

Leino, Jaakko (ed.) (2008) *Constructional Reorganization*. Constructional Approaches to Language 5. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Pp. vi + 155.

Reviewed by Jouni Rostila

This volume, comprising five articles, addresses an issue that has hitherto been largely neglected within studies on Construction Grammar(s) (henceforth CxG): language variation and its consequence, language change. Both processes can be conceived of as reorganization in the inventory of constructions that constitutes a language from a CxG point of view. However, it appears that the selection of articles available to the editor probably has not been quite satisfactory for the purpose of putting together a book on this topic. Key issues like the nature of grammaticalization – a process that involves both variation and change (Lehmann 1985) – from a CxG perspective are missing (cf. Rostila 2006, 2007; Diewald 2007; Traugott 2008 for some approaches), and as will be seen, some of the chapters do not bear very closely on constructional reorganization. Nevertheless, the book represents a valuable collection of attempts to come to terms with very varied phenomena using different sets of CxG concepts, whose selection by the individual authors is highly interesting in itself. In the following, I discuss the chapters of the book one by one, some in more detail than others, depending on the extent to which I consider myself competent to comment on them.

Ch. 1, the introduction by Jaakko Leino, provides a useful outline of research within CxG, along with an overview of the contents of the individual chapters and a section that places the papers of the volume in the broader context of research tendencies within CxG and studies on language change.

In Ch. 2, titled Resolving form-meaning discrepancies in Construction Grammar, Hans C. Boas argues that Goldberg's (1995) caused motion (e.g. in *He sneezed the napkin off the table*) and resultative constructions (e.g. in *She drank him under the table*) cannot account for the meanings of sentences like (1), despite the fact that such cases display the same syntactic pattern [NP V NP PP] as the two argument structure constructions posited by Goldberg:

- (1) a. The army blew a hole in the barrier (...)
 b. He suggests we knock a hole through the wall. (p. 12)

Boas argues for the need to assume less abstract constructions than Goldberg's argument structure constructions. More specifically, Boas proposes that a construction he calls AHTY ("a hole through Y", p. 14) is needed to account for cases like (1). As carefully as Boas states his case, his account is, as far as I can see, in many ways problematic. First of all, Boas states as an overall conclusion that "sameness in form does not always entail sameness in meaning" (p. 32); by form he here refers to the syntactic pattern [NP V NP PP] common to the caused motion and resultative constructions, as well as AHTY. However, it appears that he fails to see the significance of the fact that all instances of AHTY display the same noun hole in their second NP slot, which makes their form more specific, and hence different from that of the caused motion and the resultative constructions, which do not constrain their corresponding NP slot as strictly. Boas is probably right to argue for the need to assume a more specific construction like AHTY (albeit a pragmatic inference triggered by the noun hole might be a viable alternative). Yet it is hard to see why the existence of this separate, more specific construction should render problematic Goldberg's argument structure constructions (cf. p. 14). In my view, all of them could exist side by side, with the noun hole triggering an idiosyncratic interpretation.

What is more, in my view it is not clear that the need to argue for less abstract constructions is actually as urgent as Boas makes it seem. Is it not, on the contrary, rather commonplace within CxG that constructions exist at many levels of generalization or abstraction (cf. Croft 2001: 17, 57; Tomasello 2006; cf. also Traugott 2008; Rostila 2007)?

Further still, the nature of the "mini-constructions" that Boas exploits in his analysis does not become quite clear. They are supposed to be "form-meaning pairing[s] representing an individual sense of a verb" (p. 21). How, then, do they differ from the lexical entries of individual verbs, which must also be assumed to contain information on the syntax and semantics of their arguments? Are they to be understood as individual verbs along with their valency patterns that can act as models for how to construe other verbs as well? That is, can they be conceived of as sources of analogy e.g. on a par with Goldberg's frequently occurring individual verbs that help children form an argument structure construction (2006: 79–90)?

His study being based on electronic corpora and systematic web searches, Boas deserves credit for his data-driven approach, even though it does not become quite clear to what extent his web data has been checked by informants (cf. p. 13). One further open question is how Boas' observations bear on constructional reorganization, the intended common denominator of the papers in the volume.

In Ch. 3, Language change, variability, and functional load: Finnish genericity from a constructional point of view, Pentti Leino and Jan-Ola Östman discuss various factors involved in the recent spread of the Finnish *sä* passive. The construction in question is essentially a cognate of impersonal English structures like *You have to be alert on slippery roads*, but the factors the authors envisage as crucial to the spread of such structures in Finnish go far beyond loan translation or language contact. This is both the strength and the weakness of the chapter: the wide range of factors considered by the authors makes the paper a valuable contribution as a source of working hypotheses for future studies of the topic, but the discussion of any one factor suffers from lack of depth and the need to introduce concepts that cannot be defined properly in the space available. In the maze of motivations discussed, the exact nature and role of the two factors that the authors consider as central to the development – constructions as units of language change and their relation to so-called discourse patterns (Östman 2005) – do not get the highlight they would deserve.

Leino and Östman consider e.g. the functional load of the various Finnish generic expressions, the role of a prominent individual, analogy, language contact, and a drift towards the subject-prominent language type as factors that play a role in the spread of the *sä* passive. Of these, I find the potential tendency of Finnish towards subject prominence particularly interesting. In my view, more thorough future investigations of this factor should try to pin down what exactly makes a certain syntactic type spread. Is it the model value of expressions of a certain syntactic type (e.g. head-final word order) already established in a language? If so, what makes a pattern the more effective model, its sheer frequency of occurrence or some sociolinguistic value carried by the pattern (cf. e.g. Croft 2000)? If the role of pure frequency-induced entrenchment is more important, this suggests that once speakers learn to process language by means of a certain type of constructions (displaying e.g. head-final word order) in a frequently used functional domain, they introduce this type to other domains as well, for the sake of ease of processing.

In Ch. 4, Precategoriality and argument structure in Late Archaic Chinese, Walter Bisang demonstrates the central role that argument structure constructions (henceforth a-constructions) in the sense of Goldberg (1995) played in Late Archaic Chinese. It appears that at this development stage of Chinese, lexical items were underspecified as to their syntactic category. Only insertion into a “slot” in an a-construction reserved for either N or V assigned them a syntactic category, at the same time coercing their meaning (Michaelis 2004, Override Principle) into the function associated with the slot. Such coercion operations could have drastic effects if the lexical item in question was stereotypically associated with a category other than that provided by the slot; such coercions flouting the norm were in fact often used for rhetorical effects (p. 77).

The fact that lexemes in Late Archaic Chinese lack syntactic category would obviously seem to provide evidence for Croft’s (2001) view that there are no universal syntactic categories like N and V, but Bisang in fact argues against this stance (pp. 61). As far as I can see, his arguments are motivated by the term ‘precategoriality’, which presupposes that categoriality can develop at a later stage and is therefore also found in many languages. Such a development is, however, quite compatible with Croft’s Radical Construction Grammar, since it does not require the existence of *universal* syntactic categories. The preferences of certain lexical items for either N- or V-slots mentioned by Bisang (p. 77) could become entrenched or conventionalized in the corresponding lexical entries as information on the syntactic slots that the item is frequently used in – and this information would, in effect, constitute a syntactic category, since syntactic categories are nothing but labels for syntactic distributions.¹ However, such information would refer to individual constructions or, at most, generalizations over all the syntactic positions where a lexical item occurs in a language. The first option would amount to construction-specific syntactic categories, the second to language-specific ones. The crucial point is that no universal syntactic categories emerge from this process.

Bisang provides highly interesting data that show how lexical entries interacted with two a-constructions in Late Archaic Chinese, an intransitive and a transitive construction. He couches this data in well-informed discussions of stereotypical inferences, conceptual space, and the cultural

¹ That is, if prototypical core meanings like N = ‘thing’, V = ‘activity’ are not taken into consideration.

background from which the data emerge. Rather than trying to recapitulate these discussions, I will raise a couple of critical points, in the hope that they might bring to light questions that are also more generally left open within CxG or, in the worst case, reveal my misinterpretations of Bisang's paper.

Bisang states that “Goldberg (1995) looks at argument structure constructions from a syntax-independent semantic perspective (...), while Croft equally integrates the semantic side with the form side including syntax” (p. 59). In my view, this is not quite true. Goldberg does largely neglect the question of what exactly the form of her a-constructions consists in (cf. Rostila 2007: 61–65). Nevertheless, these constructions *have* a syntactic form, e.g. the ditransitive construction has the syntactic form of Subj–V–Obj–Obj₂, where the order of the terms is not specified, and the terms themselves must be regarded as shorthands like Subj = ‘the way(s) in which NP subjects are expressed in English’ (cf. *ibid.*). (A slightly more concrete form can be found in the conative construction: one of the arguments is symbolized by the P *at* (cf. Goldberg 1995: 63).)

One more issue regarding the form of a-constructions: Bisang posits an intransitive and a transitive construction for Late Archaic Chinese. As far as I can see, these fall together formally if the transitive construction is used with only an Undergoer argument occupying the preverbal position (cf. p. 65). How, then, can the two constructions be told apart, given that the verb slot can be taken by a wide range of items not necessarily stereotypically associated with a verb slot, and hence does not necessarily provide hints as to (in)transitivity?

One final point is perhaps in order: Bisang's contribution also lacks a clear connection to the overall topic of the book, constructional reorganization.

In Ch. 5, titled Variations in Japanese honorification – deviations or a change in the making?, Yoshiko Matsumoto puts reorganization center stage by presenting the on-going change of the non-subject honorific construction *o–V–suru* as a case of a cognitive shift by which its participants are reinterpreted as the speaker and the addressee, i.e. as belonging to the discourse level. The account explains the deviant, prescribed use of this honorific construction that seems to have been gaining ground lately and shows that it complies with the general tendency of referent honorifics developing into addressee honorifics. The paper not only deals with this change in detail and gives it an interpretation in terms of cognitive and interactional frames, but also offers a useful outline of the

properties of Japanese honorifics and the research hitherto conducted on them. However, keeping track of the different types of honorifics may pose a challenge for the uninitiated.

In Ch. 6, The connectives *för att* (causal), *så att* (consecutive) and *men att* (adversative) in Swedish conversations, Jan Lindström and Anne-Marie Londen examine the use of three complex Swedish sentence connectors, as opposed to their simple variants *för* (lit. ‘for’), *så* (lit. ‘so’), and *men* (lit. ‘but’). The study is based on conversational data and conducted with the methods of conversation analysis, but nevertheless aims at establishing generalizable categories in the form of constructions in the technical sense of CxG (cf. Fischer 2007 for some doubts in this respect). The authors show that despite their subordinated-clause syntax, clauses introduced by the connectors in question are not syntactically or semantically subordinated to a previous clause; rather, the subordination lies on discourse level. (Interestingly, this is reminiscent of the account that Lombardi Vallauri (2004) gives for free conditionals in Italian and some other languages.) The subordinating conjunction *att* ‘that’ contained within the complex connectors discussed is identified as the locus of this pragmatic subordinating function, contrary to previous accounts that have regarded it as a redundant element.² The account is laudably careful in that it involves e.g. a discussion of the historical development of *att*. In connection with this, the authors also explicitly address the question of (cognitive) reorganization, but perhaps do not do so in the clearest possible way (cf. p. 116). This is, however, understandable in a paper that involves such multi-faceted innovative use of theoretical concepts combined with careful empirical analysis. One further especially interesting issue broached by the authors is the use of the attribute-value matrix of CxG in describing the discourse subordination phenomena covered by the paper that cannot be captured by means of traditional grammar.

On the whole, the volume is significant in that it represents one of the first steps of CxG studies away from a rigidly synchronic perspective towards modeling construction inventories existing side by side and/or in the process of change. Whatever weaknesses the individual papers may

² To be more precise, *att* is identified as the means by which the pragmatic subordination of a clause can be made explicit, whereas the use of the simple variants *för*, *så*, and *men* leaves it implicit (cf. p. 148). This echoes the interesting research question of how much of a construction must be realized formally in order for it to function in interaction and, further still, what the conditions are under which parts of the form of constructions can be omitted.

display – lack of an explicit connection to the overall topic foremost among them – they are more than made up for by their theoretical innovativeness and the interesting empirical issues broached.

References

- Croft, William (2000) *Explaining Language Change: An Evolutionary Approach*. Harlow: Longman.
- (2001) *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Diewald, Gabriele (2007) Konstruktionen in der diachronen Sprachwissenschaft. In Kerstin Fischer & Anatol Stefanowitsch (eds.), pp. 79–103. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Fischer, Kerstin (2007) Konstruktionsgrammatik und Interaktion. In Kerstin Fischer & Anatol Stefanowitsch (eds.), pp. 133–150. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Fischer, K. & Stefanowitsch, A. (eds.) (2007) *Konstruktionsgrammatik: Von der Anwendung zur Theorie*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Goldberg, Adele E. (1995) *Constructions. A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- (2006) *Constructions at Work. The Nature of Generalization in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lehmann, Christian (1985) Grammaticalization: Synchronic variation and diachronic Change. *Lingua e stile* 20: 303–318.
- Lombardi Vallauri, Edoardo (2004) Grammaticalization of syntactic incompleteness: Free conditionals in Italian and other languages. *SKY Journal of Linguistics* 17: 189–215.
- Michaelis, Laura (2004) Type shifting in construction grammar: An integrated approach to aspectual coercion. *Cognitive Linguistics* 15: 1–67.
- Östman, Jan-Ola (2005) Construction Discourse: A prolegomenon. In Jan-Ola Östman & Mirjam Fried (eds.), *Construction Grammars: Cognitive grounding and theoretical extensions*, pp. 121–143. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Rostila, Jouni (2006) Storage as a way to grammaticalization. *Constructions* 1/2006 (<http://www.constructions-online.de/articles/345>).
- Rostila, Jouni (2007) *Konstruktionsansätze zur Argumentmarkierung im Deutschen*. Tampere: Tampere University Press. (Available at: <http://acta.uta.fi/pdf/978-951-44-7085-1.pdf>)
- Tomasello, Michael (2006) Construction grammar for kids. *Constructions Special Volume* 1–11/2006 (<http://www.constructions-online.de/articles/specvol1/689>).
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs (2008) Grammatikalisierung, emergente Konstruktionen und der Begriff der Neuheit. In Anatol Stefanowitsch & Kerstin Fischer (eds.), *Konstruktionsgrammatik II: Von der Konstruktion zur Grammatik*, pp. 5–32. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Contact information:

Jouni Rostila
German Language and Culture Studies
School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies
FI-33014 University of Tampere
Finland
e-mail: jouni.rostila(at)uta(dot)fi