

1. Val.Aug.
2. Weird Them.rels

Goldberg's theory  
Valency aug  
Weird them.rels

Fusion  
Trad roles

Words and rules account  
Construction Grammar

Comparison

# 11 - Construction Grammar

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December 11, 2018

## Homework

Problems with traditional Verb Argument Structure accounts

How constructions solve these issues

How constructions combine with verbs

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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  
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Subject acts on object in such a way that the object  
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By assuming that constructions have meaning, we can overcome a lot of problems with traditional Verb Argument Structure accounts.

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# 1. Valency augmentation

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 thematic relations

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

1. She is happy

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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

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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
3. That coat suits you
4. The coat fits me
5. She swapped her Porsche for a Ferrari

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## 2. Weird thematic relations

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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## 2. Weird thematic relations

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



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# 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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1. The multiple sense account.
2. The construction based account.  
The extra argument is specified by the construction itself.

# Weird thematic relations

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

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## Weird thematic relations

- (2) Die hard is  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{great} \\ \text{a great Christmas film} \end{array} \right\}$   
NP<sub>1</sub> copula ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub>

ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub> denotes a property of NP<sub>1</sub>

## Weird thematic relations

- (2) Die hard is  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{great} \\ \text{a great Christmas film} \end{array} \right\}$   
NP<sub>1</sub> copula ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub>

ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub> denotes a property of NP<sub>1</sub>

- (3) One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter  
NP<sub>1</sub> copula NP<sub>2</sub>

Both NPs identify the same referent

# Weird thematic relations

- (2) Die hard is  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{great} \\ \text{a great Christmas film} \end{array} \right\}$   
NP<sub>1</sub> copula ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub>

ADJ / NP<sub>2</sub> denotes a property of NP<sub>1</sub>

- (3) One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter  
NP<sub>1</sub> copula NP<sub>2</sub>

Both NPs identify the same referent

- (4) George Clooney is George Clooney  
NP<sub>1</sub> copula NP<sub>2</sub>

The individual identified by both NPs has a property which is relevant to the discussion.

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- (5) We 're going to  $\left\{ \begin{matrix} need \\ require \end{matrix} \right\}$  a bigger boat  
NP<sub>1</sub> Verb of needing NP<sub>2</sub>  
NP<sub>1</sub> needs NP<sub>2</sub>



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- (6)      That dress       $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \textit{fits} \\ \textit{suits} \end{array} \right\}$       you  
         NP<sub>1</sub>                                  verb of fitting/suiting      NP<sub>2</sub>  
NP<sub>1</sub> looks good on NP<sub>2</sub>

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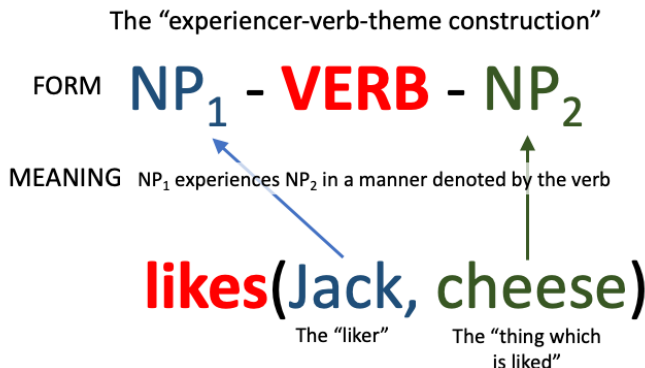
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# What about traditional roles, e.g. “AGENT” / “PATIENT” ?

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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# 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 <b>pleased</b> me	I <b>liked</b> / <b>enjoyed</b> the film
The film <b>scared</b> me	I <b>feared</b> the film (I <u>was frightened of</u> the film)
The film <b>impressed</b> me	I <b>admired</b> the film
The film <b>repulsed</b> me	I <b>hated</b> the film

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

RULE:  $VP \Leftarrow V + NP$

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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Categorical distinction between syntax (combinatorial rules)  
and the lexicon (repository of meaning)

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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 meaning.

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Clip from While we're young

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(7) Arthritis arthritis!?

FORM: N + N

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

Other examples:

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

(9) Is he french, or FRENCH-french

(10) Oh, we're not LIVING-TOGETHER living-together  
(NB Verb Phrase is doubled)

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 Birmingham,  
 United  
 Kingdom

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Reviewed 5 December 2017 📱 via mobile

## 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<sub>1</sub> ad then there is/are NP<sub>2</sub>  
 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”)
3. 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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## Clin Imps

## Bibliography

When teaching children grammatical constructions we need to highlight 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.

#### Homework

#### Probs with trad accs

1. Val.Aug.
2. Weird Them.rels

#### A solution

Goldberg's theory  
Valency aug  
Weird them.rels

#### Combination

Fusion  
Trad roles

#### Implications

Words and rules account  
Construction Grammar

#### Other constructions

#### Comparing the two models

Comparison

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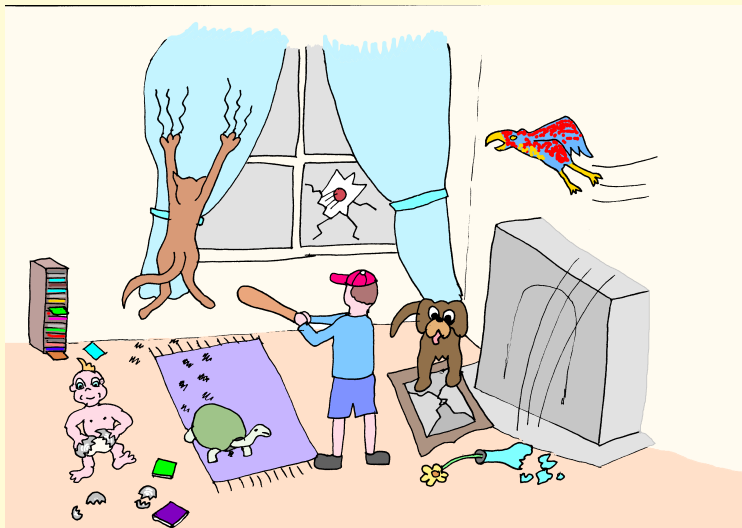
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## Homework

Problems with traditional Verb Argument Structure accounts

How constructions solve these issues

How constructions combine with verbs

The implications of VAS constructions

Other types of construction (not VAS)

Comparing the two models

Problems for construction grammar

Clinical implications

Bibliography

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Goldberg, A. E. (1995). Constructions: a Construction Grammar approach to argument structure. University of Chicago Press.

Riches, N. G. (2013). Treating the passive in children with specific language impairment: A usage-based approach. Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 29(2), 155–169.