Past and future in Construction Grammar(s) and the limits of constructions[*]

Pasado y futuro de la(s) Gramática(s) de Construcciones y los límites de las construcciones

Carmen Mellado Blanco
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela
c.mellado@usc.es

Pedro Ivorra Ordines
Centro Universitario de la Defensa (Zaragoza)
pivorra@unizar.es

Maricel Esteban-Fonollosa
Universitat de València
maricel.esteban@uv.es

In memoriam. Dedicamos este volumen
a Belén López Meirama, profesora de la Universidade
de Santiago de Compostela y muy querida compañera
de nuestro grupo de investigación FRASESPAL

1. Context and evolution of Construction Grammar(s)

The term *Construction Grammar* alludes to a diverse set of linguistic theories that have emerged over the past forty years as alternatives to the then-dominant generative approach to the study of language and grammar, especially in dealing with idiosyncratic patterns and idiomatic expressions. Rather than

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representing a single unified theory, Construction Grammar –CxG henceforth– consists of a family of constructivist "flavours", as language is not a homogenous phenomenon (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Fillmore et al., 1988; Kay & Fillmore, 1999). This explains why these days it is "more accurate to speak of Construction Grammars –in plural– than of Construction Grammar" (Van de Velde, 2014: 143). Each brand pays special attention to distinct aspects of linguistic structure and use (Gonzálvez-García, 2008: 351), enhancing the overall credibility of constructionist efforts to explore the complexities of human language, since it is simply impossible to study every facet of language from the same perspective (Van Tripj, 2024). In this sense, Hoffmann (2020) points out that the diversity of constructionist approaches is one of its central strengths, given that it offers complementary perspectives on linguistic knowledge, with each contributing insights that enhance and support one another.

Goldberg (2013), indeed, proposed the term *constructionist approaches* to avoid fragmenting closely related theoretical frameworks into isolated categories like Grammar X and Z (see Goldberg, 2006: 213-214; Hoffmann, 2022: 256-271; Ungerer & Hartmann, 2023: 15-28 for a comparative overview). CxG serves as a robust syntactic framework for a wide range of linguistic theories and research areas, including language acquisition (Diessel, 2013; Israel, 2002; Tomasello, 2003), language contact (Boas & Höder, 2018, 2021), language pedagogy (De Knop & Gilquin, 2016), diachronic linguistic change (Barðdal et al., 2015; Hoffmann & Trousdale, 2011; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), morphology (Booij, 2010), language processing (Madabushi et al., in press), machine learning (Beuls & Van Eecke, in press; van Tripj, 2024), among others.

Since its foundation in the 1980s (Fillmore et al., 1988; Kay & Fillmore, 1999; Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1987), CxG has evolved into several constructionist strands. Despite their differences, they share key principles (Goldberg, 2013; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013):

- Direct link between semantics and surface structure. Grammar does not rely on transformational or derivational mechanisms. Instead, meaning is directly tied to the surface structure of language (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2005; Goldberg, 2006).
- Constructions as symbolic units. Language consists of constructions, i. e. pairings of form and meaning that operate as symbolic units (Fillmore et al., 1988; Goldberg, 2006).

- Language as a network. Language is structured as a network of inter-connected nodes, with relationships between these nodes often forming inheritance hierarchies. These hierarchies represent taxonomic relationships, allowing for predictions about the properties of specific constructions based on more general ones (Diessel, 2019, 2023; Fillmore et al., 1988; Goldberg, 1995; Langacker, 1987; Lakoff, 1987).
- Linguistic variation. Differences between languages and dialects can be explained through general cognitive mechanisms (Bybee, 2010; Goldberg, 2013; Diessel, 2019) and the specifics of individual constructions (Croft, 2001).

Additionally, a final principle –although not universally adopted within all constructionist frameworks– is that:

- Language use shapes its structure. The emergence of linguistic structure results from the interaction of domain-general abilities through exposure to language (Bybee, 2010; Diessel, 2019; Goldberg, 2019).

These shared principles underscore the constructionist view of language as a dynamic, usage-based system that is shaped by cognitive processes and real-world linguistic experience. Initially focused on the relationship between form and meaning, CxG now extends beyond core linguistic structures to address areas such as multimodality (Hoffmann, 2021; Zima & Bergs, 2017), creativity (Hoffmann, 2024; Ivorra Ordines, in press), pragmaticalization (Diewald, 2011) and contrastive studies (Esteban-Fonollosa, 2024; Esteban-Fonollosa & Holzinger, in press). This broadening reflects its capacity to integrate insights from diverse fields such as cognitive science, sociolinguistics, and even artificial intelligence. On top of that, this interdisciplinary approach allows CxG to remain a relevant and comprehensive framework for analyzing the increasingly complex and varied facets of human language.

2. Current trends and research focus

The current special issue, *New Approaches to Construction Grammar(s)*, reflects the ongoing expansion and diversification of CxG, delving into both theoretical refinements and empirical advances. As constructionist approaches continue to evolve, they are marked by a vibrant engagement with new linguistic phenomena, interdisciplinary methods, and emerging areas

of research. As the title indicates, this issue emphasizes several core trends that underscore the innovative spirit of contemporary CxG research, each of which highlights the versatility and adaptability of constructionist frameworks.

One common thread of the contributions aligns with the goals of corpus linguistics to usage-based strands of CxG: to describe the entirety of grammar paying attention to real language use. It is thus essential to analyze linguistic phenomena –i.e., constructions– in their context of use, so that the access to macrocorpora constitutes an essential tool to assess the cognitive status of constructions and their degree of entrenchment (Fried & Östman, 2004: 24; Perek, 2023: 226). This issue is a clear example of the current trend in the implementation of corpus linguistics to constructionist approaches when analyzing language in its context of use (Yoon & Gries, 2016; see Ivorra Ordines, forth; Mellado Blanco, 2022). With this tool at hand, the papers range from more theoretically grounded contributions in "I. From theoretical to empirical approaches" to more empirically-based studies in "II. From syntax to lexicon" and "III. From lexicon to syntax: The case of the snowclones", in which we can find both partly filled constructions and lexically filled constructions in Spanish, German and English.

On the one hand, the theoretically-grounded contributions explore thought-provoking challenges in the context of CxG, such as (i) the description of Phraseme Constructions (a.k.a. "constructional idioms" or "partially filled constructions"), in that Schlund and Pavlova offer a detailed description of their morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties and argue that these patterns can be described along "a cline of phraseme constructionhood" (see Mellado Blanco, in press for another description); (ii) Cotta Ramusino, Pöppel and Dobrovol'skij highlight the importance of pragmatics in the description of two near-synonymous Russian discourse markers (i.e., lexically filled constructions), contributing to the advancement of empirical methods by examining practical strategies for managing large-scale data in linguistic research; and (iii) Lorenzo-Herrera and Navarro-Ciurana advocate for the use of CxG and usage-based theory not only as frameworks for understanding language acquisition, but also as valuable methodological tools.

On the other hand, the phenomena investigated in the two empirically based sections are further subdivided into two main types of constructions in accordance with the distinction posited in the late eighties by Fillmore *et al.* (1988) between "formal idioms" and "substantive idioms". Assuming that syntax and lexicon constitute a continuum (see Mollica, in press), the more

schematic, productive and less restrictive, the closer the constructions are to the syntax pole. Contrarily, the more conventionalized, lexicalized and idiomatic the construction is, the closer it is to the lexicon pole (see Figure 1).

The syntax-lexicon continuum constitutes an interesting point of departure in the study of semi-schematic patterns with a focus on pragmatics aspects in the crossroads with Relevance Theory (Mollica & Stumpf), or from a neo-constructionist approach with the Lexical Constructional Model (Rosca) as a theoretical framework, in the study of constructional borrowing when coining neologisms (Martínez Vázquez), or in the analysis of hyperbolic patterns (Iglesias Iglesias & López Meirama). Snowclones, for their part, as lexically filled constructions, are not simply an intellectual curiosity for linguists, but as the last three papers manifest, they represent a distinct construction type that has been further investigated. Whether with an emphasis on the meaning pole to gain a better understanding on the emergence of these patterns (Sánchez-López), from a contrastive point of view to observe cross-linguistic similarities and differences in a snowclone in German and Spanish (Mansilla & Holzinger), or with a focus on constructional borrowing in the emergence of snowclones in Spanish and German (Ungerer & Hartmann).
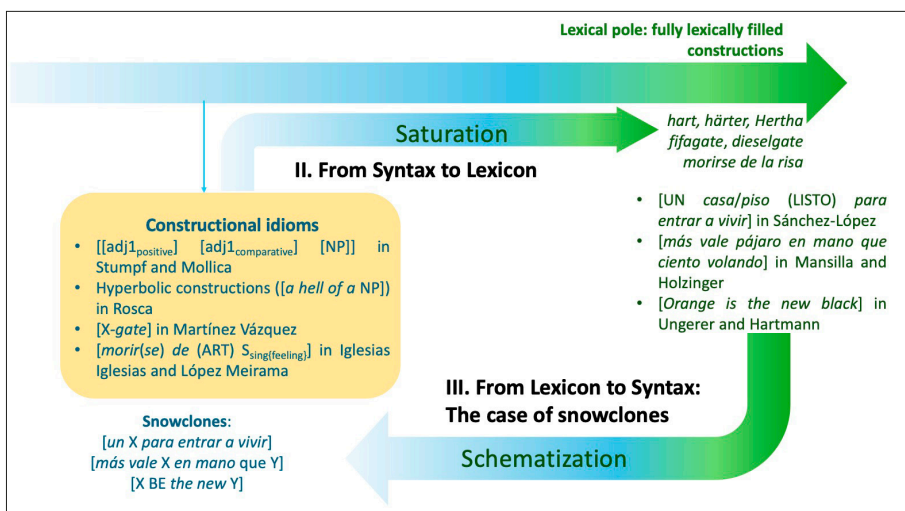

Figure 1. Constructions of the present volume. From partly filled constructions to lexically filled constructions and vice versa

3. The current issue

The special issue *New Approaches to Construction Grammar(s)* is divided into three different sections, which share the same common thread, namely the lexicon-grammar continuum. This constitutes one of the main tenets of constructionist approaches, on which the idea of the constructicon is based on. In this last part, we will go through all the papers with greater detail. The first section, "From theoretical to empirical approaches", comprises three contributions that combine theoretical aspects with practical analysis applied to two types of constructions, including those so-called *snowclones*, as well as lexically filled constructions or substantive constructions.

The first article is titled "Core and boundaries of the notion of Phraseme Construction", whose authors are Katrin Schlund (University of Halle-Wittenberg) and Anna Pavlova (University of Mainz). Within the framework of the European research project COST Action CA221151 *PhraConRep – A Multilingual Repository of Central and Eastern European Languages*, the authors aim to define the concept of "Phraseme Construction" (PhraCons), a type of semi-schematic construction also known as "constructional idiom" or "formal idiom". This concept is also explored in other articles in the volume (see works by Sören Stumpf & Fabio Mollica, Andreea Rosca, as well as Nely M. Iglesias Iglesias & Belén López Meirama). This article discusses the key morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of PhraCons in comparison to similar construction types (e. g., fully lexically specified idioms or fully schematic syntactic idioms). Using numerous examples from German and Russian, taken from the project's repository, Schlund and Pavlova demonstrate that "constructionhood" is a gradual phenomenon, as are the other defining criteria the authors present for this type of semi-schematic constructions.

Continuing with Russian as the language of study, Paola Cotta Ramusino (Università degli Studi di Milano), Ludmila Pöppel (Stockholm University) and Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij (Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences) authored the second paper in this section, titled "Russian discourse markers that highlight the truth of statements: a corpus-based semantic analysis". One of the main goals of this contribution is to demonstrate the significant utility of monolingual and parallel corpora in accurately defining the pragmatic functions of discourse markers as a specific type of lexically filled construction. Focusing on near-synonymous markers *čto ni govori* 'whatever you say' and *i Pravda* 'truly', both used to verify the truthfulness of statements

within their contexts, this analysis –based on the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and Sketch Engine– reveals distinctions in their usage across various discourse modes (dialogue, questions, and monologues), as well as in the presuppositions they carry, their positioning within statements, and their combinatorial properties.

The article "Las hablas infantiles en el marco de la gramática de construcciones: un enfoque teórico-descriptivo", by Lara Lorenzo-Herrera (Universidad de Cantabria) and David Navarro-Ciurana (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia), concludes section I. This paper, primarily theoretical in nature, demonstrates that CxG provides effective theoretical-descriptive tools for examining children's grammar by systematizing constructions articulated through cognitive and linguistic processes. The dynamic and process-oriented perspective of CxG highlights the importance of understanding how linguistic abilities evolve from an initial meaning-centered stage to the consolidation of more formal grammatical structures. The authors offer a holistic approach that emphasizes the interaction between cognition and language use in the emergence of children's grammar. Cognitive processes, such as pattern recognition and generalization, play a fundamental role in this development, guiding the process toward a more complex grammar.

Section II, "From syntax to lexicon", includes four contributions that primarily address issues related to semi-schematic constructions, particularly constructional idioms (see comments above on this type of constructions).

The first paper, "*Cool, Cooler, Clooney* – A corpus-based and relevance-theoretic analysis of the superlative heading construction in German", by Sören Stumpf (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) and Fabio Mollica (Università degli Studi di Milano), explores two current topics in CxG: the crucial role of texts genres in providing a holistic description of constructions, and the use of Relevance Theory to explain the pragmatic features of constructions. Specifically, this article focuses on the German schematic construction [[adjı$_{positive}$] [adjı$_{comparative}$] [NP]], with constructs such as *Gut, besser – Frau!* (lit. 'Good, better – woman!'), which is strongly related to headings. Using 2,835 instances from the German Reference Corpus (DeReKo), the authors analyze this intensifying constructional idiom from syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives, considering specially the principle of coercion and approaches to linguistic creativity, whereby the NP is interpreted scalarly as an elative superlative. The pragmatic effects of this construction as a genre-specific pattern are discussed combining CxG and Relevance Theory.

The second contribution, titled "Why use constructional hyperboles? Exploring the communicative functions of constructional hyperboles in the sitcom *Friends*", by Andreea Rosca (Universitat de València), also focuses on the interaction between constructions and discourse. Following the principles of the Lexical Constructional Model (LCM), the author examines the interactional dimension of hyperbole within the genre of televisual discourse. The goal of this study is to provide a frequency-based analysis of the communicative functions of constructional hyperboles in the comedy sitcom *Friends* (1994-2004), based on 200 instances of constructional hyperboles extracted from the show. The author identifies distinct communicative functions and four pairs of combined functions, highlighting the pragmatic multifunctionality of constructional hyperboles, which may be fully lexically filled. In total, the author encountered seven individual communicative functions and four dyads of functions, which points to the pragmatic multifunctionality of constructional hyperboles, which can be fully lexically specified, such as *all the time*, or can rather be more or less schematic, [X *is the* ADJECTIVE$_{SUP}$ NOUN (*in/of*)] (e. g. *His album is the worst in the world*) and [*a hell of a(n)* NP] (e. g. *a hell of a time*), respectively.

The paper "Constructional borrowing in indirect language contact situations: from *Watergate* to *Fernándezgate*", by Montserrat Martínez Vázquez (Universidad de Pablo Olavide), addresses the phenomenon of constructional borrowing, which can be observed across various types of constructions, from morphological constructions to multi-word expressions with different degrees of schematicity. To illustrate this phenomenon, the author examines the emerging Spanish morphological construction [-*gate*] to demonstrate the borrowability of morphological abstract schemas, even in indirect contact situations, by conducting a large corpus-based analysis. In English, the word *Watergate* served as a model for creating new words by analogy. Through a constructionalization process, the splinter -*gate* became a bound form attached to toponyms to refer to the place where similar political scandals occurred (*Fernándezgate*). The findings indicate that the English -*gate* schema has been successfully replicated in Spanish. The identification of numerous formations constructed with Spanish bases provides evidence for the entrenchment and the schema's integration into the constructica of Spanish speakers, who extend it in creative ways, both formally and semantically.

Like Andreea Rosca's work, the article by Nely M. Iglesias Iglesias (Universidad de Salamanca) and Belén López Meirama (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela), titled "La expresión hiperbólica de las sensaciones en

español y alemán: análisis de las construcciones fraseológicas [*morir(se) de* (ART) S$_{\text{sing\{sensación\}}}$ y [*vor* N$_{\text{Sg\{Gefühlsempfindung\}}}$ *sterben*]", focuses on constructional hyperboles. However, in this case, it does so from a contrastive perspective, comparing German and Spanish rather than focusing on English. Within the framework of the CONSTRIDIOMS project (https://constridioms.es/), this article conducts a contrastive corpus-based analysis of the idiomatic constructions [*morir(se) de* (ART) N$_{\text{sing\{feelng\}}}$] and [*vor* N$_{\text{Sg\{Gefühlsempfindung\}}}$ *sterben*] (lit. 'to die of {feeling}'). Using the monolingual corpora esTenTen18 and deTenTen20 in Sketch Engine, along with the parallel corpus PaGeS, the authors analyse the noun slot fillers of both constructions from a semantic point of view, with the goal of identifying the differences and similarities between them. The study reveals the productivity and entrenchment of the construction in both Spanish and German, as well as semantic similarities in the typology of the noun slot fillers.

Section III, "From lexicon to syntax. The case of snowclones", concludes this special issue with three articles on a type of semi-schematic construction known as snowclones (see above), explored either intra-linguistically in Spanish or cross-linguistically with English, German and Spanish. The first article, "*Snowclones*: unas construcciones *para entrar a vivir*", by Elena Sánchez-López (Universitat d'Alacant, IVITRA, IFFV, IULMA), analyzes the Spanish snowclone [UN X *para entrar a vivir*] (lit. 'one X ready to move into') a construction that emerged from creative variations of the familiar chunk *un(a) piso/casa para entrar a vivir* 'one apartment ready to move into'. The author focuses on the cognitive and semantic-pragmatic factors influencing the emergence of this semi-schematic construction, as well as the semantic constraints imposed on the X slot fillers by it. The analysis, based primarily on the recurrence of specific slot fillers, demonstrates that abstraction and projection are essential mechanisms for understanding the phenomenon of extravagance, which often accompanies creativity. In this theoretical framework, frames and conceptual integration prove to be highly useful notions for the constructionist study of snowclones.

The second paper, titled "*Más vale pulpo en mano que ciento nadando. Snowclones en la fraseología contrastiva (alemán-español): Un análisis de corpus*", is authored by Ana Mansilla Pérez (Universidad de Murcia) and Herbert J. Holzinger (Universitat de València). Conducted within the CONSTRIDIOMS project (https://constridioms.es/), this study examines snowclone variations of the Spanish proverb *Más vale pájaro en mano que ciento volando* (lit. 'it is better to have a birth in hand than a hundred flying') and its German equivalent

Lieber den Spatz in der Hand als die Taube auf dem Dach (lit. 'Better a sparrow in the hand than a pigeon on the roof'), 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush'. This article provides a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of these proverbs' modifications in discourse, exploring their semantic, pragmatic, and communicative potential. The contrastive study shows that both languages feature textual modifications of the proverb, primarily in online forums and chat genres, although these do not outnumber the occurrences of the canonical form. Nonetheless, the frequent lexical variations and high number of hapaxes legomena indicate the entrenchment of these snowclones in both languages: [*Más vale* X *en mano que ciento* Y] (lit. 'it is better X in hand than a hundred Y') in Spanish and [*Lieber* X *in der Hand als* Y *auf dem Dach*] (lit. 'better X in the hand than Y on the roof') in German.

The section on snowclones concludes with the article by Tobias Ungerer (University of Toronto) and Stefan Hartmann (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf), titled "*Contrastive is the new black*: A cross-linguistic study of a 'snowclone' in English, German, and Spanish". In this paper, the authors present a contrastive corpus-based analysis of the snowclone [X *BE the new* Y] and its equivalents in German and Spanish, and they show that this semi-schematic construction is most frequent in English, but productive in all three languages. Collostructional analysis techniques reveal parallels among the lexemes that the pattern combines with in each language, but also differences in the degree of semantic variability. As in Montserrat Martínez Vázquez's article (see above), this paper shows that the phenomenon of constructional borrowing, which can be modelled via links in the mental network of multilingual speakers, play a relevant role in the emergence of constructions, particularly those based on the global influence of the English language.

This volume constitutes an undeniable proof of the vitality of constructionist studies today and the emergence of new topics, such as creativity and the interaction between constructions and textual genres, which promise to yield interesting results in research in the coming years.

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