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Martin Hilpert, *Construction Grammar and its Application to English* (Edinburgh Textbooks on the English Language). 2014. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ISBN 978-0-748-67584-5 (hardback) / 978-0-748-67585-2 (paperback). 220 pp.

Reviewed by Lieselotte Brems (University of Liège)

This volume presents itself as an introductory textbook on Construction Grammar applied to English, aimed at intermediate or advanced students. The author addresses the reader explicitly throughout the book and is often casual and even jocular in tone (“Such places Ross called syntactic islands, presumably because words cannot swim”, p. 124), including some personal anecdotes that help make certain points clearer (p. 113). All of this seems in keeping with the aim of the book to be an accessible introduction to Construction Grammar.

Using examples from English, Hilpert builds up an argumentation for why we should think of our knowledge of a language in terms of a network of constructions. In doing so, in the **first chapter** Hilpert primarily opposes himself to the dictionary-and-grammar model (cf. Taylor 2012: 8), which suggests that knowledge of the lexicon and knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language are clearly distinct. He first presents the reader with a number of facts that make a simple dichotomy between grammar and the lexicon problematic, among which the existence of idiomatic expressions. The latter can be shown to be more central to a language than often thought. They are not just fixed strings that can simply be said to be complex lexical items and relegated to the lexicon, as the dictionary-and-grammar model suggests. They incorporate variation not only to do with the lexical items that can fill certain slots, but also to do with grammatical parameters (e.g. in terms of (in)definiteness, as in the **BIG MESS** construction, which only allows indefinite, singular noun phrases, as in *too big a shock; quite useful a lesson*; p. 5). In addition, they are often productive and can hence generate several variant realizations, which in traditional accounts is a privilege of grammar (e.g. the **COMPARATIVE CORRELATIVE** construction as in adjectival *the bigger, the better*, but also clausal realizations such as *The more carefully you do your work, the easier it will get*; p. 7). Language users seem to be able to use idiomatic expressions creatively and successfully, which suggests that lexical and grammatical knowledge interact and are stored together as well. Rather than being a matter of ‘dictionary’ versus ‘grammar’, both components can be accounted for by means of an integrated approach in terms of constructions and the construct-i-con, i.e. the repertoire of constructions in a given language. In the history of

Construction Grammar, the ‘solution’ to describe properties of idiomatic expressions as construction-specific was later generalized to all of the patterns in English, i.e. to ‘normal syntax’.

In the remainder of the book Hilpert overall convincingly makes the point that construction grammar with its idea of the construct-i-con is a theory that can encompass everything, i.e. normal syntax as well as idioms, but also morphology and other topics. In addition, it can be applied to language acquisition, language processing, variation and change and information structure. Chapters 2 to 3 introduce central concepts of Construction Grammar (CxG), whereas Chapters 4 to 8 present interfaces between CxG and specific areas of study, such as morphology, information structure, language processing and acquisition, variation and change.

In **Chapter 2** CxG is shown to apply to ‘normal syntax’ as well, in addition to idiomatic patterns. Focusing on argument structure constructions, Hilpert first discusses such central notions as ‘valency’, ‘predicate’ and ‘arguments’, as well as the “semantic coherence principle” (Goldberg 1995: 50) which specifies that “a verb can only be inserted into a given construction if the event structure of that verb and the argument structure of the construction match semantically” (p. 31). This principle explains why, for instance, *hear* cannot be inserted into a resultative construction such as **John heard his ears deaf with loud heavy metal* (p. 30). He then goes on to emphasize the importance of Goldberg’s “scene-encoding hypothesis” which can be paraphrased by Du Bois’ (1985) dictum that “Grammars code best what speakers do most” (p. 31). This hypothesis explains the existence of, for instance, the DITRANSITIVE construction in a language on functional grounds. Ditransitive constructions allow us to verbalize such basic elements of human experience as transfer of a physical object to a person, as in *I gave John the keys* (p. 32) and related metaphorical meanings to do with cause and effect, as in *The noise gave me a headache* (p. 33). Given the basic communicative messages they help communicate, such syntactic patterns are likely to occur crosslinguistically.

Next up Hilpert discusses valency-increasing constructions (such as the RESULTATIVE construction, in which intransitive verbs can take an object, as in *John ran his feet sore*; p. 29) and valency-decreasing constructions (such as the PASSIVE construction in which the agent is often left unexpressed, as in *Mistakes are made*; p. 26). He ends the chapter on some general thoughts on the somewhat controversial issue of syntactic alternations, such as for instance the PREPOSITIONAL DATIVE construction vis-à-vis the DITRANSITIVE construction. True to its tenets, CxG generally states that each pattern should be studied as a construction in its own right, despite similarities between them. Hilpert seems to follow Goldberg (2006) in her view on syntactic alternation.

Chapter 3 zooms in on the construct-i-on as a network of interlinked constructions, introducing the notion of inheritance. Hilpert sides with those branches of CxG that believe that speakers memorize many concrete instantiations of schematic constructions, rather than just the schematic constructions themselves. This redundancy hypothesis meshes with a usage-based view on the construct-i-con.

Chapter 4 turns to morphology, mainly building on Booij (2010) and (2013). Hilpert argues in favour of a constructional approach to inflectional and derivational morphology. In his discussion of a number of productive morphological constructions (e.g. the NOUN-PAST PARTICIPLE COMPOUND CONSTRUCTION, as in *moth-eaten*, *husband-dominated* and *doctor-recommended*; p. 85) he illustrates the notion of non-compositional meaning, since it is not always predictable whether the nominal part of these compounds acts as agent or patient with regard to the verbal part. In addition he shows how a constructional approach can help solve such morphological puzzles as affix ordering and compound formation.

Chapter 5 deals with information packaging and is a more technical chapter. Using Lambrecht's (1994) terms "pragmatic presupposition" and "pragmatic assertion", Hilpert shows "how syntactic constructions are conventionally associated with specific information packaging characteristics" (p. 127) and that the speaker's knowledge of a language also incorporates knowledge of constructions that allow to package information in such a way as to facilitate processing by the hearer. Hilpert illustrates this by discussing a number of cleft constructions such as IT-CLEFTS and WH-CLEFTS, dislocation constructions such as LEFT- and RIGHT-DISLOCATION constructions, and topicalisation.

Chapter 6 discusses constructions and language processing. It reinforces the point that speakers think and speak in terms of constructions. With reference to psycholinguistic work, Hilpert puts forward behavioural evidence for the importance of constructions in language production and comprehension. A constructional approach, for instance, helps predict the meaning of unknown verbs because of a speaker's knowledge of the construction in which it appears, i.e. constructional meaning independent of the lexical material in the construct at hand. For instance the interpretation of *to monk* in *It was not before his twenty-fourth birthday that Luther was monked* (p. 132) would rely on the hearer's knowledge of the PASSIVE construction and the latter's overall meaning. Hilpert furthermore reports on a number of experiments to confirm this constructional hypothesis of language processing and comprehension. In addition, it is shown how knowledge of constructions helps explain grammatical (un)acceptability in the sense that speakers' intuitions about acceptability are said to reflect knowledge about constraints on constructions. In addition, constructional knowledge helps explain

reduction effects in speech, syntactic priming and speakers' ability to complete each other's sentences.

Chapter 7 turns to constructions and language acquisition as a logical progression from Chapter 6. It is argued that language acquisition consists of learning in a step by step and item-based fashion, with children progressively generalising over these bits and pieces, first schematising them into pivot constructions with one fixed pivot and open slots. With age, increasingly more generalisations across such pivot schemas can be made, ultimately leading to an adult construct-i-con with abstract generalisations as well.

The final, and relatively short, **Chapter 8** deals with language variation and change and how those are accommodated for within the construct-i-con. Constructions should be viewed as many-to-many mappings between form and meaning, rather than static symbolic units. CxG has only just embarked on questions to do with both intra- and inter-speaker variability, Hilpert points out. When it comes to discussing constructional change, Hilpert refers to the fact that the synchronic variability of constructions makes them susceptible to change, formal and/or semantic, over time as well. Overall, the chapter remains quite brief, despite the fact that over the last few years diachronic CxG and constructional approaches to grammaticalization have become very influential not least thanks to Hilpert's own contributions to this burgeoning field.

Hilpert's textbook delivers on its promise to be an introduction to CxG and its application to various linguistic subdisciplines, despite the minor shortcoming of not properly exploring the diachronic angle. At the end of each chapter there are a number of study questions, suggestions for further reading, and exercises, for which, however, no keys are provided. In addition, a series of video lectures accompanies the book. An accessible textbook with a few more technical chapters, such as the one on information packaging, it will make a great introductory text for undergraduate students interested in Construction Grammar and its application to English.

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