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## VARIATION AND CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR: INVESTIGATING BRAZILIAN DOUBLE-OBJECT CONSTRUCTIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** In the light of the theoretical-methodological assumptions of Usage Based Models, the present work provides an analysis resulted from the observation of the following constructions from Brazilian Portuguese: *jogar o lixo fora*, *jogar lixo fora* and *jogar fora o lixo* (throw the trash out, throw the trash out and throw out the trash, respectively). The aim of this paper is to assess the pragmatism involved in the utterances where they are applied in order to verify if there is a preference for one construction over others when takes into consideration specific contexts. Data collected from the *Corpus do Português* indicate variation in some communicative situations in the sense that such constructions are interchangeable without resulting in different communicative propositions. However, there is clear preference for the discontinuous placement of the particle *fora* - V NP *fora* - when individuals describe garbage disposal as a daily routine task. Moreover, we were able to depict from the investigation that *lixo* (trash) often refers to metaphorical usage and, in that case, the preferable pattern to be used is the continuous construction, in which the NP is adjacent to the verb - V *fora* NP.

**KEY WORDS:** double-object constructions; phrasal verbs; construction Grammar; variation.

**RESUMO:** À luz dos pressupostos teórico-metodológicos dos Modelos Baseados no Uso, o presente trabalho consiste na observação das construções *jogar o lixo fora*, *jogar lixo fora* e *jogar fora o lixo* no português brasileiro. O objetivo deste artigo é avaliar o pragmatismo envolvido nos enunciados em que são aplicados, a fim de verificar se há preferência por uma construção em detrimento de outras quando se leva em consideração contextos específicos. Os dados coletados do *Corpus do Português* indicam variação em alguns contextos no sentido de serem intercambiáveis, sem interferência na proposição comunicativa. No entanto, há uma clara preferência pelo uso descontínuo do advérbio *fora* - V SN *fora* - quando os indivíduos descrevem o descarte de lixo como uma tarefa rotineira. Ainda, a análise nos permitiu perceber que *lixo* muitas vezes se refere a um uso metafórico e que, nesse caso, o padrão preferível a ser usado é a construção contínua, em que o SN é adjacente ao verbo - V *fora* SN.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** construções de objeto duplo; phrasal verbs; gramática de construções;

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variação.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is focused on the notion of transfer regarding the Portuguese Double-object Construction (DOCx) whose elements have occasional variable positioning. More specifically, constructions instantiated by the verb *jogar* - to play - and the NP *(o) lixo* - (the) trash - namely, [jogar (o) lixo fora] and [jogar fora o lixo] - *throw (the) trash out* and *throw out the trash*. We aim at investigating the pragmatic contexts in which the DOCx is used whether the adverb is adjacent to the verb [V Adv NP], as well as those in which it is discontinuous to it [V NP Adv]. Our claim is that the speaker's choice between the continuity/ discontinuity of the adverb is conditioned by particular speech demands concerning each of the pairings. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the utterances in which they occur in order to have a greater perception of the specific contexts they are used.

It is our understanding that continuous and discontinuous constructions highlight different pieces of information and thereby a continuous construction such as *jogar fora o lixo* (throw out the trash) tends to focus more on the referent *lixo* whereas a discontinuous construction tends to focus on the locative *fora*. Thus, we come across constructions such as *jogar fora lixo radioativo* (throw out radioactive waste), in which the restriction on the waste to be discarded is information to be focused. Similarly, there are discontinuous constructions - *jogar o lixo fora* (throw the trash out) - where the adverb is followed by a complement which answers to the question: out of where? This is the case of *jogar o lixo fora do cesto* (throw the trash out of the basket), in which the focus falls on the disposal destination or even a deviation from that destination.

Furthermore, we also intend to show that one of the constructions is likely more strongly associated with the idea of throwing out trash as a chore, an everyday task. In fact, we claim that those constructions are the result of form and meaning associations established in a slightly consolidated way in Brazilian Portuguese. Analyses based on corpora allowed us to observe that the idea of routine is stronger for one pattern, but weaker (if non-existent) for other patterns. Although the routine action of garbage disposal can be expressed in different configurations, speakers of a

given language have constantly repeated specific patterns, producing cognitive reinforcement in terms of mental representation. Bearing this in mind and based on token frequency, we believe that corpus data can reveal combinations which are more accessible and have been consolidated amongst members of a given linguistic community.

## 1. USAGE-BASED MODELS OF LANGUAGE

This paper follows the perspective of Usage-based Models of Language. Thus, we start from observing links between structure and events when analysing formal as well as functional properties of linguistic constructions. According to Boyland (2009), Usage-Based Models propose that

linguistic knowledge is embodied in mental processing and mental representations that are sensitive to context and statistical probabilities, which are both cognitively plausible and powerful enough to account for the complexity of actual language use. (BOYLAND, 2009: 351)

Barlow & Kemmer (2000: p. 2-9) present the following basic premises which characterize Usage-Based Models of Language, namely:

- (I) there is strong connection between the linguistic structure and the instances of language use;
- (II) frequency is important;
- (III) both understanding and production are integral and not peripheral parts of the linguistic system;
- (IV) it focuses on the role of learning and experience in the language acquisition process;
- (V) linguistic representations are taken as emergent, and not stored as fixed entities;
- (VI) linguistic data are important for construction and description;
- (VII) usage, synchronous variation and diachronic change are closely related;
- (VIII) it predicts an interconnectivity of the linguistic system with non-linguistic cognitive systems;
- (IX) context is crucial for the linguistic system operation.

Taking into account the theoretical background chosen for this research, aligned with Usage-Based Models of Language, we start from the following assumptions:

- (I) in order to process linguistic data, the speaker has a complex cognitive apparatus involving general domain cognitive processes, which were

organized by Diessel (2019) as processes related to: social cognition, e.g. shared attention; conceptualization, e.g. metaphorical and metonymic processes, and memory, e.g. analogy and automation;

(II) grammar is understood as a set of grammatical constructions, i.e., pairings of meaning and form - organized in a network, with formal, semantic and taxonomic links, amongst others;

(II) grammatical constructions, including basic grammatical categories, such as NAME and VERB, emerge and are constantly affected by language use (Cf. CROFT, 2001; BYBEE, 2010; 2015). In this sense, input plays a crucial role in the processing and storage of linguistic constructions, reinforcing and modifying constructions which had already been stored.

We propose an investigation of such constructions which takes into account language grammar as being modelled in terms of a construction grammar (CxG). In other words, a grammar in which its basic units (or grammatical constructions) are connected through different links, as detailed in the following section.

## 2. CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR

Unlike a grammatical model based on lexicon and rules, the CxG model presumes that linguistic knowledge can be captured pairings of meaning and form, also referred to as grammatical constructions (GOLDBERG, 1995; TRAUGOTT & TROUSDALE, 2013). They are organized in a constructional inventory known as *construct-icon*. Constructions relate to each other in terms of links (vertical, horizontal, etc.) and, according to Hilpert (2022: 6 -15), we could take ten basic premises to characterize CxG, namely:

- (I) the basic unit of linguistic knowledge is a symbolic pairing of meaning and form;
- (II) linguistic knowledge is a network with pairings of meaning and form – constructions - and nothing else;
- (III) constructions vary in terms of complexity and schematicity;
- (IV) constructions are idiosyncratic, constructional meanings are often non-compositional, and constructional forms are often not predictable from general rules;
- (V) all constructions, including schematic syntactic patterns, carry meaning;
- (VI) when there is conflict between the lexical meaning and the meaning of grammatical constructions, the construction produces a coercive effect;
- (VII) grammatical categories result from speakers' generalization of language usage. Thus, the individual is understood as an abstraction about agentive roles that occur in transitive or ditransitive constructions, amongst others. Speakers do not necessarily perceive them as the same;
- (VIII) constructional meaning is reflected in associations between syntactic patterns and lexical elements;
- (IX) construction knowledge is based on use. Each usage event produces a

change in the building of the network;  
 (X) language is shaped in domain-general and socio-cognitive processes, including categorization, association, routinization, generalization, schematization, shared attention, statistical learning, analogy, metaphor, amongst others.

Therefore, it is assumed that such processes constitute a set of complex cognitive skills from which speakers process not only their experiences with the world, but also their linguistic experiences (LAKOFF, 1987). In this sense, the present study predicts that speaker's perception of their language structure shows the performance of this complex apparatus. Constructions – and, consequently, grammar as a whole - are stored according to the way speakers perceive their reality around them.

Grammatical constructions are commonly known as pairings of meaning and form, suggesting the linguistic knowledge speakers have of their grammar is stored through symbolic combinations of formal units, ranging from morphemes to even productive constructions. They can be partially filled, such as the Portuguese construction *ADJ-mente*, e.g. *infelizmente* (unfortunately) or fully open, such as SVO – [Subject-Verb-Object]. They may have a given meaning integrated to a given form in a more or less idiomatic way.

Speakers need to put together constructions which vary in complexity in order to speak a language, as the combination of morphemes to form words -> words to form phrases -> and so on and so forth. The empirically attested combinations represent a cluster of information accumulated at different levels. Examples of constructions perceived as identical or similar to each other, both in form and in meaning, are associated via an analogical process, and are not only reinforced, but also updated to the point where they can become automated in terms of processing, and thus becoming more cognitively available. Each new encounter with the same or similar experience, through a process of analogy and abstraction, impacts the way we face categories represented beforehand. Consequently, the way we experience and perceive the world around us leads to constantly update formed categories and, in this sense, grammar is always emergent.

Although constructions are stored from the very first time they are witnessed by speakers, the frequency which a meaning-form pairing occurs has a relevant impact on the linguistic representation speakers make of their language structures. The fact that a sequence might be perceived as having identical or similar meaning to

one that had been previously witnessed leads to an increase in predictability when one considers the co-occurrence of such units. Also, it prompts to the reinforcement of the symbolic association between items. The increase in predictability has the effect of automating this operation, triggering other sequences which may co-occur with it.

### 3. SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to investigate the contexts in which Brazilian Portuguese speakers tend to prefer one of the discontinuous constructions a) *jogar o lixo fora* (throw the trash out), with the definite article expressed; b) *jogar lixo fora* (throw trash out), without the article; or the continuous construction c) *jogar fora o lixo* (throw out the trash), where article and particle immediately follow the verb. More specifically, we intend to verify the motivating aspects for the preference of one construction over another. The following questions stand out from this paper: (I) What is the impact caused by the different constituent orders, i.e., to what extent does the (dis) continuity of the particle play a role on the use of the constructions?; (II) Is there a construction preferred when it comes to expressing the action of waste disposal as a routine household chore?

Taking into consideration the theoretical and methodological approach applied, this paper foresees the study of the link between continuous and discontinuous constructions in the Brazilian Portuguese language regarding participle positioning in relation to the verb. In addition, we assess the semantic and pragmatic impact on the continuous construction with or without an expressed determinant. The work to be developed is aligned with previous studies regarding constituent ordering in the midst of transitivity, which contribute deeply to our aim. Constructions were collected and analysed from *Corpus do Português*, which is detailed in the next section, along with the methodology chosen for utterance investigation.

According to the theoretical presuppositions used to conduct this research, the constructions [V Adv NP] and [V NP Adv] respond to syntactic and pragmatic speech demands as a result of speakers search for greater expressiveness. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the context is required, since it provides evidence as to the

preference of one pairing over another. Given the complexity of the research, we have limited the scope of study to less schematic constructions: V, NP and Adv slots *jogar*, *lixo/ o lixo* and *fora* (to throw, trash, the trash and out, respectively). This work is conducted on the basis of *Corpus do Português*, available on the platform <https://www.corpusdoportugues.org/>, more specifically the web-dialects section, formed by 1.000.000 (one million) words from different varieties of Portuguese: Brazil, Portugal, Angola and Mozambique. The data analyzed for this research are from Brazilian Portuguese, with approximately 40.000.000 (forty thousand) words.

The data analysis provides evidence to our aim, which is to investigate the discursive-pragmatic contexts of each pairing with the central objective of relating each pattern to the contexts in which they are found, both syntactically and discursively. After analyzing the patterns and communicative situations, we carry out a quantitative survey in order to verify the limits of alternation between continuous and discontinuous constructions, therefore, investigating whether there is a more appropriate linguistic context for the use of a given construction.

#### 4. THE DOUBLE-OBJECT CONSTRUCTION

Gomes (2003) analyzed Brazilian Portuguese ditransitive constructions with the verb *dar* - [*dar X a Y*] and [*dar a Y X*]: to give something to someone and to give someone something, respectively - from a variationist perspective. Results indicate a higher token frequency for the canonical construction, i.e. [V NP PP]. This pattern is favoured when the indirect object is longer than the direct object, revealing the end-weight principle at work. Gomes (op. cit.) also points out that the PP discontinuity is more frequent in utterances indicating transference, e.g. “*dar um livro a Pedro*” (to give Peter a book). In terms of type frequency, the results obtained by the author also reveal greater variability of items occupying the V slot in [V NP PP] than its counterpart.

Adopting a constructional perspective, Oliveira (2019) observed English transitive constructions which denote spatial transfer, whether the particle is adjacent to V (1a), or discontinuous to it (1b):

(1) a. *We pushed out the chair*<sup>3</sup>

Nós empurramos pra fora a cadeira.

b. *We pushed the chair out.*

Nós empurramos a cadeira pra fora.

It is crucial to mention here that the transitive phrasal verbs exemplified have particularities which prevent them from being merely defined as being related to the Caused-motion Construction (CMCx), even though a clear notion of movement is perceived (GOLDBERG, 2016; Oliveira, 2019). What is important to highlight at this point is that examples (1a) and (1b) illustrate two possible utterances which share the same communicative purpose: the chair displacement to another location. In English, syntactic restrictions prevent the replacement of *the chair* for a pronoun (QUIRK, 1985; MICHAELIS, 2009):

(2) a. *We pushed it out.*

b. \* *We pushed out it*

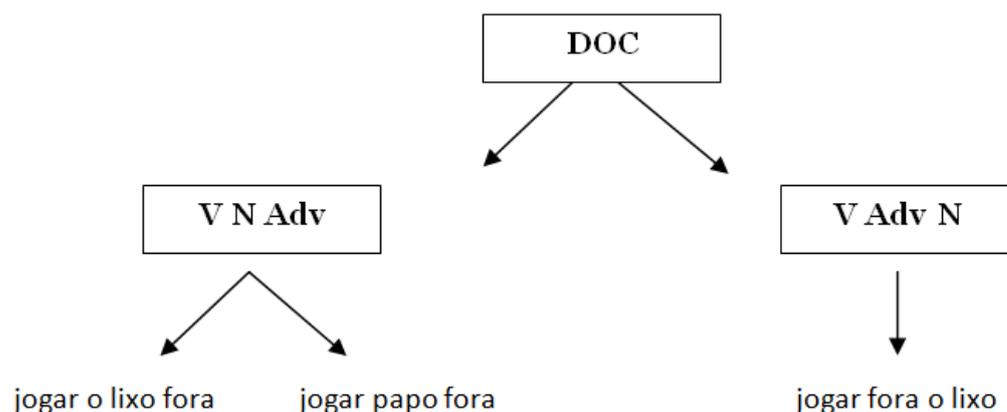
The instances represented in (2) show that the pronoun *it* ought not to be discontinuous to V in English. Although [push out N] and [push N out] are functionally similar, syntactic restrictions prevent continuous and discontinuous to alternate when it comes to constituent ordering. They also vary in terms of frequency (token). In other words, the constituents occupying the slots of each construction (type) is limited.

When one takes into account the difference in terms of continuity in the constructions relevant for this study - [*jogar fora o lixo*], continuous (C1); and [*jogar (o) lixo fora*], discontinuous (C2), a Brazilian Portuguese speaker realizes that both share the same communicative purpose. According to Cappelle (2006), the fact that the same lexical units are recruited to fill the slots of each construction leads us to reflect on the distribution of this type of construction in terms of constructional links. The author proposes the concept of *allostruction*: there is neutralization between two independent constructional patterns. Thus, C1 and C2 would be allostructions of a

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<sup>3</sup> The reading of spatial transfer is possible given the concrete reference of the NP complement, but transitive phrasal verbs with more abstract referents can occur, as in “She carried out a research”.

more schematic Double-object Construction (DOCx). As far as representation of pairings in the construct-icon goes, it is worth mentioning that microconstructions with some degree of idiomaticity, such as *jogar papo fora* (to make small talk), fit into only one of the patterns. We illustrate this relation in the following image:



**Image 1:** The double-object construction

The image shows a construction with some degree of idiomaticity – *jogar papo fora* (to make small talk) and aligned with only one of the patterns due to the weirdness resulted from the combination ?*jogar fora papo*. It seems as if other nouns may fill the same gap as *papo* (talk) so long as they share semantic features, such as *conversa* (conversation), i.e., *jogar conversa/ papo fora*. This example shows us that variation between [*jogar N fora*] and [*jogar fora N*] present restrictions depending on the pragmatic-discursive context in which they are applied.

In accordance with what has been illustrated in the previous constructional scheme, the NP *o lixo* (the trash) is sometimes adjacent to V or to the participle, without affecting communicational purposes. A similar interpretation emerges from the constructions: the displacement (*jogar/ throw*) of an object (*lixo/trash*) in space (*fora/ out*). When one considers the syntactic context regarding the presence of the determinant in C1 and C2, it seems to be optional in the former, but not in the latter, as can be seen below:

C1: continuous [*jogar NP fora*]: *jogar o lixo fora/ jogar lixo fora*

[*throw NP out*]: *throw the trash out/ throw trash out*

C2: discontinuous [jogar fora NP]: jogar fora o lixo/ \*jogar fora lixo

[*throw out NP*]: *throw out the trash/ throw out trash*

However, the syntactic restriction linked to C2 can be sustained until we consider the use of a locative, as shown in this example taken from *Corpus do Português*<sup>4</sup>:

(3) O Limpa Brasil (...) é um movimento de cidadania e cuidado com o meio ambiente que busca uma mudança de atitude do cidadão em relação ao hábito de **jogar lixo fora do lixo**.

*The Limpa Brasil (...) is a citizenship and care movement for the environment that seeks to change the attitude of citizens in relation to the habit of **throwing trash out of the trash**.*

C2 allows the absence of the determinant when *lixo* (trash) is modified by a term that indicates its place of origin (*do lixo/ of the trash*).

When analyzing data on the use of these constructions, we find continuous (C1) and discontinuous (C2) patterns in different contexts, depending on the focus given by the speaker in terms of location and direction: in C1 – *jogar fora o lixo* (throw out the trash) – the focus is on the trash or element to be discarded; in C2 – both *jogar o lixo fora* and *jogar lixo fora* – the focus is on the destination/ target/ place of garbage disposal.

As we show in the following examples, utterances referring to daily routine activities such as removing the garbage and disposing it somewhere else, can be found in different patterns: 9 data were found for C1 (example 4), while 25 data were in the C2 pattern (example 5), with and without the use of determinant (5a and 5b, respectively). This result seems to demonstrate a greater connection between the expression of a routine activity and a construction whose focus is more on the waste destination than between routine and a construction whose focus falls on the discarded element itself:

<sup>4</sup> Dados coletados do Corpus do Português/ Web dialects: <https://www.corpusdoportugues.org/>

**Daily routine activity:**

(4) C1

(...) aguarde um instante, pois gostaria de poder retribuir a gentileza. **Joga fora o lixo**, lava a bandeja, enche- a de flores, e devolve- a com um cartão, (...).

*(...) wait a moment, because I would like to be able to return the kindness. Throw out the trash, wash the tray, fill it with flowers, and return it with a card, (...).*

(5) C2

a. Gente, fui agora **jogar o lixo fora** e encontrei uma caixa de papelão mal fechada ao lado da lixeira.

*Guys, I just went to throw the trash out and found a cardboard box not well closed next to the trash can.*

b. (...) para colocar as coisas em seus lugares, **jogar lixo fora**, e escrever a lista de coisas a fazer.

*(...) to put things in their places, throw out the trash, and write the to-do list.*

Indeed, the representation of a routine task seems to be favoured by the discontinuous construction C2, in which the N *lixo* immediately follows V. Moreover, among the two constructions associated with the discontinuous pattern, the one in which the determinant appears – *jogar o lixo fora* – is favoured when it comes to expressing a daily routine idea (of the 25 data found, only in 3 utterances the determinant was not present) – which shows that speakers vary in terms of how they linguistically construct meaning, but it also reveals that one of the forms is more available and, thus, preferred.

In addition to the sense of routine, we found 3 occurrences in which C1 has a locative complement (example 6) and, finally, 4 occurrences of C1 which suggest a metaphorical reading (example 7), whether the NP is formed with or without a modifier:

**Locative complement**

(6) E a cada dia, poucas pessoas vão se educando para não **jogar lixo fora da caçamba** e papéis no chão.

*And every day, few people are educating themselves not to throw trash from the bucket and papers on the floor.*

## Metaphorical sense with and without NP modifier

(7)

a. With a modifier:

Desistir de controlar o mundo, usar a crise como motivação, **jogar fora o lixo mental** e aceitar a vida como ela é.

*Giving up controlling the world, using the crisis as motivation, throwing out the mental trash and accepting life as it is.*

b. Without a modifier:

Pesam tudo e mesmo que na dor, **jogam fora o lixo**, o entulho do ultimo relacionamento.

*They weigh everything and even if in pain they throw away the trash, the last relationship rubble.*

It is noteworthy that in utterances with a metaphorical reading of trash disposal, the most appropriate syntactic context seems to be the continuous pattern C1, as we show in examples (7a) and (7b). On the other hand, as we have seen throughout this paper, when a speaker refers to daily chores as in placing the trash in a different location from where it was originally put and with the intention of discarding it, the context that seems to favour this interpretation is C2.

The NP with a modifier (7a) portrays a situation in which the speaker focuses on the discarded referent – *lixo mental* (mental garbage) –, considering this item as the most relevant and informative portion of her/ his statement. The example reinforces the interpretation that what needs to be discarded is not just any kind of garbage, but mental garbage.

When studying the locative complement of C1, we observe different readings depending on the type of locative used. The following image illustrates spatial displacement both in 8a and in 8b, where the focus falls on the place where the action is performed. However, in (8a), the trash destination is moved from its place of origin. In other words, what was once inside the house was removed and discarded elsewhere, whereas in (8b), what is at stake is where the garbage was discarded, i.e., the place of destination was deviated from its appropriate location:

(8) a. Ele jogou o lixo fora (*de casa*)<sup>5</sup>b. Ele jogou o lixo fora (*da lixeira*)**Image 2:** fora de casa**Image 3:** fora da lixeira

Although C1 and C2 are clearly related to each other in some level, the concept proposed by Capelle (op. cit.) does not account for specific semantic-pragmatic demands imposed by the discourse. Nevertheless, we must turn our eyes to the possibility of variation in CxG, a notion that draws from Sociolinguistics, but requires further clarification within such model of conceiving grammar. Machado Vieira (2019) argues in favour of considering coexisting pairings within this perspective:

This is not a matter of conceiving identity between constructional patterns or between forms that are compatible with certain constructional pattern slots, but rather disregarding the potential for variation due to a certain alignment between properties of independent pairings or linguistic elements that are compatible to a constructional pattern. (MACHADO VIEIRA, 2019:161)<sup>6</sup>

According to Goldberg (2019), dealing with such coexistence should be possible in this model as long as we are dealing with different contexts in use and, thus, following the idea that each pairing fits into a semantic-discursive niche. For those with similar communicative purposes, such as [*jogar o lixo fora*] and [*jogar fora o lixo*], it is up to the speaker to choose an alternative which best suits the context. The author also claims that correlated constructions may be in competition, which will lead to a result where the winning construction is the one that has turned into the most representative one in a given context. Eventually, the alternative(s) are dissociated from that context. Having said that, we can imply that a pairing should become more conventional in a language and more easily recruited to discourse, a

<sup>5</sup>8a. He threw the trash out (of his house)/ 8b. He threw the trash out (of the trashcan)

<sup>6</sup> Original: *Não se trata de conceber identidade entre padrões construcionais ou entre formas que se compatibilizem no preenchimento do slot de um padrão construcional, mas de considerar a potencialidade de variação em razão de um certo alinhamento entre propriedades de atributos de pareamentos independentes ou entre propriedades dos elementos linguísticos que se compatibilizam num padrão construcional.* (MACHADO VIEIRA, 2019: 161).

process defined by the author as *conservatism via entrenchment* (GOLDBERG, 2019: 176).

The examples presented so far reveal an amount of particular features with regard to constituent order in Double-object Constructions. Despite sharing similar communicative purposes at a first take, we ought to point out that we can have a better understanding of particle positioning when we take into account the discursive-pragmatic contexts in which they are used.

### FINAL REMARKS

The study conducted for this paper promotes further discussions on constructions which are somewhat different in form but undoubtedly share communicative purposes. The higher frequency of one of the patterns investigated reveals speakers' preferences for one of the constructions as it is more expressive for a specific situation. Therefore, it becomes possible to link constituent order to factors that go beyond the end-weight principle. We have come across results that indicate different contexts for the use of [jogar fora o lixo] and [jogar (o) lixo fora], contributing to a better understanding of discourse demands with regard to three-argument structures.

Although alternation between continuous and discontinuous patterns do not always lead to change in meaning, data analysis revealed specific communicative situations in which there is clear preference for one construction over another. It has also come to our attention the importance of dealing with variation as a key concept in Construction Grammar: if constructions are coexisting pairings in grammar, how can one differentiate them in terms of pragmatics? How can we move forward to a better analysis on the specific contexts which continuous and discontinuous patterns are used?

The debate imposed on two highly productive constructions in Brazilian Portuguese requires further investigation in order to establish a clearer view on pattern organization in the constructional inventory, i.e., construct-icon.

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