

Beyond measures: distance and volume in intensifying constructions in Brazilian Portuguese

Além das medidas: distância e volume em construções intensificadoras no Português Brasileiro

Déborah Ribeiro de Alvarenga 

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro: Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.
E-mail: deborahralvarenga@gmail.com

Abstract

This article consists of an investigation into the use of non-traditional intensifying constructions in Brazilian Portuguese, formed by plural names of units of measurement, such as “correr quilômetros” and “chover litros”. The aim is to map, analyze and categorize these V + Xintensifier constructions in digital contexts, understanding their morphosyntactic and discursive functioning. The research falls within the field of Functional-Cognitive linguistics, with an emphasis on the sociolinguistic approach, and the Usage-Based Construction Grammar, which considers linguistic constructions as associations between form and meaning, shaped by the concrete experience of language. From this perspective, we intend to make a valuable contribution to studies in the field by describing innovative forms of intensification and expanding discussions on variation in a constructionist context. The specific goals include verifying the conditioning factors involved in this phenomenon and the possibility of alternation between different intensifying forms.

The study’s methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze constructions and compare its variants. Data were obtained

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from *Sketch Engine* and *Corpus do Português*, and filtered to exclude cases where the unit of measurement does not directly intensify the verb, resulting in a *corpus* of 598 examples. The analysis will examine aspects such as the most frequent verbs in these constructions, the types and animacy of subjects, and variation among intensifiers. Finally, sociolinguistic models will be applied to assess frequency and the factors conditioning the use of these expressions.

The results of this study revealed that intensifier constructions in Brazilian Portuguese, especially those formed by units of measurement, vary significantly according to the type of verb, subject, animacy and discursive context. It was observed that intensifiers based on units such as “liters”, “meters” and “kilometers” are widely used with a strong potential for creating hyperbolic and metaphorical images. In addition, the animacy of the subject has been identified as a creative factor, with animated subjects often leading to intensifications of emotional or affective charge. The type of verb also plays a crucial role in the choice of intensifier, with verbs of movement or feeling often combined with units of measurement that indicate intensity. Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of the mechanisms of linguistic variation and innovation in Portuguese intensifying constructions, proposing new approaches to the treatment of intensification in diverse discursive contexts.

Keywords

Intensification; Constructional Variation; Sociolinguistics; Construction Grammar.

Resumo

Este artigo consiste em uma investigação acerca do uso de construções intensificadoras não tradicionais no português brasileiro, formadas por nomes plurais de unidades de medida, como “correr quilômetros” e “chover litros”. O objetivo geral é mapear, analisar e categorizar essas construções V + Xintensificador em contextos digitais, compreendendo seu funcionamento morfossintático e discursivo. A pesquisa insere-se no campo da linguística Funcional-Cognitiva, com ênfase na abordagem sociolinguística e na Gramática de Construções Baseada no Uso, que considera as construções linguísticas como associações entre forma e significado, modeladas pela experiência concreta da linguagem. Sob essa perspectiva, pretendemos contribuir de forma valiosa para os estudos na área ao descrever formas inovadoras de intensificação e ao expandir as discussões sobre variação no contexto construcionista. Os objetivos específicos incluem verificar as condicionantes envolvidas nesse fenômeno e a possibilidade de alternância entre diferentes formas intensificadoras.

A metodologia do estudo combina abordagens qualitativas e quantitativas para analisar construções e comparar suas formas variantes. Os dados, obtidos via *Sketch*

Engine e Corpus do Português, foram filtrados para excluir ocorrências em que a unidade de medida não intensifica diretamente o verbo, resultando em um *corpus* de 598 exemplos. A análise investigará aspectos como os verbos mais frequentes nessas construções, tipos e animacidade dos sujeitos, além da variação entre intensificadores. Por fim, serão aplicados modelos sociolinguísticos para examinar a frequência e os fatores que condicionam o uso dessas expressões.

Os resultados deste estudo revelaram que as construções intensificadoras no português brasileiro, especialmente aquelas formadas por unidades de medida, variam significativamente de acordo com o tipo de verbo, sujeito, animacidade e contexto discursivo. Observou-se que os intensificadores baseados em unidades como “litros”, “metros” e “quilômetros” são amplamente usados com um forte potencial para criar imagens hiperbólicas e metafóricas. Além disso, a animação do sujeito foi identificada como um fator criativo, sendo que os sujeitos animados geralmente levam a intensificações de carga emocional ou afetiva. O tipo de verbo também desempenha um papel crucial na escolha do intensificador, com verbos de movimento ou sentimento frequentemente combinados com unidades de medida que indicam intensidade. De modo geral, o estudo contribui para uma melhor compreensão dos mecanismos de variação e inovação linguística nas construções intensificadoras do português, propondo novas abordagens para o tratamento da intensificação em diversos contextos discursivos.

Palavras-chave

Intensificação; Variação construcional; Sociolinguística; Gramática de Construções.

Introduction

The process of intensification in Portuguese refers to expressions of degree that involve the use of linguistic elements to emphasize, amplify or intensify the meaning of a word or expression. We therefore consider the definitions of gradation and intensification made by Vieira and Machado Vieira (2008, p. 63):

[...] constitui um recurso semântico-argumentativo muito produtivo na língua portuguesa, empregado para indicar que a dimensão ou a intensidade de dado elemento ultrapassa os limites do que se concebe como relativamente normal/neutro a ele.¹

¹ [...] it constitutes a very productive semantic-argumentative resource in the Portuguese language, used to indicate that the dimension or intensity of a given element exceeds the limits of what is conceived

Intensification is among the most frequent discursive strategies used in verbal interactions. It is considered a “semantic-argumentative” resource because it involves the use of linguistic elements that increase the expressive force of a message, enhancing its impact on the interlocutor. These intensifying elements can be adjectives, adverbs, idiomatic expressions, among others, which add an emotional or emphatic charge to the discourse. Thus, intensification alters the meaning of words or phrases by making them more emphatic, exaggerated or categorical. For example, saying “He is very intelligent” instead of “He is intelligent” intensifies the quality attributed to the person. Furthermore, by intensifying a statement, the speaker can express greater certainty, urgency or importance, which can influence the perception and reaction of the listener or reader.

In view of this, this pilot study aims to investigate innovative² intensifying expressions in use in Brazilian Portuguese (BP), composed of plural names of units of measurement, such as “andar quilômetros” and “chover litros”. The central problem, therefore, is: How are units of measurement used as intensification mechanisms for verbs in different contexts and communicative situations? So we want to answer the following question: Are these expressions really frequent in the linguistic expression of Brazilians? How does this happen? What conditions interfere with their use? What is the network of intensification constructions in which they participate? Naturally, these questions will be joined by others as the research progresses.

The study is linked to the field of Sociolinguistics, especially the socioconstructionist approach. We intend to analyze constructions with units of measurement in the light of Usage-Based Construction Grammar, a theoretical approach within Functional-cognitive linguistics, which proposes that linguistic units are formed by associations between forms and meanings. Constructions range from individual words to more complex patterns, such as idiomatic phrases and grammatical structures (see Goldberg, 1995). In addition, this approach is called “usage-based” because it emphasizes that language learning is strongly influenced by its actual use. In other words, linguistic constructions are formed, stored and organized in the mind based on the experience of concrete language use, whether spoken or written.

The *corpus* will be built with examples of intensifying constructions formed by verbs (V) linked to names of units of measurement (Xintensifier). Let’s look at some Portuguese examples:

- a) E vamos viver em paz Chorar litros, sorrir mares ! Vontade de ir pra praia, sentar na areia, tomar um banho de mar, relaxar... (‘Let’s live in peace — cry

as relatively normal/neutral to it.

² Innovative (or less traditional) forms “are related to the fact that an adjective, or any other category, is used in another linear position with different semantic effects from those of its canonical position.” (Foltran and Nóbrega, 2016, n.p., our translation).

rivers, smile oceans! I just feel like going to the beach, sitting on the sand, taking a dip in the sea, relaxing...')³

- b)** Procuro, ao menos, ser educado. Chego a andar quilômetros (exagero, é claro) com algum papel de bala na mão (...) ('I try, at the very least, to be polite. I'll walk for miles (well, that's an exaggeration) just holding on to a candy wrapper')

In the first example, the unit of measurement *litros* ('liters') and the body of water *mares* ('seas') were used to intensify the verbs *crying* and *laughing* respectively. Rather than suggesting a greater intensity than what is considered normal for these actions, the sentence is constructed to propose an antagonism between crying/smiling and liters/seas, due to the poles of states of affairs associated with emotions and the difference in their size. In the second example, we have a length marking unit – *quilômetros* ('kilometers') – intensifying the verb *andar* ('to walk'), suggesting that the author walked for a long distance or for a long time. These intensifying expressions were used metaphorically and hyperbolically to amplify the emotional impact, emphasizing the feeling of anguish caused by crying and walking, respectively.

For organizational purposes, we will analyze the units of measurement by categorizing them into 2 types: length ('meters' and 'kilometers') and volume ('liters'). The data will be collected using the *corpora* managers *Sketch Engine* and *Corpus do Português*, since we expect to obtain more occurrences in discursive practices that circulate on digital networks. The analysis, in turn, will be conducted by looking at various factors, including the type of verb, the type of subject, animacy and the content of intensification.

Firstly, the type of verb is a crucial factor because its categorization can directly influence the choice of intensifiers and the discursive effects generated. Next, the type of subject affects the formation of meaning in intensification, as there is an important semantic and discursive relationship between subject and verb. More defined subjects can emphasize the particular experience of an event, while more undefined subjects can suggest greater magnitude or impact, or can create more abstract intensification effects. The choice to consider animacy is related to the desire to explore creative and innovative uses that can arise from this factor. We believe that animate subjects, such as people or animals, generally allow for more emotional or subjective interpretations of intensification, while inanimate subjects can have more descriptive or metaphorical uses. Finally, the *tenor* is a central element, since intensifying constructions only gain full meaning in interaction with the discursive environment, bringing a more positive or more negative appreciation of the event.

³ The sources of all the data used throughout the text are indicated in Annex 1 of this article. Besides, the data has been quoted exactly as it appears in its original text, without correction or adaptation.

We justify the topic we are proposing based on the growing theoretical and explanatory interest in constructional variation within Construction Grammar (CG), as well as a possible contribution of a study that deals with this variable phenomenon in detail. So far, discussions have prioritized constructional stability or change over variation. The proposal also arises from the opportunity to describe unconventional forms of intensification from the perspective of Functional-Cognitive Linguistics, an approach that focuses on sociocultural conceptualization. In this context, we recognize that the grammar of a language contains structures with a certain level of schematicity, the result of processes of grammatical or lexical constructionalization (the definition of this term will be in a later section). The first of these processes generates procedural constructional units, while the second forms more crystallized lexical units.

General and specific objectives

The general objective is to map, analyze and categorize, in uses of BP circulating on digital networks, intensifying expressions of verbal predicators that are structured by Nplural of unit of measure. In addition, a related objective is to fill the gap in the comprehensive description of the structures under analysis, through the elaboration of a detailed empirical description. From a functional-cognitive perspective, this work contributes to the description of innovative forms of intensification and to the broadening of discussions on variation, enriching the constructionist context.

The specific objectives are to verify how these [V + XIntensifier] constructions are used by Brazilians to intensify verbal predicators, based on questions such as: 1. With which verbs are these units linked? 2. How can these verbs be categorized? 3. What types of subjects are projected? 4. What is the animacy of these subjects? 5. Are there more than one intensifier for the same verb? 6. What is the content of these intensifiers? 7. What conditioning factors are involved in the inclination to use one construction or another?

In other words, we aim to verify the conditioning factors involved in this phenomenon, as well as the possibility of alternating between the intensifying forms studied. The goal is to analyze the role of units of measure as intensifiers in Brazilian Portuguese, seeking to understand their morphosyntactic and discursive functioning.

Hypothesis

We hypothesize that the constructions under study are very productive in written Brazilian Portuguese. Furthermore, when comparing the constructions with other forms of intensification – in addition to the variant forms themselves – there will be morphosyntactic variation, possibly conditioned by discursive and semantic factors.

We also believe that these expressions intensify the verbal predicator both by profiling a negative and a positive appraisal of the event. In this way, the constructions could promote a hyperbolic reading, causing an obvious exaggeration, due to the discursive motivation to be detected in the contextual environment. We also believe that the verbs involved project subjects of different types, with a greater occurrence of [+animate], given the category of verbs we expect to find more frequently.

Theoretical premises

This research was conducted in the light of three main theoretical frameworks: Construction Grammar, Functional-Cognitive Linguistics and Sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics provides the basis for understanding how variations in language are deeply intertwined with social, cultural and contextual factors, emphasizing the importance of communicative context in the formation and interpretation of utterances. Functional-Cognitive Linguistics, on the other hand, emphasizes that language is shaped by communicative functions and cognitive processes, highlighting how speakers use intensification strategies to express emotions, persuade audiences, among other pragmatic functions. Finally, Construction Grammar complements this perspective by focusing on how certain units, called constructions, are used in a conventional way to convey specific meanings. Thus, the combination of these approaches provides a multidimensional analysis that encompasses social, cognitive and structural aspects of language, allowing for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of intensification strategies in discourse.

Usage-Based Construction Grammar

Considering that language functions as a system of social communication in which speakers are influenced by context and their intentions when choosing linguistic forms, and seeing grammar as a flexible structure in constant evolution, we understand that the study of this linguistic phenomenon requires a basis in the practical experience of language use or processing. In order to explore these structures, it is necessary to adopt assumptions aligned with Functional-Cognitivist and Socioconstructionist Linguistics, in particular with the conception of language as a Construction Grammar.

The interest in idioms has led to the need to represent linguistic knowledge in a constructionist way. In this sense, we consider idioms to be multidimensional symbolic units of language, since they combine attributes of form and function. To a certain extent, they differ from other linguistic units in the fact that their composition tends to follow a less regular pattern, undergoing a process of crystallization of form and meaning. In addition, they are learned largely by memorization, since speakers generally do not deduce their meaning from the conventional sense of their components:

Expressões idiomáticas são unidades simbólicas: unidades de representação morfossintática que estão relacionadas com propriedades funcionais – semânticas ou discursivo-pragmáticas – ímpares, incomparáveis às de outras formas. Em outras palavras, são concebidas como combinações de vocábulos que se caracterizam multidimensionalmente: qualquer expressão idiomática se configura num continuum que lida com fatores de diferentes dimensões (fonético-fonológica, lexical, morfossintática, semântica, pragmática e cognitiva).⁴ (Machado Vieira, 2014, p. 106)

Expressões idiomáticas são associadas também a unidades às quais se atribui sentido figurado. E são, sem dúvida, reveladoras de padrões da conceptualização humana, culturalmente determinados: estruturas conceptuais metafóricas e metonímicas. Tanto é assim que a compreensão do sentido de algumas delas por um estrangeiro não se dá com a mesma facilidade que ocorre entre falantes nativos de uma língua, pois envolve também uma experiência sócio-histórico-cultural que o falante estrangeiro normalmente não tem, pelo menos a princípio.⁵ (Machado Vieira, 2014, p. 107)

In this context, idiomatic expressions are linked to units that represent figurative meanings, whether metonymic or metaphorical, that reveal culturally influenced patterns. These expressions have peculiar meanings, varying in terms of the degree of semantic freezing. Therefore, these meanings result from a process of constructional lexicalization, used to meet the needs of culturally and interactionally motivated expression. This process leads to the activation of different domains of language conceptualization, whether metaphorical or metonymic.

According to Construction Grammar, our linguistic inventory is made up of constructions, units that are interconnected through inheritance relations and similarity in their properties, and which combines form (prosodic, phonetic-phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, textual) and function (semantic, discursive, pragmatic, cognitive and social). For Goldberg (1995), everything from affixes to more abstract patterns can be considered grammatical constructions, which are organized

⁴ Idiomatic expressions are symbolic units: units of morphosyntactic representation that are related to unique functional – semantic or discursive-pragmatic – properties, incomparable to those of other forms. In other words, they are conceived as combinations of words that are characterized multidimensionally: any idiomatic expression is configured in a continuum that deals with factors from different dimensions (phonetic-phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic, semantic, pragmatic and cognitive).

⁵ Idiomatic expressions are also associated with units to which figurative meaning is attributed. And they undoubtedly reveal culturally determined patterns of human conceptualization: metaphorical and metonymic conceptual structures. So much so that it is not as easy for a foreigner to understand the meaning of some of them as it is for native speakers of a language, because it also involves a socio-historical-cultural experience that the foreign speaker does not normally have, at least at first.

in a network of nodes/pairings that maintain relationships between themselves, such as inheritance and polysemy. Constructs are, therefore, practical manifestations of the constructional patterns in this network.

Ao postular que a gramática consiste em um inventário estruturado de construções, organizado na forma de uma rede, não somente cabe ao pesquisador descrever fenômenos da língua como pareamentos de forma e função (as construções), mas também indicar o modo como a construção a ser descrita pode ser localizada de um modo coerente nessa rede através de relações de diversos tipos. A partir desse ponto é que surgem algumas distinções entre os modelos construcionistas vigentes.⁶ (Oliveira; Alonso, 2022, p. 6)

CG challenges the traditional compartmentalized knowledge organization model by highlighting the presence of these constructions. The representation of constructions in the constructional network involves parameters such as schematicity, (non) compositionality, productivity and contextuality. Among them, the first is the one we will focus on in this article. According to Traugott and Trousdale (2013), linguistic schemas are abstract, semantically general patterns that group together related constructions within a language. These schemas reflect unconscious generalizations made by language users and are organized in a hierarchical constructional network. Thus, levels of schematicity indicate how general or specific a schema is—broader categories like “furniture” or “nouns” are more abstract, while items like “armchair” or “count nouns” are more specific. Also, schemas are instantiated by subschemas (or mesoconstructions), which in turn consist of microconstructions – specific instances such as “may” (a microconstruction of the subschema “modal”, itself part of the schema “auxiliary”).

Furthermore, according to this CG, language is composed of a highly structured inventory of linguistic units, organized hierarchically as a network of grammatical constructions, known as the *constructicon*. This *constructicon* is described by some researchers as a *continuum* between lexicon and syntax, while others consider it as a kind of large lexicon, formed by constructions of different types (see Diessel, 2015; 2019).

There are also branches of this theory that are dedicated to studying how linguistic constructions change over time, examining how internal factors of the language (such as the reanalysis of structures) and external factors (such as linguistic contacts

⁶ By postulating that grammar consists of a structured inventory of constructions, organized in the form of a network, it is not only up to the researcher to describe language phenomena as pairings of form and function (the constructions), but also to indicate how the construction to be described can be located in a coherent way in this network through relations of various kinds. It is from this point that some distinctions emerge between the current constructionist models.

and cultural changes) influence these transformations. For Traugott and Trousdale (2013), linguistic change can occur through constructional change or constructionalization. The first occurs within an existing construction, affecting internal dimensions of the construction without generating a new node in the language's network of constructions, while the second refers to the creation of a new construction in the language, that is, the emergence of a new node in the network. Thus, for constructionalization to occur, "a new pairing must emerge, involving both a change in form and a change in function, causing a new node in the constructional network to come into existence." (Oliveira; Alonso, 2022, p. 9)

It is worth noting that the constructionist perspective of change, according to Traugott and Trousdale (2013), states that innovations arise from individual knowledge and are reflected in each person's constructional networks. Changes, on the other hand, occur when these innovations undergo a process of conventionalization within a community, becoming shared. In other words, changes in a community's constructional network occur when small innovations, which arise in individual interactions between speakers and listeners, are accepted and disseminated by the community, largely through processes of analogy and parsing/neanalysis (see Machado Vieira and Wiedemer, 2019).

However, as with any developing theoretical approach, it is natural for divergences to arise regarding the formalization and empirical analysis of certain concepts. In the case of CG, the concept of constructionalization has also generated theoretical debates. In this context, the critical review by Börjars, Nigel and Walkden (2015) and the theoretical reflections by Hilpert (2021) on the proposal presented by Traugott and Trousdale (2013) stand out:

As críticas e discussões residem fundamentalmente sobre a dificuldade de se estabelecer com precisão os limites do processo de construcionalização e sua relação com os estágios de pré e pós-construcionalização, além do fato de, às vezes, ser difícil distinguir o processo de construcionalização do processo de mudança construcional. Essa dificuldade leva Börjars e colegas a questionarem quando estabelecer com certeza que uma construção é uma nova construção no constructicon e quando ela não é a mesma construção que passou por algum processo de mudança, seja na forma, seja na função, ou em ambas.⁷ (Oliveira, Alonso, 2022, p. 9)

⁷ The criticisms and discussions are fundamentally about the difficulty of precisely establishing the limits of the process of constructionalization and its relationship with the stages of pre- and post-constructionalization, as well as the fact that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the process of constructionalization from the process of constructional change. This difficulty leads Börjars and colleagues to question when to establish with certainty that a construction is a new construction in the constructicon and when it is not the same construction that has undergone some process of change, either in form or function, or both.

With this, Elizabeth Traugott defines constructionalization as the “establishment of a new symbolic link between form and meaning that is replicated by a network of users of a language and that involves an addition to the constructicon” (Traugott and Trousdale, 2021, n.p.). This description highlights the idea that constructionalization is intrinsically linked to the gradual dissemination of a linguistic form among the members of a community, characterizing itself as a social phenomenon, not an individual one. The individual character, in turn, is more associated with what the authors define as innovation.

A central problem involving CG is the lack of studies that have linguistic variation as their main focus. Machado Vieira and Wiedemer (2020, p. 266) state that “the phenomenon of linguistic variation needs to have its place outlined in terms of both the competition and the coexistence of variants”. This means that issues such as social, historical and cultural influence on the choice of variants, as well as the mechanisms internal to grammar that enable or limit such variation, are still poorly explored in this theoretical model. Without addressing these dynamics, CG may miss opportunities to integrate variation as a central component in the explanation of linguistic change and, furthermore, fail to take linguistic heterogeneity into account:

o que se percebe é que a ideia de Gramática de Construções mais difundida por todos “põe em proeminência uma perspectiva homogênea da língua” (Wiedemer; Machado Vieira, 2022, p. 235) ou, pelo menos, não destaca claramente o caráter de heterogeneidade da gramática, seja na perspectiva do falante monolíngue ou monodialetal, seja na do falante bi/multilíngue ou multidialetal. (...) Assumir essa postura nas pesquisas construcionistas é urgente, uma vez que ressalta uma visão heterogênea da linguagem e reflete uma realidade linguística mais complexa dos falantes.⁸ (Machado Vieira; Wiedemer; Cavalcante, 2024, p. 17-18)

By integrating CG with Sociolinguistics, it is possible to have a more complete view of how linguistic practices emerge, spread and stabilize in communities, taking into account both formal patterns and the social factors that shape language use. Both share a perspective centered on language use, but each focuses on different aspects that can complement each other in interesting ways. Given these ideas, an innovative proposal for modeling variation in the scope of CG has emerged in the Brazilian scenario, developed by Marcia dos Santos Machado Vieira (UFRJ) and

⁸ what is clear is that the idea of Construction Grammar that is most widely used “emphasizes a homogeneous perspective of language” (Wiedemer; Machado Vieira, 2022, p. 235) or, at least, does not clearly highlight the heterogeneous character of grammar, whether from the perspective of the monolingual or monodialectal speaker, or from that of the bi/multilingual or multidialectal speaker. (...) Taking this stance in constructionist research is urgent, since it highlights a heterogeneous view of language and reflects a more complex linguistic reality of speakers.

Marcos Luiz Wiedemer (UERJ): the socioconstructionist approach. We can say that this perspective offers a more holistic way of understanding how language varies and changes, taking into account both structural factors and the social contexts in which constructions are used.

Functional-Cognitive Linguistics

Functional-Cognitive Linguistics emphasizes the actual use of language in everyday communication situations to achieve objectives, highlighting the importance of the functions that language performs in human communication and the forces to which it is subject (cognitive, affective-emotional, socio-discursive, cultural). This theory considers human cognition to be fundamental to the understanding of language. It involves examining how speakers process, organize and retain information and linguistic generalizations in their minds to create language objects. Therefore, it studies how constructions are used to express specific meanings, how certain associations (distance, volume, etc.) thrive and to what extent this is related to the sociocultural context and the conceptualization adopted/expected by a community.

With regard to functionalism, “language is, first and foremost, an instrument of communication, and this fact is central to explaining why languages are the way they are” (Butler, 2003, p. 2). Grammar, therefore, would be a set of regularities that are established in a conventional way through linguistic use in different discursive situations. According to Pinheiro and Ferrari (2020, p. 599-600), “in this conception, the observed regularities reflect interactional situations and discursive conditions, from which language establishes itself as an instrument of communication”.

Cognitive Linguistics (CL), in turn, is an approach that understands language as a manifestation of human cognition. It considers that language reflects human thought, that is, that meaning is not something abstract, but rather shaped by bodily, emotional and cultural experience. Furthermore, linguistic use would be linked to general cognitive processes, which means that there is no separate “linguistic faculty”, but language shares mechanisms with other mental capacities, such as perception and memory. Unlike theories that prioritize grammatical rules, Cognitive Linguistics emphasizes the study of meaning (semantics) and how it is constructed in the mind.

In everyday life, CL has sought to engage in dialogue with other areas of knowledge to obtain evidence that complements the conceptual structures it proposes. However, it is not configured as a grammatical theory per se. Thus, it cannot be considered a parallel movement to Construction Grammar or traditional functionalist models. In fact, the description of Cognitive Linguistics as an “archipelago” (Geeraerts, 2006, p. 2) remains current, that is, a broad and diversified intellectual enterprise, composed of several relatively independent theories:

Cognitive Linguistics, when considered in the light of this metaphor, takes the form of an archipelago rather than an island. It is not one clearly delimited large territory, but rather a conglomerate of more or less extensive, more or less active centers of linguistic research that are closely knit together by a shared perspective, but that are not (yet) brought together under the common rule of a well-defined theory. The present volume contains an introduction to twelve fundamental parts of that theoretical conglomerate – a tour of twelve central islands, if you wish: Cognitive Grammar, grammatical construal, radial network, prototype theory, schematic network, conceptual metaphor, image schema, metonymy, mental spaces, frame semantics, construction grammar, and usage-based linguistics. (Geeraerts, 2006, p. 2)

By adopting this theory, we also deal with linguistic variation, that is, how different linguistic forms are used interchangeably in different contexts and how speakers choose between these forms according to their communicative needs.

Sociolinguistics

For the Sociolinguistic approach, language plays a crucial role in social relations, and its variation is a natural phenomenon influenced by extralinguistic and intralinguistic factors. In view of this, Alckmin (2009) explains that:

A proposta de Bright para a Sociolinguística é a de que ela deve “demonstrar a covariação sistemática das variações linguística e social. Ou seja, relacionar as variações linguísticas observáveis em uma comunidade às diferenciações existentes na estrutura social desta mesma sociedade”. Segundo o referido autor, o objeto de estudo da Sociolinguística é a diversidade linguística.⁹ (Alckmin, 2009, p. 28)

Even when analyzing seemingly similar constructions, such as “chorando litros” and “correndo quilômetros”, within the same context, they may exhibit semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic differences. Although speakers might perceive them as functionally comparable – and, consequently, as equivalent in use – their actual linguistic behavior can vary significantly. The preference for one linguistic form over another is influenced by multiple factors, including discursive needs, the speaker’s intent regarding their position or interlocutor, and the textual genre (whether or

⁹ Bright’s proposal for sociolinguistics is that it should “demonstrate the systematic covariation of linguistic and social variations. In other words, to relate the linguistic variations observable in a community to the differentiations existing in the social structure of that same society”. According to this author, the object of study of sociolinguistics is linguistic diversity.

not it involves persuasive appeal). Some of these preferences may become conventionalized within a linguistic community, leading to an increase in frequency that surpasses other variant forms, even those traditionally described in grammatical studies. Others, however, may remain stable within a system of variation without necessarily overtaking competing forms.

It is essential to emphasize that while not all instances of linguistic variation lead to change, every linguistic change necessarily involves variation. Thus, alongside constructional stability, variation remains a fundamental characteristic of intensification, materialized through diverse constructional resources. Hence the importance of adopting the Theory of Linguistic Variation and Change (also called Quantitative or Labovian Sociolinguistics), which aims to “study language variation and change in the social context of the speech community” (Coan, Freitag, 2011, p. 3). In this context, sociolinguists see language as a carrier of “systematic heterogeneity”, a crucial element both for identifying groups and for demarcating social differences within the community. The knowledge and use of heterogeneous linguistic structures is part of individuals’ linguistic competence, enabling them to adapt to different communicative contexts. Thus, the absence of this structured heterogeneity would make language dysfunctional, as it would compromise its ability to reflect and mediate social and situational variations (*cf.* Weinreich; Labov; Herzog 2006 [1968], p. 101).

In regard to the process of language change, it begins with an innovation resulting from individual use and usually involves several stages, including spread within a linguistic community and conventionalization. However, according to Faraco (2005), change does not refer to the direct and sudden exchange of one element for another, but always involves a phase of competition. When this innovation becomes habitual and is adopted by one or more communities of speakers, conventionalization occurs. Constructionalization is the next stage, which involves the creation of a new construction with a new pairing of form and function. Subsequently, the process of post-constructionalization may occur, resulting in further changes in the constructions. Finally, there may be a reduction in the form, or even its obsolescence (see Hoffman, 2022).

Construction Grammar, Cognitive-Functional Linguistics and Sociolinguistics can be integrated in various ways to enrich linguistic research. By combining these three approaches, researchers can gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of language, considering its cognitive, discursive, pragmatic, social and structural aspects. This allows for a more complete analysis of the complex interactions that shape language and its evolution.

Research Configuration: Materials, Methodology and Stages

The methodological design will include movements to analyze the phenomena (i) of stabilization of lexical collocations in the construction and its formal and functional configuration, as well as (ii) of variation between subsamples of data from the constructions under analysis that maintain similarity relations.

A search will be conducted on data obtained through the *Sketch Engine* and *Corpus do Português* data managers to create *corpora*. Through them, it is possible to access data from BP, in addition to data from European Portuguese. We are interested in data from Brazil. We also anticipate that it will be necessary to resort to qualitative and quantitative treatment techniques. Thus, intensifying expressions that have verbs as their scope and that are structured by V + Xintensifier, where X is the plural name of a unit of measurement, will be collected. Then, a screening will be carried out to verify whether all the data collected are of intensification. Therefore, we won't consider sentences such as:

1. “Isso perpetuou o mito de que é preciso beber **litros e litros de** água” (“This has perpetuated the myth that you have to drink gallons and gallons of water”)¹⁰
2. “Acho que seria interessante viver em um anime que eu tenha super poderes a ponto de todos inimigos ser um lixo, poder **pular quilômetros**, destruir um prédio com um soco” (“I think it would be interesting to live in an anime where I have superpowers to the point where all enemies are garbage, I can jump for miles, destroy a building with one punch”)
3. “Será que é necessário estar perto para viver? O que **são quilômetros** quando se ama (...)” (“Is it necessary to be close to live? What are kilometers when you love (...)”)

Note that, in the first example, *litros e litros* (‘liters and liters’, in literal translation) is an expression that indicates the amount of water, but does not act as an intensifier of the verb *beber* (to drink). Instead of intensifying the action, the expression describes the volume of the object of the action (water), with a possible nuance of exaggeration, but not in the direct scope of the verb. Likewise, the term *pular quilômetros* (‘jumping for miles’) refers to the distance that would be covered

¹⁰ The literal translation would be “liters and liters of water”, however, since we are dealing with Brazilian idioms, we will try to look for corresponding expressions in English that are similar to the ones we are studying in order to get a better translation.

by the jump, but does not intensify the verb *to jump*. We can see this more clearly by replacing the unit of measurement with the adverb *muito*, a traditional intensifier of verbs in variation with “kilometers”, “meters” and “liters”, which are more innovative. Thus, we note that *pular muito* (‘jumping a lot’) means to jump several times, and not to jump a long distance, unlike *pular quilômetros*. Finally, in the last example, *quilômetros* refers to the physical distance and is used as part of a metaphor about love, which transcends physical barriers. In this case, the word *quilômetros* is part of a broader semantic construction, but it is not intensifying the verbs *ser* (‘to be’) or *amar* (‘to love’).

With this, we are left with a total of 598 data to be analyzed. From this, questions will be posed (which unfold from those already formulated here), hypotheses/response expectations and variables (relating to the control of sample characteristics and conditioning of variants) that guide the analysis of the corpora. Initially, the focus will be on questions such as: which verbs are linked to these constructions, what types of subjects are projected by them, what is the animacy of these subjects, whether there is more than one intensifier for the same verb and what is the content of these intensifications. At a later point, it will be necessary to invest in a sociolinguistic analysis model, which includes frequencies and relative weights in the comparison of data samples licensed by one expression and another. The study will also include a qualitative approach so that we can understand the category of verbs that appear most in these constructions [V + Xintensifier].

Analysis and Results

This section will present the data collected in the research, followed by a qualitative and quantitative analysis of these 598 data points that support the categorization of intensifying constructions formed by verbs and units of measurement in the plural. The objective is to highlight the usage patterns and the conditioning involved in these expressions in Brazilian Portuguese, considering their role as intensifiers. It is worth noting that, among these 598 data points, 183 refer to constructions with “litros”, 41 to “metros” and 374 to “quilômetros”.

The verbal slot

First, we must analyze which verbs appear most in the verbal slot of the [V+Xintensifier] construction. To do this, we compare the expressions with “litros”, “metros” and “quilômetros” in order to identify possible differences between them. We expected that constructions with “litros” would only include verbs that already had some semantic feature with liquids in a certain way, such as “chorar” (to cry) – which is to let tears fall – or “chover” (to rain). Constructions with “metros” and

“quilômetros” would include verbs that have the idea of “movement” as a common semantic feature, such as “correr” (to run), “andar” (to walk) and “caminhar (to walk). After identifying each of the verbs in our sample, we categorized them as follows: *verbs of feeling, physiology, nature and movement*.

The results show us that verbs related to feelings (crying and laughing) were the ones that appeared most often in the verbal slot of expressions with *litros*. The verb *chorar*, as previously mentioned, was already the most likely to occupy this position, but “rir” draws attention because it is not necessarily linked to liquids. We also see the presence of some verbs related to physiology (drooling and pissing, for example) and natural phenomena (the verb “to rain”), although in a much smaller quantity than expected. Regarding “metros” and “quilômetros”, practically all the verbs found are related to movement (walking, running, cycling, driving, etc.). The only exception is, again, the verb “rir”, which appears in only 1% of the data.

Thus, with regard to filling this first slot, the results show that the construction with volume presents a greater diversity of verbal categories that can act in this place. However, the constructions with length present a greater variety of verbs within the “movement” category. This is because we found about 20 different verbs in our *corpus*. Let’s look at some data examples:

4. “A emoção era tanta que a noiva pensava que iria entrar **chorando litros**, mas não parava de sorrir.” (“The bride was so overwhelmed with emotion that she thought she would walk in crying buckets, but she couldn’t stop smiling.”)
5. “Jovane Cabral **galgou metros**, passou por todos e, à entrada da área, rematou forte à barra da baliza contrária.” (“Jovane Cabral galloped forward, dribbled past everyone, and unleashed a powerful shot against the crossbar at the edge of the box.”)
6. “uma pessoa muito pobre, que **caminha quilômetros** para chegar na escola pública, estuda com estômago vazio e trabalha para ajudar no sustento da família”. (“a very poor person, who walks for miles to get to public school, studies on an empty stomach and works to help support the family.”)
7. “**Rindo quilômetros** desse comentário. Insano isso. Sidnei não dá pra refutar porque o cara acha que este site é estatal.” (“Laughing for miles at that comment. Insane. Sidnei can’t refute it because he thinks this site is state-run.”)

In the fifth example, we have the use of the verb *galgar* (‘surge forward’/‘gallop forward’), which was the most used verb with the intensifier *metros*. In the contexts found, which are mainly in the soccer world, *galgar* would mean running with the ball towards the goal. We also find it in the context of fishing, in which *a maré galgou metros* means that the tide rose a lot (or very quickly). We also draw attention to the

seventh example, in which we can see the use of the expression *rir metros* ('laughing for miles'). We believe that this use of a verb with a different category from the others may indicate that the intensification pattern with units of measurement is adapting to include new verbs, especially those that express emotions and reactions.

In other words, this innovation indicates a creative expansion of the use of intensifying constructions, showing that the language is dynamic and allows the reconfiguration of patterns to meet new expressive needs. The verb *rir*, in this case, does not have a literal relationship with displacement, but acquires a metaphorical meaning, reinforcing the intensity of the action of laughing, as if it were something that "extends" or "prolongs" over a long space. The unit of measurement *quilômetros* works as a "hyperbolizer", communicating exaggeration and emphasizing the speaker's reaction. We must now observe whether this innovation will be adopted by more members of the community in the future, or whether it will be an exception.

Projected subjects

Analyzing subject types helps identify patterns that reveal how intensifying constructions operate in different contexts. Furthermore, the "animacy" factor, despite being a formal trait, can reveal tendencies in the creative and metaphorical use of language, highlighting the semantic and pragmatic limits of these constructions. We also understand that this concept is scalar, which allows us to speak of a continuum of animacy. At one end of this continuum would be inanimate subjects and, at the other end, animate subjects. Let's look at some examples:

8. "*A maré galgava metros*, e o Rio Tejo cheio de água doce, tinha o caudal muito elevado (...)" ("The tide was rising by meters, and the Tagus River, full of fresh water, had a very high flow (...)")
9. "Todos me alertavam que *eu ia chorar litros* e olha que sou chorona, mas acredita que não rolou nem uma lágrima?!" ("Everyone warned me that I was going to cry gallons, and I'm a crier, but can you believe I didn't even shed a tear?")
10. "os calcanhares rachados que *galgam quilômetros* para que em sua casa nunca falte água, nem milho, nem lume." ("the cracked heels that run for miles so that your house never lacks water, corn or fire.")

In the first two examples, it seems clear that *a maré* ('the tide') is +inanimate, since it is something from nature, without life and without a will of its own, while *eu* ('me') is +animate because it is the person who wrote the sentence. However, the referent of the subject in sentence 10 may not be so close to the extremes in this continuum. Although *os calcanhares rachados* ('the cracked heels') was classified as +inanimate,

since heels do not have a will of their own, this referent may have a slightly greater animacy than *tide* precisely because it is a part of someone's body – this person does have life and a will. With this explained, we can now move on to the results.

In all constructions, the majority of subjects projected by verbs are +animate - 98% for liters, 82% for meters and 94% for kilometers. This predominance suggests that intensification is closely linked to actions performed by agents with a greater degree of volition and intentionality. This was already expected in the case of the unit of volume, given our expectation for verbs of feeling. The cases of +inanimate subjects indicate a creative or metaphorical use of the constructions. This is because, when +inanimate subjects appear, the interpretation often shifts to a figurative or symbolic field, as in “the heels that climbed meters” or “the eyes cried liters”. In these cases, the emotional charge is amplified, creating a hyperbole and personification simultaneously by attributing human characteristics to the parts of the body.

Regarding the type of subject, to classify it, we adopted the definitions of Duarte (2007). The author says that “(a) in terms of form (structure), the subject can be expressed or not expressed; (b) in terms of reference (its content, its semantic value), the subject can have a definite reference, an indefinite reference or no reference at all” (Duarte, 2007, p. 13, our translation). That said, our analyses allowed us to identify that the difference between expressed or unexpressed subjects was not that significant (being practically half of each – 50/50 – in all constructions). However, the semantic value is what draws attention.

When it comes to the reference of these subjects, there is a difference between constructions with *litros*, *metros* and *quilômetros*. While the first two are selected, in most cases, when the reference is defined, the expressions with *quilômetros* were not as conclusive in this regard, since the difference between defined and undefined subjects is very small. The small cases of “no reference” occurred when the verb was a natural phenomenon and, therefore, did not project any subject. These results have significant implications for the semantic and pragmatic patterns of these intensifying constructions.

The majority association of the intensifiers *litros* and *metros* with defined subjects indicates that they are often linked to contexts of greater referential clarity and specificity. This may be related to the fact that these units of measurement evoke intensification in actions or states that have a clear, concrete and directly observable subject. Examples:

11. “aquela cena em que a Callie leva um susto... kkkkkk... **ri litros** também.. kkk... esse episódio foi simplesmente perfeito (...)” (“that scene where Callie gets scared... kkkkkk... I laughed a lot too... kkk... that episode was just perfect (...)”)

12. “Senão, *a planta cresce metros e metros* e os frutos que estão mais longe acabam por morrer pequeninos.” (“Otherwise, the plant grows for meters and meters and the fruits that are further away end up dying tiny deaths.”)

In 11, although the subject is not expressed, we can recover it through the verb *ri* (‘laughed’) itself, conjugated in the first person singular, referring to the speaker himself – therefore, with a defined reference. In 12, *a planta* (‘the plant’) is expressed and is also well defined, since, in that context, the subject was not just any plant, but rather a person’s specific tree. To understand this, it was necessary to read previous parts of the text and recover the reference of this well-defined plant. At the same time, the smaller difference in the proportion of defined and undefined subjects in constructions with *kilometers* may point to a broader use that is less dependent on referential specificity. Let’s look at the example:

13. “enquanto *outras (e muitas) pessoas* consomem água suja depois de ter que **andar quilômetros e quilômetros** com uma enorme lata de água na cabeça” (“while other (and many) people consume dirty water after having to walk miles and miles with a huge can of water on their heads”)

The subject reference in 13 is *outras (e muitas) pessoas* (‘other (and many) people’) – clearly undefined, as there are no names, locations or specific characteristics that make these people identifiable. This choice promotes a generalization that can amplify the impact of the statement, making it refer to a broad and potentially universal group. The large number of undefined subjects with this intensifier suggests that *quilômetros* is more flexible in contexts where the identity of the subject is not the focus, allowing greater adaptability in narrative, figurative or generic uses. Many of the contexts found, as the example shows, focus on the inequality or precariousness of the situation (consumption of dirty water). Therefore, by not specifying the subjects, the text invites the reader to focus on the condition of suffering (walking long distances or for a long time to fetch water) rather than on specific individuals. This strategy can be used to emphasize the systemic problem, moving the focus away from individual cases.

We also believe that the large number of contexts like these in our *corpus* was responsible for the difference in the results indicated by the graph between expressions with *quilômetros* and *metros*. Although both are units of length, indicating a distance here, the latter did not appear as much in contexts of inequality. *Metros* was the most used intensifier to refer to sports, fishing or vehicles, for example. Consequently, the referential of this subject was more defined, as they are less generic and more observable. In addition, we explain the greater appearance of *quilômetros* in situations of suffering, precisely, in comparison to *metros*, by semantic, pragmatic

and symbolic factors associated with the extension and intensity conveyed by these units of measurement in different discursive contexts. *Kilometers* denotes a much greater extension than *meters*, which aligns more directly with the idea of prolonged suffering, strenuous effort or enormous challenges.

Considering these results, we can say that referencing the subject projected by the verb, together with the choice of intensifier, reflects a discursive choice that prioritizes the emotional and ethical impact of the statement over the specific identification of the agents involved. The vagueness allows the sentence to apply to a broad and diverse group, avoiding geographic, cultural or social restrictions. This enhances the ethical and emotional appeal, allowing the reader to imagine people anywhere in the world who face similar conditions. In some contexts, this approach broadens the interpretative scope of the message, allowing the focus to remain on structural injustice and the person's effort. At the same time, a defined reference implies a closer relationship between the intensification and concrete and specific contexts, where there is a greater need to identify or delimit who performs the action.

Appreciation

Another factor in which the analysis of the entire context and the subject of the written text is relevant concerns the +positive or +negative content of the intensification. This means that, when intensifying a verb, the speaker can outline a +positive or +negative appreciation of the event – always treating this concept as something scalar. In the case of expressions with volume, the predictions were that we would find more contexts in which the content of the intensity was +negative, given the high occurrence of the verb “chorar”. With the expressions of length, however, we believed that the difference might not be so expressive. The results, however, contradicted our expectations.

According to our survey, 71% of the intensifications in constructions with *litros* were surrounded by a more positive semantic load. This is due to the fact that, even with a high incidence of the verb *chorar*, the expression was often used when the subject was weddings, books, movies or achievements. Thus, the person would be crying happy tears, not sad ones, which would be considered something good for them. Let's look at the examples:

14. “(..) é simplesmente o melhor livro que eu ja li até hj e que eu **chorei litros** amo de mais e esperarei anciosa pela estreia” (“(...) it's simply the best book I've ever read and I've cried my eyes out, I love it so much and I'm looking forward to the premiere”)
15. “[disse] que precisaríamos dum tempo pra esfriar nossas cabeças... Eu **chorei litros e litros...** ligava pra ele, implorava, e ele disse que não.” (“[he said]

that we would need some time to cool off... I cried gallons and gallons... I called him, begged him, and he said no.”)

It can be seen that, in example 14, the content would be +positive, because the person was so moved by a book that she cried buckets of tears. Proof of this is the fact that it is *o melhor livro* (‘the best book’) she has ever read, and she is anxiously awaiting its adaptation into a film. In example 15, the content would be +negative because it is about the end of a relationship, which made the person feel very sad. In this case, the crying would be out of sadness and not emotion. The graph also shows us that the expressions with meters behave in a similar way, with 68% of the intensifications having a +positive appreciation. Again, the two length unit intensifiers behave differently, because with *quilômetros* the content was significantly more negative.

This probably happens for the same reason that we find more subjects of indefinite reference with kilometers: situations in which both expressions are used more. *Kilometers* is a larger unit than *meters*, suggesting long distances or strenuous and exhausting situations. This often carries a connotation of suffering, sacrifice or excessive effort, evoking more negative situations. Let’s look at more examples of sentences in which intensifiers have been used:

16. “Patacho com a maré baixa, já é linda assim, imagino que deve ser mais linda ainda com a maré cheia. Mais uma vez **caminhamos metros e metros** com a água batendo nos calcanhares. A praia do Patacho é praticamente deserta, um convite ao relaxamento.” (“Patacho at low tide is already beautiful, I imagine it must be even more beautiful at high tide. Once again we walked for meters and meters with the water lapping at our heels. Patacho beach is practically deserted, an invitation to relax.”)
17. “a segunda posterior ao sábado, onde trancada no quarto, eu **andava quilômetros** entre uma parede e outra, chorando copiosamente e vendo as pessoas pela janela (...)” (“the Monday after Saturday, when locked in my room, I would walk for miles between one wall and another, crying copiously and watching people through the window (...)”)

In example 16, even with the repetition of the unit *metros* – which could be an indication of an exhausting situation for the writer – , we realize that being able to walk a lot *with the water up to your knees* is one of the reasons why the person likes the beach so much. On the other hand, in 17, there is a sequence of negative situations: locking yourself in your room, walking miles between walls, crying profusely, watching people through the window... Therefore, we realize that there is a certain suffering in the author’s words.

Therefore, the differentiated behavior of these expressions reinforces the idea that the choice of units of measurement as intensifying elements in the discourse is not random. It is influenced by the symbolic and emotional charge that each unit carries, in addition to its cultural and pragmatic associations. *Litros* stands out for its connection with intense emotions, often linked to joy or deep sadness. *Metros* are balanced in more accessible and controlled contexts, while *quilômetros* are more associated with experiences of greater negative emotional intensity, reinforcing the relationship between distance and difficulty in the event. In any case, we can conclude that intensifications through units of measurement can promote both a positive and negative appreciation of the situation, depending on the context.

Number of intensifiers

At this point, we can see that it is possible to repeat the same intensifier, as in examples 12 (*crescer metros e metros*), 13 (*caminhar quilômetros e quilômetros*) and 15 (*chorar litros e litros*). This strategy not only reinforces the idea of quantity or length, but also carries stylistic and emotional nuances that can be interpreted in different ways. Before delving deeper into this issue, we need to analyze whether this repetition only occurs with [V + X e X], as in the examples presented, or if there are other possibilities. For example, could we use two different intensifiers, but from the same category – measurement of length – to intensify the verb, such as *caminhar metros e/ou quilômetros* ‘(walking for meters and/or kilometers)’? Is it possible to combine intensifiers from different categories, such as *rir litros and quilômetros* ‘(laugh liters and kilometers’, in literal translation)? Is there any other connective, other than *e* (and), that can connect the units of measurement?

We expected that only the second question would have a negative answer. However, what we found in our *corpus* was the following (Figure 1 and Figure 2):

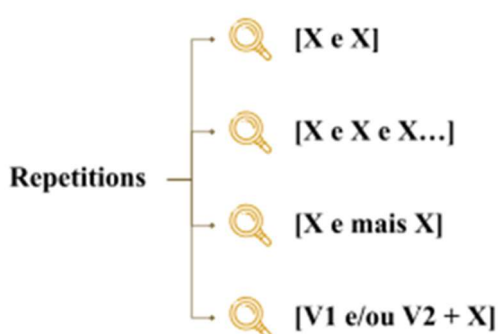


Figure 1. Different strategies for constructing the repetition of intensifiers found in our *corpus*. X is an intensifier per unit of measure and V1/V2 verbs. (Source: Own elaboration.)

[X e X]	“preocupadas com a tal máquina poderosa, capaz de, a cada dia, <u>cavar metros e metros</u> na rocha.”
[X e X e X...]	“o livro lhe emocionou e do jeito que sou uma tola emotiva vou chorar <u>litros e litros e litros</u> , rrsrsrs.”
[X e mais X]	“Por que tinha andado <u>quilômetros e mais quilômetros</u> de mata fechada para chegar até lá?”
[V1 e/ou V2 + X]	“para que não se corra o risco de precisar sacar dinheiro e ter que <u>andar ou dirigir quilômetros</u> ”

Figure 2. Examples of different strategies for constructing intensifier repetitions, based on the *corpus* with 598 data. (Source: Own elaboration.)¹¹

This contradicts the prediction that it would be possible to combine two different intensifiers, but of the same category, with a single verb, since we did not find data on *metros e/ou quilômetros* serving as a single intensifier. We did, however, find some situations that we were not expecting, such as the possibility of repeating the unit of measurement multiple times (X e X e X...) and the possibility of using a single intensifier for different verbs (V1 e/ou V2 + X). We see this in *andar ou dirigir quilômetros* (‘walk or drive for miles’), in which the measurement of length intensifies both the first and the second verb. In this example, the verbs are connected by the conjunction *ou* (‘or’), but when it comes to repeating the intensifier, *and* seems to be preferred by speakers. At most, we found examples of *e mais* (‘and more’) supporting this strategy, as in *tinha andado quilômetros e mais quilômetros* (‘I had walked for miles and more miles’).

Thus, the findings presented raise significant implications for the study of intensification strategies in linguistic constructions, demonstrating that the repetition and combination of intensifiers play an important functional and stylistic role, but with patterns that follow certain preferences and restrictions in the language. The prevalence of the connective *and* reflects a structural and pragmatic preference in the Portuguese language to express cumulative addition, and may be a more crystallized use.

¹¹ 1 – “Worried about the powerful machine, which could dig deeper and deeper into the rock with each passing day.”/ 2 – “The book moved her, and since I’m such a sentimental fool, I’m going to cry buckets and buckets and buckets, lol.”/ 3 – Why have they walked extra kilometers through dense forest, just to get there?/ 4 – “So that there’s no risk of needing to withdraw money and having to walk or drive for miles.”

This choice not only reinforces intensity, but also contributes to a fluid and natural reading. On the other hand, the appearance of *and more* suggests that speakers may resort to alternative forms to further emphasize extension or repetition, but without breaking with the convention of the additive conjunction.

Furthermore, the absence of constructions such as *metros e/ou quilômetros* in the *corpus* indicates that intensifiers are not treated as interchangeable elements in the same context, even though they belong to the same category (units of measurement). This limitation suggests that intensifiers have specific semantic or stylistic functions, which makes it difficult to combine them without redundancy or loss of discursive coherence. At the same time, the absence of constructions such as *rir litros e quilômetros* suggests a semantic or pragmatic barrier that regulates the use of intensifiers from different categories. This reflects that, although speakers are creative in forming intensifiers, this creativity operates within cognitive and cultural limits that avoid combinations considered unnatural or confusing. In other words, possible ambiguities that could arise when combining different intensifiers are avoided.

Finally, examples such as *andar ou dirigir quilômetros* ('walk or drive kilometers') show linguistic economy, where a single intensifier is shared between two semantically related verbs. This strategy does not diminish the intensity of each verb, but demonstrates how the intensifier can be flexible within certain limits. The conjunction *or* in this case, although less common than *and*, reinforces the possibility of choosing between two actions that share a similar intensity. All these cases, in general, reflect a balance between linguistic creativity and the semantic and pragmatic norms that guide the formation of intensifiers, helping to better understand the dynamics between innovation and standard in the language.

Discussion

The data presented in this research allow for a more in-depth reflection on the intensification processes in the Portuguese language and their implications for everyday use. In general, we observed that the constructions with *litros*, *metros* and *quilômetros* present significant differences both in frequency of use and in the semantic and stylistic loads they carry. These findings suggest that the selection of intensifiers is highly sensitive to the context, the type of verb and the emotional charge of the message. We created the following table (Table 1) to summarize the results and facilitate comparison:

Table 1. Summary of results found in the research. (Source: Own elaboration)

LITROS	METROS	QUILÔMETROS
Greater incidence of verbs related to feelings.	Greater incidence of verbs related to movement.	Greater incidence of verbs related to movement.
Projected subjects are, for the most part, animate and have a defined reference. However, there is also the possibility of them being inanimate and undefined.	Projected subjects are, for the most part, animate and have a defined reference. However, there is also the possibility of them being inanimate and undefined.	Projected subjects are, for the most part, animate and have a defined reference. However, there is also the possibility of them being inanimate and undefined.
There may be repetition of an intensifier for the same verb, but not of different intensifiers.	There may be repetition of an intensifier for the same verb, but not of different intensifiers.	There may be repetition of an intensifier for the same verb, but not of different intensifiers.
They promote both a positive and negative assessment of the event, depending on the context.	They promote both a positive and negative assessment of the event, depending on the context.	They promote both a positive and negative assessment of the event, depending on the context.
More productive intensification.	Less productive intensification.	More productive intensification.

We say that constructions with *metros* are slightly less productive than the others due to the distribution of the data: among the 598 data, 183 refer to constructions with *litros*, 41 refer to constructions with *metros* and 374 refer to constructions with *quilômetros*. Thus, the lower productivity of constructions with *metros* in relation to the others reflects differences in the use and preference of speakers in relation to these units of measurement as intensifiers. *Meters* is a smaller unit of measurement of length and, therefore, carries a lower load of exaggeration or intensity compared to *kilometers*. Because of this, it probably does not carry the same symbolic weight, which reduces its attractiveness as an intensifier in contexts that demand impact or exaggeration.

The findings of this research also have implications for broader studies of Construction Grammar. The association between specific verbs and certain intensifiers suggests that there are underlying patterns that guide the formation of these expressions. For example, the predominant use of *litros* with *chorar* ('to cry') may indicate a grammaticalized construction that combines a liquid unit of measurement with a verb that evokes emotional abundance. Similarly, *quilômetros* seems especially apt to be associated with verbs that indicate movement or effort, such as *andar* and *caminhar*. These and other results found reveal what is stable and what is variable in the data of the constructions in question.

In line with what Mota and Machado Vieira (2020, p. 65) represent in terms of (non-exhaustive) possibilities of mesoconstructions arising from the underspecified intensification scheme and constructional unfoldings from one of the predicted constructions (the one that has the researchers' attention), we note that the constructions examined here reveal stability and variability that compose and generate the complex of intensification resources as projected below (Figure 3):

Constructional patterns

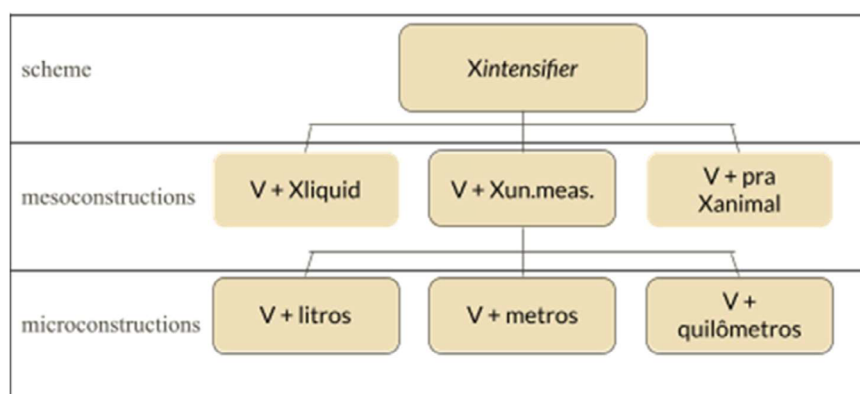


Figure 3. Representation of the constructional patterns that license the research data in focus. (Source: Own elaboration.)

The constructional patterns that give rise to the data described in this research inherit attributes from an intensification scheme that can be expressed linguistically by many mesoconstructions. Among them, the mesoconstructions [V+Xunitofmeasurementintensifier], [V+pra+Xanimalintensificador] and [V+Xliquidintensificador], in addition to others such as the mesoconstruction [Xcolor de Y] (focused on by Mota and Machado Vieira, 2020, p. 66). From the mesoconstruction [V+Xunitofmeasurementintensifier], different more specified constructional patterns (microconstructions) inherit attributes of form and function from it: in [V + litros], the “unit of measurement of volume” and the link with a generally positive contour predication; in [V + metros] and [V + quilômetros], the “unit of measurement of length” and the link with a negative or positive contour predication, for example.

Although they are independent in the language, they also reveal themselves as aligned generalizations, such as allostructions/variants, either due to configurational similarity (by constructional type) or due to symbolic similarity (promotion of the intensification of V in a predication). In this case, the mesoconstructions align with each other as allostructions and even with other mesoconstructions not represented here, namely: [V muito], [V demais], [V bastante], [V imensamente], among other

underspecified patterns. The microconstructions with *litros*, *metros* and *quilômetros*, in turn, can also be considered variants, as they perform similar functions within the same semantic and pragmatic domain, even with the formal and contextual differences that distinguish them.

We conclude that the selection of intensifiers reflects cultural and stylistic aspects of language. The preference for certain units of measurement may be linked to cultural and social experiences, such as the idea of exhaustive distances (*kilometers*) or exaggerated emotional situations (*liters*). These uses also show how speakers creatively exploit linguistic resources to create expressive effects and engage the interlocutor. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of equivalence between the expressions presented in terms of constructional variation, with regard to the comparisons presented. Speakers use these constructions with the purpose of conferring an intentional exaggeration to the statement, both when it has positive and negative content, and they can be found in different contexts of communication.

Therefore, the analysis reveals the frequency of intensification through the constructions [V+Xunitofmeasurement] in the communication and expressiveness of Brazilians. In this way, they not only add liveliness to communication, but also provide a rich range of emotional nuances. The careful selection of these intensifiers and their strategic application reveal the sophistication and versatility of the language used by Brazilian speakers, demonstrating the ability to create meaning and impact through specific linguistic constructions.

In a future extension of this research, it will be necessary to compare these portions of the data with other forms of intensification, such as the constructions [V+pra+Xanimalintensifier] and [V+Xliquidintensifier]. We can analyze, statistically or even experimentally, the conditioning factors that trigger these constructions, as well as the differences between them and the choice of one or another intensifier. These next steps are part of my master's project at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), which I will complete in 2025. They are not just next steps, but a natural continuation of the vision I have established.

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Declaration of availability of access to data

The collection of data examined in the research reported in this article can be found at the following link: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15367267>