

The lexical-specific nature of syntax: Hypothetical manner constructions and Filler-Slot Relations

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The distinction between lexicon and syntax has played an important role in linguistic theory. For instance, in the generative approach, lexical expressions are freely inserted under the terminal nodes of syntactic phrase structure trees (Diessel & Hilpert 2016). However, the dichotomy of lexicon vs. syntax and their presumed independence has long been challenged in particular by work in the framework of Construction Grammar (e.g., Goldberg 1995). Such work has proposed that the co-occurrence patterns of lexemes and constructions is functionally motivated; for instance, verbs occur in some construction's slot especially if the verb's function/meaning is compatible with that of the construction (Goldberg 1995:50; Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004:99), which gives rise to a joint distribution of lexemes in constructions that are known in the literature as 'Filler-Slot Relations' (see Diessel 2019: 20). In a usage-based framework, such probabilistic associations constitute part of each language user's individual and ever-changing exemplar-based representation of linguistic knowledge (Beckner et al. 2009), which is why our general understanding of linguistic knowledge but also our particular understanding of specific constructions benefits from the study of such associations between constructional slots and lexemes filling them (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003).

The present study applies this logic to the analysis of Filler-Slot Relations by exploring Hypothetical Manner Constructions (HMCs) in Mexican Spanish (e.g. *parece como si estuviera borracho* 'it looks as if he were drunk'; Olguín Martínez 2021). Our analysis is based on 1362 instances of six constructional schemas (with NPs as locatives or non-locatives; see Appendix) from The Corpus del Español NOW corpus (News on the Web). While we know that the first slot in such HMCs can be filled by a variety of different verbs (e.g., *sentir* 'to feel', *es* 'it is', *ver* 'to look', *comportar* 'to behave', *actuar* 'to act', *sonar* 'to sound', and *parecer* 'to seem', see Olguín Martínez 2022), much less is known about both the specific association patterns between these constructions and the verbs they take and, more importantly, what such patterns reveal about these constructions' functions (which in turn can inform analyses of their acquisitional paths, and processing).

We applied a revised version of distinctive collexeme analysis (Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004, Gries, to appear) to our concordance data, specifically a newly-developed kind of analysis that adds the equivalent of confidence intervals to the collostructional strengths usually reported, and does that in a way that also helps assess the dispersion of the filler-slot types across the corpus. This is a major improvement of existing work because, while much usage-based work has happily made connections to many aspects of domain-general cognition such as frequency, exposure, learning, and contingency, most collostructional work has narrowly focused on frequency as the main tool of quantification – the present study, however, offers a wider coverage of cognitively relevant notions/mechanisms. It is expected that this revised version of distinctive collexeme analysis will enable us to assess all the dimensions of collostructional attraction or repulsion of HMCs, and other constructions, in a more theoretical/explanatory way.

Appendix. Hypothetical manner constructional schemas in Spanish

(1) como 'like' constructional schema with non-locative NP
_____ como +NP (e.g. se comporta como un doctor
'he acts like a doctor').

(2) como 'like' constructional schema with locative NP
_____ como +LOC.PHR (e.g. se siente como en la playa
'it feels as if we were on the beach').

(3) igual que 'like' constructional schema with non-locative NP
_____ igual que +NP (e.g. se comporta igual que un doctor
'he acts like a doctor').

(4) igual que 'like' constructional schema with locative NP
_____ igual que +LOC.PHR (e.g. se siente igual que en la playa
'it feels as if were on the beach').

(5) como si 'as if' constructional schema with non-locative NP
_____ como si +ser.SUBJ + NP (e.g. se comporta como si fuera un doctor
'he acts as if he were a doctor').

(6) como si 'as if' constructional schema with locative NP
_____ como si +estar.SUBJ + NP (e.g. se siente como si estuviéramos en la playa
'it feels as if we were on the beach').

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