

A study on linguistic constructions under the lens of an analytical perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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This special issue of the *Domínios de Linguagem* journal is comprised of ten articles that focus on constructions, a concept hailed from construction grammar. This perspective of analysis incorporates Cognitive Linguistics, a wide, albeit disjointed, theoretical framework, characterized as a set of approaches and models describing the workings of linguistics. When dealing with phenomena of a conceptual nature, this large theoretical framework ties language skills to human cognition at large, working with notions and principles related to the outlook that a language's structure derives from skills such as perception, memory and problem solving. In this context, Langacker (2000) posits that five psychological phenomena are essential for language processing, namely: (i) routinization (entrenchment), the consolidation of an item as a unit, due to its frequency of use; (ii) abstraction, which promotes the emergence of a structure through the reoccurrence of a given empirical situation; (iii) comparison, working with recognition and categorization of different units; (iv) composition,

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which generates bigger units from smaller units. Lastly, (v) association, with concepts such as symbolization, characterized by the association between semantic poles and phonological poles (sounds, signals, graphic elements).

Construction Grammar has reached a prominent position in Cognitive Linguistics as a set of theoretical-analytical approaches for linguistic representation. Among its eminent precursors are Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor (1988), Lakoff (1987), Goldberg (1995; 1999; 2006), Langacker (1987; 2000; 2008), Croft (2001; 2005; 2007), Traugott & Trousdale (2013). Although pretty well-known in the international linguistics scene, constructionist approaches still need to be spread in our country, Brazil, such that we can witness a wide range of studies adopt phenomenological descriptions in Brazilian Portuguese, a goal this issue aims to contribute to.

Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor (1988) signed one of the founding papers on Construction Grammar. In this work, the authors sought to describe idiomatic structures, idiosyncratic and very present in our language, structures which possess non-compositional meanings. Some examples include expressions such as “bater as botas”, a completely specific expression meaning “to die”, or yet, “puxar o tapete”, a more schematic and/or complex expression meaning “to betray someone”. Since idioms range from lexically specific to completely schematic, there wouldn't be, in this kind of approach, a place for the classical lexical vs syntactical opposition, such as established in the traditional and generative theories. Under this perspective, these authors posit that grammatical description needs to mirror the way a language associates its semantic content to a more complex unit than a lexical item. This grammar, therefore, could not treat syntactic, semantic and phonological components as distinct modules.

In line with Lakoff (1987) and his studies about the English's *There* construction, Goldberg (1995, 2006), expands the view of grammar beyond irregular structures or idiosyncrasies explored by Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor

(1988). The author's study is focused on verb constructions, called *argument structure constructions*. This entails that a construction that makes up a sentence is perceived as one of the determining elements of the meaning of said sentence (GOLDBERG, 1995; 1999), on the account of analysis of clausal units requires the association of the syntax to principles of semantic comprehension, unshackled by the lexical contents of its composition.

If the notion of construction has occupied a prominent place in linguistics since traditional studies, in contemporary approaches the pre-theoretical view of construction as a pre-conceived entity is challenged in favor of a growing interest in how constructions emerge in interaction and in their function in discourse. According to Goldberg (1995), one finds the definition of construction, which, in the author's model, constitutes the basic unit of language:

"C is a construction iff_{def} C is a form meaning pair <F_i S_i> such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established constructions." (GOLDBERG, 1995, p. 4)

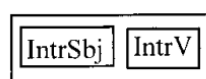
This definition goes beyond establishing the unpredictability of any aspect of the form or meaning/function of a construction based on another, it translates the conception of this theoretical construct as a non-compositional pairing between form and meaning. With this line of thinking, the construction holds a relation with the linguistic sign as in Saussure (1995 [1969]) In spite of that, types of pairings involved in both proposals differ, mainly because it is the saussurian sign characterized by a rigid and conventional association between form and meaning. Being symbolic, the construction is also conventionalized, although it emerges in a communicational environment and can have many degrees of schematization and complexity.

As proposed by Goldberg (1995), there are four basic argument structure constructions, which compile the scenes of human experience, these are: transitives, ditransitives, resultatives and caused-motion. These basic constructions, along with others, establish inheritance relations of four types: by polysemy, by subpart, by instantiation and by metaphor. Grammar thus constitutes a network of constructions, within which not only sentences but also the linguistic patterns of which they are instances carry meaning (GOLDBERG, 1995). A noteworthy property of this architecture is the presence of central, prototypical structures; other constructions are extensions of these prototypes and inherit their syntactic constructional schemas. This descriptive model is therefore more economical since it avoids the proliferation of lexical rules.

Originally from Construction Grammar, descriptive optimization, however, doesn't imply reductionism. The proposals from the Cognitive Grammar and Radical Construction Grammar (CROFT, 2001; 2005), are non-reductionist. Both Langacker (2008) and Croft (2007) defend that the cognitive representation and the linguistic system should be necessarily redundant: specific structures as well as general patterns must be integrated into the grammar, learned and mentally represented during language acquisition.

For Croft (2007), the reductionist view disregards both the empirical facts and the advantages of defining categories in terms of constructions. For example, categorizing a verb as transitive or intransitive doesn't exactly capture the fact that verbs such as "to dance" exhibit different uses depending on the context and the construction in which they occur. In his non-reductionist model, the complex structure defines the category in terms of the role it would play within the overall structure. We thus have, according to the author, the following representations of intransitive and transitive constructions, respectively:

Intransitive construction:



Transitive construction:



(CROFT, 2007, p. 498)

According to Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2007), as of 1985, Cognitive and Functional Linguistics have led the trend of relating grammar to discursive and contextual aspects, as well as giving greater attention to linguistic elements previously considered peripheral. According to the authors, this movement implies placing meaning at the center of grammar and adopting a usage-based stance:

In the context of Cognitive Linguistics, the “relexification” of grammar is particularly emphasized in Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995; Croft, 2001), which begins from the recognition that there is a continuum between the lexicon and syntax: constructions are syntactic structures that can contain lexical material.¹ (GEERAERTS; CUYCKENS, 2007, p. 14). (Author’s translation)

The descriptive models of Cognitive Linguistics still take support on the view that languages are structured through actual usage, molded by pragmatic-discursive and cognitive constraints (LANGACKER, 1987; 2000; 2008). For these models, it is language use in the communicative interaction that determines possible structural patterns that underlies both acquisition and drive linguistic change.

¹ Source: “In the context of Cognitive Linguistics, the relexification of the grammar is most outspoken in Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001), which starts from the recognition that there is a continuum between syntax and lexicon: constructions are syntactic structures that may contain lexical material.”

Thus, Cognitive Grammar, which integrates the approaches from Cognitive Linguistic Construction Grammar, is characterized by Langacker (2000) as a dynamic, usage-based model² that can be extended to other constructional models. According to Langacker (1987, 2000), his Cognitive Grammar, despite diverging in important aspects and having evolved independently, shares significant similarities with Construction Grammar. For example, “constructions (not ‘rules’) are the primary objects of description; the lexicon and grammar are not distinct but form a continuum; and constructions are connected in inheritance networks (or categorization)”³ (Langacker, 2007, pp. 421–422). From this perspective, he advocates in favor of the network model, which, in his conception, is distinctive from a stable set of structures viewed as discreet, objectified entities.

Therefore, we see that constructivist approaches form a set of models with guiding principles, while also presenting specificity at the same time. Amongst these approaches, Traugott e Trousdale (2013) propose a theoretical model that specifically addresses the issue of language change. The authors, like many others, adopt the perspective that the constructional network is central to grammar and that the language system is structured as a continuum between lexicon and grammar. In this model, there is no space for the distinction between the concepts of grammaticalization and lexicalization, as traditionally conceived. The authors analyze the change from two perspectives: construction (grammatical or lexical) and constructional change. The former refers to the creation or formation of a new pairing between form and meaning, which

² Croft (2007) defines the usage-based model as a model “in which language use determines grammatical representation. Specifically, frequency of use and similarity of form and meaning are the determining factors for the structure of grammatical knowledge in the mind” (p. 499).

³ Source: “constructions (not ‘rules’) are the primary objects of description; that lexicon and grammar are not distinct, but a continuum of constructions (form-meaning pairings); and those constructions are linked in networks of inheritance (or categorization).”

involves “small steps” (TRAUGOTT; TROUSDALE, 2013, p. 36); while the latter stems from an internal process that focuses on the constituents of the construction, whether they are formal or semantic/functional in nature.

To summarize, the joint of approaches of Construction Grammar as a key component of Cognitive Linguistics, operates on the perspective that language and the linguistic knowledge represented in the speaker’s mind constitute a system structured like a network. Under these circumstances, constructions are basic linguistic units that exhibit correspondences between form and meaning, resembling interconnected nodes in this network. This architecture is dynamic, which means that it is open to the establishment of new elements, new symbolic units (morphemes, lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and more or less schematic grammatical structures), therefore consisting of a semantic pole (of semantic, pragmatic, and/or discursive content) and a phonological pole (structured by sounds, signals, or graphic patterns), which are constituted based on language use.

Within this collection, both works that are grounded in Cognitive Linguistics and works that focus on the theoretical construct of constructions from the perspective of language in use can be found. As described, despite this guiding theoretical framework, the approaches can be distinguished, which helps in the enrichment of the description of the phenomena selected by the various authors who contribute to them.

In the introductory article of this special issue, Jéssica Casseiro Muniz and Diogo Pinheiro use an experimental methodology to revisit a concept central to Cognitive Linguistics, that being the concept of the *prototype*, with the goal of explaining why speakers often resort to non-prototypical forms rather than more prototypical alternatives. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Usage-Based Construction Grammar, the authors explore the hypothesis that non-prototypical usages result from the way “speaker linguistic knowledge is organized within

the constructional network”, which was confirmed by the analysis of data obtained through an experiment involving twenty five subjects.

Still from the perspective of the Usage-Based Construction Grammar, the second article in this corpus, authored by Flávia Saboya da Luz Rosa, is dedicated to the study of constructional change. Taking the microconstruction *calma aí* as the subject of analysis, the author examines, in light of the analysis of nanosteps proposed by Rosa (2019), the process of linguistic change through which “expressions formed by inducer-restrictor elements and affixoids of locative origin” result in constructions that function as discourse markers of an argumentative nature.

Adopting an interface-based approach between Cognitive Linguistics and Variational Sociolinguistics, Luiz Fernando de Carvalho analyzes, in the third essay of this issue, three constructional instances of the second-person singular imperative in Brazilian Portuguese: (i) the true imperative (indicative + tu), (ii) the suppletive imperative (subjunctive + você), and (iii) the “brazilianified” imperative (indicative + você). Drawing on the Theory of Mental Spaces, proposed by Fauconnier (1994), the author argues that the “brazilianified” imperative stems from a blending process, in the terms of Fauconnier and Turner (2002), between the true imperative and the supplementary imperative.

In the fourth article, Vítor Cordeiro Costa proposes an analytical connection between the theoretical framework of Construction Grammar and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, exploring the correlations between the metaphorical and literal uses of the verb *construir* and the pattern [verb + (determiner) + noun + adjective]. Although this is still an “exploratory study”, in the author’s view, the reflections presented are highly relevant: “the verb *construir* fused into the pattern [verb + (determiner) + noun + adjective] may be related to one or two grammatical constructions, depending on whether one

accepts the existence of causative and resultative constructions, or only causative ones, to instantiate literal and metaphorical statements”.

Jussara Abraçado and Eduardo Santana Moreira sign the fifth essay, in which they analyze, based on the Cognitive Grammar proposed by Langacker (1976; 2005), idiomatic constructions in Brazilian Portuguese formed with the verb *pagar*. Based on a qualitative analysis of data collected from the web using the Google search engine, the authors concluded that both idiomatic and bitransitive constructions with the verb studied “stem from the schematic construction TRANSFER SN TO SN which, in turn, derives from the even more schematic construction V SN SPREP”, revealing a hierarchy of conceptual complexity.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of Construction Grammar (FILLMORE et al., 1988; GOLDBERG, 1995, 2006; BYBEE, 2016) and based on a corpus analysis, the next author, Wellington Araújo Mendes Junior, describes a construction in the English language and brings to the discussion the analysis of [*because* X] with a preference for nouns, adjectives and interjections, such as in *because wow* or *because food*, statements that occur in informal language contexts such as blogs and Twitter (currently known as X). These constructions oppose to the use of *because* as a conjunction, in order to introduce a finite clause (*he did this because he was bored*) as well as an element of a compound preposition, in order to introduce a prepositional phrase (*I can't go out because of the rain*). As stated by the author, comparing to a formal grammar construction, the construction [*because* X] is used in informal contexts, such as on social media, whereby brevity is favored.

Monclar Guimarães Lopes and Mara Cristina Machado Ladeira Martins' article discuss the relationship between syntax and aspect of a construction [for X time], in which X represents a slot that can be filled by indefinite pronouns as *much*, *many*, *less* and *some*. From the perspective of the Cognitive-Functional

Linguistics (CUNHA et al., 2013; ROSÁRIO; OLIVEIRA 2016; TRAUGOTT; TROUSDALE, 2013), it's verified that this specific construction is characterized by a distributive or iterative trajectory, even on events with telic verbs in perfective tenses. This study presents results based on 400 occurrences extracted from *Corpus Now*, defending that the distributive and iterative aspects could be understood as gradual categories, in which the construction take in different aspects more or less durative or iterative, depending on the pronoun that occupy the X slot, the additional class of the verbs and on the immediate linguistic context.

The schematic concessive-comparative construction [Até que para X, Y/For X, Y], seen in “Até que para um palhaço, você escreve legal/For a clown, you write alright”, is the subject of Gabriela da Silva Pires and Luiz Fernando Matos Rocha's article. Recovering Goldberg (1996; 2006) and Fillmore, Lee-Goldman and Rhomieux (2012), and a database created from Internet occurrences, the authors show how X, an indefinite noun phrase, creates expectations that Y contradicts with a commentary. For them, there is a conceptual blending in this kind of constructions (FAUCONNIER; TURNER, 2002), since they establish a denial of assumptions from the assessment made in Y, whether as veiled criticism or praise.

With a similar focus on Internet data, Tharlles Lopes Gervásio focus the attention on the [#SóQueSim] (literally “Only that yes”) construction. Combining Goldberg's Construction Grammar (1995), Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Blending Theory (2002) and Coulson's concept of irony (2001; 2005), the author studies this construction from a discourse-pragmatic perspective. It's appointed that irony is the main function of this construction based on the interactions established on written posts from *Facebook*, mainly on hashtags. As a result, it marks the effect of the irony in the discourse as it triggers and reiterates ideas previously presented in the text. In conclusion, [#SóQueSim] contributes to the

formation of a conceptual integration network, as meant by Fauconnier e Turner (2002).

Closing this issue, Gislane Aparecida Martins Siqueira presents us with her study on the Amazonian regional expression “Olha já!” based on the theoretical framework established by Croft (2007). From the presentation of data gathered from online sources, as well as occurrences of authentic speech, the author illustrates the high productivity of this regional expression and reveals the rule of its formation as a standard for similar expressions in Brazilian Portuguese. According with her perspective, the construction [intransitive imperative perception verb + monosyllabic adverb] can also be found in expressions such as *olha só* and *veja bem*, etc. Siqueira concludes that this idiomatic construction acts as an interjection of shock, surprise or indignation.

For three decades or so, research on constructions was limited to introspectively generated examples before an interest in studying form-meaning pairings in their actual use in written and, even later, spoken discourse began, in which they are no longer simply instantiated as “prepackaged wholes” but undergo variation, modification, development (AUER, 2006; FRIED; ÖSTMAN, 2005). The ten articles featured in this dossier shows an unequivocal trend towards an increasing focus on: (a) usage-based constructional research, (b) corpus-driven analysis, and (c) studies that increasingly directs its gaze towards the use of informal language and/or spoken discourse. For all these points, particularly regarding the latter, the Internet seems to be a rich source of diverse discourse genres, where there is a continuum between orality and writing. Alongside these approaches, new lines of research are already observed, such as Multimodal Construction Grammar, which integrates symbols and icons in the analysis of emerging internet-based constructions, as well as prosodic and gestural-bodily aspects, instantiated in the constructions of talk-in-interaction (cf. for an overview HOFFMANN, 2021).

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