

# Complex Predicates and the Expression of Emotion: A Corpus-Based Approach

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## Abstract

This paper consists of a lexical and syntactic study of constructions involving verbs usually called “light verbs” and nouns expressing an emotion or a sentiment (nouns that we will call NES), based on authentic data extracted from a balanced written and spoken 51 million words corpus of European Portuguese. Although verbal predicates of emotion and sentiment have been widely studied for English and Portuguese, the light verb + NES construction still raises important issues for both languages, which will be addressed in this paper, namely:

- Similarities and differences between the light verb construction (*pregar um susto* ‘to give a fright’) and its verbal counterpart (*assustar* ‘to frighten’);
- Semantic contribution of the light verb to the construction and its implication to the way these light verbs are conceived: as agreement and tense feature carriers, as auxiliaries undergoing grammaticalization, as semantic contributors to the construction;
- Restrictions triggered by NES (*\*ter tristeza* ‘have sadness’/ *sentir tristeza* ‘feel sadness’; *\*ter um susto* ‘have a fright’ / *\*sentir um susto* ‘feel a fright’) related to the aspectual properties of both NES and verbal counterpart (*susto* ‘fright’ and *assustar* ‘frighten’ express punctual events and occur with verbs that also express punctuality like *apanhar* ‘catch’ and *pregar* ‘nail’).
- Diversity of verbal elements entering this construction (*ter*, *sentir*, *pregar*, *apanhar*, etc.) and its implications regarding the definition of “light” verbs;
- Do NES, when occurring with light verbs, share the polysemy of corresponding verbal predicates, which show regular shifts of meaning (*abater* ‘to put down’) or underspecification (*acalmar* ‘to calm down’) (e.g. *O Pedro massacrou o João com perguntas* ‘Peter massacred John with questions’; *\*O João teve / sentiu um massacre* ‘John had / felt a massacre’; *O João sofreu um massacre* ‘John suffered a massacre’; *?O João causou um massacre ao Pedro* ‘John caused a massacre to Peter’).

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