A Cognitive and Constructionist Approach to the Portuguese Grammar
The Case of Superlative Construction and Body Expression

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Overview

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1. Introduction

(1) Isto lhe rasgava de dor o coração.
This PERSON.PRON.3SG rip.PAST.3SG GEN.PREP pain.N the heart
It made his heart suffer very much. /The pain tore at his heart.

(2) Esse cara morre de ciúme de mim.
This guy die.PAST.3SG GEN.PREP jealousy.N GEN.PREP me
This guy is terribly jealousy of me.

(3) Estou farto de aturar aquele maçador.
be.PRES.1SG gorge-N GEN.PREP tolerate-INF that boring_guy
I'm tired of putting up with that boring guy[...]
• **Background:**

– “Superlative Constructions of Brazilian Portuguese: A study about scale semantics” project (Miranda, 2008 – CNPq).


– Frames and Constructions, FrameNet Brasil.
• **Context of the investigation:**


• “Morrer de” (“*Morro de saudade dos meus alunos*/I miss my students to death): a constructional pattern, metaphorically motivated, in great usage.
• **Main research questions:**
  – Is the Superlative Construction and Body Expression a significant pattern of Portuguese, with specific form, meaning and use?
  – What can a cognitive/constructionist analysis bring to this research?

• **Objectives:**
  – Describe, organize and explain the node of the vast network of Portuguese Superlative Constructions (MIRANDA, 2008 – CNPq) named SCBE.
• Relevance:
  (1) description of Portuguese;
  • FrameNet Brasil Construction (with a specific notation)

(2) language translation.
2. Theoretical point of view


  – Cognitive Construction Grammar (Lakoff, 1987; Goldberg, 1995, 2006; among others).
    • Constructions as a form-meaning pair
    • Constructions as basic units of language
    • "constructions form a network and are linked by inheritance relations which motivate many of the properties of particular constructions" (Goldberg, 1995:67)

  – Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1977, 1982; among others).
    • Meanings as relativized to scenes
3. Methodology

• Corpus-based approach (Gries & Divjak, 2003; Stefanowitsch, 2006; among others).

• Corpus used:
4. SCBE

- Productivity

- 19 different types in Corpus do Português.

| 1. acabar(-se) “to cease”         | 11. fartar(-se) “to gorge” |
| 2. borrar(-se) “to take a shit”  | 12. finar(-se) “to die”   |
| 3. cagar(-se) “to take a shit”   | 13. mijar(-se) “to piss”  |
| 4. cair “to fall”                | 14. morrer “to die”       |
| 5. cansar(-se) “to get tired”    | 15. não se aguentar “cannot stand to” |
| 6. chorar “to cry”               | 16. rachar(-se) “to crack”|
| 7. contorcer(-se) “to contort”   | 17. rasgar(-se) “to tear” |
| 8. dobrar(-se) “to bend”         | 18. rebentar(-se) “to burst” |
| 9. escangalhar(-se) “to break”   | 19. torcer(-se) “to twist” |
• Conventionalization:

  – 1,726 token: 44% of the use of these 19 verbs followed by the preposition “de” in the corpus (.0388).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCBE Constructional Types</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 MORRER de Y</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 FARTAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 CANSAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 CHORAR de Y</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 CAIR de Y</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 REBENTAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 ESTOURAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 TORCER(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 ACABAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 FINAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 RASGAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 BORRAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 CAGAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 MIJAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 ESCANGALHAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 CONTORCER(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 DOBRAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 NÃO SE AGUENTAR de Y</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 RACHAR(-SE) de Y</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,726</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
– Range in the conventionalization of construction types:

1) “Morrer de Y”
2) “Fartar(-se) de Y”
3) “Cansar(-se) de Y”
4) “Chorar de Y”
5) “Cair de Y”
6) “Rebentar(-se) de Y”
7) “Estourar(-se) de Y”
• Form domain:

João morria de medo/rir

\[ [X_V \ de \ Y_{(N/V)}] \]

João die.PAST.3SG GEN.PREP fear.N/lault.INF

– X: an \textbf{ergative verb} that evokes the \textbf{Physical Impact} frame ("cair", "contorcer(-se)", "dobrar(-se)", among others) or \textbf{Physiological impact} frame ("morrer", "fartar(-se) de Y", "mijar(-se)", etc.).
– **Y**: typically, an abstract noun:

[...] criança tem essa capacidade de se espantar com o mundo. Por isso ela não morre de tédio.

s/he not die-PRES.3SG GEN.PREP boredom

[...] child has this ability to be amazed by the world. So she doesn’t die if boredom.

[...] o Rui ficou comigo por piedade, pra não morrer de culpa[...]

not die.INF GEN.PREP guilty

[...] Rui stayed with out of pity, to not feel too guilty [...]

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Costa & Miranda (ICLC-12)
– Or a verb in the infinitive form:

Maria do Carmo Borges, a presidente em exercício, não se cansou de valorizar esta festa [...]  
not REFLEX.PRONOUN tire-PAST.3SG GEN.PRON valorize-INF this party.N  
Maria do Carmo Borges, the acting president, never tired of valuing this party [...]  

Estou farto de aturar aquele maçador [...]  
be-PRES.1SG gorge.N GEN.PREP tolerate-INF that boring_guy  
I'm tired of putting up with that boring guy[...]
• Semantic dimension:

- SCBE profiles a basic (metaphorical) scene: a *cause (Y)* of superlative intensity unleashes a *physical or physiological impact (X)* over the body of an *affected*:

  O Leo morria de ciúmes do Ivan.
  The Leo die-PAST.3SG GEN.PREP jealousy GEN.PREP+the Ivan
  Leo was dying of jealousy of Ivan.

- Force as Intensity.
The Position_on_a_scale frame:

O Leo  morria  de  ciúmes do Ivan.
Affected/Item  Effect/Value  Cause/Variable
Leo was very jealous of Ivan.

Reanalysis:
- X: Degree modifier;
- Y: Gradable Core, modified by X.
• An interesting fact about the form-function mapping:

João morria de medo/rir.
João die-PAST.3SG GEN.PREP fear.N/laught-INF
João is dying of fear/laughter.

– Mismatch (cf. Michaelis, 2002; Traugott, 2007): X element, in the Verbal Variant of the SCBE.

– Emergence of a “new thing”, which we called (semi)auxiliary verb.
Two functions of X in Verbal SCBE:

(1) it indicates the notions of mood, tense, person's speech and singular/plural, as any auxiliary verb;

(2) it places the instance of the construction on a scale of pragmatic force.
Conceptual motivation:

- Causality concept (Tomasello, 1999).

\[ A \quad \text{Human Entity} \quad [\text{Normal state}] \quad A' \quad \text{Human Entity'} \quad [(\text{metaphorically) altered by a physical or a physiological impact}(X)] \]

\[ \text{Underlying cause} \quad Y \quad (\text{saudade, tristeza, amor, rir, trabalhar etc.)} \]
- COMPULSION image schema (Johnson, 1987);

- “Cause Is Physical Force” primary metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 53):
  
  - In SCBE, the Cause Y imposes itself in such a way over the Affected as to initiate a metaphorical physical or physiological impact, which commonly cannot be controlled.
[...] esses chapéus de pluma que fizeram rebentar de medo o Imperador da China [...] made-PAST.3PL burst-INF GEN.PREP fear.N emperor GEN.PREP+the China [...] these plumed hats that caused the Chinese Emperor to burst with fear [...] 

Foi quando, quase se mijando de medo, o moleque o cutucou com a coronha do bacamarte [...] almost REFLEX.PRON piss-GER GEN.PREP fear.N It was then, almost pissing with fear, the kid nudged him with the butt of the gun [...]
Domain of use

• The construction belongs to discursive contexts in which the speaker/writer has more liberty of subjective expression.

• SCBE is typically present in narrative sequences and dialogues (87% of the occurrences are found in works of fiction).
5. Final remarks

- The analytical findings presented here suggest that SCBE is an independent construction of Portuguese, with a proper form, meaning and use.

- Wealth of a Cognitive-constructionist analysis.
  - Material for other researches.
  - Evidences of language/mind phenomena.
• Metaphor in grammar.

• Mismatch.

• (Semi)auxiliary verb.

• (Grammaticalization.)
References


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Thank you!

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