

Empirical Evidence.
Converging approaches to constructional meaning

This theme session brings together the various empirical approaches to the study of syntactic meaning. Cognitive Linguistics has recently witnessed a new and healthy concern for empirical methodology. Using such methods, important inroads have been made in the study of near-synonymy, syntactic alternation, syntactic variation, and lexical licensing. However, the use and meaning of constructions themselves represents relatively uncharted territory in empirical cognitive research. Drawing on the insights of the analytical models proposed in Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987) and Construction Grammar (Lakoff 1987), the theme session focuses on empirical methods to examine this question.

In Cognitive Linguistics, technically any form-meaning pair may be treated as a construction. However the schematic structures of the morphosyntactic level have traditionally posed problems for the study of their meaning. For one, there is the abstractness of the semantics typically associated with constructions at the clause level. Next, the use/meaning of such constructions is entwined with both 'grammatical' concerns and the lexical semantics of the verbs with which they combine. It is precisely this multifactorial nature of the phenomenon that makes it an ideal test-case for empirical research - experimental, elicited, and corpus-driven - which claims to excel at tackling such linguistic phenomena. Taking on board the corpus-based work on construction/lexeme attraction (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003 and subsequent publications) as well as the study of constructional alternations (de Heylen 2006, Tummers & al. 2005 *inter alia*), the next step is to focus more squarely on the use and meaning of the constructions themselves.

Empirical methods, and methodology generally, are one of the most important concerns for any descriptive science and the recent blossoming of research in this respect in Cognitive Linguistics can be seen as a maturing of the field. A range of recent anthologies on the issue, including Gries & Stefanowitsch (2006), Stefanowitsch & Gries (2006), Gonzalez-Marquez & al. (2007), Andor & Pelyvas (forthc.), Newman & Rice (forthc.), and Glynn & Fischer (in preparation), can be seen as testimony to the importance attached to this issue. Despite the advances in this regard, how the different methods and the results they produce inform each other remains largely ill-understood. Although this question of how elicited, experimental, and found data relate has been addressed in the work of Schönefeld (1999, 2001), Gries & al. (2005, in press), Goldberg (2006), Arppe & Järvikivi (in press), Gilquin (in press), Divjak (forthc.), and Wiechmann (subm.), it warrants further investigation. It is in this light that this theme session seeks to bring to the fore the importance of comparing and combining the results gleaned from different empirical methods in a relatively unexplored domain, the meaning of constructions.

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