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M. HILPERT, *CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR AND ITS APPLICATION TO ENGLISH* (EDINBURGH TEXTBOOKS ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE), EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, EDINBURGH 2014, 220 pp.

The approach to language defined as Construction Grammar has been present for over two decades, but until very recently there was no authoritative overview of its theoretical foundations. While Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013 offer such a comprehensive reference work, *Construction Grammar and its Application to English* by Martin Hilpert is intended as an accessible introductory textbook, which presents the main tenets of the theory and demonstrates how it can be applied in various areas of linguistics. The purpose of the volume is twofold: firstly, it introduces the reader to Construction Grammar as a non-transformational, non-modular framework, built on the premise that linguistic knowledge boils down to constructions: form-meaning pairings which can be traced at all levels of language. Secondly, the book applies the theory to the description of various areas of the English language, from morphology to pragmatics, which makes it a potential element of a course on descriptive grammar or linguistics.

The book lends itself well to academic uses: it is clearly structured and engagingly written, in a lively, conversational style. The author frequently addresses the readers, posing questions or anticipating objections, thus making them partners in the exploratory enterprise, but without overwhelming them with too much information. More general conclusions are arrived at gradually, through a number of exhaustively discussed examples and vivid explanatory metaphors. Each chapter finishes with a summary, a list of study questions and detailed guidelines for further reading. For each of them there is also a video lecture available online, which gives a detailed summary of the content and could be used as homework assignment or the basis of an e-learning task.

The book divides into two main sections: chapters 1–5 give the reader “a grand tour of English grammar” (p. 23) as seen from the constructionist perspective, first defining the fundamental notion of constructions (ch. 1), then zooming in on their specific types: argument structure constructions (ch. 2), abstract phrasal and clausal constructions (ch. 3), morphological constructions (ch. 4) and finally information packaging constructions (ch. 5). The second part of the book focuses on the interconnections between CG and various areas of linguistic research, such

as psycholinguistics (ch. 6), language acquisition (ch. 7) or language variation and change (ch. 8).

Chapter 1 explains and motivates the constructional framework. The author argues against the 'dictionary and grammar model', i.e. a clear cut division between lexicon and syntax, demonstrating that language is permeated by expressions of different degrees of idiomaticity, which cannot, however, be treated as fixed strings, as they are productive in various ways and have 'slots' sensitive to grammatical distinctions. Such expressions pose a problem for the 'dictionary and grammar model', as they constitute a large grey area between lexicon and syntax. CG proposes instead that all linguistic knowledge can be represented in terms of constructions, defined as "units of linguistic knowledge that pair form with meaning" (p. 2), characterized by formal and/or semantic non-predictability. The chapter subsequently explores practical procedures for the identification of constructions, based on features such as non-compositional meaning, syntactic patterns different from canonical ones, idiosyncratic constraints and collocational preferences.

Chapter 2 shows that the notion of constructions can be effectively applied not only to idiomatic structures, but also to the core of 'normal syntax' – the argument structure. Basic sentence patterns are more than just structural templates: they carry schematic meanings that reflect event types basic to human experience, e.g. the concepts of motion, transfer or causation. Such notions do not arise directly from the individual elements of the structure; on the contrary, often it is the construction that imposes the meaning on the verb, as in the classic example *to sneeze the napkin off the table*, where the meaning of resultant motion derives from the construction rather than the verb itself. To explain how verbs and constructions combine, the author relies on the distinction between syntactic valency and semantic event structure expressed in terms of thematic roles. A particular verb can occur in a construction if the argument structure of the construction and the event structure of the verb match semantically to an extent which allows for the fusing of their respective semantic contents. For instance, the verb *play* can enter the RESULTATIVE construction (as in *John played the piano to pieces.*) since both of them require an agent in subject position.

The chapter examines in more detail selected examples of valency-increasing constructions: the DITRANSITIVE construction (*Sally baked her sister a cake.*), the CAUSED MOTION construction (*The audience laughed Bob off the stage.*) and the WAY construction (*John elbowed his way across the room.*). Then it moves on to valency-decreasing constructions: the PASSIVE, the IMPERATIVE and the NULL INSTANTIATION, in which an element of the verbs event structure is not overtly expressed (*Chill before serving.*). Finally, the chapter touches on the thorny issue of syntactic alternations: pairs such as active and passive or ditransitive construction and prepositional dative. In the generative paradigm, those are usually accounted for in terms of transformations, but within CG each member of the pair is analyzed as a construction in its own right, as any affinities between the two are believed to be outweighed by the similarities that hold among the realizations of each individual pattern.

Chapter 3, devoted to more general theoretical issues such as the structure of linguistic knowledge and the nature of generalization in language, proves that the CG framework really is “very young, highly diverse, and undergoing rapid development” (p.xi) since there is no consensus among construction grammarians on many of the points discussed. The author carefully navigates those murky waters, relating the diverse opinions clearly yet without too far-reaching simplifications and explicitly indicating which of the opposing views is adopted in the book. The first of those problematic questions is if each and every construction is meaningful or whether some of them have a purely formal import. The author argues for the former view and shows two possible routes of analysis to account for the problematic cases (e.g. highly generic constructions such as subject-predicate, inversion or ellipsis): the ‘schematic’ approach looking for a common semantic core and the ‘prototype’ approach aiming for a network of lower-level constructions linked by family resemblance.

The central part of the chapter examines how speakers’ knowledge of language is organized in the construct-i-con, a network of form-meaning pairs from words and idioms to more generic constructions. Its elements are connected by various types of inheritance links: more specific patterns instantiate more generic ones, but there are also connections at the same level of abstraction, so the construct-i-con is a highly structured network rather than a straightforward hierarchy. Opinions differ as to the exact nature of linguistic knowledge stored in the construct-i-con: does it contain only constructional schemas or does it also comprise some of their specific instantiations? The author sees the construct-i-con as essentially usage-based, i.e. arising from and constantly shaped by the speakers’ experience with language, which results in a certain amount of redundancy – even fully regular forms can be stored in memory in addition to the generalized rules if they are frequent enough in language usage. On the basis of evidence from corpora and psycholinguistic research, primary importance within the model is given to more specific, low-level linguistic generalizations, pertaining to particular constructions. Notions such as syntactic categories or phrase structure rules are not treated as ‘an assembly manual’ for linguistic structures, but rather highly abstract generalizations over repeated instances of usage, whose practical import is limited. As can be seen from the above, CG aims for a theory of language that is empirically plausible, though it may not be the most economical model possible.

Chapter 4 focuses on constructional approach to morphology, recasting morphological processes as morpho-phonological constructions, which resemble syntactic constructions in that they are selective in the choice of their input elements (*runner* but not **stander*) and they exhibit coercion effects when speakers stretch the limits of the constructional schema (as in *skypable* or *cut-and-paste-able*). The author gives an overview of selected inflectional and derivational constructions, discussing some of their basic features: productivity determined on the basis of corpus data, non-compositional meaning that they may convey and their paradigmatic organization – the fact that they rely on sets of interconnected lexical elements.

The final part of the chapter demonstrates how the constructivist framework can be used to solve two ‘morphological puzzles’. First, the author relates Hay and Plag’s (2004) psycholinguistically motivated account of affix ordering in English: the tolerance of particular morphological constructions for complex forms as their bases increases with their parsability; in other words, the more easily a particular form can be analyzed into its components, the more likely it is to accept words that themselves contain other affixes. This regularity results in a usage-based hierarchy of suffixes, reflecting the order in which they occur in particular words (e.g. *relativize* but not **generalize*). As the second problematic case the author explains how the idiosyncratic characteristics of minor compounding processes such as compounds with plural non-heads (*claims department* but not **cars factory*) can be accounted for in terms of low-level constructional schemas and sub-part links with other constructions.

Chapter 5 moves in the direction of pragmatics, discussing information packaging constructions: sentence-level constructions which relate discourse-new information to the information already shared by the speakers. The author introduces basic theoretical concepts (based on Lambrecht 1994), such as pragmatic presupposition and pragmatic assertion (roughly corresponding to discourse-old and discourse-new information), the terms topic and focus, and finally the distinction between active, semi-active and inactive referents. The notions are subsequently used to demonstrate that several syntactically similar constructions (e.g. different types of cleft sentences, right- and left-dislocation, topicalisation and nominal extraposition) exhibit functionally motivated differences in information structure. The chapter closes with a pragmatic account of syntactic island constraints: phrase types that cannot be the focus of a wh-question essentially occur in the parts of information packaging constructions that are conventionally associated with presupposed information, and as such they cannot felicitously be questioned.

While chapters 1–5 introduce the basic tenets of CG and exemplify its applications to various areas of the English language, in the final three chapters the emphasis is placed on substantiating the framework with empirical evidence as the author relates psycholinguistic experiments and corpus research that give credence to the notion of constructions. Chapter 6 deals with language processing and reports on a growing body of research on the role of constructions in speech comprehension and production. It argues that hearers rely on constructions in understanding novel linguistic items and in making acceptability judgements. Moreover, in guiding the listeners’ interpretation of the whole sentence, the construction seems to play a more pivotal role than the lexical meaning of the verb. Discussing speech production, the author refers, though without too much technical detail, to the statistical methods developed to determine how characteristic a particular lexical item is for a construction (e.g. Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003; Hilpert 2014) and demonstrates that this factor can account for certain phenomena in speech production, such as phonetic reduction effects, syntactic priming and the speakers’ ability to complete sentence fragments.

Chapter 7 gives an overview of constructional theory of language acquisition, contrasting it with a more traditional account, based on continuity hypothesis, i.e. the assumption that mental representations of syntactic rules are essentially the same in child language and in adult language. By contrast, CG holds that the acquisition process is item-based: children initially acquire concrete phrases, which very slowly give rise to more abstract schemas. Children build up their construct-i-cons step by step, first forming pivot schemas, mini-constructions with one fixed element and one open slot, and then gradually generalizing over them to form increasingly complex structures. Instead of a language acquisition device, the process relies on several socio-cognitive skills, not specific solely to language learning, such as joint attention, intention reading and pattern recognition. The 'poverty of stimulus' argument is countered with empirically attested poverty of output: children are found to be less creative than usually assumed, and the vast majority of novel structures they produce involve a substitution of a single element in a previously heard or produced pattern. It is doubtful then whether they possess adult-like, reliably productive syntactic rules.

Chapter 8 puts forward an account of language variation and change based on corpus research and grounded in well-established work in quantitative sociolinguistics. Constructions are far from fixed; they change across time and from speaker to speaker. They permit variation both in their form and in their meaning, so they are in fact many-to-many mappings: connections between a number of related forms and a number of related meanings. Such variety is a part of the speakers' knowledge of language. The speakers distinguish not only between variants that are possible and those that are not, but also between the ones that are more and less frequent. The actual occurrence of a particular pattern is probabilistic in nature, as contextual features, ranging from morpho-phonology to discourse factors, make the speakers' choice of the structure more or less likely. Consequently, quantitative corpus-based methods can effectively be applied to assess the degree of variation and the impact of each individual factor, thus producing a detailed model of a particular construction across geographical or social varieties of contemporary English as well as different stages of its historical development.

The book closes with a short concluding section, offering practical guidelines for readers who wish to continue their acquaintance with CG, namely tips on further reading and on starting out one's own research projects. This is further facilitated by the fact that throughout the text the author systematically refers the readers to more exhaustive publications, such as for instance the classic works by Goldberg (1995, 2006) or *The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar* (Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013), a more specialist-oriented reference work.

The volume is slim and not meant to be comprehensive in its description of English grammar. However, it provides a reasonably full picture of the CG framework, introducing the readers to its principles, scope and methods. What makes the book particularly valuable is the author's consistency in adopting a usage-based perspective and emphasizing the need for empirical validation of linguistic theories, with clear examples of how this can be achieved in each

particular area of study. In summary, *Construction Grammar and its Application to English* is an informative yet accessible primer, well-documented with up-to-date research. It can safely be recommended both as an introductory text for undergraduate students and as a pleasant read for linguists unfamiliar with the framework.

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