

Reviewer: Rafael Marcos Tort Peixoto<sup>1</sup>

Book Title: O Jeito que a gente diz: combinações consagradas em Inglês e Português.

Book Editors: Stella E. O. Tagnin.

Publisher: Disal Editores: São Paulo-SP, 2013.

## Overview

The book published in 2013 by Stella Tagnin (image to the right) is a lexical study of the English language and its translations into German, Spanish, French and Italian. To be more precise, the author works with the translation of idioms and other linguistic units that require an accurate pragmatic knowledge on the foreign language.

The title of this work refers to the linguistic conventions commonly used in a given society. Tagnin also believes that conventional means language in use, what people often say and use, following common standards without being original when it comes to new linguistic forms.

Over the course of this work, the author describes in detail the terms ‘conventionality’ and ‘idiomaticity’, because the work is linked to a pragmatic approach of language, which at first is not presented in the early sections of the book.

In the definition of conventionality, the author presents a somewhat general definition of conventionality based on some concepts from the Concise Oxford Dictionary – she shows some concepts from the Concise Oxford Dictionary – combining social convention with language, exemplifying with the words *when* referring to the former and *how* referring to the latter.

Within pragmatics, the term ‘conventionality’ is defined by O’Keeffe (2011) as a principle of language acquisition, in which language speakers expect certain word(s) to be used in a situation or context, according to the standards of a linguistic community. I would suggest that Tagnin (2013) made use of references from other authors from the area to enrich her work, thus better situating the role of Corpus Linguistics within idiomaticity, presented in Chapter 4.

Sardinha (2004) explains that when it comes to analyzing idiomaticity, it is essential to use a resource that is independent of our intuition: such as a corpus for instance. In Corpus Linguistics, a corpus is defined as a collection of written texts and speech transcripts stored in an electronic format that can be investigated from a linguistic point of view. The corpus serves as a record of language in use by a group of speakers. Thus, when we question a corpus about speaker preferences, we obtain a more reliable answer than if we ask the speakers themselves.



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In the chapter on conventionalities, the author explains that the most frequently used clusters are a sort of agreement (not made previously) between speakers of a particular language community. See one of the tables proposed by Tagnin (2013).

Table 1 – Adjective collocations which are different in English and Portuguese

Colocações Adjetivas	
Hard luck	Má sorte
Outside chance	Hipótese remota
Spare parts	Partes sobressalentes
Up right piano	Piano de armário
Public Television	Televisão educativa

Source: Tagnin (2013)

Without further explanation, the author mentions the word ‘blithering’ that occurs mainly with the noun *idiot* and *fool*. The equivalent in Portuguese would be *coroca*, which is usually accompanied by the word *velha*. It is hard to find another word that goes together with *coroca* in Portuguese. However, the author argues that the words *prescription* and *wand* are usually accompanied by *fill* and *magic*, when we know we can also use *write out* a prescription.

Importantly, the author points out some comments regarding the nature of syntax and how conventionality affects it: we may have confusing sentences when it comes to grammar, however, acceptable for speakers of any socio-cultural level, for instance *by and large* in English and *de vez em quando* in Portuguese.

Perini (2009) believes that there are forces competing in languages: an internal force, immanent inside the system, and an external one, which is outside. Thus, the principle of arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is reconsidered, as it is accepted that there is a relationship between language and external reality, and that certain pragmatic functions can influence the grammaticalization process. Givón (2001), on the other hand, assumes the grammaticalization process or syntaxation comes from the functionality in levels out of the syntax.

On the semantic level, the author argues that there is a direct relationship between words and their meaning, which belongs to agreement inside the language, and not motivated at all. Tagnin (2013) reflects on this matter, considering that meanings and images are directly associated.

We also recall that for Lakoff (2002), metaphors permeate the language, because in Western culture, for instance, everything that is *up* is considered good; everything that is *down* is considered bad. The examples in Portuguese and English can be found in Table 2 below:

Table 2 – *Ups e Downs* in Western cultures

Baixo	Cima	Down	Up
Baixo astral	Alto astral	I'm feeling down	Thumbsup
Caiu da cama	Cabeça erguida	You're falling to pieces	Thismovieis top
Ele vive na fossa	Levante o ânimo	He's in a low spirit today	Chin up

Source: Tagnin (2013) e Lakoff (2002)

But we must not forget that this rule is not consensual. Some phrasal verbs with the preposition *down* appear to have a neutral meaning, as *intake it down on a piece of paper*, which means to make a note.

Based on the interpretation by Tagnin (2013), one can make a visual scheme to illustrate the levels of conventionality, which covers much of her view on the subject developed in the book. See Table 3 below:

Table 3 – Visual overview of conventionality

<b>Conventionality</b>	<b>Pragmatic</b>	<b>Situation</b>
		<b>Verbal Expression</b>
	<b>Semantic</b>	<b>Meaningoftheform</b>
		<b>Meaningoftheimage</b>
		<b>Grammaticality</b>
	<b>Syntatic</b>	<b>Order</b>
<b>Word choice</b>		

After a brief summary of the theoretical framework, Tagnin (2013) addresses her methodology, which expands upon what was mentioned in the first five chapters of her work, which has a strong emphasis on corpus linguistics.

We can see that Tagnin (2013) strongly emphasizes that the use of specialized corpora in Brazilian Portuguese has had a significant role in improving the quality of the translations by her students in class, when it comes to the correct choice of the term and idiomatic aspects of writing. If we understand "correct choice of a term/word" as a collocation and "idiomatic writing" as natural language, we realize that these two aspects are the pillars of what we call "conventionality (or phraseology) in the language" in which the lack of knowledge characterizes the naïve speaker.

The issue of the naïve speaker permeates the book; he is defined as someone who is not aware of the language conventions. For instance, according to Fillmore (1979), he would not know that a prisoner and a jailer are two different things. Why should they be different? After all, both are formed by the base *prison* and *jail* which means "a building where wrong-doers are locked up", plus a more agentive suffix *-er*. How do we explain, then, that a *prisoner* is "the person kept in the prison" while a *jailer* is "the person in charge of the jail"?

At the end of the work, Tagnin (2013) talks about other important aspects, including situational formulas, which are the conversations that we maintain on a daily basis, following patterns established in society that make our everyday speech a kind of cliché: pre-shaped patterns of thought that can be always developed. According to the author, speakers can predict what will be said in a dialogue even before it is delivered given our previous knowledge of previously made clusters. An example in Portuguese:

-Você acabou de ganhar um presente da tia, como é que a gente diz?<sup>2</sup>  
-Obrigado, tia!<sup>3</sup>

In English, the polite form ‘*May I*’ is an example, but Tagnin (2013) also points out that collocations and formulas are the categories that present the greatest difficulty. When we are talking about collocations -words that co-occur more frequently than if they were randomly combined- the difficulty may lie in the fact that they are understood most of the time, so they tend to go unnoticed. In other words, most of them are compositional; collocations are easy to understand. However, when it comes to production, they are not easily found in the memory, since there is no conscious effort to memorize them. A dictionary itself could never solve all the problems a translator can have in terms of conventionality. It is true that there are some reference books that address these categories, especially monolingual and bilingual dictionaries of idioms.

At the end of the book, the author provides us with a generous glossary with translations in German, French, English and Spanish, of some topics (collocations, clusters) covered in the reading. In addition, there is a commented bibliography used in the work.

#### **About the reviewer:**

Rafael Peixoto holds a degree in English and Portuguese Studies with teaching degree from PUCRS. He has recently completed a certificate course in Translation Studies and he is currently completing his master’s degree, at the same university. The reviewer has been working with TESOL and FLE for over 8 years. As a graduate and postgraduate student, he has conducted many studies in pragmatics, syntax and prepositions.

#### **References**

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O’Keeffe, Anne. 2011. **Introducing Pragmatics in Use**. Abingdon: Routledge.  
Perini, Mário Alberto. 2009. **Gramática Descritiva do Português**. 4 ed. São Paulo: Ática.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation: You have just received a present from your auntie, what do you say?

<sup>3</sup> Thank you, Aunt.

Givón, Talmy (2001). *Syntax: An Introduction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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