Conceptual integration as a tool for description of some grammatical phenomena in Portuguese

António Suárez Abreu

Universidade Estadual Paulista

The emergence of pragmatics and functional linguistics in the second half of the 20th century – confronting the prevailing Chomskyan formal model of generative grammar – has brought new instruments that allow us to understand with advantage language in use. But there remained several unfathomable problems that only recently, with the raising of cognitive linguistics, might have been explained. The aim of this paper is just to throw some light on some already unsolved problems in Portuguese grammar, involving morphological reduction and the employment of tense and mood, using the theory of conceptual integration developed at first by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) and the principle of complex systems self-organization. My statement is that the same blending principle that explains, for instance, conceptual metaphors and metonymy can easily be utilized for elucidating compound-noun reductions, polite and hypothetical uses of some verb tenses as well as the use of the so-called historical present employed when narrating past events and, even more, the apparent clash between subjunctive mood in concessive clause and its original hypothetical meaning.

1. Introduction

The theory of conceptual integration or blending, developed by Turner (1996) and Fauconnier and Turner (2002), arises in the wake of mental space’s theory by Fauconnier (1998). According to this point of view, producing as much as receiving a text, we set up our backstage cognition from our long term memory in order to grasp blueprints for what we listen or read. It is this behavior that allows us to confer different meanings to sentences as This beach is safe / This child is safe. Mental spaces are hence little pieces of long term memory which opens up when we produce or receive texts.

Conceptual integration is small subsets of mental operations that work in all levels of language: phonology, morphology, syntax, text and even before, as stated by Turner (1996), unifying separate and partial sensory inputs processed in different brain regions. When one sees a horse, for instance, its shape, color and motion are processed at different places in the brain, but connected in a single perception by conceptual integration. According to the author, “The horse that seems one thing corresponds to a widely distributed fragmentation in the brain. Mentally, the unitary horse is a fabulous blend.” (op. cit., p. 111). It is also important to say that even the horse we see is not the entire horse, but only one side of it that we integrate conceptually into its whole body in our mind, as we do with the part of our friend that we see over a table pub, integrating him into his whole body.

This very basic kind of conceptual integration (or blending) is suggested to be called first-order blending by Bache (2005) and, in principle, is independent of language. According to him, language could not have developed without this previous first-order blending. The symbolic links between phonological structures and semantics structures would be unthinkable without it.

In this paper my intent is neither to defend the conceptual integration theory — which is taken for granted — nor to explain its details at least in this introduction. My aim is to use it at the second-order blending, also suggested by Bache (op. cit., p. 1622), “that produces regular clausal constructions.” But, on the other hand, only singling out the strong influence of history and culture on language we can understand all the meaning of a construction.

Let us focus for instance on English idioms as: he is at stake (he is in danger) and to put the cat out of the bag (to tell a secret). Carrying out the origins of them, we will conclude that they are all the result of several adaptations. To be at stake is connected to death by burning, a form of capital punishment in which the condemned was bound to a large stake. Christian martyrs in Roman Empire and people judged to be heretic under the medieval Inquisition used to be executed at stake.

To put the cat out of the bag belongs to the Middle Ages, when livestock used to be sold alive usually in sacks, so the purchaser could bring it home relatively neatly, and unscrupulous merchants might replace the livestock with a cat, since cats were readily available.

The widespread incidence of adaptations in language send us to the theory of complexity in which emergent phenomena can arise without the need for an “invisible hand” (cf. Johnson, 2009), only by self adaptation. Our body, for instance, is a complex system. Having harmed a leg, after a certain time our own body can heal it. As complex systems are typically open they can be affected by external agents or events, self-adapting to them. Our feet, for example, have been made for walking, but they can be adapted culturally to play soccer. Our hands have been made for grasping objects, but they can be adapted to play the piano, paint or caress our sweetheart. Being removed by the neuroscience the
limits between mind and body, and assumed by cognitive linguistics that language (a mental activity) is embodied, there is no reason for not admitting that language is also a complex self-adaptive system as the human body is.

2. Conceptual integration in morphological and syntactic reduction in Portuguese

There is a tendency of languages in general for boiling down expressions as well as in phonetics, in morphology and syntax. An emblematic example is the reduction in English of *do not* to *don’t* or the reduction of *Los Angeles* to *LA*. This tendency is compatible with the behavior of complex systems, as we have seen, that provides continuous self adaptations. In Portuguese, it’s very common to find morphological reductions as *celular* instead of *telefone celular* (*cell phone*), *importados*, instead of *produtos importados* (*imported goods*). This phenomenon can be described by metonymic conceptual integration, in which the meaning of *telefone* (*phone*) is blended with *celular* (*cell*) and so *celular* (*cell*) can be used to mean *telefone celular* (*cell phone*).

Unlike metaphor blending, in which we have two different inputs or domains, in the metonymy blending we have a single domain, as stated by Kövecses and Radden (1998, p. 39):

> Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain, the ICM.

Hence, *celular* is the salient vehicle that highlights the target *telefone celular*, as we can see in the following diagram:

```
+-----------------------------+
<p>| target concept              |
| telefone celular            |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>celular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vehicle concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
+-----------------------------+
```

This process can be sometimes recursive, when people use *pré-pago* (*prepaid*) instead of (*telefone*) *celular* *pré-pago* (*prepaid cell phone*). Diagramming:

```
+-----------------------------+
<p>| target concept              |
| (telefone) celular <em>pré-pago</em>|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pré-pago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vehicle concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
+-----------------------------+
```

Regarding the same phenomenon in syntax, according to the general principle of cognitive grammar, defended by Taylor (2003), which blots out the limits between levels of grammar, there is a tense in Portuguese called *futuro do pretérito* that usually can be employed for events which occurred in the past, but in a future time related to another past, as in *Pedro chegou às 8h; ao meio dia almoçaria com os pais.* (*Peter arrived at 8:00; at noon he would have lunch with his parents.*) The same tense, despite that, is used for polite behavior, in sentences such as *Você me passaria o sal?* (*Would you pass me the salt?*). My statement is that this meaning of hypothesis for saving face arose from a blending in conditional constructions like *Se eu ganhasse na loteria, compraria um carro novo.* (*If I won the lottery I would buy a...*  

---

1 Idealized cognitive model.
new car). In this syntactic context, *compraria* (would buy) acquires the meaning of hypothesis from if-clauses by metonymic conceptual integration (blending between this tense and if-clauses), and hence it can be used in polite constructions as above and in others like:

Eu *gostaria* de experimentar aquela blusa que vi na vitrine.
(I'd like to try on the blouse I saw in the shop window.)

By the way, it is even possible to “put back” the if-clause in such constructions:

Eu *gostaria* de experimentar aquela blusa que vi na vitrine, *se você me trouxer*.
(I'd like to try on the blouse I saw in the shop window, if you bring it to me.)

Using the hypothetical meaning acquired by this tense, Portuguese speakers have adapted it in contexts in which there is not the intention to be polite, but only the desire of reducing evidence or saving face as in:

O governo *aumentaria* os impostos depois das eleições.
(Government would raise taxes after the elections).

In this case, the mechanism of blending must work also by disintegration as it does in metaphorical double-scope network2, as stated by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) and especially by Bache (op. cit). Actually, when we use a metaphor as *Jenson Button was a lion in the last F1 race*, not all the features of lion are blended with the English driver. Using the traditional diagram created by Fauconnier, we could see:

The features *mane* and *tail*, for instance, are disintegrated, in the sense that they are not transferred to Jenson Button. The same occurs in metaphors like: *Joe Louis*3 was a rock, *My girlfriend is an angel*, in the sense that the feature *inanimate* from the frame of rock and the feature *nonexistent* from the frame of angel are not transferred to the targets *Joe Louis* and my girlfriend.

Coming back to our last metonymic conceptual integration example (*O governo aumentaria os impostos depois das eleições = Government would raise taxes after the elections*), there is no conditional feature in it. As a matter of fact, the idea of politeness that should be implied in the use of this tense (*aumentaria* = would rise) isn’t featured. That doesn’t

---

2 Fauconnier and Turner (op. cit.) state that there is a Single-Scope Network when there are no clashes between the origin space (called input 1) and the target space (called input 2). When we use a metaphor for saying that *a candidate knocked down his adversary*, nothing in the frame of input 1 clashes against the frame of input 2. In Double-Scope Network, unlike Single-Scope, some features of input 1 clash against the frame of input 2, as we shall see further ahead. Bache, op. cit., set down both kinds of those blending into his *Third-Order blending* classification.

3 Joe Louis (1914 – 1981) was one of the most famous pugilists of the 20th century, in the United States.
happen in the occurrence. It brings out only a hypothesis instead of politeness. The conditional meaning was disintegrated, because it has not been transferred to *aumentaria* (*would raise*) in this context. Actually, we cannot “put back” an if-clause in this kind of construction as we did before:

O governo *aumentaria* os impostos depois das eleições, se ?????
(Government would raise taxes after the elections, if ?????)

This kind of construction can be employed, in the same pragmatic sense, also for events in the past, as in:

O ladrão *teria destruído* as provas.
(The thief *would have destroyed* the evidences.)

These syntactic phenomena deals with what we have named complexity or adaptive characteristic of the human language.

### 3. Broaden tense conceptual integration

There is a well known work about the problematic of verb tenses, written in 1964 by Harald Weinrich, a German philologist, who focused on tense not in singular sentences but in the structural perspective to a “textual linguistics”, stating two different speech attitudes that generate, on one hand, the narrated world that produces tales, novels, historical narratives and, on the other hand, the commented world that produces editorials, scientific reports, scholarly essays and legal treatises. (Cf. Weinrich, [1964], 1973). According to him, past tenses are usually employed in the narrated world, and present tenses, in the commented world but sometimes past tenses can be employed in the commented world and present tenses in the narrated world, producing what he calls *tense metaphors*. His purpose was to describe the pragmatic functions of those “deviations”. As we have seen, in the case of using past tenses in present time, the aim is to perform politeness or simply include a hypothetical perspective to what we say. When using the historical present in narratives (also called dramatic present or narrative present), the objective is to foreground an event, making it more vivid. Those two pragmatics intentions explain why present and past tenses used to be changed in those genres. What lacks in Weinrich’s work at all is just what makes it possible vivid.

This text tells us an event that came about in the past. Even though, all the tenses are in the present (*conseguiam* impedir incomboda sensação de agonia diante da fúria da natureza, o fim do mundo. *Procuram* manter a calma, controlar o sobressalto; *sentem* de Natário: da intempérie *poderão* escapar com vida, de bala do capataz nem por milagre. Armada a tocaia, designado o posto de cada um, *determina* como e quando entrar em ação, *exige* silêncio e *acentua* a responsabilidade da empreitada: ai daquele que *errar* a pontaria! (Amado, 1984, p. 29)\(^4\)

This kind of “tense metaphor” is usually employed as well for “hot news” in headlines as:

Presidente Lula *diz* que apoia Hugo Chaves.
(President Lula *says* that he *supports* Hugo Chaves.)

Candidato *critica* decisão do governo de apoiar Hugo Chaves.
(Candidate *criticizes* government decision on supporting Hugo Chaves.)

and in everyday conversation as:

---

\(^4\) Being used to the longish waiting time of ambushes, toughen in the dangers of fight, close to death, they don’t *manage* yet to stop the uncomfortable sensation of agony facing the fury of the natural world, the doomsday. They *try* to keep calm, to control the fright; but the biggest fear they *feel* from Natário: from the rainstorm they *will survive*, but from the bullet of the foreman, neither by miracle.

Set up the ambush, specified the position for each one, Natário *decides* how and when to engage with, he *demands* silence and *emphasizes* the responsibility of the task: alas who *will miss* the sighting! JORGE AMADO, Tocaia Grande.

\(^5\) Subjunctive future in portuguese.
Eu estava pensando em ficar em casa no feriado, mas de repente minha namorada aparece e me convida para uma viagem.

(I was thinking about staying home on the holiday, but suddenly my girlfriend comes and invites me for a trip.)

In all these cases, we have a conceptual integration from the past to the present time, by compression. Compression is a kind of conceptual integration widely common in our daily life. There are a lot of commented examples in Fauconnier and Turner (2002), some of them well known, as the Regatta in which a reporter imagines a race between two boats: the Great American II in present time, and the Northern Light, a hundred years ago.

There is time conceptual integration by compression even in the commented world, when we give a quotation such as: Montaigne says that death rides us of all our obligations. Despite the fact that Michel Montaigne wrote such sentence in his 1877 Essays, we compress it today in our current discourse. In scientific text quotations, there are other conceptual integrations by compression: the merging of someone’s ideas with ours.

4. Subjunctive mood in concessive clauses introduced by embora: another example of complexity, or adaption by conceptual integration

Using language, we usually talk about state of affairs and sometimes in subordinate clauses about actions or events that did not happen at the moment of speech, from the point of view of the speaker. Let us consider the following sentences:

(1) Pedro sabe que a Terra é redonda.
(Peter knows that the Earth is round.)

(2) Pedro não sabe que a terra é redonda.
(Peter doesn’t know that the Earth is round.)

Both subordinate clauses in these sentences report states of affairs and have their verbs in the indicative mood. In the sentence below:

(3) Pedro quer que a seleção brasileira vença a próxima Copa do Mundo.
(Peter wants the Brazilian team to win the next World Cup.)

the subordinate clause does not report a state of affairs, but just a possibility and hence has its verb in the subjunctive mood. The same occurs in practice in almost all subordinate clauses in Portuguese that do not report a state of affairs. Unexpectedly, in concessive clauses introduced by the conjunction embora, although reporting a state of affairs, it has the verb in the subjunctive mood as in:

(4) Meu carro novo não tem airbag, embora seja um carro caro.
(My new car doesn’t have airbags, although it is an expensive car.)

To be an expensive car is a fact, a state of affairs, but the verb seja is in subjunctive mood, which means hypothetical situations in Portuguese.

Consulting the “Corpus do Português” (Portuguese corpus)\(^6\), we can see that only in the early 19th century, embora begins to be employed as a conjunction. In the previous centuries, it was used only as an interjection indicating a wish that something would happen “in a good moment”; and for this reason, it was always connected to the subjunctive mood, as we can see in the following sentences extracted from 18th century texts of the mentioned corpus:

(5) Duvide-se embora da origem da formasura, porém não se duvide da do amor.
(Doubt “in a good moment” the origin of beauty, but don’t doubt the origin of love)

(6) Sejão embora condes, Marquizes, & Duques, mas sejão como as frutas da sua terra.
(Be “in a good moment” counts, marquises, & dukes, but be like the fruits from your homeland.)

In such clauses, the subjunctive mood (duvide-se, sejão = sejam) is appropriate, since they report actions that did not happen yet, that is to say they do not report a state of affairs.

Before the 19th century, the concessive conjunction was only apesar de as in:

A pesar de tão fatais calamidades, será sempre feliz o glorioso reino de Vossa Magestade. (1756)

---

\(^6\) Davies, Mark and Michael Ferreira. (2006-) Corpus do Português (45 million words, 1300s-1900s). Available online at http://www.corpusdoportugues.org.
(Although suffering such inevitable calamities, the glorious kingdom of Your Majesty will always be happy.)

Since the early 19th century, the old meaning of *embora* (“in a good moment”) has been less and less used and its utilization as a concessive conjunction begun to arise. The question is why? The answer is: adaption in language complex system by conceptual integration. Thumbing through examples in the 18th century and even before, we observe that such word was always used in clauses that, despite not having formal concessive conjunction, were mostly in opposition to another clause, as we can see in the (5) and (6) examples. From this context, fading out the ancient wishing meaning (in a good moment), its new grammatical function of concessive conjunction arises due to conceptual integration between this word and that opposition syntactic context.

It is important now to highlight that, differently from the compositional account of formal semantics, cognitive linguistics emphasizes the strong function of context for setting up new meanings in concrete utterances, in different scenarios. As says Coulson (2006, p. 17):

> On this view, interdependence of meaning and background knowledge is no accident. Contextual variation in meaning is ubiquitous because context is an inherent component in the meaning construction process.

Well, another visible sign of adaptation from context to syntax is the nowadays occurrence of the subjunctive mood in concessive sentences introduced by *embora*, even though they do not describe a hypothetical situation, but a state of affairs. I argue that there was, in this blending, a disintegration of the hypothetical meaning from the frame of such mood. In other words, we can say that *embora*, according to this new grammatical function, brought together the use only of the “form” of the subjunctive mood as a fallen appendix that just points out the evidence of its diachronic adaptation.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to apply the conceptual integration model of cognitive linguistics to some problems of lexical reduction and pragmatic uses of tense and mood in Portuguese syntax. Although this theory cannot be depicted as a “silver bullet”, there is a wide range of grammatical phenomena that can be explained by it. I argue that not only this theory but cognitive linguistics as well and the complexity theory must work close to functional grammar in order to achieve the goal of describing languages in a consistent way.

References