Nick Riches

Newcastle University

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11 - Construction Grammar

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robs with trad

1. Val.Aug.

2. Weird Them.rels

solution

Goldberg's theory Valency aug

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1. She sneezed the napkin off the table

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- 1. Special sense of *sneeze*, e.g. sneeze = make a sudden involuntary expulsion of air from the nose and mouth due to irritation of one's nostrils such that the resulting air flow propels an object X from location Y.
- 2. The meaning comes from the construction

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(1) She sneezed the napkin off the table
S VERB Od PP
Subject acts on object in such a way that the object changes location

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Homework

By assuming that constructions have meaning, we can overcome a lot of problems with traditional Verb Argument

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Structure accounts.

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Probs with trad accs

Problems with traditional Verb Argument Structure accounts

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- 1. She sneezed the napkin off the table
- 2. The naughty students laughed the teacher out of the room
- 3. She juggled her way to the semi-finals of the juggling contest
- 4. Can you chop me some carrots?
- 5. Quote me happy! (Recent advert for insurance)

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2. Weird Them.rels

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There are plenty of verbs which take arguments with 'weird' roles, e.g.

1. She is happy

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2. Weird Them.rels

There are plenty of verbs which take arguments with 'weird' roles, e.g.

- 1. She is happy
- 2. The table needs a leg

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There are plenty of verbs which take arguments with 'weird' roles, e.g.

- 1. She is happy
- 2. The table needs a leg
- 3. That coat suits you

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There are plenty of verbs which take arguments with 'weird' roles, e.g.

- 1. She is happy
- 2. The table needs a leg
- That coat suits you
- 4. The coat fits me

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There are plenty of verbs which take arguments with 'weird' roles, e.g.

- 1. She is happy
- 2. The table needs a leg
- 3. That coat suits you
- 4. The coat fits me
- 5. She swapped her Porsche for a Ferrari

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There are plenty of verbs which take arguments with 'weird' roles, e.g.

- 1. She is happy
- 2. The table needs a leg
- 3. That coat suits you
- 4. The coat fits me
- 5. She swapped her Porsche for a Ferrari
- 6. They loaded the truck with hay

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Dozens of attempts by linguistics to come up with a definitive list!



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How constructions solve these issues

A solution

Goldberg's (1995) theory of Verb Argument Structure Constructions

When we use verbs in sentences, we insert them into Verb Argument Structure Constructions (VAS Constructions).

These are syntactic units with their own **independent** meaning.

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Goldberg's theory

Goldberg's (1995) theory of Verb Argument Structure Constructions

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1. The multiple sense account.

2. The construction based account.

The extra argument is specified by the construction

itself.

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If roles are (in part) given by the construction itself, we are not committed to a small and finite set of roles.

```
(2) Die hard is \begin{cases} great \\ a great Christmas film \end{cases} ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub> denotes a property of NP<sub>1</sub>
```

- (2) Die hard is $\begin{cases} great \\ a great Christmas film \end{cases}$ ADJ / NP₂ denotes a property of NP₁
- (3) One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter NP_1 copula NP_2 Both NPs identify the same referent

- (2) Die hard is $\begin{cases} great \\ a great Christmas film \end{cases}$ ADJ / NP₂ denotes a property of NP₁
- One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter

 NP₁ copula NP₂

 Both NPs identify the same referent

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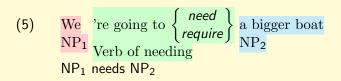
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(6) That dress $\begin{cases} fits \\ suits \end{cases}$ you NP_1 verb of fitting/suiting NP_2 NP_1 looks good on NP_2

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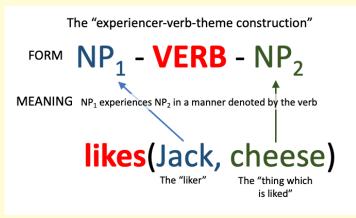
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What about traditional roles, e.g. "AGENT" / "PATIFNT"?

Traditional labels could be used to describe slots in VAS Constructions with very general/abstract meanings, e.g. AGENT + VERB + PATIENT

But importantly, the roles are specified by the construction, and are not independent of it

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Trad roles

What about traditional roles, e.g. "AGENT" / "PATIENT"?

Some of the more general roles are 'echoed' across constructions...

THEME + VERB + EXPERIENCER	EXPERIENCER + VERB + THEME
The film pleased me	I liked / enjoyed the film
The film scared me	I feared the film (I was frightened of the film)
The film impressed me	I admired the film
The film repulsed me	I hated the film

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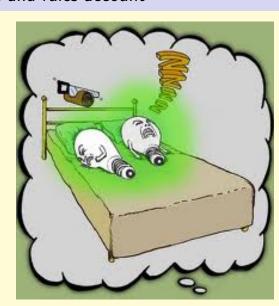
The words and rules account (e.g. Chomksyan linguistics):

 $\mathsf{RULE} \colon \mathsf{VP} \Leftarrow \mathsf{V} + \mathsf{NP}$

RULE: Sentence \Leftarrow NP + VP

INTERPRETATION: A situation involving two NPs whose roles are determined by the verb.

Words and rules account



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Words and rules account

and the lexicon (repository of meaning)

Categorical distinction between syntax (combinatorial rules)

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Words and rules account

meaning.

Syntactic constructions can also be **meaningful**.

No distinction between syntax and the lexicon.

Words involve mapping between form and meaning. Constructions also involve a mapping between form and 11 - Construction Grammar

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Other constructions

(NB Verb Phrase is doubled)

FORM: N + N

(7)

MEANING: We evoke a scale of authenticy. N + N is placed higher on the scale than N

Other examples:

(8)It's tuna salad, not SALAD-salad.

Arthritis arthritis!?

(9)Is he french, or FRENCH-french

(10)Oh, we're not LIVING-TOGETHER living-together

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StuW232 Birmingham, United Kingdom

F122 1 24

There are burgers and then there are burgers...

On a very quiet, very wet Tuesday in December I dropped in for a late dinner and had the restaurant all to myself which was really quite lovely as it's super cozy even when it's just you on your lonesome! I've simple tastes so had French onion soup followed by the house burger and chips. Now this was a burger, piled high with salad, crispy bacon and a beef patty that was cooked to perfection, super crunch chips and great relishes to dip in to.

Simple doesn't have to be basic and in this instance it was for me a pretty perfect burger.

Ask StuW232 about Restaurant Underhuset

(11) There are burgers and then there are burgers There is/are NP_1 ad then there is/are NP_2 2nd NP is more authentic than the first

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(12) Now watch me go and drop this cake!

Now watch Non-finite clause

We are 'tempting fate'

(13) She worked her way to the top of the class SUBJ. V his/her/its way PREP. PHRASE SUBJECT changes location (literally/metaphorically) by performing action denoted by the verb. Movement is **effortful** and **circuitous**

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According to the Words and Rules Approach

- 1. There is a categorical distinction between words (meaning) and rules (form)
- 2. Linguistic knowledge consists of (a) lexical knowledge, and (b) syntactic knowledge (ability to combine words)
- 3. Semantic interpretation of a sentence is separate (and subsequent to) syntactic interpretation

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According to Construction Grammar accounts

- 1. Words and syntactic constructions are all part of the same system, sometimes called the "Constructicon"
- 2. Linguistic knowledge = knowledge of constructions (words can be described as "minimal constructions")
- Semantics and syntax are inseparable (as syntactic constructions are meaningful)

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Some syntactic phenomena do not appear to be linked to

meaning, e.g. subject + verb agreement.

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When teaching children grammatical constructions we need to higlight the **meaning** of those constructions.

e.g. Riches (2013) highlights the meaning of the passive construction (the verb is highly affected), e.g.

1. The vase was smashed by the dog (Vase is highly affected)

This is reflected in children's early use of the passive. We very rarely have passives in which the subject is not highly affected, e.g.

1. It was dreamt about.



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