

# The cognitive basis of desubjectivizing constructions: The use of the periphrases *haber/tener que + infinitive* in Spanish

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The confluence of cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics has become evident in recent times because the two approaches share many basic commonalities in the study of variation. From a cognitive viewpoint, linguistic variation is built on general principles of human cognition and also on the interaction of participants with the physical environment. Meaning in morphological and syntactic variants is a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing cognitive properties that give rise to pragmatic-discursive values which otherwise exhibit social and situational distribution among participants. Thus, morphological and syntactic variants can be considered meaningful and socially conditioned choices.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between the patterning of linguistic choices or variants and the meaningful use of such variants in particular contexts by different kind of speakers. We depart from the assumption that morphosyntactic variants are choices constructed in a meaningful way that reveal perceptions of real-world events, projected stylistically into the domain of discourse and interaction.

The variants that will be analysed in the present investigation are the impersonal Spanish periphrases *haber que + infinitive* ('it should be/it must be + infinitive') and *tener que + infinitive* ('have to + infinitive'). By means of cognitive salience, each variant conveys a gradual desubjectivizing or impersonal meaning. Grammatical elements that are known or predictable under the attention focus of speakers or participants are considered as *salient* (Croft & Cruse 2004: 46-50; Langacker 2009:112). Due to the possibility of inferring a human agent, the periphrasis *tener que + infinitive* is more salient than that of *haber que + infinitive*. Since *haber* is an impersonal verb in Spanish, it is mandatorily conjugated in third person (*hay que, habrá que, habría que...*). Thus, the referent of this construction is less salient. For that reasons, the periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* will convey a more desubjectivizing meaning than *tener que + infinitive*. These different degrees of salience will create different desubjectivizing or impersonal meanings that will serve to accomplish different communicative goals in interaction.

To analyse these variants, the present research will use the *Corpus Interaccional del Español* (310,759 words), which comprises a wide range of communicative genres and communicative situations. The analysis will be both qualitative and quantitative and will be accomplished by measuring the weights of the occurrences of each variant and the crosstabulations between them by using *Rbrul* package (Johnson 2009).

Results will show that speakers use each periphrasis as a desubjectivizing choice for the accomplishment of their communicative purposes, and that such uses exhibit an unequal sociolinguistic distribution across different kinds of interactions. The periphrasis *haber que + infinitive* promotes a desubjectivizing and deontic style. It tends to appear in written texts in which the absence of a specific or addressed audience makes it possible to perform the deontic meaning without being impolite, or rather, to pursue other communicative functions like giving advice or recommendations. *Tener que + infinitive* is used as a desubjectivizing resource mostly when used in third-person and in combination with clitic *se* (*tiene que hacerlo; se tiene que hacer*).

- Croft, W. & A. D. Cruse (2004) *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
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