

# Construction Grammar and its Application to English

Second edition

Martin Hilpert

EDINBURGH  
University Press

# Contents

<i>List of tables and figures</i>	x
<i>Preface to the first edition: Why you shouldn't pick up, let alone read, this book</i>	xi
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
1 Introducing Construction Grammar	1
1.1 What do you know when you know a language?	1
1.1.1 Idiomatic expressions permeate ordinary language	3
1.1.2 Idiomatic expressions are more than fixed strings	5
1.1.3 Idiomatic expressions are productive	7
1.1.4 The growth of the appendix	7
1.2 What is a construction?	8
1.2.1 Defining constructions: a first try	9
1.2.2 Defining constructions: beyond non-predictability	12
1.3 Identifying constructions	14
1.3.1 Does the expression deviate from canonical patterns?	14
1.3.2 Does the expression carry non-compositional meaning?	16
1.3.3 Does the expression have idiosyncratic constraints?	18
1.3.4 Does the expression have collocational preferences?	20
1.4 Summing up	22
1.5 Outline of the following chapters	23
Study questions	24
Further reading	24

2	Argument structure constructions	25
2.1	Analysing 'simple sentences'	25
2.2	Argument structure	26
2.3	Valency-increasing constructions	31
2.3.1	The DITRANSITIVE construction	31
2.3.2	The CAUSED MOTION construction	35
2.3.3	The WAY construction	36
2.4	Valency-decreasing constructions	39
2.4.1	The PASSIVE	39
2.4.2	The IMPERATIVE construction	42
2.4.3	NULL INSTANTIATION	44
2.5	Relations between argument structure constructions	45
2.6	Summing up	47
	Study questions	49
	Further reading	49
3	Inside the construct-i-con	50
3.1	Meaningless constructions?	50
3.2	The construct-i-con: a network of interlinked constructions	57
3.2.1	Inheritance	57
3.2.2	Kinds of inheritance links	60
3.2.3	Constructional contamination – when subpart links influence speakers' choices	65
3.2.4	Complete inheritance vs. redundant representations	67
3.3	'Normal syntax' in Construction Grammar	68
3.4	Summing up	72
	Study questions	74
	Further reading	74
4	Constructional morphology	75
4.1	More than a theory of syntax	75
4.1.1	<i>one wug, two wugs</i>	75
4.1.2	<i>skypable</i>	76
4.1.3	<i>shpants</i>	78
4.1.4	<i>a what-the-heck-is-wrong-with-you look</i>	80
4.2	Morphological constructions and their properties	81
4.2.1	Morphological productivity	82
4.2.2	Paradigmatic organisation	84
4.2.3	Non-compositional meanings	86
4.2.4	Simultaneous affixation	87

4.3	Constructional solutions to morphological puzzles	89
4.3.1	Affix ordering	89
4.3.2	Compounding	94
4.4	Summing up	97
	Study questions	100
	Further reading	100
5	Information packaging constructions	102
5.1	The pragmatic side of Construction Grammar	102
5.1.1	Information packaging: the basics	105
5.1.2	Presupposition and assertion	106
5.1.3	Activation	108
5.1.4	Topic and focus	110
5.2	Information packaging and grammar	112
5.2.1	Cleft constructions	113
5.2.2	Dislocation and related constructions	118
5.3	Island constraints	123
5.4	Summing up	127
	Study questions	129
	Further reading	129
6	Constructions and language processing	130
6.1	The quest for behavioural evidence	130
6.2	Evidence from language comprehension	132
6.2.1	Constructions explain how hearers understand novel denominal verbs	132
6.2.2	Constructional meanings are routinely accessed in sentence comprehension	134
6.2.3	Constructions explain knowledge of grammatical unacceptability	137
6.2.4	Constructions explain incidental verbatim memory	142
6.3	Evidence from language production	144
6.3.1	Constructions explain reduction effects in speech	144
6.3.2	Constructions explain syntactic priming, and exceptions to syntactic priming	145
6.3.3	Constructions explain how speakers complete sentences	148
6.4	Summing up	151
	Study questions	154
	Further reading	154

7	Constructions and language acquisition	155
7.1	Construction Grammar for kids	155
7.1.1	Item-based learning	156
7.1.2	The sociocognitive foundation of language learning	158
7.2	Evidence for the item-based nature of language learning	163
7.3	From item-based schemas to constructions	169
7.4	The acquisition of complex sentences	172
7.5	Summing up	176
	Study questions	178
	Further reading	178
8	Language variation and change	179
8.1	Language myths	179
8.2	Constructional variation	181
8.2.1	There's more than one way to do it	181
8.2.2	Variation in syntactic constructions: the example of relative clauses	183
8.2.3	Analysing variation between constructions	185
8.3	Constructional variation across groups of speakers	191
8.4	Constructional change: variation across time	194
8.5	Three open questions in Diachronic Construction Grammar	199
8.5.1	What is investigated in Diachronic Construction Grammar?	199
8.5.2	When is a new construction a new construction?	200
8.5.3	Are there nodes in the constructional network?	202
8.6	Summing up	204
	Study questions	206
	Further reading	206
9	Constructions in spoken language	208
9.1	Overcoming the written language bias	209
9.2	On-line syntax	213
9.3	Emergent constructions	218
9.4	Using constructions in spoken language	221
9.4.1	Projector constructions	221
9.4.2	Apo-koinou constructions	223

9.4.3	The DOUBLE-IS construction	225
9.4.4	Collaborative insubordination	227
9.5	Summing up	230
	Study questions	231
	Further reading	232
10	Constructions across grammars	233
10.1	Diasystematic Construction Grammar	234
10.2	Do foreign language learners also have constructions?	241
10.3	Typological differences and their effects on L2 learners	243
10.4	Implications for the L2 classroom	247
10.5	Summing up	252
	Study questions	253
	Further reading	254
11	Concluding remarks	255
	<i>References</i>	258
	<i>Index</i>	275