

Construction Grammar

What do speakers of a language have to know, and what can they ‘figure out’ on the basis of that knowledge, in order for them to use their language successfully? This is the question at the heart of Construction Grammar, an approach to the study of language that views all dimensions of language as equal contributors to shaping linguistic expressions. The trademark characteristic of Construction Grammar is the insight that language is a repertoire of more or less complex patterns – constructions – that integrate form and meaning. This textbook shows how a Construction Grammar approach can be used to analyse the English language, offering explanations for language acquisition, variation and change. It covers all levels of syntactic description, from word-formation and inflectional morphology to phrasal and clausal phenomena and information-structure constructions. Each chapter includes exercises and further readings, making it an accessible introduction for undergraduate students of linguistics and English language.

THOMAS HOFFMANN is Professor and Chair of English Language and Linguistics at the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt as well as Furong Scholar Distinguished Chair Professor of Hunan Normal University. Notable publications include *Preposition Placement in English* (CUP, 2011), *English Comparative Correlatives* (CUP, 2019) and *The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar* (co-edited with Trousdale, OUP).

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Construction Grammar

The Structure of English

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To Moni, Sammy and Jonny

Construction Grammar: The Structure of English

A central property of human cognition is symbolic thinking, that is the ability of our minds to pair a string of sounds ([ha:t] or letters <heart>) with an arbitrary meaning (‘♥’). All speakers of English have stored thousands of such form-meaning pairings (also known as ‘words’) and are thus able to communicate with each other about topics as diverse as love, life, football or quantum mechanics. Now, all linguistic theories agree that words are one of the central units of any language. In addition to words, however, most theories postulate additional mechanisms for the combination of words into utterances (combinatory syntactic rules that have no access to meaning). In contrast to this, Construction Grammar holds that form-meaning pairings are not only a useful concept for the description of words, but that all levels of grammatical description involve such arbitrary and conventionalized form-meaning pairings. This extended notion of the Saussurean sign has become known as the ‘construction’ and includes morphemes, words, idioms, as well as abstract phrasal patterns.

The present textbook shows how a usage-based Construction Grammar approach can provide an explanatory as well as descriptively adequate analysis of the English language. It covers all levels of syntactic description, from word-formation and inflectional morphology to phrasal and clausal phenomena and information structure constructions. Moreover, it outlines how constructionist approaches can account for language acquisition, variation and change. Finally, it also offers an in-depth comparison of the differences as well as similarities of the many constructionist approaches that are currently being employed by Construction Grammar researchers.

Contents

List of Figures xvi
List of Tables xvii
Preface xix

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Constructions as Linguistic Signs 1

1.2 Basic Assumptions of Construction Grammar Approaches 10

 1.2.1 The Lexicon-Syntax Continuum 10

 1.2.2 Taxonomic Network Organization and Inheritance 10

 1.2.3 Surface Structure-Orientation 15

 1.2.4 Cross-linguistic Variability and Generalization 15

1.3 Summary 16

Exercises 16

2. Usage-Based Construction Grammar 17

2.1 Learning Constructions: Usage-Based Approaches 17

 2.1.1 Innate Grammar? 17

 2.1.2 Language Acquisition: First Constructions 20

 2.1.3 Exemplar Storage and Usage-Based Construction Grammar 27

2.2 Usage-Based Constructions 38

 2.2.1 The Internal Structure of Constructions 38

 2.2.2 When Can We Postulate that Something Is a Construction? 43

 2.2.3 Data in Usage-Based Construction Grammar 44

2.3 Summary 46

Exercises 47

3. Morphological Constructions 48

3.1 Morphemes: the Smallest Types of Constructions? 48

3.2 Inflectional Morphology 55

 3.2.1 Verbal Inflectional Constructions 57

 3.2.2 Nominal Inflectional Constructions 73

 3.2.3 Adjectival and Adverbial Inflectional Constructions 81

3.3 Word-Formation 86

 3.3.1 Derivational Constructions 86

 3.3.2 Compounding Constructions 88

 3.3.3 Conversion Constructions 92

 3.3.4 Clipping, Backformation and Blending Constructions 93

3.3.5	Alphabetism and Acronym Constructions	98
3.3.6	Eponymy and Neologism Constructions	100
3.4	Summary	100
	Exercises	101
4.	Word, Phrasal and Idiom Constructions	103
4.1	Words, Words, Words?	103
4.2	Word Classes and Basic Phrasal Constructions	111
4.2.1	Nouns and Noun Phrase Constructions	114
4.2.2	Adjectives and Adverbs/Adjective Phrase and Adverb Phrase Constructions	138
4.2.3	Verbs and Verb Phrase Constructions	142
4.2.4	Prepositions and Preposition Phrase Constructions	153
4.2.5	Main Word Classes and Beyond	164
4.3	Idioms as Constructions	168
4.4	Summary	175
	Exercises	175
5.	Complex Phrasal and Clausal Constructions	177
5.1	Argument Structure Constructions	177
5.1.1	The Basic Argument Structure Constructions of English	178
5.1.2	Degrees of Schematicity: The Network of Argument Structure Constructions	189
5.1.3	Argument Structure Constructions and Passive: Lexical versus Phrasal Construction	199
5.2	Tense and Aspect Constructions	206
5.3	Core Clause Constructions	211
5.4	Information Structure	221
5.5	Filler-Gap Constructions	229
5.6	Summary	234
	Exercises	235
6.	Constructional Variation and Change	236
6.1	Synchronic Variation	236
6.1.1	Cognitive Sociolinguistics	237
6.1.2	Post-Colonial Englishes	243
6.2	Diachronic Change	250
6.3	Summary	255
	Exercises	255
7.	Constructional Approaches and Formalisms	256
7.1	Construction Grammars	256
7.2	Complete Inheritance Approaches: BCG and SBC	258
7.3	Models of Human Language Processing: PA, FCG and ECG	261
7.4	Non-Formalized Usage-Based Approaches: CCG and RCG	266
7.5	Summary of Construction Grammar Approaches	269
	Exercises	271

8. Outlook: Emerging Research Topics in Construction Grammar	272
8.1 Constructional Approach to Syntactic Analysis	272
8.2 Multimodal Constructs – Multimodal Constructions?	275
8.3 Construction Grammar and Creativity	278
8.4 Is Construction Grammar a Falsifiable Theory?	281
8.5 Coda	284
<i>Glossary and List of Abbreviations</i>	285
<i>References</i>	290
<i>Index of Constructions</i>	310
<i>General Index</i>	312

Figures

1.1	Using taxonomic networks to represent information	page 11
1.2	Taxonomic network analysis of (1.7b) <i>She takes things for granted</i>	12
3.1	The Usage-based V-Past Tense construction network for regular verbs	63
3.2	–t/-d deletion in all words (a) and past tense verbs (b) in (figures for graphs from Bybee 2000: 70, 78)	64
4.1	The KICK Lexeme construction network	105
4.2	The BE Lexeme construction network	109
4.3	Partial construction network of Definite Pron _{poss} +N-NP construction	127
4.4	A partial representation of the Definite NP construction network	128
4.5	A partial representation of the Indefinite NP construction network	134
4.6	The different types of V-PP _{optional} relationships	163
5.1	Partial construction network for the Ditransitive construction (from Hoffmann 2017b: 314)	195
5.2	Active and Passive Ditransitive construction	203
5.3	Active and Passive Transitive construction	204
5.4	Abstract Active and Passive construction	205
5.5	The English Imperative construction network (Croft and Cruse 2004: 321)	217
5.6	The major clause constructions of English	221
7.1	SBCG representation of Caused Motion construction (adapted from Michaelis 2013: 149)	260
7.2	RCG representation of past tense wiped in Caused Motion construction (adapted from Croft 2012: 338–9)	268
8.1	CASA analysis of <i>This rendered him speechless</i>	273
8.2	CASA analysis of <i>he tottered helplessly out of the room and was not seen again for hours</i>	274

Tables

2.1	Training stimuli (adapted from Casenhiser and Goldberg 2005: 503)	<i>page</i> 32
3.1	The finite and non-finite forms of selected English verbs	68
4.1	Top 20 collocate nouns directly following <i>my</i> in the COCA corpus	125
4.2	Distribution of N types across Definite NP constructions	128
4.3	Ten most frequent <i>all</i> + NOUN sequences in COCA	134
4.4	Ten most frequent <i>in the N</i> patterns in COCA	156
4.5	Prototypical features of the major English word class categories	165
4.6	Top 10 N, N <i>and</i> N constructs in COCA	167
4.7	Selected quantifier + N sequences	175
5.1	Distributional properties of five Argument Structure constructions in the spoken part of the ICE/GB (data from: Perek and Lemmens 2010)	197
5.2	Collo-profile of the verb <i>CATCH</i> in the monotransitive construction (adapted from Herbst and Hoffmann 2018: 208)	198
5.3	Imperative constructs in the ICE-GB corpus (Hoffmann 2013: 316)	218
7.1	Summary of properties of Construction Grammars	270

Preface

The present book has taken an awful lot of time to write. When I first submitted my proposal for it to Cambridge University Press, I thought I would be able to deliver the manuscript within two years without any problems. Then we had our first child, I changed jobs, commuted for a couple of years and finally moved the whole family to Osnabrück, where I was working as a tenure-track assistant professor at the time. After that, however, I thought I would be able to quickly write up this textbook. Then we had our second child, I changed jobs, commuted for a couple of months and finally moved the whole family to Eichstätt, where I now work as a tenured professor. Finally, I was able to finish the textbook! Well, eventually I did, after serving as head of department, then head of my school and various other fun admin jobs. Believe it or not, all this time has done the book a lot of good – after teaching its content for more than a decade now, it is definitely a better read than the one I would have originally written.

Thanks, as always, first and foremost, go to my wonderful family, Moni, Sammy and Jonny. You are my world and without your love, support and understanding none of this would be possible, or even worthwhile. I spent ages in my study at home, typing away at this book and especially Sammy and Jonny did not quite get why daddy was ‘wasting his time’ like this. Still, I hope that when you grow up you will always feel that I stopped whatever I was doing whenever you needed to talk to me – or for a quick two-against-one football match.

This book owes a lot to the wisdom and knowledge of many wonderful colleagues, many of whom I am fortunate enough to call friends. I have benefited greatly from many challenging and stimulating discussions with Alexander Bergs, Hans Boas, Thomas Brunner, Bert Cappelle, Nik Gisborne, Thomas Herbst, Martin Hilpert, Graeme Trousdale, Mark Turner, Peter Uhrig and Alexander Ziem. Moreover, I, obviously, could never have written this textbook without the ground-breaking work on Construction Grammar by Bill Croft, Chuck Fillmore, Adele Goldberg and Ivan Sag. I am indeed standing on the shoulders of giants!

I would like to thank everyone at Cambridge University Press for their continued support in publishing this book. Publishing with Cambridge University Press is an honour as well as a privilege and, on top of that, always a pleasure. In particular, I am indebted to Andrew Winnard for considering my book a possible contribution to the excellent *Textbooks in Linguistics* series in

the first place – and for his patience waiting for the final manuscript. I would also like to express my gratitude to Isabel Collins, for her continuous support throughout the entire publication process.

Finally, I would like to thank my student assistants, Matthias Mgratsch for his help during the early stages of the project and Sina Damköhler for all the meticulous and invaluable work she has put into the final layout of the book.

A textbook such as the present one cannot be written without drawing on one's own previous research. Astute readers will notice that parts of the book particularly draw on my following, earlier publications:

- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2017a. From constructions to construction grammar. In: Barbara Dancygier, ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 284–309.
- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2017b. Construction grammars. In: Barbara Dancygier, ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 310–29.
- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2017c. Multimodal constructs – Multimodal constructions? The role of constructions in the working memory. *Linguistics Vanguard* 3, s1: 1–10.
- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2018. Creativity and construction grammar: Cognitive and psychological issues. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 66, 3: 259–76.
- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2019a. *English Comparative Correlatives: Diachronic and Synchronic Variation at the Lexicon-Syntax Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2019b. Language and creativity: A construction grammar approach to linguistic creativity. *Linguistics Vanguard* 5, 1: 379–96.
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- Hoffmann, Thomas and Graeme Trousdale. 2011. Variation, Change and Constructions in English: Introduction. *Cognitive Linguistics* 22, 1: 1–23.
- Hoffmann, Thomas and Graeme Trousdale. 2013. Construction Grammar: Introduction. In: Thomas Hoffmann and Graeme Trousdale, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1–12.

So much for the Preface – now, after all this dilly-dallying – it is high time to start with our usage-based Construction Grammar analysis of the English language.