

BRAZILIAN LINGUISTIC ATLAS: LEXICAL ITEMS PARASYNONIMIS¹

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Introduction

The people who study semantics, since immemorial times, have highlighted particularly the problem of synonymies and from these studies, the most diverse questions are brought about the existence or not the synonyms. If they exist, as defined, how they work, what is their status, in cognitive and/or affective terms, if they are absolute or partials, if limited to the denotation or if are linked to the connotation in every particular context.

From these questioning and discussions, the notion of para-synonymies, almost synonymies, partial synonymies and synonymies in speech, to designate “terms of same sense, where the distributions are not exactly equivalent”, as Galisson and Cost said. (Galisson and Cost 1976:399).

Our work will try to find, in the specializes literature, answer to the question: the lexical items of the Linguistic Atlas constitute para-synonymies?

As corpus to this analysis we will use some Regional Linguistic Atlas from Brazil, published until today: Bahia, Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Sergipe, Sergipe II and Amazonas.

1. The lexical units and their signification

Although the studies of synonymies and, consequently, the para-synonymies, is connected to the significance and, therefore, to semantics, the first basic approach, has to be from lexis, from lexicology and lexicography, and after, from syntaxes of the phrase or text.

Ullmann tells us that “the distinctions between synonymies are a great challenge to the lexicographic talent”. (Ullmann 1964:298)

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This affirmation is confirmed by Barbosa when she says:

In each one of the methodological phases to elaborate the macrostructure, the microstructure and the process of remissive of a lexicographic text and/or terminology, the application of significance relations, that is, the relations that are established between the plan of contents and the plan of expressions of the lexical units, is of fundamental importance.
(Barbosa 1998:19/20):

The types of relations of sense that exists between lexical items are determined by the function of these relations. Therefore the significance is a function of the significance relations, as (Lyons 1974:101) says.

When commenting the synonymic relations of sense, Lopes says that: “[...] the sense of the linguistic elements is a relational sense e it is a consequence that comes from the structural character of the signs [...]”. (Lopes 1976:255)

He complements his thoughts by affirming:

[...] the synonymy is not, as the contrary that someone can believe, a property of the word by themselves, but is, a structural property of the code, better saying, of the relations that bring the structures. (Lopes 1976:255)

When we talk about the relations of the meaning of lexical items Cruse affirms that the semantic properties of a lexical item are fully reflected in the aspects of the relations that maintain with today’s and potential contexts. He says that: “the meaning of a word is constituted by its contextual relations” (Cruse (1991:1)

He concludes his thoughts when he says that the lexical unity is the union of a lexical form in only one way

Therefore, the relations and the real and potential contexts of the lexical item are the ones that will determine its semantic contents.

For Cruse there are two basic kinds of significance relations of the lexical item: the paradigmatic relations and the syntagmatic relations. He says that the **paradigmatic relations** represent systems of choices that the speaker makes when he codifies his message, and he also says that:

Paradigmatic relations, for the most part, reflect the way infinitely and continuously varied experienced reality is apprehended and controlled

through being categorized, subcategorized and graded along specific dimensions of variation. (Cruse 1991:86)

The **sintagmatic relations** give cohesion to the message, adding informational redundancy. In his words:

Sintagmatic aspect of lexical meaning, on the other hand, serve discourse cohesion, adding necessary informational redundancy to the message, at the same time controlling the semantic contribution of individual utterance elements through disambiguation, for instance, or by signaling alternative – e.g. figurative – strategies of interpretation. (Cruse 1991:86).

2. Synonymy and para-synonymy

The different definitions and delimitations of synonymy come from principles and different basis, reason why, depending on the point it begins, these definitions some times are opposite and some times are complementary.

For Crystal, (1988:453) synonymy is:

Term used in semantics referring to an important kind of sense relation between lexical items: the lexical items that have the same significance are synonyms – are in relation of synonymy.

Lyons (1979:453) agrees with Crystal when he says that the synonymy is a relation of sense, showing that, in this case, is not a question of reference.

According to him:

Since the identity of meaning – synonymy – is a relation that is established between two or more vocabular units, it is a question of sense and not of reference.

He also adds, that “ synonymy is established between lexical units and not between senses”.

Some authors relate synonymy sometimes to the cognitive aspect, affective or denotative aspect and other to the connotative aspect. Depending on these visions that could be controversy since the meaning could depend on subjective aspects of the transmitter/receiver, what could make it really difficult to the lexicographer, for example, to elaborate his definitions and remissions.

Dealing with cognitive synonymy Cruse defines as a “ pair of lexical items that have certain semantic properties in common”. (Cruse (1991:270)

He says that there are only a few pairs of the so called absolute synonyms, since they, in some ways, will have some difference of meaning. Let's see his affirmation:

[...] very few pairs of cognitive synonyms are absolute synonyms [...] in the majority of cases a lexical item must, in some respects at least, be different in meaning from any of its cognitive synonyms. (Cruse (1991:270))

Still dealing about the absolute synonym Cruse (1991:277) says that there is a great distinction between the two ways of manifestation of the lexical items. For him the two ways of manifestation of the lexical items are: the propositional way and the expressive way.

The **propositional way** depends on the propositional attitude expressed in the phrase in which operates the item, that is, if it is an affirmation, interrogation, commend or exclamation, for example.

In the **expressive way** the significance of the lexical item does not determine one true condition, but can reinforce the intensity of a determined sense.

Therefore, the inherited significance of a lexical item can be constituted of one or both types of significance. If two lexical items are cognitive synonyms, then, they will be identical in the propositional traces, but can be different in the expressive traces.

Complementing his vision of **absolute synonym** Cruse he says that it not natural and it is instable. In his words:

Absolute synonymy was shown to be a somewhat rare phenomenon, but whereas there is reason to believe that absolute synonymy is in some sense unnatural, and very probably unstable... (Cruse (1991:290))

Matthews, when defining synonymy shows that:

[...] relation between two lexical units with a shared sense – absolute synonymy, if they exist. Have identical signification in all aspects and in all contexts. (Matthews 1997:267)

The question is, and the discussion from this question, is if there are synonyms and if they are or can be absolute or not, bringing the notion of parasynonym and its other denominations: partial synonym, almost synonym, incomplete synonym, speech synonym and pseudo-synonym.

The certainty that everybody have today is that **there are no perfect synonyms nor absolute synonyms**, since once the sememes of two lexical items do not cover totally one another, that is, the generic semes, specific and virtual can not be totally the same.

There will always be, at least, one different sense. For Matthews what exists are partial synonyms that:

[...] have identical sense in some contexts, or identical only when substitutes another that does not change the conditions of truth of one sentence. (Matthews 1997:178)

Another important aspect involved in the discussion of synonymy – para-synonymy is the notion of context.

The context can be linguistic, but, also, extra-linguistic, such as spatial or geographical, the temporal, the situational or the technical, for example, in which the similarity of two lexical items can occur in one of them and not in one of the other. Barbosa shows that “they are cases of para-synonymy the cultural paraphrases, the different visions for the same conceptual scheme, the diachronical varieties, diatopic, diastric and diphasic”. (Barbosa 1998:31)

Cruse (1991:282-283) says that the geographic variation does not have a great significance for the synonyms or para-synonyms, but the social variations is of fundamental importance, fact that was not confirmed in our corpus.

When defining para-synonym Xavier and Mateus, say that para-synonyms are the:

[...] terms in which they have the same meaning, but do not have exact equivalent distributions, that is, they are not commutable in all contexts. (Xavier and Mateus 1992:288)

Galisson and Coste, added to this the concept of use, application, register, and domain of the experience, to close the concept of para-synonym. “Sometimes, the distributional deviation does not occur due to specialization in the domains of diverse experience, but is observed of registers of different speech”. (Galisson and Coste 1976:399)

Finally, a vision of the para-synonymy, in terms of a significant block and signification block is offered by Barbosa, saying that it occurs when:

[...] to two or more elements in the significant block, related to the disjunctive opposition, correspond to two or more elements of the signification block, these as related to the transitive opposition. (Barbosa 1998:21)

3. The lexical items of the linguistic Atlas and their relation of significance

One of the basis of Linguistic Geography is the study of diatopic variations, or geographic variations, in the lexical level. It is in these variations, as also in the phonetic variations, where we can find the delimitate marks of the regional speech.

The affinity of significance, as Pottier says (1974, 1987), that is found in the para-synonymy, can situate the speaker in different subsystems such as the spatial, temporal, situational or of technical.

For our objective we will work in terms of spatial context.

3.1 The Regional Linguistic Atlas of Brazil

The Regional Linguistic Atlas more recently published in Brazil present a concerning methodology with the proposed models by the dialectologists and geolinguicists in the whole world. Therefore, there is among some of them, some differences that make them unique by the methods and techniques applied.

These differences can be listed in terms of choice of locations, criteria to choose the informants, types of questionnaires, semantic fields covered by the semantic-lexical questionnaires, types of publication, types of letters presented, number of letters, types of comments in the letters, methodology in separated on in the Atlas itself, that is, small or great details that individualize each one of the Regional Brazilian Atlas.

The Linguistic Atlas published in Brazil, until today, were the following one: Atlas Prévio dos Falares Baianos, coordinated by Nelson Rossi; Esboço de um Atlas Linguístico de Minas Gerais, coordinated By Mário Roberto Zágari; the Atlas Linguístico da Paraíba, coordinated by Maria do Socorro Silva de Aragão; the Atlas Linguístico de Sergipe, coordinated by Carlota Ferreira; the Atlas Linguístico do Paraná, coordinated by Vanderci de Andrade Aguilera; the Atlas Linguístico de Sergipe II, coordinated by Suzana Alice Cardoso; the Atlas Linguístico da Região Sul, coordinated by Walter Kock and Cleo Altenhofen; the Atlas Linguístico Sonoro do Pará, coordinated by Abdelhak Razky and the Atlas Linguístico do Amazonas, coordinated by Luiza Cruz.

Some Atlas are very close to conclusion and some are in the initial phase of elaboration. The Linguistic Atlas of Brazil – Project AliB, is doing field research in the whole country.

3.2. The Lexical Variations

All those who worry about the study of the lexical know about the importance and of the difficulty dealing with the problem of the regional/popular lexical. This difficulty comes from the definition of what the regional/popular lexical should be because it involves this matter two level of analysis, the dialectal and the sociolinguistic, and is also

of open inventory, being created and modified according to the needs of the users. We agree with OLIVEIRA when he affirms:

All this dynamicity of the language is proved, in a strong way, in the lexical, linguistic level that better expresses the mobility of the social structures, the way that a society sees and represents the world. (OLIVEIRA 1998: 133)

Brazil is known as a continental country, huge with regional and socio-cultural differences, and because of that, the Portuguese language, in our country, presents a very significant diversity, regional and social, specially related to lexicon. This diversity is many times characteristic of one specific state, and other time broadens to a whole region, and it is in this aspect that we will see how some words that constitute the lexical maps of the Linguistic Atlas of Bahia, Sergipe, Paraíba, Paraná and Amazonas are treated.

When we analyze the lexical variations, object of this work, some authors consider that, among the linguistic variations, this is the most complex one, since it involves semantic problems of difficult determination. Skankoff says that:

[...] fenómenos como la sinonimia, los significados sobrepuestos, la especificidad versus la generalidad o referentes que son marginales o están en la frontera de dos dominios semánticos pueden todos llevar a consideraciones probabilísticas del lexicon. Skankoff, In: Morales 1993:105)

Wardhaugh when treated the register, from the lexical point of view shows that they are: “[...] sets of vocabulary items associated with discrete occupational or social groups”. (Wardhaugh 1992:49) He affirms that the register is independent of the dialect (or regional form) and is closely related to the social-cultural category of the speaker.

In the case of the Atlas that we analyzed, what is marked is the regional variation, mark of the region where the informants were born and live, however the popular register, non-standard, related to the socio-cultural status is, also, very important, since the informers with higher educational degree always choose the canonic form of that item analyzed.

3.3. Analysis of Lexical Maps of Brazilian Linguistic Atlas

For our analysis we will work with lexical items of some lexical maps of the semantic fields “atmosphere phenomenon”, “the human body”, “culture and living with”, of six published Brazilian Atlas.

3.3.1. Rainbow (Arco-íris)

The concept of **colored bars that appear in the sky, before or after the rain**, presented, in these Atlas, the following variations:

ITEM LEXICAL	ATLAS LINGÜÍSTICOS BRASILEIROS PUBLICADOS / ELABORADOS					
	BA	MG	PB	SE 1	PR	AM
ARCO-ÍRIS						
Arco – íris	X	X	X	X	X	X
Arco-celeste	X		X	X		
Arco-da-velha	X	X		X	X	
Arco de velho	X			X	X	
Arco-de-boi	X			X		
Arco-da-aliança	X	X			X	
Arco	X		X			
Sete-couros	X					
Barra-de-nuvem	X					
Arco-do-sol		X				
Rabo-de-galo		X				
Olho-de-boi		X	X	X		
Mãe-d'água		X				
Rabo-de-pavão		X				
Navio		X				
As torres			X			
As barras			X			
Sub-dourada			X			
Os véus			X			
Os vieiras			X			
Arco-da-aliança de Jesus					X	
Arco-da-nova-aliança					X	
Aliança de Cristo com os homens					X	

From the twenty three variations found for this basic form, **arco-íris** (rainbow), this was the only one to occur in all regions. Other forms such as *arco-celeste*, *arco-da-velha*, *arco-da-aliança* and *arco-de-velho*, are very common to some regions, but not to all of them.

We can observe, in this case, that the generic seme common to almost all the lexical items is the form *arco*, how the **colored bars that appear in the sky, before or after the rain**, are presented. Of the 23 items found, 10 have the form *arco*. Some specific semes and the virtual ones will mark the lexical variations of *arco-íris*.

3.3.2. Falling Star (Estrela Cadente)

The question referring to Falling Star: **In the night many times we can observe a star that moves in the sky and draws a line of light.** How do you call that? Some of the answers presented the following variations:

ITEM LEXICAL	ATLAS LINGÜÍSTICOS BRASILEIROS PUBLICADOS / ELABORADOS				
	BA	MG	PB	SE 1	PR
ESTRELA CADENTE					
Zelação	X	X	X		
Velação	X				
Planeta	X	X	X	X	X
Cometa	X	X		X	X
Estrela Corredeira	X			X	X
Estrela Cadente		X	X		
Papa-Ceia		X	X		
Diamante		X		X	X
Estrela de rabo		X		X	X
Satélite		X		X	X
Mãe-do-ouro		X			X
Estrela d'alva			X	X	X
Sete estrelas			X		
Viração			X		
Mercúrio			X		
Barca			X		
Rabisca			X		
Elevação			X		
Estrela Mariana			X		
Estrela se mudando			X		
Deus te abrande			X		
Estrela da guia				X	X
Aparelho				X	X
Rabo de estrela				X	X
Rabo de fogo				X	X
Estrela do oriente				X	X
Estrela guia				X	

From a total of twenty seven lexical items that form the variation for **Falling**

Star – [Estrela Cadente], only *Planeta* is found in the five Atlas in which this question is found. Next, in terms of diffusion to other regions come *Cometa* and *Zelação*. The other forms appear in two or in one of the regions.

We can see in this case, the generic seme of **estrela cadente, planeta and cometa**, is an astro without self light, that falling star, that if called star should be an astro with own light, in definition of dictionaries is a fragment of matter from interplanetary space that when penetrating the atmosphere gets hot, becoming luminous, that is, it only acquires luminosity when entering the atmosphere. The other designations are different because of the specific and virtual semes, or are, in some cases, phonetical variations, that constitute a new lexical item in the case of *velação* and *zelação*.

3.3.3. Miser [Avarento]

The question refers to **the person that does not like to spend his money and sometimes go through difficulties not to spend**, obtained the following variations:

ITEM LEXICAL	ATLAS LINGÜÍSTICOS BRASILEIROS PUBLICADOS / ELABORADOS		
	BA	PB	SE 1
AVARENTO			
Avarento	X		
Canguinho	X		
Usurave	X		
Sovino	X	X	X
Econômico	X		
Usurento	X		
Morto-de-fome	X	X	
Morto-a-fome	X	X	X
Seguro	X	X	X
Mão-apertada	X		
Amarrado-por-detrás	X		
Somítico	X	X	X
Agarrado	X		
Pão-duro	X	X	
Pechincheiro	X		

Usurento	X		
Amarrado		X	
Unha-de-fome		X	X
Pica-fumo		X	
Mesquinho		X	
Chula		X	
Fona		X	X
Fominha		X	
Arrochado		X	
Usurário		X	X
Enforcado		X	
Miserável		X	
Resina		X	
Papagaio-no-aramé		X	
Dominado pelo dinheiro		X	
Amarrado que nem catarro na parede		X	
Pão-duro			X
Casquinha			X
Canguinha			X

From the thirty four lexical variations for **avarento**, only *sovina (o)*, *morto-a-fome*, *seguro*, *somítico* and *usurário*, are common to the three regions researched. The other forms are found distributed in an irregular way among the regions.

In this case the generic seme is *not to spend money*. The other lexical items are related to the physical form how the Miser- avarento hides his money, such as in the examples of *mão apertada*, *unha de fome*, *agarrado*, *seguro*, *arrochado*, *papagaio no arame*, *amarrado que nem catarro na parede*. The other forms found have specific semes that are also common, linked to the economy made by the Miser, such as, for example, *econômico*, *pão-duro*, *pechinheiro*, *pica-fumo*, *fominha*, *mesquinho*, *dominado pelo dinheiro*.

3.3.4. Uterus [Útero]

The question referring to the **part of the mother body where the baby stays before being born**, obtained the following variations:

ITEM LEXICAL	ATLAS LINGÜÍSTICOS BRASILEIROS PUBLICADOS / ELABORADOS			
	BA	PB	SE 1	PR
ÚTERO				
Útero	X	X	X	X
Mãe do corpo	X	X		X
Dona do corpo	X			
Senhora do corpo	X			
Madre	X			
Comadre	X			
Bacia	X	X	X	X
Saco	X		X	
Ova	X			
Ventre da mãe		X		
Ventre		X		X
Companheira			X	
Fato			X	
Barriga				X
Bolsa				X

From the fifteen lexical variations for **uterus - útero**, they are common to the four regions researched: *útero* and *bacia* and *mãe do corpo* in three. The other forms found were distributed in an irregular way among the regions.

In both forms found in all states researched the generic seme is related to the place where the child stays before being born, and *bacia* the mark is the part of the body where the uterus is and in *mãe do corpo* there is a connotation of root, matrix of life that has been created. The other forms found also maintain the same generic semes of where the child is created as in *bolsa*, *fato*, *saco*, *ova* or matrix of life that commands the body, such as in *mãe do corpo*, *senhora do corpo*, *dona do corpo*, *madre*.

3.3.5. Kneecap [Rótula]

The question related to the **round bone that stays in front of the knee**, we obtained, in the five Atlas that considered the question, the following lexical variation:

ITEM LEXICAL	ATLAS LINGÜÍSTICOS BRASILEIROS PUBLICADOS / ELABORADOS				
	BA	PB	SE 1	PR	AM
RÓTULA					
Rótula	X	X	X	X	X
Pataca	X			X	
Bolacha	X	X	X	X	X
Pataquinha	X				

Patinho	X	X	X		
Bolachinha	X	X			
Prato	X				
Rodela	X				
Carapuça	X				
Bolinha	X				
Cotovelo	X		X		
Cabeça do joelho		X			
Bolacha do joelho		X		X	
Rodinha do joelho		X			
Pratinho			X		X
Catoca			X		
Bola			X		
Carapucinha			X		
Cabeça			X		
Patacão				X	
Batata				X	
Travela				X	
Travela do joelho				X	
Bolachinha do Joelho					X
Bacia do Joelho					X
Rota					X
Joelho					X

From a total of twenty seven lexical items that form the variations for **Kneecap -Rótula**, are found, in the five Atlas where the question is made only the form *rótula* and *bolacha*. Next, in terms of diffusion for the other regions comes *patinho*. The other forms appear in two or in one of the regions.

The generic seme found was of round articulated bone. The specific and virtual are, in the same way, related to the round form, such as for example, in *rodela*, *bolacha*, *bolachinha*, *pataca*, *rodinha*, *prato*.

The semantic motivations of each lexical items were not analyzed, since the research were made some time ago and this question was not risen or analyzed.

Final considerations

When we proposed to work with the significance relations of the lexical items of the Linguistic Regional Atlas from Brazil, we started questioning if these lexical items could be considered synonyms or, on the contrary, if they could be seen as para-synonyms.

After reading various authors of semantic, semiotic, and lexicology areas, with different visions about the theme, we concluded that, agreeing with these authors, that the question of synonymy is a matter of degree and of variation that can be linguistic, extra-linguistic, and that it is not a perfect synonym, once no sememe of a lexical item totally covers the sememe of another item.

We also found that synonymy can not be seen, only as two lexical items that have the same signification, but it should be analyzed from the relations of significance as functions of these lexical items.

Answering the initial question, if the lexical items of the Linguistic Atlas are para-synonyms, we are very sure that it is true, that each one of them, even though that have the same generic semes, their specific and virtual semes cover different geographic realities, that constitute sub-systems marked by diatopic variation, since the diatopically the marks of social variation: age, sex, school level, have same or similar characteristics opposing the vision of some authors in this area.

Our conclusion is, therefore, that the lexical items of the Brazilian Linguistic Atlas are para-synonyms, imperfect synonyms, almost synonyms, speech synonyms, pseudo-synonyms, or any other given name.

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