VARIATIONIST SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR
THE CHALLENGES AND THE PROSPECTS OF COMPATIBILIZATION

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In this chapter, we argue in favor of the description of the phenomenon of variation by similarity/synonymy in the context of Portuguese Construction Grammar through the compatibilizing of Sociolinguistics orientations and concepts to Usage-based Construction Grammar orientations and concepts. In order to collaborate to construct a socioconstructionist heuristic, we use two theoretical-methodological constructs: (i) variation by allostructions (CAPPELLE, 2006) in metaconstruction (or constructeme, according to PEREK, 2015); (ii) variation by symbolic similarity. We also associate the following concepts: (i) the variation and change theory restriction problem (WEINREICH; LABOV; HERZOG, 1968) to the Usage-based Construction Grammar restriction or statistical preemption notions; (ii) restrictions or conditioning factors to (different or similar) factors/values involved in the formal and functional attributes of variant (lexical or grammatical) constructional patterns/allostructions; (iii) independent variables and attributes. Moreover, we signal a forwarding for the development of the scientific research: by focusing on the use and/or processing-perception--subjective evaluation experiences, as well as by considering a network of constructional patterns configured upon introspection and empiricism, it develops statistical generalizations about associative links between the values/factors of

the attributes involved the formal and functional faces of the constructions put/apprehended, in use, as being in variation by similarity/synonym relation.

Construction Grammar conceptualizes constructions as nodes in a hierarchical network lower-level constructions display a lower level of schematicity than the ones that license them; and multiple inheritance links govern the flow of features forms the higher-level nodes to the lower-level ones. The links that hold between constructions/constructional patterns at relatively the same level of schematicity and which can enable language change (VAN DE VELDE, 2014) have only recently been object of observation, due to the assumption that, if constructions/constructional patterns are sufficiently similar on the same level, speakers might link them up in their mental grammars. So, similarity too is a factor that impacts the dynamic constructional network of a language, as soon as, a construction enters a context typical of another, their increased proximity/similarity may create an associative link.

Generally speaking, our contribution to such object of observation lies (i) in the fact that, in Brazil, only recently the question of variation by similarity/synonym is getting some scholars´ attention and specially only after the discussion our texts (since MACHADO VIEIRA, 2016) have mobilized/provided here and (ii) in the fact that we have already initiated the configuration of a scientific path that articulates corpus-based discourse analysis, sociolinguistics multivariate analysis and constructional collostructional/collocational analysis[1] (somehow, similar to the one that KLAVAN, 2012, has also developed) to deal with connections between variant constructional patterns and with the (variant) collexemes attraction patterns to the same constructional slot or the (variant) lexemes coercion patterns to a constructional slot.

In this effort to show how the configuration of constructional variation can take central place between the generalizations of experience-based Construction Grammar, we particularly problematize here two of the possibilities of variation treatment already mentioned: (i) variation by analogy/associative/alignment variation of independent constructions and (ii) variation by matching (co)lexemes to a constructional slot. In order to illustrate variation by symbolic similarity or by metaconstruction description and also variation by colocation of (co)lexemes, we use data from some ongoing researches in the PREDICAR Project / UFRJ[2].

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[1] Na linha de STEFANOWITSCH; GRIES (2003), GRIES; STEFANOWITSCH (2004).

[2] By the way, it is worth adding that the phenomenon of constructional variation is one of the thematics of two completed researches in such project: TRAVASSOS (2019) e FERREIRA (2019).

Theoretically, we conceive language as a cognitive and social system of constructions: a network of symbolic units that parallel attributes related to linguistic form (prosodic, phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical ones) to attributes related to semantic, discursive, pragmatic, social and cognitive functionality/meaning. This system conceives language in the language's (mental/ emotional) use and processing experiences and is shaped by them. Futher it is subjected to general cognitive processes such as: *analogical thinking* (process of combining aspects of function/meaning and form), which may or may not give rise to analogization (mechanism of change that gives rise to a previously nonexistent correspondence), and *parsing* (process of analysis that motivates/enhances analysis/recombination of productive unit(s) different from the current analysis), that may or may not give rise to neoanalysis (mechanism of change that gives rise to a new structure). And change implies the stage of social dissemination and conventionalization of a (individual) linguistic innovation in a community. In this context, the constructional network of a language contains associative links put forward due to the conventionalized alignment of (some) formal and/ or functional attributes values involved in independent constructional patterns or (co)lexemes. In other words, it means that there is an area in such network in which these constructional patterns or (co)lexemes have their own independent existence and there is also an area in which they align by attibute(s) value(s) association, by similarity/synonym relation, made/perceived by language community and, then, they are in *constructional variation*. Due to this theoretical conception briefly exposed, we seek to answer the question of how to delineate the design of the linguistic *variation-(meta)construction* in the proposal of compatibilizing Sociolinguistics and Construction Grammar.

Our hypothesis is the following one: if constructions are stabilized regular symbolic units that license the constructs (concrete utterance tokens that have actually been produced/processing), but are also subject to instability due to factors internal to the constructions (the statistical values of the attributes, as soon as constructions are potential prototype categories with more central and more peripheral features/values of attibutes for providing the production/processament of constructs/uses/tokens), due to factors that are external to their manifestation/ update in constructs/uses, and due to factors which are external and/or internal to speakers/communities of speakers involved in real situations of linguistic experience and/or linguistic processing, consequently the role of variation in the generalizations of the Construction Grammar of a language must be considered central. Notwithstand, the role of variation can also be put as peripheral. The configuration of this role will depend on the problem to which the research pro-

posal is inclined: for variation; or for variation and change, or for change. The proposal will orient all the choices in the development of the research. We are arguing here in favor of the necessity and the feasibility of generalizations about variation that result from a linguistic analysis that is attentive to statistically interchangeable uses, that considers analogical thinking as one of the cognitive processes and that bases its generalizations on the theoretical assumption that the network of constructions of a language licenses uses and reconfigures itself when affected by uses in different language communities and/or different communities of practice or by uses in individual practices that influences those communities. Such statistical generalizations on constructional variation are representations that are updated through both the speaker's and the community′s experience with language in a lot of different social, discursive, pragmatic and interactional contexts embedded in a cognitive, social and historic linguistic architecture and that may be mentally apprehended and/or assessed as being either in a stabilized coexistence situation or in a competition situation.

The linguistic units subject to the process of variation which we, in this chapter, focus on may have one of these configurations: (i) they are units/constructions of the order of metaconstruction (a constructional network over-lapping area of representation in which there is a (relative) neutralization of the differences of the constructional patterns in variation in favor of their formal and/or functional attributes values in common), that is, *allostructions* (named according to CAPPELLE, 2006); or (ii) they are units/constructions of the order of the constructional slot, that is, *(co)lexemes* (form-functional pairing representations associated to the same constructional slot). The constructional slots, depending on the level of schematicity of the construction they are in, will be subject to more or less filling possibilities and to the compatibilization of more or less exemplary/prototypical members of the category. Another pos-sibility of analytical cutout is the relation of both configurations, by calculating the attraction/repulsion force of (co)lexeme regarding a constructional slot (in a construction, in all constructions that configure the metaconstruction), as well as the profile of constructions or of allostructions with which the (co)lexemes maintain a matching relationship (by force of attraction/repulsion or force of coercion) in the language system.

The envelope design of the varying constructional patterns in a metacons-truction is made of two or more (procedural or lexical) constructions that are as-sociated by analogy (because of their configurational similarities or because some symbolic association attributed to them), thus are foreseen in variation and, then,

are socially routinized as well as cognitively stored as constructional alternatives (allostructions). Metaconstruction (*constructeme*, as named by Perek, 2015) is a theoretical construct that, left partially underspecified, captures the level of representation at which constructions/constructional patterns sistematicaly in alternation are functionally equivalent. Allostructions specify exactly how such constructions differ (by which attribute values/properties, restrictions). Thus, the metaconstruction/allostruction representation has the potential to apprehend the tension between similarity and dissimilarity (ie, values, in constructions, linked to their attributes).

In order to exemplify the alignment of the *allostruction* and *metaconstruction* concepts with the concepts involved in the configuration of the envelope of linguistic variation (variants and dependent variable), we use, among other Portuguese research results, the ones of the research about the *discursive impersonalization verbal predication construction*, conducted by Silva, Fontenlos and Justen (2017): [$_\text{Auxiliar}$V $_\text{Direct Transitive}$V + $_\text{Participant passivation/indeterminacy}$SE SN]. These construction license strategies for signaling a participant's opacification/defocusing by discursive impersonalization such as: [$_\text{Singular/Plural auxiliar}$V $_\text{Direct Transitive}$V + $_\text{Participant passivation/indeterminacy}$SE $_\text{Singular/Plural Non-agentive}$SN] and [$_\text{Singular auxiliar}$V $_\text{Direct Transitive}$V + $_\text{Participant indeterminacy}$SE $_\text{Singular/Plural Non-agentive}$SN]. The former captures the possibility of variation in verbal flexion according to singularSN or pluralSN and being SE conceptualized as either a participant passivation resource or an indeterminacy one. The recognition of the passivation resource depends on the (plural) verbal flexion (according to pluralSN). The latter represents the stability of the singular verbal flexion, being the SN either singular or plural and being SE conceptualized necessarily as a participant indeterminacy resource. We represent this variation in Portuguese by configurational similarity (where patterns reveal stable parts and similar attributes, even because of the subpart inheritance relationship to which they are submitted, and also different attributes). *Allostructions* then designate the variant constructional patterns themselves, while *metaconstruction* is the nomenclature used to capture the shared generalization domain (of the expression of states of affairs with the opacification/defocusing of its inducing force – agent, causer, force, experiencer), in which those independent patterns (with different verbal flexional features) relate and are configured in an abstract neutralization area.

In order to illustrate the alignment of the *(co)lexemes* and *constructional slot* concepts with the concepts involved in the configuration of the envelope of linguistic variation (variants and dependent variable), we resort to Alves' (2011)

results about the variation between pronominal simple verb forms (*preocupar--se*, to worry) and similar periphrastic verbal-nonverbal forms (*ter preocupação*, to be worried) in the constructional slot of the verbal predicate/slot in a verbal predication. According to such research, there are some verbs that, by force of attraction, tend to match in the verbal slot of the periphrastic forms and there are some verbs that, by force of coercion, can also appear (although less in statistical analysis) in some verbal-nonverbal periphrasis. The verb *ficar* (in a similar use as "to get", "to be" in "to get disturbed"/to disturb) is among the first ones. Then, two or more lexical units/lexical constructions have the potential to develop the profile of alternatives in the constructional slot matching process by attraction (collexemes) or coercion (lexemes). Therefore, a slot in a construction can have (i) units with formal-functional similarity, that is, alternatives attracted by the categorical slot/collexemes and then more expected due to the filling conditions implied by it and, naturally, by inclinations of use observed in a community; and (ii) less in tune units with the categorical slot attributes/features and, then, not or less attracted by the slot/lexemes, which, by virtue of coercion exercised by the construction, are formally and functionally aligned with those most often matched in such slot. They, then, act as alternatives to these. The (co)lexemes can, then, turn out to be variants of a dependent variable/constructional slot, which has fill constraints.

Furthermore, this chapter suggests the possibility of bringing together various empirical methods, such as corpus analysis or experimental studies, and the introspective method, to approach language variation within the theoretical framework of combining Sociolinguistics and Usage-based Construction Grammar and the mapping of a language constructional network, where we assume that speakers and communities (re)organize their mental grammar on the basis of the available input via cognitive processes (including analogical thinking, that can give rise to associative links) which result in a (kind of "diasystematic") constructional grammar which comprises both language-specific and independent constructions restricted to certain formal and functional features/attributes and constructions with features/attributes to some extent underspecified, besides the underspecified or less specified slots in some constructions. In order to develop a socioconstructionist research, we propose some aspects that deserve attention in the configuration of analytical conditions, sample designs, research processes and procedures, among which there is the delimitation of the design of linguistic variation assumed here.

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