

## BOOK REVIEW

Boas, Hans C. and Gonzálvez-García, Francisco (Eds.). (2014). *Romance Perspectives on Construction Grammar* (Constructional Approaches to Language 15). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 316 pp.

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In 1995, Goldberg's seminal work on English argument structure constructions was the first book-length treatment of the theory of Construction Grammar. Twenty years later, the theory can be said to have come of age, as also testified by the recent handbook entirely devoted to it (Hoffmann & Trousdale, 2013). This maturity is visible in the diversity of constructionist approaches that have developed over the last few years (Embodied Construction Grammar, Fluid Construction Grammar, Sign-Based Construction Grammar, Radical Construction Grammar, etc.). It is also visible in the expansion from English as the main language of study to other languages. The book *Romance Perspectives on Construction Grammar*, edited by Hans C. Boas and Francisco Gonzálvez-García, is the perfect illustration that the principles of Construction Grammar can be – and have been – applied to other languages than English, in this case Romance languages, and especially French, Romanian and Spanish. The eight chapters of the volume examine different linguistic phenomena and adopt various constructionist approaches (which, incidentally, points to the diversification of the theory mentioned above), but they all focus on one or several Romance languages as their language of study, and show how Construction Grammar can contribute to the study of these languages and, conversely, how the study of these languages can offer new insights into the theory of Construction Grammar.

The first chapter, by Hans C. Boas and Francisco Gonzálvez-García, serves as an introduction to the volume. The authors start by pointing out that, while most early research in Construction Grammar focused on English, a basic idea of the framework is that “constructional concepts should in principle be applicable to languages other than English” (p. 3). Their aim, through this first chapter, is to provide an overview of how insights from (mainly English-based) Construction Grammar can be applied to the language family under scrutiny in this volume, namely Romance languages. This is done from a diachronic point of view by comparing the NP + XPCOMP construction (*He found the boy rude and impolite*) and the Accusative-cum-Infinitive construction (*He found the boy to be rude and impolite*) in Latin and present-day Spanish. The notion of coercion and its application to the Spanish NP + XPCOMP construction with verbs of cognition help illustrate the relevance of Construction Grammar for Romance languages from a synchronic point of view. Although one may regret that this introductory chapter does not provide examples from other Romance languages (this could for instance have been done rather easily in Table 1, which presents examples of English constructions at varying degrees of complexity and their Spanish counterparts), it constitutes a nice preamble to the volume which makes the reader want to read more, especially after the overview of the chapters and the summary of the main features of the volume that end this introduction.

In the second chapter, Jiyoung Yoon deals with novel verb-noun compounds in Mexican Spanish. She starts from Yoon's (2009) claim that two types of [V + N] compound constructions can be distinguished in Spanish: Type 1, a highly transitive construction with an affected object and a potential beneficiary, in which the resultant state of the action is highlighted (e.g. *limpiabotas*, lit. 'cleans-boots', referring to a shoeshine boy); and Type 2, which displays a lower degree of transitivity, does not presuppose the existence of a potential beneficiary and highlights the activity itself rather than its result (e.g. *saltamontes*, lit. 'jumps-hills', referring to a grasshopper). With the aim of understanding the role played by the constructional meanings of these two types of compounds in comprehension and production, Yoon designed two experiments involving novel [V + N] compounds, conducted among twenty native speakers of Mexican Spanish. The first experiment, which tested the subjects' comprehension, consisted in multiple-choice questions where the subjects had to choose what they considered the best description(s) for a novel [V + N] compound (they could also write their own description if none of the descriptions provided seemed appropriate to them). The results showed that, as predicted by Yoon's hypotheses, Type 1 compounds were overwhelmingly associated with meanings corresponding to the Type 1 construction, and Type 2 compounds with meanings corresponding to the Type 2 construction; compounds which were ambiguous between a Type 1 and a Type 2 turned out to be associated with either of the two types of meanings, but always presented a strong preference for one or the other. The second experiment was a production task in which the (same) subjects had to create novel compounds to express the meanings that were given to them. Some of these meanings evoked a Type 1 situation (a prototypical action scenario with high transitivity and a potential beneficiary) and others evoked a Type 2 situation (no required affected object or potential beneficiary, no particular focus on the resultant state). Prototypical actions overwhelmingly triggered the creation of Type 1 compounds; on the other hand, less prototypical actions led to the creation of Type 1 or Type 2 compounds, and sometimes even compounds that deviated from the [V + N] structure or no compounds at all (when the participants could not provide any answer). All this is taken as evidence that the constructional meanings of Type 1 and Type 2 compounds do play a role in comprehending and producing novel compounds. While the demonstration is very neat and convincing in the case of the first experiment, it is slightly less so in the second one, perhaps in the first place because the hypotheses put forward by the author do not really seem to follow from her initial claim but rather to be guided by the results of the experiment (hypothesis 3, in particular, is so specific that it is difficult to imagine how one could have formulated it without first looking at the results). However, readers will certainly be interested to see what compounds the subjects came up with, and also how creative they could be when doing so. Researchers might also be inspired by Yoon's list of external factors potentially affecting the comprehension and production of novel compounds (such as analogy, metonymy, metaphor or cultural background), which Yoon does not expand on but which could each be the topic of an individual paper.

The third chapter, by Peter Lauwers, focuses on complex prepositions in French, and more precisely the pattern (X) [*sous* ‘under’ + Def. art. sg. + N<sub>1</sub> + (Adj) + *de* ‘of’ + NP<sub>2</sub>], as illustrated by *sous le contrôle de* ‘under the control of’. Such uses of the preposition *sous*, which differ from its locative uses, imply a sort of dependency or subordination (‘X is subject/subordinate to NP<sub>2</sub> in a way specified by N<sub>1</sub>’), hence the term ‘Mediate Dependency Construction’ (MDC). The goal of the study, based on the Frantext literary corpus and on Google searches, is to determine whether this pattern constitutes a construction in Goldberg’s (1995) sense, that is, a form-meaning pairing whose properties are not fully predictable from its components. Lauwers makes a clear case for the constructional status of the *sous* pattern by highlighting a number of syntactic and semantic properties that apply to the construction as a whole. Among the syntactic properties are the obligatory presence of the definite article before the central noun N<sub>1</sub>, the singular nature of the central noun (with a few exceptions) and the expression of the prepositional phrase *de* + NP<sub>2</sub> (it cannot be left implicit). Interestingly, these properties do not apply to the central noun when it is used outside the construction nor to the other uses of *sous*. Semantically, the central noun can describe an (abstract) action or property (e.g. *menace* ‘threat’, *puissance* ‘power’) or a (concrete) instrument or body part (e.g. *baguette* ‘stick’, *oeil* ‘eye’), and can be ‘coerced’ into taking on a particular meaning in the construction which is (sometimes quite subtly) different from its canonical meaning. Lauwers also points out that the MDC “is rather schematic, but some of the constructs need to be described at a lower level of schematicity” (p. 103). This is the case of more lexically constrained and opaque (and hence more idiomatic) instantiations of the construction, with which internal variation is less likely (e.g. *sous l’égide de* ‘under the aegis of’) and which the author argues are expected to be stored as units in the mental lexicon. The chapter includes a very useful appendix which lists and classifies about a hundred MDCs which served as a basis for the study. This appendix also provides frequency estimates that represent the number of Google hits. The author cautions us that these correspond to raw figures, which in some cases may “contain many irrelevant instances” (e.g. literal interpretation of the pattern), and that they should be seen as mere “tendencies” (p. 92). However, given the serious objections that some scholars have raised against the use of Google frequencies as linguistic information – Gatto (2014, p. 70) argues that “numeric data obtained from hit counts on the web [are] virtually useless from the point of view of statistics” – one may wonder whether these frequencies should have been supplied at all. Also, since they were extracted in 2008, they probably no longer reflect present-day tendencies (*sous la toque de* ‘under the hat of’, for example, turns out to be over a hundred times more frequent today than it was in 2008 – perhaps partly due to the recent popularity surge of cooking competition TV shows, since *toque* primarily refers to a chef’s hat) and can hardly be taken to reveal “novel usages” (p. 81) as hoped by the author. The list of MDCs, however, and especially the very detailed description of their properties provided in the chapter, will be an excellent starting point for further “fine-grained corpus studies” (p. 105) of this and other complex prepositions in French, as recommended by Lauwers himself.

In the next chapter, by Dominique Willems and the late Claire Blanche-Benveniste, it is the ‘weak verb construction’ in French that is under scrutiny.

The construction includes a weak verb (also called ‘weak valency verb’, ‘parenthetical’, ‘evidential’ or ‘(modal) epistemic’ verb), mostly used in the first person singular and in the present tense, e.g. *je pense* (‘I think’), *je crois* (‘I believe’), *je trouve* (‘I find’) or *je suppose* (‘I suppose’). The construction is claimed to be associated with three syntactic realisations: one with a *que* (‘that’) clause (*Je trouve que c’est dommage*, lit. ‘I find that this is a pity’), another corresponding to a parenthetical structure (*C’est dommage je trouve*, lit. ‘This is a pity I find’) and a third one, rarely acknowledged in the literature, functioning as a conversational response (*C’est dommage. – Oui, je trouve*, lit. ‘This is a pity. – Yes, I find’). The authors argue that “[t]hroughout the different syntactic realisations, the basic meaning remains constant: they weaken the truth-value of the proposition by limiting the responsibility (commitment) of the speaker” (p. 117), a meaning which they summarise as ‘mitigation’. They also clearly demonstrate that the weak verbs occurring in this construction behave differently from their ‘strong’ equivalents, for instance in terms of pronominalisation of the complement: *Je trouve ça* ‘I find this’ is possible with the strong ‘discovery’ meaning of *trouver* ‘find’, but not with its weak, mitigating meaning ‘think’; in the latter case, no pronoun is necessary, cf. *Je trouve* ‘I find/think (so)’, which Willems and Blanche-Benveniste interpret as a “loss of some valency properties” (p. 119). All these characteristics, some of which might be seen as a sign of grammaticalisation, are illustrated by means of authentic examples taken from the spoken corpus *Corpaix*, from which the authors also extract frequencies (of the three verbs *penser* ‘think’, *croire* ‘believe’ and *trouver* ‘find’, of their uses in weak verb constructions, and of their three syntactic realisations), as well as a list of weak verbs in modern French. One may, however, regret that the corpus data have not been examined with the specific aim of determining whether the three realisations of the weak verb construction correspond to a single meaning, as posited by the authors: “As a construction, in Goldberg’s sense, the ‘weak verb construction’ has the peculiarity of not linking one specific structure to one meaning, but rather of linking a cluster (or family) of three syntactically quite different constructions to a specific meaning” (p. 126). In fact, Willems and Blanche-Benveniste’s description of the three forms/structures suggests that they do correspond to different meanings/functions (“the choice of one particular realisation mainly depends on macro-syntactic factors such as information structure, textual coherence and (inter)subjectivity”, p. 130), which would be in line with the “Principle of No Synonymy” (Goldberg 1995, p. 67), according to which syntactically distinct constructions should be “semantically or pragmatically distinct”. Recognising this possible difference in meaning/function between the three realisations of the weak verb construction would have made the constructionist approach even more compelling.

The fifth chapter of the volume, by Irina Nikolaeva, centres around the Narrative Infinitive (NI) construction in French and Latin, as illustrated by the following examples, cited on p. 139: French *Et lui de ne pas rater l’occasion* (‘And he didn’t miss his chance’, lit. ‘And him of not miss the chance’); Latin *Tum redire paulatim amor obsequii* (‘Then the love of obedience returned little y little’, lit. ‘Then return little by little love of obedience’). NIs are described as one type of Root Infinitives, i.e. syntactically independent infinitival structures – which include

Imperative Infinitives, Incredulity Infinitives, Exclamative Infinitives, Descriptive Infinitives, Deliberative Infinitives, Optative Infinitives and Title Infinitives – but they differ from these other Root Infinitives in denoting a proposition, i.e. reporting an event and conveying assertion. The author demonstrates this by showing that NIs represent canonical subject-predicate structures, are temporally anchored and informationally structured. At the same time, her comparison of the French and Latin constructions underlines some differences between the two languages: the French construction expresses a tense that is relative (and subsequent) to another situation, whereas in Latin the temporal reference is the absolute past and the construction is primarily used for information structure effects, viz. “foregrounding and advancement of the plot” (p. 157). Using Sign-Based Construction Grammar (SBCG), Nikolaeva then goes on to argue that languages that do have NIs exhibit two distinct infinitival words corresponding to two different feature structures, namely the regular infinitive (*inf*) and the narrative infinitive (*narr-inf*). She further claims that the *narr-inf* type belongs to the category of finite verbs and that the *inf* type belongs to the category of non-finite verbs. In her view, “finiteness is not defined by inflectional morphology: the verbal form is finite if it is associated with relevant functional information” (p. 175). While some readers may miss more detailed information about SBCG and especially its formal representation of constructions, as well as a general conclusion to the chapter, perhaps the main weakness of the analysis comes from the data that are used as a basis to describe NIs. Besides examples taken from Englebert’s (1998) corpus study, the other data for French seem to be constructed examples, whose acceptability has been assessed intuitively. As a native speaker of French I did not always fully agree with the acceptability judgements of the sentences provided by the author to make a particular point, and in any case I would have liked to see her claims confirmed by authentic data and combined with some quantitative findings to get a more accurate picture of the Narrative Infinitive construction. However, this study has the merit of considering NIs from a more syntactic point of view, as against the numerous studies that focus on their stylistics, and also of challenging well-established assumptions like the definition of finiteness in terms of inflectional morphology.

The next chapter, by Francisco González-García, offers a critical reappraisal of Thompson’s (2002) analysis of English finite complementation. According to Thompson, verbs of cognition functioning as complement-taking predicates (CTPs) and their subjects (e.g. *I think* in *I think it’s cool*) should not be seen as main clauses governing object complement clauses but as epistemic/evidential/evaluative fragments. Since Thompson suggests that her analysis should be applicable to languages other than English, González-García sets out to apply it to Spanish. He shows that Thompson’s arguments do not really hold in the case of Spanish: Spanish CTPs can take NP objects and can be used in the passive, which points to a direct object relation between the CTP and the finite *que*-complement clause; and while finite *que*-complement clauses can be said to override the main clause by conveying the main message of the utterance, as predicted by Thompson, they can become the focus of cleft constructions, which suggests that they are genuine subordinate clauses. Moreover, Thompson’s claim that English CTP-phrases such as *I think* or *I guess* can be used as parentheticals and with no associated clause does not necessarily

apply to Spanish. In fact, other authors like Newmeyer (2010) have even challenged the fact that this applies to English, with a phrase like *I regret* not appearing as a parenthetical and a phrase like *I think* mostly occurring with the pro-form *so* rather than on its own. González-García also seeks to determine whether Thompson's analysis can be extended to other complementation types, in particular verbless complement clauses, and finds out that it is "somewhat inadequate" (p. 219) in this respect too. As against, or rather as a complement to, Thompson's fragment analysis, González-García makes a convincing case for the existence of the subjective-transitive construction in both English and Spanish, a family of constructions with a verbless complement clause that not only occurs after verbs of cognition, as suggested by Thompson, but also after verbs of sensory perception, verbs of saying and calling, verbs of causation and volition, and verbs of liking and preference (e.g. *Bosses want their employees weak*; *A tu amigo Pepe lo encuentro yo un poco raro* 'I find your friend Pepe a bit strange'). English and Spanish are shown to present the same subconstructions within the subjective-transitive construction, and even more importantly, to be subject to the same semantic and pragmatic constraints as far as the syntactic elements of the construction (postverbal NP and XPCOMP) are concerned, for example in terms of the specificity of the NP. A notable difference between the two languages, however, is that right- and left-dislocation often leads, in Spanish, to the adjacency of the matrix verb and XPCOMP (cf. above example), a phenomenon that tends to be rare in English. This asymmetry is strongly supported by quantitative findings from the spoken components of the British National Corpus and the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual. These and other corpora also serve as a source of examples to illustrate the different claims made in the chapter. On a very minor note, it would have been useful if the relevant part of the (sometimes long) examples had been highlighted in some way – although the mention of bold print on p. 215 for an example where no bold is visible suggests that some highlighting might have been initially planned but may have disappeared in the publication process.

In the penultimate chapter, Anne Abeillé, Gabriela Bîlbîie and François Mouret focus on gapping in Romance languages, and more particularly in French and Romanian. This phenomenon is illustrated by French *Paul viendra lundi et Jean mardi* ('Paul will come on Monday and Jean on Tuesday') and Romanian *Ion mănâncă mere, iar Maria pere* ('Ion eats apples, and Maria pears'), where the main head verb is omitted from the second part of the sentence and the remnant phrases should be interpreted in relation to the first part of the sentence. The authors provide some basic information about the phenomenon, showing with abundant examples when it can occur (e.g. in any type of clause – declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamative) and when it is ruled out (e.g. with oblique NPs without their head preposition). They also demonstrate that strong syntactic parallelism is not required for gapping to be acceptable and that asymmetries in grammatical category, word order, case marking or number of realised dependents are possible. On the other hand, constraints on discourse parallelism are stronger, resulting for example in the unacceptability of gapping with relations like concession or condition. Considering three types of analysis that have been put forward to account for gapping, the authors present arguments against two of them, namely a movement-based type of analysis and a

deletion-based type of analysis, and plead in favour of a construction-based analysis. They opt for a construction-based version of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG), while acknowledging that “nothing hinges on that particular choice” (p. 229) and that other constructional frameworks like Sign-Based Construction Grammar or Berkeley Construction Grammar might be equally suitable. Using the framework of HPSG, Abeillé, Bîlbîie and Mouret are able to explain an interesting feature of gapping, namely that, while syntactic parallelism is less crucial than discourse parallelism (see above), syntax is still important in that remnants must match some subcategorisation frame of the source verbal predicate (hence the ungrammaticality of *\*He has become crazy but in good spirit*). The analysis relies almost exclusively on constructed examples (I have counted two corpus examples out of more than 150 examples). This, of course, is not a bad thing in itself, but it is perhaps slightly surprising, given this reliance on artificial data, that the authors should emphasise the empirical adequacy of their approach (p. 229) and the use of naturally occurring examples (p. 237). In this respect, Bîlbîie’s (in prep.) study of gapping in the English Penn Treebank should be an ideal complement to this thorough description of the phenomenon.

Finally, Johan Pedersen’s chapter revisits Talmy’s (2000) well-known distinction between verb-framed languages like Spanish, which express path of motion through the verb and manner of motion outside the verb, and satellite-framed languages like English, which do the opposite. The observation of directed motion constructions that do not fit this typology leads Pedersen to question Talmy’s theory and to try to account for such exceptions. Using “a typological characterization of Germanic versus Romance languages that draws on fundamental ideas of constructionist frameworks” (p. 300), he claims that certain languages tend to be characterised by diagrammatic organisation (this is the case of English, which is said to rely essentially on schematic, constructional organisational devices, and only secondarily on lexical constraints), whereas others are characterised by lexical organisation based on principles of valence structure (this is the case of Spanish, with its primary lexical encoding and secondary diagrammatic encoding). Prototypically, a language will opt for sequences which best exploit its preferred encoding strategy. However, this is subject to intra-linguistic variation, which Pedersen refers to as ‘variable type framing’ and which explains why, for instance, manner of motion verbs do occur in Spanish. In an attempt to investigate to what extent this is the case, the author examines the relation between the Spanish ‘manner of intransitive telic motion’ construction [V *a* NP] and a list of about thirty manner of motion verbs, some of which have a clear directional meaning and the others not. The data come from the Corpus del Español and the methodology is that of collostructional analysis. The results show that, contrary to Aske’s (1989) claim, manner of motion verbs can be found with telic motion events. Interestingly, the data also underline the importance of the concept of directionality for the expression of motion: verbs associated with a directional meaning are more likely to be attracted to the [V *a* NP] construction than verbs that do not have such a meaning but instead profile a manner or means of motion. While, as Pedersen himself acknowledges, the results of the collostructional analysis are biased by the fact that only a limited list of manner of motion verbs has been taken into account, the technique sheds

new light on the construction and ties in nicely with Pedersen's theoretical proposals.

Taken together, the eight chapters of the volume underline the relevance of Construction Grammar for languages other than English, the language on the basis of which the theory was initially developed. This does not mean that English is altogether absent from this volume. In fact, several chapters use English as a kind of reference; sometimes this is evident, as in Chapter 6 which relies on the comparison between English and Spanish, and sometimes this is only noticeable through a brief mention, like a footnote in Chapter 7 (p. 233). More generally, a (fully or partially) contrastive perspective is adopted in several of the chapters, which constitutes a follow-up to volumes like Fried & Östman (2004) or, more recently, Boas (2010). Most chapters have an empirical basis in that they rely on authentic data of some sort, be it corpus data (e.g. Chapter 8) or more experimental data (cf. Chapter 2). However, the data tend to be used as a repertoire of examples that illustrate a particular point, and quantitative investigations of the full set of data, as in Chapters 4 (pp. 122-123) and 6 (pp. 216-219), are the exception rather than the rule. It is not uncommon either that corpus examples are adapted to include both acceptable and unacceptable (or less felicitous) options or to be followed by several possible endings that help interpret the meaning of the main sentence (cf. Chapter 1). Yet, this (semi-)empirical orientation represents an improvement over Construction Grammar's tendency, until recently, to rely exclusively on invented examples and linguists' intuitions – a tendency that is still visible in a couple of chapters in this volume. In more theoretical terms, besides the variety of constructionist approaches illustrated throughout the volume, it must be stressed that the chapters present varying degrees of involvement with the theory of Construction Grammar. While certain chapters fully embrace the framework from beginning to end, and even suggest theoretical refinements to the model (cf. Chapter 8), others like Chapters 4 and 5 describe the linguistic phenomenon under study from an atheoretical (or at least non-constructionist) perspective and only later show how the analysis could be integrated into Construction Grammar. This, however, should simply be seen as a reflection of the variety of ways in which Construction Grammar can contribute to linguistic analysis. A last aspect worth mentioning is that some authors take the cognitive dimension of Construction Grammar seriously by trying to account for linguistic features with reference to certain cognitive principles (e.g. the storage of high frequency items in the mental lexicon in Chapter 3 p. 101) or by emphasising the necessity to conduct further research to uncover cognitive mechanisms at work (e.g. in Chapter 2 p. 74 or in Chapter 6 p. 220). This can be hailed as a welcome attempt to make the framework more cognitively plausible. For all the valuable contributions that it makes, both to the theory of Construction Grammar and the description of Romance languages, this volume deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone who is interested in the latest developments of constructionist approaches and their opening up to new languages and new phenomena.

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