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Investigación



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**Collocations in theoretical
and applied linguistics: from Classical
to Romance languages**

**Las colocaciones en la lingüística teórica
y aplicada: de las lenguas clásicas
a las lenguas romances**

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E D I T O R

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Introduction

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Verb-noun collocations (hereinafter VNC) or, in a broad sense, support verb constructions (SVC), are restricted lexical combinations of a noun and a verb which are preferably used together. Collocations such as *take a walk/dar un paseo*, *make mention/hacer mención*, or *pay attention/prestar atención* are complex predicates with a unitary value: there is often a parallel synthetic predicate (*walk/pasear*, *mention/mencionar*, *atender*), although not necessarily (*pay attention*, *tener hambre*, *donner une gifle*). These complex predicates are made up of the *base*, a predicative or event noun (*walk*, *mention*, *attention*...), with its own argument structure, and a verb (the *collocate*) which, irrespective of its greater or lesser semantic load, has a functional value above all: it provides the noun with grammatical categories such as person, tense, mood, aspect, or voice, thus making it the semantic and syntactic head of the predicate. Verbs with vague or neutral meaning (such as *do*, *give*, *get*, *have*, or *take*) are commonly referred to as *support verbs* or *light verbs*, as in the previous examples. However, collocate verbs may add more specific contents, most frequently aspectual or diathetical distinctions and intensive values, as in *fall in love*, *fare paura*, *recevoir une gifle*, *arder de amor*. These are the so-called «support verb extensions» (Gross 1981: 33; Giry-Schneider 1987: 211)¹.

¹ The terms used for such predicates vary widely (cf. Hoffmann in this volume) and do not always have the same scope. In the papers in this monograph, «verb-noun collocations» and «support verb constructions» are used interchangeably, although the latter term is sometimes restricted to a specific type of VNC.

VNCs have been the subject of numerous studies in modern languages from a wide range of approaches: second language teaching, machine translation, creation of dictionaries, etc. However, up until the last decade (with some notable exceptions)² they had not aroused similar interest in the classical languages, grammars often disregarding these complex predicates or at most relegating them to the sphere of stylistics under the conception that their use was, at least in the case of Latin, typical of colloquial or vulgar registers³.

However, current studies have shown the extent to which VNCs are not a stylistic category but a grammatical phenomenon (Hoffman 1996: 203): not only are they used in all literary genres, but are also much more frequent, for instance, in historiography than in vulgar or colloquial texts (Baños 2022: 136). Their high frequency in Latin, compared with their far more limited use in classical Greek (Baños 2015; López Martín 2016), has above all a functional motivation (Baños 2018: 23) of lexical, semantic and/or morphosyntactic nature. Indeed, Latin relies exclusively or essentially on collocations for the expression of certain predicates (*bellum gerere* «wage war», *impetum facere* «attack», *gratias agere* «give thanks», etc.). Furthermore, whenever there is simple verb (such as *sperare*) and several roughly equivalent VNCs (*spem habere* / *nancisci* / *relinquere*; *in spem venire*; *in spe esse*, etc.), the latter usually have specific semantic traits (aspectual, diathetic, intensive) which distinguish them from that simple verb (Jiménez Martínez 2016). Lastly, VNCs function as a lexical passive to defective or deponent verbs with a syntactical bi-argument structure (*memini*, *odi*, *paenitet*, *gaudeo*, *utor*, *suspikor*, etc.) (Baños

² There are, of course, notable precedents from the last century: Rosén (1981) already offered significant data regarding such verbal periphrasis in archaic Latin. Flobert (1996) was the first to use the term «support verb» for Latin, as opposed to the broader *Funktionverbsgefugen* (functional verb) from Hoffmann (1996) and the more restrictive «lexical auxiliary» from Martín Rodríguez (1996) in his analysis of *dare*. For an account of these and many more studies, as well as the current state of research on VNCs, see Mendózar (2020).

³ This idea, so widespread in the last century (Hofmann [1921] 1958: 246; Marouzeau 1946: 284; Hofmann & Szantyr 1965: 754-755), has now been abandoned (Bodelot & Spevak 2018: 12-13; Baños 2022), as clearly demonstrated by the difference in approach to VNCs in current syntax handbooks: from Pinkster's monumental *Oxford Latin Syntax* (2105: 74-77, 781-782; 903; 1041) to the *Sintaxis del griego antiguo* (Jiménez López (coord.-ed.), 2020: 16, 34, 217-218, 345, 575, 584) or the more recent *Sintaxis Latina* (Baños (coord.-ed.) 2021: 32, 45, 136, 188, 203, 207, 211, 213-214, 224, 366, 383, 453, 470-473, etc.).

2020): they make up for such verb's' inability to codify their second argument as syntactic Subject (*in odio esse, usui esse, in suspicionem venire*, etc.) or their lacking a past participle (Tur 2019: 147-149, 279-281, 332-334). Conversely, Ancient Greek tends to express synthetically many situations which in Latin are codified analytically thanks to its morphology and its preference for verbal composition and derivation: εὐχαριστεῖν/*gratias agere*, ψευδομαρτυρεῖν/*falsum testimonium dicere*, μισεῖν/*odio habere*, μισεῖσθαι/*odio esse*, μετανοεῖν/*paenitentiam habere*, etc. (Baños & Jiménez López 2017a, 2017b). The synthetic tendency of Greek, diametrically opposed to the analytic tendency of Latin, is reflected on a lower frequency in the use of VNCs. This in itself, too, betrays the idiosyncratic nature of collocations.

Evidence of the great interest in the study of VNCs in classical languages in the last decade are the various conferences and scientific gatherings held in Madrid, Toulouse, Naples and Rome⁴, the publication of two monographs (Bodelot & Spevak 2018; Pompei & Mereu 2019) and an imminent third (Pompei, Mereu & Piunno forth.), not to mention the doctoral theses read over recent years⁵. It is in this context of growing interest in the field that this monograph in the reader's hands came to be, its main novelty lying in a multidisciplinary approach to collocations in classical languages: the authors aim to emphasise the importance of these constructions with regard to a number of different although related linguistic areas.

The volume includes eleven contributions grouped together in the three main sections defining the book's structure:

- (i) The first section provides an analysis of Latin collocations from both typological (Hoffmann) and cognitive linguistics approaches (Tur, De Felice & Fedriani, Salas).
- (ii) The second section deals with Latin collocations from linguistics fields as diverse as pragmatics (Tarriño), translation (Baños & Jiménez), stylistics (López Martín) or didactics (Taous);
- (iii) The third and final section comprises three diachronic studies: the first two cover specific aspects of their renewal in Postclassi-

⁴ Specifically, the 1st and 2nd *Jornadas sobre colocaciones y verbos soporte en latín* (Madrid, June 2016; January 2018); *Journée d'étude: Les constructions à verbe support en latin* (Toulouse, September 2016); *Light verb constructions as complex verbs* (Naples, August 2016) and *Verbi supporto: fenomeni e teorie* (Rome, June 2017).

⁵ Cf. Jiménez Martínez (2016), Di Salvo (2017), Mendózar (2019), Tur (2019) and López Martín (2022).

cal Greek (Vives & Madrigal) and in the evolution from Latin to the Romance languages (Jiménez Martínez & Melis), whereas the last one (Sanromán) provides an overview of diachronic studies of CVNs in Spanish.

1. COLLOCATIONS, TYPOLOGY AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Roland HOFFMANN («Latin Support Verb Constructions: A View from Language Typology») opens the monograph showing how these analytic predicates not only exhibit a high degree of grammaticalisation in Latin but are also common to many other genetically and typologically different languages: data are offered on at least 28 European and 37 non-European languages, thus revealing the significance of the phenomenon.

The author, who opts to consistently use the term «Support Verb Constructions» (SVC) as a specific type of complex predicate, offers a definition valid for all languages based on semantic and syntactic parameters. He emphasises that it is preferable to set aside the morphological specificities of the components of an SVC, since in many languages the nominal base is not necessarily in the accusative case but can be involved in a vast array of constructions, including prepositional phrases. Hoffman consequently focuses on function instead of form: SVCs may maintain a paradigmatic relationship with a possible or existing base verb, but also cover fill in lexical shortcomings or codify specific aspectual or diathetical contents. In addition, they tend to form series, that is, both the verb and the noun may be combined with other nouns or verbs. All these parameters together make up the prototype of an SVC, less prototypical cases being also possible. Lastly, he provides a comparative analysis of SVCs in Latin and five other languages (Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, German, Japanese and Swahili) which lays the necessary methodological foundations for a future typological study of much greater breadth and ambition, in the manner of the *Word Atlas of Language Structures* (Haspelmath *et al.* 2005).

Some of the criteria followed in contemporary linguistics (e.g., possibility of modifying the nominal base, anaphora, relativisation, topicalisation, passivisation, etc.) allow to distinguish VNCs from idioms, the latter constructions having a high degree of formal fixation and a conventional and cultural meanings which cannot be directly deduced on the basis of their sub-parts. Cristina TUR («Combinatoria léxica y lenguaje figurado: algunas consideraciones sobre las colocaciones en la frontera con la fraseología») deals precisely with a number of VNCs which lie at the boundary of idioms. Drawing on a variety of examples from the collocational range of *manus* «hand», a

noun which plays a significant role in the creation of figurative language, she focuses on those collocations where the base is used in a metaphorical sense and those which have, on the whole, a metonymic reading.

When combined with abstract or event nouns, the support verb in a VNC frequently loses part of its basic meaning in favour of a more abstract, figurative meaning by means of metaphorisation: the event coded by the noun is then conceptualised as an object, a place, a container, etc. Hence the fact that one of the most promising perspectives for analysis is that of cognitive linguistics and, more specifically, the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor.

Two chapters from this volume are based on this cognitive approach. In the first one, Irene DE FELICE & Chiara FEDRIANI («Collocazioni verticali: metafore di orientamento UP/DOWN nella lingua latina») study spatial orientation (up/down) metaphors that provide the conceptual basis underlying collocations made up of several emotion nouns («fear», «anger», «hatred», «love», «joy» and «sadness») in Latin. These metaphorical structures focus on different aspects of the emotional process and the nature of the emotions implied. An emotion can thus be conceptualised, for example, as a place located upwards, as an object moving upwards or falling, etc., all of which is reflected in the creation of a wide array collocations where the verb has developed a figurative reading. In short, «up/down» verb-noun collocations in Latin are yet another evidence of the organisation of abstract concepts based on embodied spatial experience. The fact that this type of VNC is also documented in many modern languages betrays the similarity in terms of emotion construal between Latin and contemporary speakers.

The relationship between collocations and conceptual metaphors is also addressed by Guillermo SALAS («Colocaciones incoativas en latín y metáforas conceptuales»), whose chapter focuses on collocations with three Latin nouns from the same semantic field (*bellum* «war», *proelium* «battle» and *pugna* «fight»), and more specifically those focalising the initial phase of the action (inchoative), an aspectual value derived from the metaphorization of the collocates when combined with such nouns. These collocates not only have a figurative meaning but also belong to specific semantic classes as a result of underlying metaphorical patterns: the beginning of an event is conceptualised as concrete actions such as «take» (*suscipio*, *sumo*, *incipio*), «enter» (*ineo*) or «join» (*committo*, *sero*), situations that are deeply rooted in the sensory-motor (or, in other words, embodied) experience of reality. Knowing and understanding these patterns is of the utmost interest in that it allows to narrow down the semantic class of collocates to be expected in this type of collocations, thereby reducing the degree of unpredictability in

verb selection. Furthermore, the study of inchoative collocations with *bellum*, *proelium* and *pugna* reinforces the idea that aspectual collocations are particularly liable to metaphorisation and thus are a fertile category for the study of conceptual metaphor.

2. COLOCATIONS AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Eusebia TARRIÑO («Colocaciones verbales y pragmática: *gratiam inire* en la petición cortés») provides an analysis of SVCs based on pragmatics, an approach which has scarcely been explored in Latin. The term *gratia*, belonging to the semantic field of friendship and interpersonal relations in Rome, is involved in a great number of collocations, most notably *gratias agere* «give thanks», one of the most frequent in Latin⁶. As opposed to this VNC, in which the Experiencer of the gratitude is coded as the syntactic Subject of the support verb, *gratiam inire* («earn someone's gratitude») offers different perspective on the situation: A (Subject) earns the gratitude of B (Experiencer) as a result of a service (*beneficium*) rendered. The event, controlled by an Agent, is of an inchoative nature: the Subject achieves someone's gratitude for a *beneficium*, which is most frequently construed as a situation that is not factual but hypothetical (*irrealis*), as in the formula *If you do me this favour, you will earn my gratitude*. The construction is thereby used in verbal exchanges with a distinctive pragmatic function: it works as a polite request strategy, complementary both diathetically and aspectually to the stative collocation *gratiam habere alicui* («have gratitude, be grateful to someone»).

One of the most fruitful perspectives in the study of collocations in modern languages is that of translation, among other reasons, because a literal translation of VNCs from one language to another is not always possible given their idiosyncratic nature: in Spanish, walks «are given» (*dar un paseo*), whereas in French and Italian they are «done» (*faire une promenade*, *fare una passeggiata*) and in English they are «taken».

In the case of classical languages, the Bible is especially useful to understand not only the problems that arise from the translation of VNCs, but also how the literal translation of these sacred texts, either from Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek (in the *Septuagint*) or from Greek or Hebrew into Latin (in the *Vetus Latina* and the *Vulgate*) plays an essential role in the genesis and development of new VNCs in these languages. With respect to this, José Miguel

⁶ In the *Diccionario de Colocaciones Latinas* (DiCoLat: <https://dicolat.iatext.ulpgc.es/>), data are offered regarding some of the most common VNCs in the corpus of the *Packard Humanities Institute*.

BAÑOS & María Dolores JIMÉNEZ LÓPEZ («Translation as a mechanism for the creation of collocations: the alternation *operor/facio* in the Bible») analyse the use of *operor* «operate, do» in the Vulgate in combination with nouns such as *iniquitas*, *abominatio*, *peccatum*, *impietas*, *scelus* and *iniustitia*. Such combinations, alternating with SVCs with *facio*, are loan translations from Greek ἐργάζομαι and/or Hebrew *pā'al* hitherto unattested in Latin literature but soon to be spread as collocations through the rest of Christian literature, thus making their way to the Romance languages. Furthermore, their study reveals that VNCs are an objective criterion to consider, on the one hand, when comparing translation techniques from different versions of the same work, such as the Vetus Latina (closer to the Greek text) and the Vulgate (a freer but also more natural translation) and, on the other hand, when discerning internal differences within each version, as is the case with the translation of various books from the Septuagint's Old Testament from Hebrew or Aramaic and with the Vulgate depending on the source language (Greek or Hebrew) and the nature of St. Jerome's version: a mere revision of the Vetus Latina or a new translation from Hebrew in the case of the Old Testament's canonical books.

From a literary perspective, the use of VNCs differs greatly in Latin between prose and poetry (Baños 2021), but also, given their idiosyncratic nature, among authors within the same literary genre: the differences, for example, between Caesar and the authors of the *corpus Caesarianum* are remarkable in this regard (Hofmann & Szantyr 1965: 755).

Accordingly, quantitative and qualitative differences in the use of VNCs may be a relevant criterion for authorship when analysing works written by unknown authors or attributed to several ones. Such is the case of the set of biographies that make up the *Historia Augusta*, regarding which there is an ongoing debate as to whether it was written by six different authors and whether it is relevant that the manuscript version of the work shows a gap splitting it into two separate parts. Iván LÓPEZ MARTÍN («The use of verb-nominal collocations as a resource for the attribution of authorship: The *Historia Augusta*») shows that, from a quantitative perspective, there is a clear-cut difference in the use of collocations between the first and second parts of the work. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis of certain VNCs with some of the most frequent support verbs (*habere*, *esse*, *dare*, *facere* and *agere*) reveals significant variation between both parts, which suggests that the *HA* was written by at least two different authors.

Tatiana TAOUS («Collocations et constructions à verbe support chez les grammairiens latins et dans quelques manuels antiques: un impensé didac-

tique?») addresses VNCs from another of approach that has aroused great interest in the field, especially regarding modern languages: language teaching. In reverse chronological order, she begins noting distinctive traits from French textbooks from the 19th and 20th centuries with regard to the teaching of Latin collocations, then focuses on data from medieval and classical grammars (from the 14th to the 17th century) and, finally, goes through the *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana*, manuals drawn up between the 1st and 3rd century A.D. and used by Latin speakers learning Greek in the eastern part of the Empire. Regarding the teaching of collocations, the most interesting part of these manuals are the *Colloquia*, which record everyday scenes corresponding to different times of day. In the second part of the work, Taous provides a qualitative and quantitative analysis of these *Colloquia* based on data, which are not particularly numerous, on the Latin collocations listed and the didactic problems that their teaching entailed.

3. A DIACHRONIC VIEW

Another distinctive trait of collocations is that they are subject to renewal and changes diachronically, as shown by the three chapters from the final part of the monograph.

Alfonso VIVES & Lucía MADRIGAL («Support verb constructions in Postclassical Greek and sociolinguistics: a diachronic study of εὐχὴν ποιέω as a marker of level of speech») approach SVCs in post-classical Greek from a twofold perspective: on the one hand, their diachronic distribution, and on the other, their use as a criterion to characterise different levels of speech. Their corpus comprises the Gospels, which serve as a reference point for low koine, and several works from Christian hagiographical literature, thus ranging from the 1st to the 14th century, which in turn allows to consider the evolution of the genre from popular, low-level koine to a more educated or higher koine. The VNC εὐχὴν ποιεῖν/ποιεῖσθαι (equivalent to the verb εὐχεσθαι «pray, make a vow») is analysed as a case study, with special attention to the collocate verb's voice distribution: as opposed to classical Greek, where verbs regularly appear in the middle voice in SVCs, the study reveals that in the selected corpus the use of the active voice (εὐχὴν ποιεῖν) is associated with a low level of speech, whereas the middle voice (εὐχὴν ποιεῖσθαι) is used in higher level texts. Furthermore, the diathetic distribution seems to be subject to each author's preferences, inconsistencies within any given work thus pointing to the involvement of different authors.

María Isabel JIMÉNEZ MARTÍNEZ & Chantal MELIS («Continuidad y cambio en las colocaciones del latín a las lenguas romances») show how a

diachronic approach helps to understand similarities and differences among equivalent VNCs in different languages. The authors draw on a previous study (Jiménez Martínez & Melis 2018) dealing with collocations with emotion nouns in Latin (*metus, timor, laetitia, gaudium*) which revealed that some of the verbs combining with these bases (*facere*, typically causative; *dare*, associated with nouns of positive emotions and mainly restricted to poetry; *mittere* and *ponere*, normally used in combination with nouns of fear and with a terminative meaning) are still used in Italian, Portuguese and Spanish in causative collocations. The study of an extensive historical corpus from the 11th to the 20th century confirms that each language has taken their own path: Italian, with remarkable stability over time, makes use of the verb *fare* as the most frequent causative, thus showing the same tendency as Latin, whereas Portuguese and especially Spanish experienced, with fluctuations over time, an increase in the use of *dar*. At the same time, however, there is certain degree of continuity in the preferential use of these verbs in combination with specific nouns: «alegría» («joy») in the case of «dar», which paved the way for the creation of other combinations with semantically similar nouns, and «miedo» («fear») in the case of «poner/meter», where the original terminative meaning in Latin has been lost in the Romance languages.

In the last chapter of the monograph, Begoña SANROMÁN («Las colocaciones verbales en la historia del español») provides a critical review of a broad arrange of studies that, over the course of the 21st century, have directly or indirectly addressed support verb constructions in the history of the Spanish language.

Although the diachronic study of collocations is an area of the Spanish language that has scarcely been explored, the overview of these works allows to draw at least two notable conclusions. On the one hand, the dominant approach is to conceive collocations as a phraseological phenomenon, although there are authors who focus on the grammatical selection inherent to such combinations. On the other hand, aside from general VNCs, the type of collocation arousing greatest interest in diachronic studies are inchoative and causative extensions, emotion nouns being the bases selected preferably for study. After this overview, Sanromán reflects on what a diachronic perspective contributes to our understanding of the origin and evolution of these combinations, as well as to the ongoing debate about the nature of their meaning and the directionality of selection.