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Subject: Constructing Families of Constructions

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SUMMARY

In her contribution to the Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar, Goldberg (2013:15-

16) identifies five assumptions that characterize constructionist approaches to linguistic analysis: (1) "Phrasal constructions, like traditional lexical items, are learned pairings of form and function"; (2) "Grammar does not involve any transformational or derivational component"; (3) "Phrasal constructions, words, and partially filled words (aka morphemes) are related in a network"; (4) Cross-linguistic generalizations "are explained by domain-general cognitive processes or by the functions of the constructions involved"; and (5) "Knowledge of language includes both items and generalizations, at varying degrees of specificity". Taken together, Goldberg's items 1, 3, and 5 frame linguistic knowledge as emergent generalizations within a network of learned phrasal and lexical items. This highly structured network of constructions subsumes the traditional lexicon and grammar, and so it is sometimes referred to as the "constructicon" (Fillmore 1988).

Since the 1980s, analyses in constructionist frameworks have contributed to our understanding of linguistic constructions as diverse and complex pairings of function and form. However, construction grammarians have traditionally devoted less attention to the network structure of "families" of related constructions in the constructicon. Accordingly, in "Constructing Families of Constructions: Analytical Perspectives and Theoretical Challenges", editors Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, Alba Luzondo Oyón, and Paula Pérez Sobrino bring together ten chapters to address this gap. The chapters are developed from papers that were presented at the "3rd International Conference on Meaning Construction, Meaning Interpretation: Applications and Implications" at the University of La Rioja, Spain in July 2013. Here I provide a brief summary of each of the ten contributions, before providing a general evaluation of the volume:

"The role of verbs and verb classes in identifying German search-constructions" by Kristel Proost (Ch1) identifies a previously-unexplored family of 20 related argument-structure patterns that code "prospective possession" with the phrasal structure [NP V PP] in German. Drawing on examples from the Deutsches Referenzkorpus, the author analyzes these argument-structure patterns as belonging to four subfamilies: (i) search-constructions referring to concrete actions, (e.g. "Künstler suchen nach Ateliers"/"Artists are looking for ateliers"); (ii) search-constructions referring to mental actions (e.g., "Er grübelt nach einem Motiv"/"He is brooding to find a motive"); (iii) search-constructions referring to linguistic actions (e.g., "Vorsitzender Theo Ferdinand telefonierte schon mittags nach weiteren Sonnenschirmen"/"Already at lunch time, chairman Theo Ferdinand phoned for additional sunshades."); and (iv) search-constructions referring to attitudes (e.g., "Rund um den Erdball dürsten Milliarden von Menschen nach Fernsehport"/"All around the globe, billions of people thirst for television sports").

"Embodied motivations for abstract in and on constructions" by Marlene Johansson Falck (Ch2) analyzes several in- and on-constructions in English as construals of relationships involving containers and surfaces, respectively. Analyzing 1000 random realizations of in/on-constructions from the British National Corpus, the author demonstrates that both construction types can be analyzed into several conceptual categories that are grounded in body-world knowledge. In-constructions are shown to fall into 10 conceptual categories, including construing an event, action, or process as something that something else is located in (e.g. "Some drugs are useful agents in the treatment of disease in man and animals but some may also produce undesirable effects"). On-constructions are found to fall into 14 conceptual categories, including someone doing something on the basis of something else (e.g. "The right to abortion on psychological or social grounds had not been included in a more restrictive earlier draft").

"Doing Tsukahara' and 'the Epley' in a cross-linguistic perspective" by Rita Brdar-Szabó and Mario Brdar (Ch3) analyzes eponymous verb constructions, in which a (light) verb and NP denote a metonymic action, in Croatian, English, German, and Hungarian. The authors conclude that eponymous verb constructions are shaped in part by the structural facts of a language, including the use of light verbs, morphosyntactic gender, and tolerance for complex metonymy. Drawing primarily on eponymous medical and sports terms as attested in internet search results, the authors demonstrate that English eponymous verb constructions (e.g. "With that hint and my careful practice, I could easily do the Hallpike. So I did the Hallpike on the other side and..."), may present a somewhat exceptional case. In the other three languages surveyed, the verb or NP tend to be heavier (e.g., Croatian "Dijagnoza se potvrđuje izvodenjem testa Dix Hallpike"/"The diagnosis can be confirmed by performing the Dix-Hallpike test"; German "... wird das Lagerungsmanöver nach Dix-Hallpike durchgeführt"/"the Dix-Hallpike maneuver is executed"; and Hungarian "A Dix-Hallpike manővert elvileg megcsinálta az ügyeletes"/"The Dix-Hallpike maneuver was basically done by the doctor on duty"). These tendencies are accounted for in a factorial typology of four micro-constructions that cross light and heavy verbs and NPs.

"The role of inferencing in the interpretation of two expressive speech act constructions" by Klaus-Uwe Panther and Linda L. Thornburg (Ch4) focuses on two illocutionary constructions in English, "That NP should VP" (e.g. "That it should come to this!") and "Wh-x do you think CL-x" (e.g. What do you think you are doing?"). Appealing to examples attested in the Corpus of Contemporary English and the corpus of Global Web-Based English, the authors evaluate propositional and illocutionary speech acts from a constructionist perspective. They demonstrate that constructions such as "That all your friends should be so sympathetic" and "What do you think you are – some kind of New Age theologian?" conventionally code idiomatic expressive senses that overshadow, yet are inferentially derivable from, a more transparent source sense. Moreover, this trajectory can be explained through conceptual and pragmatic analysis, leading the authors conclude that "the theoretical apparatus of cognitive linguists must be enriched by an inferential component" (p.130).

"Exploring inter-constructional relations in the constructionicon: A view from Contrastive (Cognitive) Construction Grammar" by Francisco González-García (Ch5) considers relations within and across three construction types, (i) the reflexive subjective-transitive construction (e.g. "I consider myself Cervantes, the poet), (ii) the self-descriptive transitive construction (e.g. "James found himself a virtual prisoner"), and (iii) the WXDY construction (e.g. "What's this fly doing in my soup?"), in English and in Spanish. The majority of data are extracted from the British National Corpus and from the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual. Providing a detailed analysis of several construction types, and consistent with the constructionist approach, the author argues that the unifying factor uniting these various construction types, cross-linguistically, is their shared pragmatic function, namely, to encode characterizations of temporary states. The final analysis, with cross-constructional morphosyntactic properties of interest and examples from both languages, is helpfully summarized in Table 1 and in Figure 1 (p.166).

"Revisiting the English resultative family of constructions: A unifying account" by María Sandra Peña Cervel (Ch6) seeks to unify Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004) and Luzondo (2014)'s competing analyses of the structure of the English family of resultative constructions. The author considers familiar examples from the literature as well as new data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English and from Google Books, to develop a

more unified taxonomy. The revised classification of the family of resultative constructions in English draws initial distinctions between motion (e.g., "He froze to death") and non-motion (e.g., "The pond froze solid") resultatives, and secondarily between transitives (e.g., "Bill rolled the ball down the hill") and intransitives (e.g., "The ball rolled down the hill"). The result also enriches Goldberg and Jackendoff's original taxonomy with construction types that have been identified since 2004.

"The family of German dative constructions" by Sabine de Knop and Fabio Mollica (Ch7) considers two alternative analyses of the German dative. Drawing on examples collected from everyday speech and the *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, the authors first identify two types of dative: the valency-dependent dative object (e.g., "Max gibt seiner Schwester[dative] ein Buch"/"Max gives his sister[dative] a book"), and the free dative (e.g., "Ihr[dative] ist die Aufgabe zu schwer"/"The task is too difficult for her[dative]"). They demonstrate that projectionist frameworks such as Valency Grammar do not account for the second class of free datives neatly, but that the constructionist account, augmented with insights from projectionist accounts, provides a unified analysis of both dative types. The authors ultimately analyze dative constructions into two broad functional types: benefactive/recipient-constructions (e.g., "Das Kind hilft der alten Dame[dative]"/"The child helps the old lady[dative]") and experiencer-constructions (e.g., "Ihm[dative] gefallen interessante Bücher"/"He[dative] likes interesting books").

"Motivation behind the extended senses of the Polish ditransitive construction" by Joanna Paszenda (Ch8) identifies the cognitive motivations for ditransitive expressions in Polish, as attested in the National Corpus of Polish. Drawing on Goldberg's analyses of the ditransitive as a radial network of related constructions, the author proposes that the central prototype of the ditransitive network in Polish encodes caused events of transfer (e.g., "Podarował Ewie książkę"/"He gave Eve a book"). From this central prototype are several metonymic extensions regarding the action (relating to causality, transfer, communication, preparation, attitude), as well as several metaphoric extensions regarding the object (encoding a message, a feeling, an intention, a mental state, an outcome), and related changes in perspective (including antonymy and negation). Accordingly, this in-depth, multidimensional analysis complements Goldberg's original radial model.

"The English conative as a family of constructions: Towards a usage-based approach" by Pilar Guerrero Medina (Ch9) argues for a family-resemblance account of at-constructions in English. Drawing on examples from the Corpus of Contemporary English and the British National Corpus, the author proposes that at-constructions in English include at least three sub-types: the allative at-construction (e.g., "With an uncoordinated reflex, I kicked at the thing, knocking it a few meters away"), the ablative at-construction (e.g., "I was so nervous, so I sat by Reef, stroking him and talking to him while my dad cut at the net binding him"), and the directional at-construction (e.g., "They all looked disdainfully at the boy's father"). This family-resemblance analysis considers the contributions of verbal semantics and constructional semantics in order to provide a complete account of relationships between verbal alternations.

The final contribution, "Multimodal constructional resemblance: The case of English circular motion constructions" by Elisabeth Zima (Ch10) demonstrates that verbal motion constructions are often combined with recurrent gestures, arguing that a speaker's knowledge of when and how to coordinate speech and gesture must be accounted for as part of linguistic knowledge, if the usage-based perspective is to be taken seriously. The author analyzes 5

circular motion constructions in English: [V in circles], [circle], [orbit], [spin around], and [rotate]. A total of 881 instantiations of these motion constructions are analyzed from the NewsScape Library of Television News Broadcasts, 63% of which are found to be accompanied by circular motion gestures. Despite variations in form among these recurrent gestures, these results demonstrate that a very common way to talk about motion events involving a circular motion is to use a circular motion gesture. Thus, the construction "must be taken to be essentially multimodal." (p.332)

EVALUATION

"Constructing Families of Constructions: Analytical Perspectives and Theoretical Challenges" (CFC) is a diverse volume that should be of interest to cognitive linguists, construction grammarians, functional typologists, and corpus linguists. The volume opens with an introduction written by the editors, followed by the main content chapters. As references helpfully appear at the end of each chapter, the volume ends with a comprehensive subject index. CFC is the 58th volume in the long-running series "Human Cognitive Processing: Cognitive Foundations of Language Structure and Use", which John Benjamins has published for over 20 years. The quality of volume is consistent with the high standards that one expects from Benjamins. However, there are a number of small typographical errors throughout the volume, particularly noticeable when authors comment, for example, on the decision to reproduce a table for reference or to use italics to mark a feature of interest, these decisions not having been implemented in the final version. Thankfully, these small errors do not hinder understanding in any consequential way.

The editors' stated goal for the volume is that it "moves away from a compartmentalized view of constructions with the aim of providing readers with a more holistic perspective of grammar as based on interconnected configurations" (p.3). This goal is achieved in that each of the ten contributions provides an example of how a particular construction of interest can be related to other constructions on the basis of shared aspects of function, shared aspects of form, or a more abstract analysis of family resemblance among function-form pairings.

One small issue that I have with CFC is that the division of the ten chapters into two main parts is more puzzling than enlightening. Ch1-5 are presented together as Part 1: "Analytical perspectives on grammatical constructions", and Ch6-10 form Part 2: "From applications to theory and back". However, nearly every chapter does both of these things, providing an analytical perspective on the notion of a grammatical construction and navigating the relationship between theory and analysis, and so the two-part division strikes me as somewhat arbitrary. I would have preferred groupings that reflect the content of the chapters in more closely, especially given the overlap in phenomena and sensibilities across many chapters. For example, several chapters speak to the structure and nature of the relationships among members of a constructional family (Ch3, Ch5, Ch6, Ch8), others to the mapping of semantic functions to morphosyntactic form (Ch1, Ch2, Ch7, Ch9), or to the apparatus and scope of construction grammar (Ch4 and Ch10). Because the contributions fit together well as a single volume, many alternative groupings would also have been possible. However, there is no accounting for taste when it comes to organization and classification, and the arrangement of the chapters in two main sections does not detract from the overall high quality of the volume.

One of CFC's particular strengths is its empirical breadth. Though several contributions analyze morphosyntactic constructions in English, a handful of languages other than English

are analyzed: Croatian (Ch3), German (Ch1, Ch3, Ch7), Hungarian (Ch3), Polish (Ch8), and Spanish (Ch5). The majority of contributions also draw on corpus data, rather than invented or elicited examples. It bodes well for linguistics as a science that the study of languages other than English and the analysis of linguistic phenomena as they are actually used are becoming increasingly standard. Given its focus on languages other than English, and on the use of data from a number of different corpora, this volume may also be of interest to linguists for more practical or pedagogical purposes. For example, instructors looking for templates for advanced undergraduate class projects, or for items to seed discussion in graduate seminars on linguistic methodology, would be well served by using the chapters of the volume as examples.

In closing, it is interesting to note that construction grammarians consider constructions to be *gestalts*, organized wholes that exceed the sum of their parts. Much like the constructions being studied, CFC exceeds the sum of its parts, while also encompassing a number of independently meaningful contributions. Though the volume will be of significant interest to construction grammarians, as it examines families of constructions that have traditionally been underexplored in the theory of Construction Grammar, the diversity of topics and methodologies across the ten chapters will make this volume appealing to a much broader audience, as well.

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