

REVIEW

# North american functionalism: history and perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The conference *Functional Mechanisms of Language Usage – 30 Years Later* approaches the courses of North American Functional Linguistics about three decades later the publication of one of its most representative texts, written by Sebastião Josué Votre, guest lecturer, and Anthony Julius Naro. Initially, there are presented the context of Brazilian Linguistics at the time these studies have begun and, also, the basic functionalist theoretical assumptions. Besides that, there are presented the directions that this approach has followed, mainly since Discourse & Grammar Study Group's publications, which was founded by Votre in the early 90's, it has been highlighted the adherence to the constructionist contribution and the analytical resumption of some phenomena.

RESUMO

A conferência *Mecanismos funcionais do uso da língua – 30 anos depois* aborda os rumos da Linguística Funcional norte-americana cerca de três décadas após a publicação de um dos seus textos mais representativos, escrito por Sebastião Josué Votre, conferencista convidado, e Anthony Julius Naro. Inicialmente, são apresentados o contexto da Linguística brasileira na época em que tais estudos começaram e, também, os pressupostos teóricos funcionalistas basilares. Além disso, são apresentados os rumos que essa abordagem seguiu, sobretudo a partir das publicações do Grupo de Estudos Discurso & Gramática, fundado por Votre no início da

década de 1990, sendo destacadas a adesão ao aporte construcionista e a retomada analítica de alguns fenômenos.

### KEYWORDS

Functionalism. Discourse. Usage.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Funcionalismo. Discurso. Uso.

The conference *Functional mechanisms of language usage – 30 years later*, delivered by linguist Sebastião Josué Votre in *Abralin ao vivo*, configures in a great relevant moment for the functionalistic studies and, broadly, the Brazilian Linguistic, because it resumes the history and the assumptions of one of the most widespread theoretical approaches currently in this country. The conference has shown different moments on Votre's story and, consequently, on North American Functionalism's story in Brazil, indicating its origins, fundamentals, methodological nuances and current and future perspectives, with mediation of Carla Valle, professor at Federal University of Santa Catarina.

At the beginning of the conference, Votre approached the paper's publication *Mecanismos Funcionais do Uso da Língua*, which is considered a mark in the Brazilian publications about the theme, acting as a founding text on functionalistic investigations. When it was published, in partnership with Anthony Julius Naro, in 1989, the paper was inserted on a theoretical context dominated by Gerativism and Sociolinguistics, which, according to the guest lecturer, created a lot of negative reactions, not only in this publication, but also in the entire discussions related to the functional approach.

Votre and Naro were directly involved at that time with Theory of Variation and Change's studies and they have done partnerships with international researchers about the theme. In his speech, Votre highlights that Sociolinguistics also suffered several criticisms and, many times, its works were classified with weak theorization. With the advent and advance of functionalists' ideals, the criticisms related to a possible end of syntax's studies reproduced, also, harsh commentaries about the functional approach.

Indeed, on functionalist's perspective, the syntax is studied attached to discourse, which is evident from some theoretical concepts presented in diverse books and reunited, for example, in Furtado da Cunha, Silva and Bispo (2016) and Rosário and Oliveira (2016). Basic functional issues, like marking, discursive plans, iconicity, informativeness, prototypicality and metaphorical projection are focused in this vision.

Votre points out that, before the exposed publication of *Mecanismos Funcionais do Uso da Língua*, there was a response of Milton do Nascimento about the theme and a proposal to assemble the gerative and functional approaches, which it was not developed over the following decades, neither by the guest lecturer, nor by these theoretical perspectives. Votre introduces his current reflections

about the theme in a clear and didactic way, and also comments a new text received from Nascimento the day before, which raises important linguistic discussions.

Throughout the conference, he has also a great concern in demonstrate how the North American Functionalism developed in the country, highlighting to the Discourse & Grammar Study Group's production, created by Votre in the early 90's and being present in different Brazilian universities. According to the guest lecturer, over 100 theses and dissertations were oriented by Angélica Furtado, Mariangela Rios, Mário Martelotta and Maura Cezario throughout the years and that gave great relevance to the functionalistic studies in the country.

The theoretical advance created, for example, an increase in the quantity of publications in books and periodicals, events and also it has made that postulates of decades ago were expanded and discussed starting from the analyses of different linguistic phenomena. Votre highlights, for example, that the discussions realized about the VS order were retaken by the professors Maria Maura Cezario, Priscilla Mouta Marques and Roberto de Freitas Jr. Years later, making possible important advance (cf. FREITAS JR; MARQUES, 2014; MARQUES; CEZARIO, 2015).

Votre highlights, still, that, recently, the Functionalism has also been articulated with Cognitive Linguistic and, more specifically, with the Construction Grammar from a use perspective (cf. BYBEE, 2010; TRAUGOTT; TROUSDALE, 2013). He highlights, however, that not all functionalists will work with Construction Grammar and not all constructionists will be functionalists.

This discussion is of great relevance because, exposes to a scenario that great part of the studies connected to the North American Functionalism are related to constructional issues, there are researches that do not adopt this approach and they should not be disregarded in the functionalist Brazilian panorama. This elucidation also refers to a confusion made many times in works about linguistic interfaces, in which, sometimes, it is comprehended that two theories represent the same ideas, although, actually, they could be complementary.

Ultimately, the lecturer answered some audience's questions and highlighted the importance of the relation between Functionalism and language teaching, pointing out progress on the work developed by Angélica Furtado at Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte and Mariangela Rios de Oliveira at Federal University Fluminense, both professors at Discourse & Grammar Study Group.

In this sense, it is possible to affirm that Votre's conference was an important moment for resuming North American Functionalism's basic questions and, at the same time, revisiting discussions from a speech quite didactic and elucidative. In this way, the conference was an opportunity of knowing the history and importance of one of the most consolidate linguistic approach in Brazil from the perspective of the most responsible person for its implementation and diffusion across the country.

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