the structure *estar para*, affecting the computation of its final meaning.

The main goal of this paper is, thus, to investigate the semantic properties that characterise the structure *estar para* + infinitive, seeking to recognise the linguistic factors that interfere with the various meanings associated with this construction and to establish the relationships between the different readings that can be observed.

The work is structured as follows: in Section 2, I will demonstrate that, in its basic reading, the structure *estar para* + infinitive describes a pre-preparatory state, as defined, e.g., in Moens (1987); Section 3 discusses the role played by tense in the interpretation of the construction at hand, with particular focus on the contrast between *presente do indicativo* (simple present), *pretérito imperfeito* (imperfective past), *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past) and future tenses. Section 4 deals with the interpretative consequences of embedding *estar para* under negation. In Section 5, I will look more closely at some apparent exceptions, and in 6, I will try to give a unified analysis for the semantics of the construction at issue. Finally, 7 summarises our findings.

2. ESTAR PARA + INFINITIVE AS A PRE-PREPARATORY STATE

In its most natural reading, the structure *estar para* + infinitive points to a period of time that immediately precedes the happening of a given eventuality, leading to its occurrence, as the sentences in (3) and (4) suggest:

(3) «Estou convencido que o investimento estrangeiro que está para chegar a Portugal continuará a procurar Setúbal, e não outras regiões» referiu Rui Mil-Homens. (CetemPúblico, par=ext11746-nd-98b-2)

Be.pres1sg convinced that the investment foreign that be.PRES3SG to arrive.INF at Portugal continue.fs3sg to seek.INF Setúbal and not other regions refer.PPERF3SG Rui Mil-Homens
‘I’m convinced that the foreign investment that is about to arrive in Portugal will continue to seek out Setúbal, and not other regions,’ mentioned Rui Mil-Homens.’

(4) Há uma caixa de dez CD da minha música que agora está para sair: muito poucos compositores tiveram isso durante a vida deles. (CetemPúblico, par=ext189709-clt-97b-2)

Therebe.PRES3SG a box of ten CD of the my music that now be.PRES3SG to come out.INF: very few composers have.pperf3pl that during the life of them
‘There’s a ten-CD box set of my music that’s about to come out: very few composers have had that in their lifetime.’

In (3), the foreign investment did not yet reach Portugal at the interval of the utterance, but its arrival is taken as granted and imminent. Similarly, in (4), the release of the CD set has not yet taken place but is described as being very close in time.

Examples like these show that *estar para* + infinitive typically describes an interval that immediately precedes the occurrence of a given situation, serving as its onset.

One possibility to deal with this meaning would be to consider the structure *estar para* + infinitive as a case of “prospective aspect,” as defined in Klein (1994). According to the author, temporal and aspectual relations may be modelled by exploiting three different time intervals: the time of utterance (TU), the time of the situation (TSit), and the topic time (TT), the time about which the speaker or writer makes a claim or assertion, i.e., the interval that is focalised in discourse.

Within Klein’s framework, the prospective aspect is conceived as follows: the TT coincides with TU, and both precede TSit ((TT = TU) < TSit). Applying this definition to the structure *estar para* + infinitive, we obtain the desired result, according to which the construction at hand focalises an interval

that is simultaneous to the speech time and immediately goes before the occurrence of the situation in its domain.²

Nevertheless, if we take a closer look at some examples, we observe that this merely topological definition is insufficient to account for the behaviour and restrictions exhibited by *estar para* + infinitive.

First, it is unable to explain some important aspectual constraints that characterise the construction at issue. Consider the following sentences, in which I indicate the basic aspectual class of the eventuality that is combined with *estar para* + infinitive:

- (5) O presidente está para viajar por Portugal. (process)
The president be.PRES3SG to travel.INF through Portugal
'The president is about to travel through Portugal.'
- (6) A companhia de teatro está para apresentar o seu novo espetáculo. (culminated process)
The company of theatre be.PRES3SG to present.INF the its new show
'The theatre company is about to present its new show.'
- (7) O comboio está para chegar. (culmination)
The train be.PRES3SG to arrive.INF
'The train is about to arrive.'
- (8) * O Rui está para gostar de linguística. (state)
* The Rui be.PRES3SG to like.INF of linguistics
'Rui is about to like linguistics.'
- (9) * A Maria está para ser milionária. (state)
* The Maria be.PRES3SG to be.INF millionaire
'Maria is about to be a millionaire.'

Apart from a few exceptions that I will address in Section 5, it is clear that *estar para* + infinitive combines nicely with every sort of event but gives rise to semantic anomaly when it occurs with states. Such a disparity in terms of its selection restrictions cannot be captured through a treatment exclusively based on relationships between time intervals, as this does not satisfactorily account for the aspectual constraints mentioned above. In particular, provided that the only prerequisite associated with the prospective aspect, as formulated in Klein (1994), is the anteriority relation of TT/TU with respect to TSit, why should states, but not events, be ruled out in these contexts?

Another shortcoming of choice for merely temporal-based approaches to account for the structure *estar para* + infinitive has to do with the clear stative behaviour exhibited by this construction. As an illustration, consider the interpretation of temporal adverbials such as “há N tempo” (literally, “there is N time”) in the context of the *presente do indicativo* (simple present).

In languages like European Portuguese, the adverbial “há N tempo” receives different readings depending on whether it occurs in the simple past³ or in the simple present. For our purposes, it is important to emphasise that, combined with stative predicates in the context of the *presente do indicativo* (simple present), as in (10)–(12), it indicates an initial boundary from which the length of the interval occupied by the whole situation is calculated and measured out (constituting the utterance time its endpoint). In other words, in the environment settled above, “há N tempo” manifests properties of a time measurement adverbial, being translated as “for N time” (cf. Móia, 2000). As shown in (13)–(15), this interpretation does not extend to events, which typically give rise to semantic anomaly.

- (10) O Rui gosta da Maria há três anos. (state)
The Rui like.PRES3SG of the Maria thereis three years
'Rui has loved Maria for three years.'
- (11) A Maria é milionária há dez anos. (state)
The Maria be.PRES3SG millionaire thereis ten years
'Maria has been a millionaire for ten years.'
- (12) As crianças estão no recreio há cinco minutos. (state)
The children be.PRES3SG in the playground thereis five minutes
'The children have been in the playground for five minutes.'
- (13) ?? O presidente viaja por Portugal há três dias. (process)
?? The president travel.PRES3SG through Portugal thereis three days
'The president has been travelling in Portugal for three days.'

² The concept of prospective aspect has been widely employed in the literature to describe the linguistic behaviour displayed by different structures. One example is the use of this proposal to account for the “be going to” construction in English (cf. Schroeder, 2011) and its counterpart (*ir a* + infinitive) in Spanish (cf. Bravo Martin, 2008; Moreno Burgos, 2013, 2014).

³ With the *Preterito Perfeito* (the terminative simple past), the adverbial “há N tempo” merely locates a situation within a past interval that is itself placed N time before the speech time, meaning something like “N time ago”; this reading is irrelevant for our discussion, since it does not distinguish between states and events, so I will disregard it in my analysis.

(14) # A companhia de teatro apresenta o seu novo espetáculo há uma semana.⁴ (culminated process)

The company of theatre present.PRES3SG the its new show thereis a week
 ‘The theatre company has been presenting its new show for a week.’

(15) * O comboio chega há cinco minutos. (culmination)

The train arrive.PRES3SG thereis five minutes
 ‘The train has been arriving for five minutes.’

Now, as can be seen in (16)–(18), even in combination with basic event predicates, the construction *estar para* + infinitive cooccurs without any problems with the adverbial “há N tempo,” which is given a durative interpretation, thus suggesting that we are dealing with true stative constructions.

(16) O presidente está para falar com o primeiro ministro há dois dias.

The president be.PRES3SG to talk.INF with the prime minister thereis two days
 ‘The president has been due to speak to the prime minister for two days.’

(17) O comboio está para chegar há cinco minutos.

The train be.PRES3SG to arrive.INF thereis five minutes
 ‘The train is due to arrive for five minutes.’

(18) Irons, por seu lado, apresentará em antestreia «Lolita», o «remake» que Adrian Lyne fez da obra de Kubrick e que há um ano está para ser estreado nos EUA. (CetemPúblico, par=ext1075521-clt-97b-2)

Irons, by his side, present.fs3sg in preview «Lolita», the remake that Adrian Lyne make.PPERF3SG of the work of Kubrick and that thereis a year be.PRES3SG to be.INF premiered in the USA

‘Irons, for his part, will present a preview of «Lolita», Adrian Lyne’s remake of Kubrick’s work, which is due to premiere in the USA a year ago.’

In addition to the behaviour brought out by the adverbial “há N tempo,” there are many other arguments that lead us to conclude that the sentences in which the structure *estar para* appears are stative.

First, much like lexical states (19) and differently from events (20), the structure *estar para* + infinitive does not typically promote quantificational or habitual readings when combined with the *presente do indicativo* (simple present), getting instead a purely temporal interpretation (cf. (21)):

(19) A Maria é alta * habitualmente/neste momento. (state)

The Maria be.PRES3SG tall habitually/inthis moment
 ‘Maria is tall usually/at the moment.’

(20) O João compra um carro novo todos os anos/* neste momento. (event)

The João buy.PRES3SG a car new every the years/* inthis moment
 ‘João buys a new car every year/right now.’

(21) O João está para comprar um carro novo ?? todos os anos/neste momento.

The João be.PRES3SG to buy.INF a car new ?? every the years/inthis moment
 ‘João is about to buy a new car every year/right now.’

On the other hand, much like lexical states, and in sharp contrast with eventive predications, the construction *estar para* + infinitive never occurs embedded under aspectualisers such as *começar a* (‘begin’) or *parar de* (‘stop’), as the following sentences illustrate:

(22) * A Maria {começou a/parou de} ser portuguesa. (state)

The Maria {begin.PPERF3SG to/stop.PPERF3SG from} be.INF Portuguese
 ‘Maria {began/stopped} being Portuguese.’

(23) O professor {começou a/parou de} falar com os alunos.

The teacher {begin.PPERF3SG to/stop.PPERF3SG from} talk.INF with the students
 ‘The teacher {started/stopped} talking to the students.’

(24) * O professor {começou a/parou de} estar para falar com os alunos.

The teacher {begin.PPERF3SG to/stop.PPERF3SG from} be.INF to talk.INF with the students
 ‘The teacher {began/stopped} being about to talk to the students.’

A third argument that settles the stative nature of the construction *estar para* + infinitive has to do with its behaviour in the context of some triggers of agentivity (cf. the discussion in Dowty, 1979). Like most lexical states, the structure *estar para* + infinitive avoids agentive contexts, even when applying to basic agentive predicates: it cannot occur as an imperative (cf. (25)) and typically rejects the embedding under verbs of command, like *forçar* (‘force’) or *persuadir* (‘persuade’) (cf. (26)).

⁴ Sentences like these are perfectly acceptable as long as they are given a quantifying or a habitual reading, which, as Smith (1997), Lenci (1995), Lenci and Bertinetto (2000), Cunha (2012) or Bertinetto and Lenci (2012), among others, have pointed out, provides them unambiguous stative properties. This behaviour ultimately reinforces the observations we are making.

- (25) * Rita, está para fechar a porta! (vs. Rita, fecha a porta!)
 Rita, be.imp2sg to close.INF the door! (vs. Rita, close.imp2sg the door!)
 ‘Rita, be about to close the door (vs. Rita, close the door!’)
- (26) * A mãe obrigou a Rita a estar para fechar a porta. (vs. A mãe obrigou a Rita a fechar a porta.)
 The mother force.PPERF3SG the Rita to be.INF to close.INF the door (vs. the mother force.PPERF3SG the Rita to close.INF the door)
 ‘Her mother forced Rita to be about to close the door (vs. her mother forced Rita to close the door.)’⁵

The data we’ve just discussed shows that the structure *estar para* + infinitive not only provides temporal information, namely by establishing a relation of anteriority of the topic time with respect to the time of the situation, but also plays an important role at the aspectual level, insofar as, on the one hand, it establishes restrictions on the nature of the predications it can be combined with, and, on the other, it shows a clearly stative behaviour.

In order to accommodate these observations, we could extend to the treatment of *estar para* + infinitive the analysis that [Schroeder \(2011\)](#) proposes to account for the construction “be going to” in English.

According to Schroeder, the prospective aspect can be defined in terms of the present relevance of a future situation, thus making explicit the temporal condition associated with *estar para* + infinitive. To ensure the relevance of the present domain, she assumes the existence of a state, simultaneous with the speech time, which occurs prior to the relevant eventuality, which she calls the causative state.

To that extent, the prospective aspect would be represented by a causative state, simultaneous to the utterance time, and a target state that would correspond to the situation predicted to occur in the future.

Although, in general terms, this proposal seems to be perfectly adequate for describing the behaviour of the structure *estar para* + infinitive, it nevertheless raises some questions of undeniable importance that need to be solved.

On the one hand, the state that precedes the occurrence of the relevant situation need not be a causative one, as the following example suggests:

- (27) Eduardo Prado Coelho lembrou-lhe, no entanto, que está para sair um novo livro do poeta.
 (CetemPúblico, par=ext988090-clt-93a-2)
 Eduardo Prado Coelho remind.PPERF3SG-him, inthe however, that be.PRES3SG to comeout.INF a new book ofthe poet
 ‘Eduardo Prado Coelho reminded him, however, that a new book by the poet is about to come out.’

In a sentence like (27), it seems hard to find an explicit causal chain that would originate the future occurrence of the situation described by “the book coming out.” On the contrary, we are dealing with a state that merely precedes the occurrence of the event at stake.

On the other hand, as we have seen above, the eventuality that follows the state that overlaps the speech time is never a stative predicate but almost always an event, so the use of the term “target state” to describe it seems quite inappropriate.

In order to avoid these shortcomings, I will choose here to adopt a treatment based on the phase structure proposed, e.g., by [Moens \(1987\)](#) or [Moens and Steedman \(1988\)](#), that seems to be more suitable to correspond to the behaviour of the construction at hand.

[Moens \(1987\)](#) and [Moens and Steedman \(1988\)](#) conceive the distinct types of events as the result of the combination of different phases that constitute the so-called Aspectual Nucleus. Except for statives, which do not exhibit a complex internal constitution, each aspectual class is, thus, characterised by its phrasal structure, obtained from different patterns of interaction between a preparatory process, a culmination point, and a consequent state.

Besides this nuclear makeup, it is also possible to refer to a phase that occurs immediately before the beginning of a given eventuality. Though intimately related to it, this phase cannot be considered a portion of the nuclear structure of the situation at hand since it does not take part, by itself, in the internal structure characterising the event (cf. [Moens, 1987](#); [Moens & Steedman, 1988](#); [Binnick, 1991](#); [Kamp & Reyle, 1993](#)). Since this phase is clearly stative in nature, it is called a pre-preparatory state.

⁵ For a more in-depth discussion on the differences between states and events, as well as on the tests that make it possible to linguistically distinguish these two categories, see, among many others, [Vendler \(1967\)](#), [Dowty \(1979\)](#), [Mourelatos \(1981\)](#), [Moens \(1987\)](#) or [Smith \(1997\)](#); also [Oliveira \(1991\)](#) and [Cunha \(2004\)](#) for an adaptation of these tests to European Portuguese. Specifically on the stative nature of the structure *estar para* + infinitive in European Portuguese, see [Cunha \(2004\)](#), 3.2.3.

Serving to refer to the coming about of a given eventuality, the pre-preparatory state does not seem to significantly interfere in the internal constitution of the situations with which it is combined, although it has a relevant impact at the aspectual level.

Treating *estar para* + infinitive as a pre-preparatory state has the advantage of accounting for the various restrictions manifested by its behaviour, contrary to the purely temporal proposal by Klein (1994), which is unable to deal with the aspectual constraints that we have observed. On the other hand, being more neutral regarding the nature of the phases that are involved, this treatment also avoids the shortcomings that were recognised in the analysis developed by Schroeder (2011).

In sum, following Moens (1987) and Moens and Steedman (1988), I will argue for an analysis of the construction *estar para* + infinitive, at least in its standard use, as the linguistic exponent, in EP, of a pre-preparatory phase, conceived as an optional state that precedes the nuclear phase structure of a given event.

Given that basic states do not have their own phase structure, i.e., they do not take part in the aspectual network. This analysis correctly predicts that examples like (8) and (9), repeated here for convenience as (28) and (29), are excluded since phases cannot be added to eventualities that do not present a complex internal constitution.

(28) * O Rui está para gostar de linguística.

* The Rui be.PRES3SG to like.INF of linguistics
'Rui is about to like linguistics.'

(29) * A Maria está para ser milionária.

* The Maria be.PRES3SG to be.INF millionaire
'Maria is about to be a millionaire.'

On the other hand, assuming that pre-preparatory phases are states of their own right explains the stative behaviour associated with the structure *estar para* + infinitive.

3. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN *Estar para* + INFINITIVE AND SOME EP TENSE FORMS

As we have already mentioned, the construction *estar para* + infinitive, when combined with the *presente do indicativo* (simple present), introduces a pre-preparatory state that is simultaneous with the speech time, and that leads to the future realisation of a given event, as illustrated in the following examples:

(30) A conferência de representantes das cidades e autarquias dos EUA ocorre numa altura em que está para aprovar no Senado uma lei sobre o controlo da venda de armas, conhecida por «Brady Bill». (CetemPúblico, par=ext317198-soc-91a-1)

The conference of representatives of the cities and municipalities of the USA occur.PRES3SG in a time in which be.PRES3SG to approve.INF in the Senate a law about the control of the sale of arms known by «Brady Bill»

'The conference of representatives of US cities and municipalities is taking place at a time when the Senate is about to approve a law on the control of arms sales, known as the «Brady Bill».'

(31) As relações com a Assembleia da República também estão para mudar e o discurso com que o novo Presidente assinala hoje a sua posse já deverá reflectir isso. (CetemPúblico, par=ext402950-nd-96a-2)

The relations with the Assembly of the Republic also be.PRES3SG to change.INF and the speech with which the new Presidente of the Republic signal.PRES3SG today the his inauguration already shall.fs3sg reflect.INF this

'Relations with the parliament are also about to change and the speech with which the new President marks his inauguration today should already reflect this.'

(32) Agora, essa mesma cabra está «cheia» e, com os cabritos que estão para nascer, José Pinto poderá suavizar a perda de quatro ovelhas (...) (CetemPúblico, par=ext12123-soc-96a-1)

Now, that same goat be.PRES3SG «full» and, with the smallgoats that be.PRES3SG to born.INF, José Pinto may.fs3sg soften.INF the loss of four ewes

'Now that same goat is pregnant and, with the kids that are about to be born, José Pinto will be able to soften the loss of four ewes.'

Thus, in a sentence like (30), the structure *estar para* + infinitive refers to a period of time – overlapping the utterance time – that precedes the occurrence of the event corresponding to the “approving a law on the control of arms sales”, a situation that is presented as certain in the future.

Similarly, in (32), the birth of the goat's kids is not only assumed to occur in a future time but, due to the expression of a pre-preparatory phase carried out by *estar para* + infinitive, it is also taken as relevant at the present interval, thus explaining the “soften of the loss of the four ewes.”

However, when we combine *estar para* + infinitive with past tense forms, namely the *pretérito imperfeito do indicativo* (the imperfective EP past tense), and the *pretérito perfeito do indicativo* (the terminative EP past tense), the results are quite different.

Beginning with the *pretérito imperfeito* (imperfective past), we observe that the structure *estar para* + infinitive combined with this tense form describes an ongoing pre-preparatory state located in the past but very often carrying an inference of non-realisation of the accompanying event, as shown in (33)–(34):

(33) E, quando estava para regressar a Portugal, tive um contrato para ir à Rodésia. (CetemPúblico, par=ext71709-clt-93b-1)

And, when be.imp1sg to return.INF to Portugal, get.PPERF1SG a contract to go.INF to the Rhodesia
'And, when I was about to return to Portugal, I got a contract to go to Rhodesia.'

(34) O resultado foi que o Plano do Alto do Lumiar – uma nova cidade para 50 mil pessoas – foi devolvido quando já estava para ir a Conselho de Ministros. (CetemPúblico, par=ext120559-soc-98a-1)

The result be.PPERF3SG that the plan of the Alto do Lumiar – a new city for 50 thousand people – be.PPERF3SG sent back when already be.imp3sg to go.INF at Council of Ministers

'The result was that the Alto do Lumiar Plan—a new town for 50,000 people - was sent back when it was about to go to the Council of Ministers.'

We observe that in a sentence like (33), the event that follows the pre-preparatory state, viz. the return to Portugal, is not meant to come about; the same happens with the situation corresponding to the plan going to the Council of Ministers in (34).

Note, nevertheless, that this interpretation is just an inference (most likely an implicature) associated with the use of the *imperfecto* (imperfect) since, in many other sentences, the actual occurrence of the eventuality at issue seems to be confirmed. (35) and (36) illustrate this point:

(35) Há muito tempo que estava para escrever (...) e aqui vão as minhas reacções: a primeira e globalmente é de parabéns. (CetemPúblico, par=ext144190-opi-96b-1)

There is much time that I be.imp1sg to write.INF (...) and here go.pres3pl the my reactions: the first and globally be.PRES3SG of congratulations

'I've been meaning to write for a long time (...) and here are my reactions: first and foremost, congratulations.'

(36) Por outro lado, quando eu estava para nascer, a minha mãe veio do Rio de Janeiro para Lisboa, e eu estava dentro da mãe, e tenho belíssimas fotografias com «zeppelins». (CetemPúblico, par=ext161588-clt-96b-2)

By other side, when I be.IMP1SG to be born.INF, the my mother come.PPERF3SG from the Rio de Janeiro to Lisbon, and I be.imp1sg inside the mother, and have.pres1sg very beautiful photographs with «Zeppelins»

'On the other hand, when I was about to be born, my mother came from Rio de Janeiro to Lisbon, and I was inside my mother, and I have beautiful photographs with «zeppelins»'.

The events that follow the (past) pre-preparatory state in these examples, namely writing in (35) and being born in (36), really took place at a past interval, which proves that the non-realisation of the situation associated with *estar para* + infinitive in the imperfect is undoubtedly a cancellable inference.

In any case, the behaviour of the structure *estar para* + infinitive with the *pretérito imperfeito* (past imperfect) contrasts sharply with what happens when the configuration at hand appears in the present tense, insofar as, in the former case, and given the appropriate conditions, the occurrence of the situation that follows the pre-preparatory state may not be guaranteed, which brings this construction close to some modal structures that convey uncertainty.

The move from a purely aspectual meaning into a modal one is even more evident when we consider the combination of the structure *estar para* + infinitive with the *pretérito perfeito* (the EP terminative past tense).

Consider the following examples:

(37) O assunto esteve para ser abordado pelos socialistas no início da reunião que terminou na madrugada de ontem. (CetemPúblico, par=ext82216-soc-96a-1)

The subject be.PPERF3SG to be.INF discussed by the socialists in the beginning of the meeting that end.PPERF3SG in the dawn of yesterday

'The subject was to be discussed by the Socialists at the beginning of the meeting that ended in the early hours of yesterday morning.'

(38) Soube-se que um deles esteve para casar com uma jovem que depois deixou, para se unir com outra, e que, por via disso, teria arranjado problemas com familiares da primeira. (CetemPúblico, par=ext123575-soc-97b-1)

Know.PPERF3SG-clitic that one of them be.PPERF3SG to marry.INF with a young that later leave.PPERF3SG to himself join.INF with other and that, by result of this, have.cond3sg got troubles with relatives of the first

‘It was learnt that one of them was about to marry a young woman whom he later left to join another and that he had got into trouble with the former’s relatives as a result.’

It is clear that both the discussion of the subject at the beginning of the meeting in (37) and the marriage in (38) never took place; moreover, unlike the *pretérito imperfeito* (imperfect), the *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past) never admits the realisation of the event that follows the pre-preparatory state, thus functioning, in a certain extent, as a structure that refers to counterfactual propositions.

Thus, the inference of non-realisation of the event following the pre-preparatory state seems to be part of the basic meaning of the construction *estar para* + infinitive in the *pretérito perfeito*, as the clear-cut contradiction shown in the following example demonstrates:

(39) Val Kilmer esteve para acompanhar Phillip Noyce a Lisboa * e acompanhou-o mesmo.
(adapted from CetemPúblico, par=ext102509-clt-97a-1)

Val Kilmer be.PPERF3SG to accompany.INF Phillip Noyce to Lisbon * and accompany.PPERF3SG-him indeed

‘Val Kilmer was about to accompany Phillip Noyce to Lisbon and indeed he did so.’

The discussion developed so far leads us to the following conclusions: (i) the choice of different tense forms has a decisive influence on the final interpretation of the construction *estar para* + infinitive; the use of past tenses such as the *pretérito imperfeito* (imperfective past) and the *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past) favours a move from a purely aspectual interpretation, i.e., prospective aspect, into clearly modal meanings – uncertainty readings in the case of the imperfect, counterfactual ones in the case of the terminative past.⁶

This move towards a modal meaning has an interesting consequence: unlike its counterpart with the present tense, the structure *estar para* + infinitive in the *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past tense) may be easily combined with basic statives. Consider the following pair of sentences:

(40) O filme, que esteve para ser inicialmente uma peça de teatro, é, em princípio, o último realizado por Bergman, que tem 78 anos. (CetemPúblico, par=ext119137-clt-96b-1)

The movie, which be.PPERF3SG to be.INF initially a play of theatre, be.PRES3SG, in principle, the last directed by Bergman who have.PRES3SG 78 years

‘The film, which was originally intended to be a play, is, in principle, the last directed by Bergman, who is 78 years old.’

(41) * Este filme está para ser uma peça de teatro.

* This movie be.PRES3SG a play of theatre

‘This film is about to be/to become a theatre play.’

Ultimately, the contrast in acceptability that emerges between (40) and (41) reflects the fact that the aspectual restrictions we observed for the *presente do indicativo* (simple present) do not extend to the *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past), which would confirm our hypothesis that, actually, in the latter case we are dealing with a modal operator and not with an aspectual one.

Not surprisingly, we did not find in our corpus the combination of the structure *estar para* + infinitive with future tenses. This may be explained by the well-known fact that, in the majority of the languages of the world, the expression of posteriority in the future is highly restricted, if not forbidden (cf. Comrie, 1985; Binnick, 1991; Declerck, 1991, 2006).

The only possibility available is the combination of *estar para* + infinitive with the *futuro simples do indicativo* (simple future) in its epistemic modal meaning, as illustrated in (42)–(43):

(42) Circulam rumores de que estará para ser negociado (= deve estar para ser negociado) um lote de acções relevante, detido pelo actual sócio maioritário, a construtora inglesa Buckingham LDC. (CetemPúblico, par=ext484344-eco-91a-2)

Circulate.pres3pl rumours of that be.FS3SG to be.INF negotiated (= may be.INF to be.INF negotiated) a batch of shares relevant, held by the current shareholder majoritarian, the construction company british Buckingham LDC

‘Rumours are circulating that a relevant batch of shares, held by the current majority shareholder, the British construction company Buckingham LDC, is probably about to be negotiated.’

⁶ This move from prospective aspect into irrealis modality brought about by the use of past tenses in contrast with the simple present was already noticed and discussed for languages like Turkish, Basque, and Papuan by Jendraschek (2014), who claims that, diachronically, while a present prospective can develop into a future tense, past prospectives tend to take over the function of counterfactual conditionals in the past.

(43) Na mesma notícia refere-se que o intermediário é espanhol e que, para breve, estará para chegar (= deve estar para chegar) a Lisboa um emissário encarregue de acelerar as negociações. (CetemPúblico, par=ext626447-des-98a-1)

In the same report state.PRES3SG-clitic that the intermediary be.PRES3SG spanish and that, for soon, be.FS3SG to arrive.INF (= may be.INF to arrive.INF) at Lisbon an envoy incharged of accelerating the negotiations

'The same report states that the intermediary is Spanish and that an envoy probably will be arriving in Lisbon soon to speed up negotiations.'

In these examples, we are not dealing with a posteriority-in-the-future reading, but rather with an epistemic interpretation, in which the *futuro simples* (simple future) is used to emphasize the uncertainty of the speaker regarding the realisation of the event following the preliminary state.

4. *Estar para* + INFINITIVE AND NEGATION

Although, in a few cases, the embedding of the structure *estar para* + infinitive under sentential negation does not substantially affect its prime semantic properties, simply bringing about a reading in which the occurrence of a given pre-preparatory state leading to a future event is denied (cf. (42)–(43)), there are nevertheless examples in which we find clear changes to the basic meaning that was ascribed to the construction at hand.

(44) Os UHF não estão para acabar, mas o seu líder António Manuel Ribeiro vai estrear-se a solo. (CetemPúblico, par=ext1004139-clt-92a-1)

The UHF not be.PRES3SG to end.INF but the their leader António Manuel Ribeiro go.PRES3SG debut.INF at solo

'The UHF aren't about to break up, but their leader António Manuel Ribeiro will be making his solo debut.'

(45) Se bem que a variação foi menor, na quarta-feira o indicador cresceu 0,5 por cento, operadores disseram que o mercado ainda não está para reajustar. (CetemPúblico, par=ext691802-eco-93b-1)

If well that the variation be.PPERF3SG smaller, in the Wednesday the indicator rise.PPERF3SG 0.5 per cent, operators say.pperf3pl that the market yet not be.PRES3SG to readjust.INF

'Although the variation was smaller, on Wednesday the indicator rose by 0.5 per cent, operators said that the market is not yet ready to readjust.'

As shown in the corresponding English translations, in (44) *estar para* + infinitive describes a pre-preparatory state leading to the future breaking up of the music group UHF, but due to the semantics of negation, this state is presented as not going on at the speech time. Similarly, in (45), the combination of *estar para* + infinitive with sentential negation points to an interpretation in which the preliminary phase conducting to the readjustment of the market is not occurring yet at the utterance time.

However, in the vast majority of constructions of this kind found in our corpus, the obtained results go far beyond the interpretation that reflects the mere compositional combination between the basic semantics of the construction *estar para* + infinitive and negation. Take the following illustrative sentences:

(46) Há coisas tão úteis e tão importantes para fazer que se calhar comprar sapatos é uma coisa tão banal que não está para perder tempo com isso. (CetemPúblico, par=ext256747-pol-95b-1)

There be.PRES3SG things so useful and so important to do.INF that if happen.INF buy.INF shoes be.PRES3SG a thing so trivial that not be.PRES3SG to waste.INF time with it

'There are so many useful and important things to do that maybe buying shoes is so trivial that he doesn't want to waste his time on it.'

(47) (...) a comunidade não está para sustentar os cientistas, sobretudo no domínio da chamada ciência pura, se não encontrar uma justificação social para isso. (CetemPúblico, par=ext355651-clt-92a-2)

The community not be.PRES3SG to support.INF the scientists, especially in the field of the so-called science pure, if not find.futsubj3sg a justification social for it

'(...) the community does not intend to support scientists, especially in the field of so-called pure science, if it doesn't find a social justification for it.'

(48) «As pessoas têm hoje em dia a possibilidade de ouvir em casa boas gravações com as melhores orquestras sinfónicas e não estão para assistir, ao vivo, a versões com elenco reduzido». (CetemPúblico, par=ext307474-clt-93b-1)

The people have.pres3pl today in day the possibility of listen.INF in home good recordings with the best orchestras symphonic and not be.pres3pl to watch.INF, atthe alive, to versions with cast reduced

‘«Nowadays people have the chance to listen to good recordings with the best symphony orchestras at home and are not willing to watch live versions with a reduced cast.»’

In examples like these, we are no longer talking about the expression of a pre-preparatory state that precedes the occurrence of a future event and which is denied, but rather about an attitude of rejection towards the realisation of the situation on the part of the subject of the sentence. Thus, in (47), for instance, the most natural interpretation is that the community does not want to support the scientists; a parallel reading can be found in (48), which points to the people’s rejection of watching live versions with a reduced cast, and in (46) regarding the event of buying shoes.

So, once again, we are dealing with a move from a pure aspectual sense into a modal meaning. In this case, negation seems to favour a reinterpretation of the construction *estar para* + infinitive, imposing a reading that conveys a volitional or desiderative modality.⁷

That negation plays a central role in this interpretative change can be confirmed by the following contrasts:

(49) A Maria está para mudar de casa.

Maria be.PRES3SG to move.INF of house

‘Maria is about to move house.’

(50) A Maria não está para mudar de casa.

Maria not be.PRES3SG to move.INF of house

‘Maria is not willing to move house.’

(51) Os convidados estão para chegar à festa.

The guests be.pres3pl to arrive.INF atthe party

‘The guests are about to arrive at the party.’

(52) ?? Os convidados não estão para chegar à festa.

?? The guests not be.pres3pl to arrive.INF atthe party

While the affirmative sentences (49) and (51) describe, as expected, a pre-preparatory state leading to the realisation of the events of Maria moving house and the guests arriving at the party, respectively, in their most natural readings (49) and (51) behave quite differently. In (49), we get a volitional or desiderative interpretation which expresses Maria’s desire not to move house; in (51), however, since the eventuality of arriving at the party is not agent-oriented, and, as a consequence, not subject to volitions, the sentence sounds somewhat odd.

We are therefore observing an interesting behavioural pattern concerning the structure *estar para* + infinitive: when combined with certain linguistic elements, this construction moves from conveying aspect to expressing modality. The modal values it acquires, however, differ greatly depending on the linguistic forms it interacts with: with the *pretérito imperfeito* (imperfect), it receives an epistemic interpretation of uncertainty; with the *pretérito perfeito* (terminative past), it discloses a reading of counterfactuality and, finally, with negation, it refers to the expression of volitional or desiderative modality.

5. OTHER NON-CANONICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STRUCTURE *Estar para* + INFINITIVE

In addition to the cases we have just discussed, the structure *estar para* + infinitive appears in other contexts in which its canonical interpretation seems to undergo quite visible changes, even if they are not as significant as the previous ones. In the present section, I will address some of these problematic instances.

A first kind of example, which would seemingly contradict the proposal we have been endorsing, is shown in (53)–(54):

(53) Se está para ser mãe, se está para ser pai, se quer amamentar os seus filhos, tem de ler este diploma de fio a pavo. (CetemPúblico, par=ext42727-opi-96b-2)

If be.pres2sg to be.INF mother, if be.pres2sg to be.INF father, if want.pres2sg breastfeed.INF the your children, must.IMPER2SG of read.INF this diploma from wire to wick

‘If you’re going to be a mum, if you’re going to be a dad, if you want to breastfeed your children, you need to read this diploma through and through.’

(54) É verdade, a minha esposa está para ser mãe e eu estou morto para saber se o meu filho já nasceu. (CetemPúblico, par=ext1541016-des-92b-1)

⁷ For an in-depth characterisation and discussion on the concept of volitional or desiderative modality, see, among others, Palmer (2001), Portner (2009), Oliveira and Mendes (2013).

Be.PRES3SG truth, the my wife be.PRES3SG to be.INF mother and I be.pres1sg dead to know.INF if the my son yet beborn.PPERF3SG
 ‘That’s right, my wife is about to be a mum and I’m dying to know if my son has been born yet.’

As we mentioned above, the structure *estar para* + infinitive in the *presente do indicativo* (simple present tense) does not typically combine with stative predications. So, how can we explain these examples?

One hypothesis to consider is that, in these cases, we are not dealing with true states but rather with culminations. To that extent, “to be a mother” would not refer to the state that describes a family relationship but rather to a momentary situation equivalent to becoming a mother or giving birth. This reading is widely attested in our corpus, even in examples where the construction *estar para* + infinitive does not appear, as the following sentences prove:

(55) A série de partos de gémeos começou às 7h40 de quinta-feira passada, quando Mimi Brill deu à luz Isabel e Grace, e acabou quando Lan Chu Cheung foi mãe de Yun Chon e Yub Ioi, pouco depois das 13h00 do dia seguinte. (CetemPúblico, par=ext442510-soc-98b-1)

The series of births of twins begin.PPERF3SG at the 7h40 of Thursday last, when Mimi Brill give.PPERF3SG at the light Isabel and Grace, and end.PPERF3SG when Lan Chu Cheung be.PPERF3SG mother of Yun Chon and Yub Ioi, little after of the 13h00 of the day following

‘The series of twin births began at 7.40 am last Thursday, when Mimi Brill gave birth to Isabel and Grace, and ended when Lan Chu Cheung became mum to Yun Chon and Yub Ioi, just after 1pm the following day.’

(56) Leontina, que teve um total de 57 filhos, foi mãe de trigêmeos nove vezes, e de gémeos onze. (CetemPúblico, par=ext1188084-soc-98b-2)

Leontina, who have.PPERF3SG a total of 57 children, be.PPERF3SG mother of triplets nine times, and of twins eleven

‘Leontina, who had a total of 57 children, was the mother of triplets nine times and twins eleven times.’

The temporal adverbial “pouco depois das 13h00 do dia seguinte” (“just after 1pm the following day”) that locates the eventuality “ser mãe” (“become a mother”) in (55) and the quantificational adverbials “nove vezes” (“nine times”) and “onze vezes” (“eleven times”) counting the situations of being a mother in (56) clearly show that, in these sentences, we are dealing with events, not with statives.

This alternation between a stative and an eventive (more precisely, a culmination) reading is not surprising: several authors, such as Dowty (1979), have pointed out that some verbs appear in both stative and culminative predications, depending on their context of occurrence (consider, for instance, the contrast between “Mary knows French”, a state, and “Mary knew the truth yesterday,” a culmination).⁸

More complex are the cases in which the structure *estar para* + infinitive denotes a durative situation overlapping the utterance time and describing the progress of a given predication. This interpretation is extremely restricted and only occurs with certain fixed or idiomatic constructions, such as “está para durar” (literally, “be to last”). Consider the following illustrative examples:

(57) O escândalo do sangue contaminado em França está para durar. (CetemPúblico, par=ext75856-soc-92b-1)

The scandal of the blood contaminated in France be.PRES3SG to last.INF

‘The contaminated blood scandal in France is set to last.’

(58) «Mas a guerra está para durar», assegurava um dos contestatários. (CetemPúblico, par=ext160109-soc-95b-1)

«But the war be.PRES3SG to last.INF», ensure.imp3sg one of the protesters

‘«But the war will last,» said one of the protesters.’

In examples like these, the structure *estar para* + infinitive merely describes a durative state conceived as the continuation or extension (in the present and in the future) of a given situation associated with the noun phrase in the sentential subject position. In our corpus, only “*estar para durar*” (literally, “be to last”) and “*estar para ficar*” (literally, “be to stay”; cf. (59)–(60)) can express this kind of interpretation.⁹

(59) Todos os indicadores económicos disponíveis apontam na mesma direcção: não chegou ainda o momento da retoma, a recessão está para ficar. (CetemPúblico, par=ext385124-eco-93b-1)

⁸ On the similarities between states and culminations, see, among others, Verkuyl (1989) or Rothstein (2008).

⁹ Confirming the rather crystallised nature of this kind of interpretation associated with *estar para* + infinitive, we can invoke the use of a very curious expression, “lavar e durar” (“wash and last”), which obviously cannot be interpreted in its literal sense: (i) A polémica em torno da indústria da pedra em Sesimbra, na zona do Parque Natural da Arrábida, está para lavar e durar. (CetemPúblico, par=ext509741-soc-93b-1) The controversy in surrounding of the industry of the stone in Sesimbra, in the area of the Park Natural of the Arrábida be.PRES3SG to wash.INF and last.INF ‘THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE STONE INDUSTRY IN SESIMBRA, IN THE AREA OF THE ARRÁBIDA NATURAL PARK, IS SET TO LAST.’

All the indicators economic available point.PRES3SG in the same direction: not arrive.PPERF3SG yet the time of the recovery, the recession be.PRES3SG to stay.INF

‘All the available economic indicators point in the same direction: the time for recovery has not yet come, the recession is here to stay.’

(60) Tudo indica que as sementes de violência, também racial, estão para ficar. (Cetem Público, par=ext764577-soc-92a-1)

Everything indicate.PRES3SG that the seeds of violence, also racial, be.PRES3PL to stay.INF

‘Everything indicates that the seeds of violence, including racial violence, are here to stay.’

Taking into account the divergent interpretations displayed by the structure *estar para* + infinitive in the various contexts of occurrence considered in the previous discussion, the question arises as to which semantic properties actually qualify to describe its behaviour. Can we ultimately find a unified characterisation for this construction? I will devote to this issue in the next section of this paper.

6. TOWARDS A UNIFIED ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE *Estar para* + INFINITIVE

As we have seen, in addition to its canonical interpretation, in which it describes a pre-preparatory state leading to the realisation of a given event (cf. *Section 2*), the structure *estar para* + infinitive can, under appropriate conditions, convey modal information of uncertainty, counterfactuality (cf. *Section 3*), or desire/intention (cf. *Section 4*), as well as expressing a durative state that extends from the present into the future (cf. *Section 5*).

However, it is essential to ask if there are, in fact, semantic properties common to these divergent readings that would allow us to provide a unified characterisation for the construction at hand. We believe that the answer to this question is positive. Let us see to what extent.

Firstly, in all these different readings, the structure *estar para* + infinitive behaves consistently as a state, irrespective of the basic aspectual class of the eventuality with which it combines.

Thus, even when it is associated with a culmination, the construction under analysis is always durative, regardless of the specific reading it receives, as the following examples show:

(61) O funcionário está para ligar o computador há meia hora. (pre-preparatory state)

The employee be.PRES3SG to switchon.INF the computer there is half hour

‘The employee is about to switch on the computer for half an hour.’

(62) O funcionário estava para ligar o computador há meia hora, quando o chefe entrou na sala. (uncertainty)

The employee be.imp3sg to switchon.INF the computer there is half hour, when the boss enter.PPERF3SG in the room

‘The employee had been about to switch on the computer for half an hour when his boss entered the room.’

(63) O funcionário esteve para ligar o computador durante meia hora, mas entretanto foi chamado para a reunião. (counterfactual)¹⁰

The employee be.PPERF3SG to switchon.INF the computer for half hour, but meantime be.PPERF3SG called to the meeting

‘The employee was about to switch on the computer for half an hour, but was called into the meeting in the meantime.’

(64) O empregado não esteve para ligar o computador durante a tarde. (volitional/intentional)

The employee not be.PPERF3SG to switchon.INF the computer for the afternoon

‘The employee did not intend to switch on the computer for the afternoon.’

(65) O governo está para ficar durante os próximos anos. (durative)

The government be.PRES3SG to stay.INF for the next years

‘The government is here to stay for the next few years.’

In all these sentences, the durative expressions – “há meia hora” (“for half an hour”) in (61)–(62), “durante meia hora” (“for half an hour”) in (63), “durante a tarde” (“in the afternoon”) in (64) and “durante os próximos anos” (“for the next few years”) in (65)—measure out the situation associated with *estar para* + infinitive, proving that, irrespective of the aspectual class of the eventuality in its scope, this construction gives rise to predication that persist in time.

Moreover, *estar para* + infinitive, in its different readings, much like lexical states,¹¹ cannot be embedded under aspectualisers such as *começar a* (“begin”) or *para de* (“stop”). Consider the following examples:

¹⁰ Needless to say, I am ignoring here the readings in which the durative adverbial measures the consequent state associated with the culmination.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion on the interaction of stative predication with different types of aspectualisers in European Portuguese, see, e.g., Cunha (2004) or Cunha (2011).

- (66) * O presidente começou a estar para falar no parlamento.
 * The president begin.PPERF3SG to be.INF to speak.INF in the parliament
 (67) * A Maria {parava/parou} de estar para ler o artigo.
 * The Maria {stop.imp3sg/stop.PPERF3SG} of be.INF to read.INF the paper
 (68) * A Rita não começou a estar para escrever o artigo no fim de semana.
 * The Rita not begin.PPERF3SG to be.INF to write.INF the paper in the weekend

This kind of incompatibility seems to be primarily due to the stative nature of the structure *estar para* + infinitive since if we reverse the order of the operators—and taking into account that the construction under analysis typically applies to events –, the results are perfectly acceptable, as (69)–(72) reveal. In other words, we cannot justify the ungrammaticality of examples like (66)–(68) simply through the idea that there is a complete mismatch between the elements involved; the explanation will, therefore, lie in the stative nature of the structure *estar para* + infinitive that, as all other statives, cannot be embedded under aspectualisers such as *começar a* (‘begin’) or *parar de* (‘stop’).

- (69) O presidente está para começar a falar no parlamento.
 The president be.PRES3SG to begin.INF to speak.INF in the parliament
 ‘The president is about to start speaking in parliament.’
 (70) A Maria estava para parar de ler o artigo quando o telefone tocou.
 The Maria be.imp3sg to stop.INF of read.INF the paper when the phone ring.PPERF3SG
 ‘Maria was about to stop reading the article when the phone rang.’
 (71) O João esteve para parar de discutir com o vizinho, mas este insultou-o e a discussão durou mais meia hora.
 The João be.PPERF3SG to stop.INF of argue.INF with the neighbour, but this insult.PPERF3SG-him and the discussion last.PPERF3SG more half hour
 ‘João was about to stop arguing with his neighbour, but the latter insulted him and the discussion went on for another half an hour.’
 (72) A Rita não está para começar a escrever o artigo no fim de semana.
 The Rita not be.PRES3SG to begin.INF to write.INF the paper in the weekend
 ‘Rita is not willing to start writing the paper at the weekend.’

There is a second property that seems relevant when it comes to proposing a unified semantic characterisation for the different meanings associated with the structure *estar para* + infinitive. In fact, in all the interpretations considered, there seems to be a relationship of prospective projection between the state that overlaps a given interval of time that constitutes its temporal perspective point (cf. [Kamp & Reyle, 1993](#)) and the eventuality in its scope.

In the case of the canonical interpretation of *estar para* + infinitive, this semantic schema is straightforwardly applicable. Consider the following sentence:

- (73) Segundo o Departamento de Mercados da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, o pelouro do trânsito está para iniciar ali uma obra de tráfego que implicará a destruição da plataforma onde os feirantes estavam instalados. (Cetem Público, par=ext449071-soc-95b-1)
 According to the Department of Markets of the Council Municipal of Lisbon, the department of traffic be.PRES3SG to start.INF there a work of traffic that involve.FS3SG the destruction of the platform where the market vendors be.imp3sg installed
 ‘According to the Lisbon City Council’s Markets Department, the traffic department is about to start works of traffic there that will involve the destruction of the platform where the market vendors were set up.’

In a sentence like this, the pre-preparatory state triggered by the form *estar para* overlaps the speech time, which serves as its temporal perspective point, projecting the associated event of “iniciar ali uma obra de trânsito” (“starting works of traffic there”) into a future interval.

A similar treatment, provided the consideration of some adaptations, could be extended to the cases we labelled “durative” in section 5. Consider the following illustrative example:

- (74) A controvérsia em torno da corrupção na arbitragem nacional está para durar. (Cetem Público, par=ext163720-des-94b-1)
 The controversy in surrounding of the corruption in the arbitration national be.PRES3SG to last.INF
 ‘The controversy surrounding corruption in national arbitration is set to last.’

In this sentence, too, the state associated with *estar para* takes place in a period of time whose temporal perspective point is the moment of the utterance, but it is also projected into a future time interval. The difference regarding examples like (73) is that the situation described remains the same, i.e., it is the state associated with the noun phrase that occupies the subject position - in this case, the controversy

surrounding corruption in national arbitration - that takes place in the present and extends into a later time.

The notion of a prospective projection also seems to be involved in cases where the structure *estar para* + infinitive receives modal interpretations. However, in these contexts, the situation to which the operator applies is no longer located in a future time interval but rather in a possible world different from *w*₀ (but also subsequent to the state described).

(75) Mas até ontem ao fim da tarde não havia sinal garantindo que os ataques e contra-ataques estavam para acabar e que os guerrilheiros não iriam ripostar ao bombardeamento de sábado à noite. (CetemPúblico, par=ext1391180-pol-96a-1)

But until yesterday at the end of the evening not there be.IMP3SG signal ensuring that the attacks and counter-attacks be.IMP3PL to stop.INF and that the guerrillas not go.COND3PL fight back.INF at the bombardment of Saturday at the night

‘But until yesterday evening there was no sign ensuring that the attacks and counter-attacks were about to end and that the guerrillas would not fight back against Saturday night’s bombardment.’

In this example, the structure *estar para* + infinitive describes a pre-preparatory state located in a past interval that precedes a situation referring to the stopping of the attacks and counter-attacks, which, regardless of whether or not it comes about in the real world, is typically conceived of as being posterior to that state.

Similar remarks can be extended to the cases in which a counterfactual reading is involved:

(76) Todos os alunos que estavam para chumbar vão receber notas para passar. (CetemPúblico, par=ext340388-pol-92a-1)

All the students who be.IMP3PL to fail.INF go.PRES3PL receive.INF marks to pass.INF

‘All the students who were about to fail will receive marks to pass.’

(77) Um navio esteve para evacuar, no dia 21, todos os estrangeiros, entre os quais 14 portugueses, mas o barco aguardou, em vão, ao largo do Soyo, acabando por levantar ferro. (CetemPúblico, par=ext155283-pol-93a-1)

A ship be.PPERF3SG to evacuate.INF, in the day 21, all the foreigners, between the which 14 Portuguese, but the boat wait.PPERF3SG in vain, at the opening of the Soyo, ending up by lift.INF iron

‘On the 21st, a ship was due to evacuate all the foreigners, including 14 Portuguese, but the boat waited in vain off the coast of Soyo and ended up lifting iron.’

Although, in sentences like these, the situations accompanying the form *estar para* never happen in the real world, the idea of prospective projection remains valid. In either case, the pre-preparatory state associated with *estar para* necessarily precedes the virtual realisation of the eventualities described by “the students fail” or “the ship evacuates all the foreigners.” The fundamental difference is that, in examples like these, the prospective projection is no longer made regarding a time interval but a possible world that does not coincide with the world of reference.

Finally, and regardless of the semantic consequences carried over by sentential negation - a problem we will not deal with here, as it goes far beyond the scope of this article - it should be noted that, typically, volitions and intentions, presented in examples like (78), express, by their nature, situations that are assumed to occur in the future, so the idea of prospective projection also seems perfectly appropriate to describe this kind of configurations.

(78) Como artista não está para trabalhar numa companhia instituída e a notoriedade não lhe interessa. (CetemPúblico, par=ext1274941-clt-94a-1)

As artist not be.PRES3SG to work.INF in a company established and the notoriety not him interest.PRES3SG

‘As an artist, he is not ready to work for an established company and he is not interested in notoriety.’

In short, despite the diversity of meanings discussed so far, it was also possible to find semantic invariants that characterise the structure *estar para* + infinitive. Thus, in all the observed readings, we can say that the construction at issue (i) always describes a stative predication that establishes an overlapping relation with a given temporal perspective point and (ii) induces a prospective projection of the situations with which it is typically combined.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Unlike most aspectual operators in European Portuguese, which maintain their meanings unchanged regardless of the conditions in which they occur, the structure *estar para* + infinitive is sensitive to linguistic and contextual factors that constrain, to a certain extent, the readings it triggers.

Thus, while, prototypically, this construction conveys information about the prospective aspect, displaying a state that, in the present, precedes the realisation of a future event, factors such as the combination with certain tenses or the presence of sentential negation substantially alter the obtained interpretations.

In the case of co-occurrence with the *pretérito imperfeito* (past imperfect), for example, the structure *estar para* + infinitive favours an epistemic modal interpretation, highlighting the uncertainty regarding the actual realisation of the eventuality described.

On the other hand, the *pretérito perfeito* (past terminative) typically induces a counterfactual reading of the eventualities involved, inscribing them in a possible world which is definitely different from the world of reference.

Finally, sentential negation gives preference to the arising of readings concerned with volition, desire or intention.

In all these cases, we observe a clear shift from a plainly aspectual interpretation to other readings involving essentially modal meanings.

However, there seem to be some semantic invariants that run through all these divergent readings, allowing us to establish a unified characterisation for the construction *estar para* + infinitive. In particular, we observed that, in all the cases under analysis, *estar para* describes a preliminary stative situation that consistently induces what we have termed a prospective projection. Such projection is meant to place the relevant eventualities either in a future interval or in a possible world.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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