

Construction Grammar in the 21st Century

Hans C. Boas

Adele Goldberg (2006): *Constructions at Work. The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. vii+280.

1. Introduction

Goldberg's new work "investigates the nature of our knowledge of language, how that knowledge is acquired by children, and how cross-linguistic and language-internal generalizations can be explained."¹ It builds on earlier research on Construction Grammar (CxG) by Fillmore (1986), Lakoff (1987), Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor (1988), and Goldberg (1995), among others. Since the mid-1990s constructions have become more and more popular as an alternative to Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist Program, but it was not until the new millennium that CxG reached a new level of interest that resulted in an ever-growing body of research (for an overview, see Fried and Östman 2004). Besides numerous articles and monographs, the increased interest in CxG is evidenced by a book series and an e-journal devoted to constructional research, as well as the bi-annual International Conference on Construction Grammar (ICCG). The publication of Goldberg (1995) inspired much constructional research over the past decade, most notably Croft's (2001) typologically-oriented approach to CxG and Tomasello's (2003) constructional account of language acquisition.

G's new book *Constructions at Work. The nature of generalization in language* is certain to have a similar impact on constructional research as it incorporates a wide range of empirical data to arrive at a psychologically plausible model of grammar. Her book contains eleven chapters, which are grouped into three parts. The first part offers an introduction to the theoretical principles of CxG, the second part focuses on how and why constructions are learned, and the third part argues that CxG does not require language-specific stipulations to explain the nature of linguistic generalizations. In what follows, I provide an overview of each part of the book, and then I offer some critical observations about G's main claims in order to assess how they differ from other constructional research.

2. Constructions

The first chapter ("Overview") outlines the main ideas underlying current constructional research, such as the concept of what constructions are (a pairing of form and meaning/function), how constructions can be identified (non-predictability of some aspect of their form or function), and how a construction-based theory is different from other types of linguistic theories ("it's constructions all the way down" (18)). Many of the examples used to illustrate the nature of argument structure constructions come from G's (1995) book, such as the transitive, caused motion, ditransitive, and resultative constructions. While her earlier book focused primarily on English, Goldberg (2006: 7-9)

¹ See back cover of Goldberg (2006).

also discusses data from Croatian, French, Russian, Maasai, and German to propose that constructions are learned pairings of form and function. To set the stage for the subsequent chapters, G points out that constructional approaches “excel at being descriptively adequate, since both generalizations and idiosyncratic particulars can be captured” (11). This observation, as well as a short discussion of what adherents of different frameworks claim should count as an explanation in linguistics, serves as a springboard for G’s overview of the remainder of the book. The rest of chapter 1 briefly touches upon the importance of usage-based models, the nature of inheritance hierarchies, the role of productivity, and the role of cross-linguistic generalizations.

G’s second chapter (“Surface Generalizations”) investigates the role of alternations and argues that each surface pattern should be considered “on its own terms” (19). She first uses the English ditransitive construction (*Bill baked Chris a cake*) as an example to illustrate what is commonly referred to as surface form. On this view, all pairings of “Agent,” “Recipient,” and “Theme” with the grammatical functions Subject, Primary Object, and Secondary Object are ditransitives, and thus share the same sense of “causing somebody to receive something.” Next, she compares this constructional account with the derivational analysis proposed by adherents of generative grammar and argues that the latter approach has problems with explaining the similarities between ditransitives as well as the differences in meaning between prepositional paraphrases. A discussion of the distribution of caused-motion constructions and the *load/spray* alternation leads G to “the role(s) of the verb” (38-40). Based on a review of the Semantic Coherence Principle and the Correspondence Principle from her (1995) book, G emphasizes the importance of pragmatic context and frame semantic knowledge (see Fillmore 1985) for determining when a verb’s participant roles can fuse with a construction’s argument roles. This central status of a verb’s meaning finally leads G to explain the paraphrase relations observed in the *load/spray* alternation: “The shared meaning can be attributed directly to the shared verb involved” (41).

G’s third chapter (“Item-specific knowledge and generalizations”) addresses the importance of usage-based models of language (see Barlow and Kemmer 2000) by following Langacker’s (1987: 494) proposal about capturing both instances and generalizations simultaneously:

Substantial importance is given to the actual use of the linguistic system and a speaker’s knowledge of this use; the grammar is held responsible for a speaker’s knowledge of the full range of linguistic conventions, regardless of whether these conventions can be subsumed under more general statements. [The usage based model is] a non-reductive approach to linguistic structure that employs fully articulated schematic networks and emphasizes the importance of low-level schemas.

The importance of this statement is not to be underestimated: While most other linguistic theories continue to argue for a strict separation of the syntax and the lexicon, proponents of CxG typically do not assume such a strict division. Instead, the co-existence of item-specific knowledge and generalizations connected through an abstraction cline allows constructional approaches to describe item-specific knowledge alongside the relevant generalizations (see Jurafsky (1996), Boas (2003), Goldberg & Jackendoff (2004), Iwata

(2006)), combined with frequency information (Gries & Stefanowitsch 2005). Based on evidence from psycholinguistic research (Bybee (1995), Pinker and Jackendoff (1995)), G thus argues that constructions can also be formulated in cases where linguistic structures are predictable from other facts, leading her to claim that “patterns are stored as constructions even when they are fully compositional under these circumstances” (64).

After a discussion of conventionality and redundancy, G illustrates these points by showing how verbs that are closely related in meaning exhibit a strong tendency to appear in the same argument structure constructions. Similar regularities can be observed in child language acquisition, where children spontaneously over-generalize, and in adult speech, where novel instances such as *They haven't found the time to play him a whole lot of minutes* (Pinker 1989: 154) demonstrate the speaker's ability to generalize argument structure patterns. These observations lead G to claim that verbs are categorized together, ultimately resulting in abstract argument-structure constructions. At the end of her third chapter, G sets the stage for the second part of her book by bringing the reader's attention back to her main point, namely that a usage-based approach “allows us the chance to bridge naturally to an empirically grounded theory of how language can be learned” (65).

3. Learning Generalizations

G's fourth chapter (“How constructions are learned”) begins with a discussion of recent experiments demonstrating the impressive learning capabilities of bees, which, in contrast to earlier assumptions, go well beyond simple associative learning. According to G, this insight is significant because a range of arguments made in the 1950s and 1960s about the innateness of human language was based on what was known back then about learning mechanisms among non-humans. This observation, in combination with new data about how children are capable of extracting statistical regularities in the input, leads G to propose a re-evaluation of Chomsky's concept of universal grammar.

She tackles this task by looking at how children acquire argument structure generalizations. A large part of her explanation rests on studies showing that children fail to generalize beyond the input until they have been exposed to large amounts of data at age 3.5 or older (see, e.g., Tomasello (1992), Brooks and Tomasello (1999)). G takes these observations as an indication that “constructions must be learned, since they are acquired so late and in such a piecemeal fashion” (73). Another factor influencing the acquisition of constructions, according to G, is the skewed input that children receive. Based on previous work by Goldberg, Casenhiser, and Sethuraman (2004), G argues that children's input is not arbitrary, but rather geared towards specific general-purpose verbs such as *go*, *put*, *make*, or *give* that occur in particular constructions with high frequency. The frequent use of these verbs in a particular syntactic pattern from very early on suggests that the learning of the particular semantics of those patterns is facilitated, according to G. On this view, these verbs function as cognitive anchors that ease the acquisition of the particular argument structure constructions that are associated with them. G takes this evidence, as well as data showing that children and adults can learn new constructions on the basis of only a small set of skewed input within three minutes, to question the “paucity of the stimulus argument” (92).

The fifth chapter (“How generalizations are constrained”) investigates the nature of productivity and how to constrain it. One factor involved in constraining productivity is the degree of entrenchment (i.e., its token frequency), which G describes in terms of a statistical process of pre-emption that involves the role of semantic or pragmatic contrast. On this view, overgeneralizations are minimized because “more specific knowledge always pre-empts general knowledge in production, as long as either would satisfy the functional demands of the context equally well” (94). Thus, learners are claimed to be capable of inferring that a particular construction is not appropriate if another construction that fits the same context is constantly heard instead (e.g. **She explained me the story/She explained the story to me*). Another factor involved in determining productivity is type frequency in combination with the degree of openness of a pattern. The observation that constructions that have appeared with many different types of verbs have a higher probability of occurring with new verbs than those which have appeared with fewer types of verbs is taken as evidence that learners are likely to extend a pattern when they have witnessed the pattern being extended before. However, G points out that at the same time learners are often cautious when it comes to producing utterances based on generalizing beyond the input. Thus, G suggests that a combination of factors (“multiple cues”) is at work to constrain productivity, resulting in a strong hypothesis about when the use of a particular construction is fitting.

Chapter six addresses the question of “why generalizations are learned.” Drawing on research in psychology, G first points out that “human categorization is generally driven by some functional pressure, typically the need to predict or infer certain properties on the basis of perceived characteristics” (103). G then extends these insights to language by proposing a functional explanation for the learning of constructions: children need to generalize constructional patterns to some point to produce and understand new utterances. She bases her proposal on data illustrating the predictive value of overall sentence meaning, which in turn is based on the predictive meaning of verbs.

While G follows Tomasello’s (1992) verb island hypothesis, which states that children initially generalize at the level of specific verbs and their argument slots, she also argues that the meaning of verbs in speech of older children and adults is not sufficient for predicting sentence meaning. Thus, it is necessary to generalize beyond a particular verb to a more abstract pattern. G argues this point on the basis of a test investigating the cue validity of verbs and constructions in sentences such as *Pat got the ball over the fence*. The test looks at the probability that a verb (i.e., *get*) is in a specific category – the overall sentence meaning – given that it has a specific cue. G finds that children generalize beyond individual verbs to arrive at more abstract argument structure constructions such as caused-motion. This is possible, according to G, because certain patterns such as the VOL (verb, object, location) pattern have roughly the same cue validity as a predictor of overall sentence meaning when compared to the morphological form of the verb (i.e., *get*). G discusses a second test to determine the category validity, that is, the probability that an item has a feature, given that it belongs to a particular category such as caused-motion. She points out that constructions are at least as reliable as the verb in predicting meaning, and that the construction is additionally much more available. According to G, this is important because many verbs exhibit relatively low cue validity in isolation, which raises the importance of the construction for determining

sentence meaning. G finishes chapter six by pointing out an important motivation underlying her constructional approach: “Instead of learning a myriad of unrelated constructions, speakers do well to learn a smaller inventory of patterns in order to facilitate online production” (126).

4. Explaining Generalizations

Chapter seven (“Island constraints and scope”) addresses the constraints on movement and on relative scope assignment from a constructional perspective. To set the stage, G stresses the importance of information structure and processing demands and introduces a set of relevant terms, most notably ‘primary topic’ (*She hit a pole*), ‘within the potential focus domain’ (*George met her*), and ‘backgrounded elements’ (*The man who she told him about called*) (see Chafe (1987), Lambrecht (1994)). G then offers a brief review of classic examples of island constraints on complex NPs, subjects, complements of manner of speaking verbs, and presupposed adjuncts to outline how a constructional approach explains them. On her view, so-called movement phenomena are the result of combining a construction with an unbounded dependency construction such as a question, relative clause, or topicalization. When two constructions are combined, their particular information-structure properties need to remain consistent to avoid a pragmatic clash.

To illustrate her point, G discusses complements of manner of speaking verbs such as *shout* by looking at questions such as *Why was Laura so happy?*. An answer such as *#John shouted that he was dating someone new* is not an acceptable reply to the question, whereas the use of *said* instead of *shouted* would render it acceptable. The reason for this difference is that direct replies are sensitive to islands, which are assumed to be backgrounded. Since *shout* appears in an unbounded dependency construction it occupies a discourse-prominent slot and functions as an island to suitable answers. Thus, the unacceptability is due to the clash of information structure properties of the two construction types: elements appearing in unbounded dependency constructions occur in discourse-prominent slots, whereas islands are typically backgrounded. Since backgrounded propositions are not part of what is asserted, they do not provide felicitous answers to questions, according to G.

The importance of information structure occupies most of the remainder of chapter seven. To explain why ditransitive recipient arguments resist unbounded dependencies, G points to the fact that they are omitted quite frequently. This suggests that they exhibit a relatively low discourse prominence. Since ditransitive recipients are not the primary topic and they are not within the focus domain, they are backgrounded, again leading to a pragmatic clash. G’s analysis of data from a Google search (supplemented with data from the Linguists’ Search Engine (Resnik and Elkiss 2005) searching on Alta Vista) also demonstrates the importance of using various types of empirical data for linguistic analysis. She shows that there is a statistical tendency of the recipient argument to resist being involved in unbounded dependencies unless it has the status of passive subject. G devotes a substantial section of chapter seven to the issue of backgrounding in subordinate clauses, reason clauses, non-restrictive relative clauses, and other types of clauses. An analysis of the lexical semantics and the particular constructions shows that the choice of constructions determines which arguments are topical or backgrounded, leading G to conclude that “functional explanations require

reference to the function of the constructions involved (including the lexical semantics of the words involved)” (161).

Chapter eight (“Grammatical categorization: subject-auxiliary inversion”) examines the common properties of SAI (Subject-Auxiliary Inversion) constructions such as questions, clauses with initial negative adverbs, wishes, counterfactual conditions, and exclamatives. Contrary to prior analyses that claim that there is no functional generalization associated with the SAI pattern (see, e.g., Green 1985), G points to the evidence for radial categories in the concepts denoted by words to suggest that the type of category functions exhibited by SAI should be regarded as quite natural. On her view, SAI constructions have more in common than their syntax, i.e., they should be analyzed as deviating semantically from a prototypical sentence that, given the truth of the proposition, is positive, assertive, declarative, independent, and which has predicate focus. The different SAI constructions are portrayed as extensions from the prototype motivated by so-called markedness links. The main difference between the prototype and its extensions is that SAI constructions are non-positive. Each SAI construction additionally exhibits specific properties, e.g., non-assertive (exclamatives), dependent (counterfactual conditionals, negative rejoinders, comparatives, and positive conjunct clauses), and non-declarative speech-act force (*yes/no* questions, wishes, curses), among others.

Following the detailed analysis of different SAI constructions, G points to an interesting fact that runs counter to Emonds (1970) and Newmeyer (2000), who claim that SAI is restricted to main clauses. Citing examples such as *Junie B. knew that boy, was she in trouble!* and *They knew that had she left on time, she'd be here by now* G proposes a first approximation of a generalization capturing the distribution of SAI in main and subordinate clauses: “(Only) SAIs that are restricted to conveying particular speech acts are restricted to main clauses, or to subordinate clauses that convey speech acts” (181). Commenting on the results of chapter eight, G finally argues against purely syntactic accounts and proposes that functional motivations should be taken seriously when explaining seemingly idiosyncratic facts of grammar:

In seeking out functional categories we need to be cognizant of the sort of categories we should expect to find. Categories of language, like most human categories, are much more flexible than those defined rigidly by necessary and sufficient conditions. (182)

Chapter nine (“Cross-linguistic generalizations in argument realization”) investigates whether the types of linking rules proposed by Pinker (1989), Gleitman (1994), and Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) are indeed universal and widespread. G claims that if they were universal and not attributable to general cognitive mechanisms then one could legitimately argue that while they are learnable they are not learned. The chapter begins with a summary of Pinker’s (1989) linking rules and a brief review of Dowty’s (1991) proposal about how arguments are linked to syntactic positions. This leads G to a discussion of the saliency of actors and undergoers, which both exhibit a high degree of salience and therefore appear in prominent syntactic slots. In discussing the tendency to have as many arguments as there are complements G argues against a universalist

mapping between syntax and semantics as proposed by Lidz, Gleitman, and Gleitman (2003).

Instead, she invokes the Gricean principles of relevance and economy to arrive at two pragmatic mapping generalizations that are somewhat weaker: “(a) The referents of linguistically expressed NPs are interpreted to be *relevant* to the message being conveyed. (b) Any semantic participants in the event being conveyed that are *relevant* and *non-recoverable* from context must be overtly indicated” (190). One important feature of her constraints is that they allow us to account for cross-linguistic differences. For example, G points out that (b) does not make any predictions about semantic participants that are recoverable or irrelevant. It thus captures the fact that different constructions and different languages exhibit diverse mapping properties (e.g., some languages allow recoverable participants to be omitted freely), a property that is difficult to account for with hard-wired linking rules that do not allow for exceptions. On her view, arguments that are predictable, recoverable, or highly frequent tend to be reduced to make expressions more economical. One of the most significant outcomes of this chapter is G’s explicit (and repeated) highlighting of the importance of cognitive facts. That is, her generalizations about omission of arguments, analogy, word order, and the principle of iconicity do not represent hard and fast constraints, but should instead be seen as tendencies that appeal to independently motivated pragmatic, semantic, and processing facts.

Chapter ten (“Variations on a constructionist theme”) explores the relationship between G’s constructional approach and various other frameworks. She first addresses mainstream generative grammar proposals that she characterizes as Syntactic Argument Structure theories (SAS). One commonality that some SAS accounts such as Hale and Keyser (1997) and Borer (2001) have with CxG is the idea that there are associations between some types of form with some types of meaning. However, some major differences between SAS theories and CxG are that the former (1) are derivational, (2) do not emphasize speaker construals of situations, (3) regard constructions as pairings of underlying form and coarse meaning (instead of surface form and detailed function), (4) view only certain syntactic patterns as constructions, (5) assume constructions to be universal and determined by UG, (6) have not addressed language-internal generalizations across distinct but related constructions, and (7) claim that constructions are compatible with Minimalist architecture (see Chomsky 1995). Another hallmark of SAS accounts is that they aim to reduce the role of the lexicon and do not pay sufficient attention to lexical exceptions, according to G. In contrast, CxG aims to capture detailed information about distinct verb senses, including their rich frame semantic meanings.

The second part of chapter ten compares various constructional approaches such as Unification Construction Grammar (Fillmore 1999, Fillmore et al. 1988, Kay and Fillmore 1999), Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1990), Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001), and Cognitive Construction Grammar (Lakoff 1987, Goldberg 1995). G splits these constructional approaches into two different groups to highlight their similarities and differences. All approaches share the view that (1) constructions are learned pairings of form and function, (2) the role of constructions is central, (3) CxG is non-derivational, and (4) inheritance takes place by default. In contrast, Unification Construction Grammar differs from the other approaches in that – according to Goldberg – it is not usage-based, places a heavy focus on unification-based formalism (as well as

formal explicitness and maximal generalizations), and does not regard the role of “motivation” as central. To explain why her approach does not employ a rigid formalism that makes use of unification, G reviews the advantages and disadvantages of feature-based systems and arrives at the conclusion that such a “formalism becomes unwieldy” (217). The remainder of chapter ten discusses the roles of motivation, stipulation, and prediction as explanatory forces in different constructional approaches and compares the major differences between Cognitive Grammar, Radical Construction Grammar, and Goldberg’s constructional approach.

The beginning of chapter eleven (“Conclusions”) echoes the main tenet of G’s book: “Speakers’ knowledge of language consists of systematic collections of form-meaning pairings that are learned on the basis of the language they hear around them” (227). G provides brief summaries of the main points of each chapter and finally highlights some important theoretical differences between her constructional approach and present-day mainstream generative theories. The latter regard constructions as epiphenomenal and without theoretical standing (Chomsky 2000), while at the same time assuming that the complexity and diversity of human language cannot be explained in terms of the input and general cognitive processes. As outlined in great detail throughout her book, G takes the opposite approach by proposing to account not only for the periphery of language in terms of constructions, but also for the core of grammar. On this view, language is learnable and calls for a detailed explanation of “how it is learned and why it is the way it is” (230).

5. New directions for Construction Grammar?

G’s new book places constructions at the center of an account of language that explores in detail the relationships between semantics, pragmatics, syntax, and much more. Based on a wide range of experimental as well as cross-linguistic data G successfully argues for a methodological approach that leaves behind long-standing assumptions about innateness and Universal Grammar. Her usage-based approach argues for a psychologically plausible model of grammar that seeks to explain language-internal generalizations and how they are learned, as well as cross-linguistic generalizations. The clarity underlying her arguments in favor of regarding language learning as a process of statistical generalization in combination with semantic and pragmatic information deserves special mention. As such, the book’s intelligibility and depth make it indispensable for students and researchers interested in the latest methods and trends in Construction Grammar.

For linguists unfamiliar with CxG, three points are especially worth mentioning. First, the structure of G’s book makes the fundamental concepts of CxG readily accessible to anyone with a rudimentary background in syntax and semantics. The first part of her book serves as a condensed introduction to the main ideas underlying constructional research, and summarizes most of the major insights gained from this line of inquiry over the past 15 years. Similarly, chapter ten offers an excellent comparison of how CxG differs from mainstream generative grammar and shows how various constructional approaches differ from each other. Second, newcomers to CxG may find the range of data used by G to arrive at her conclusions enlightening. Recall that most work in mainstream generative grammar over the past four decades has primarily relied

on introspective data, which gives linguists only a limited picture of the full range of particular phenomena and may thus skew their results (see Fillmore (1992), Sampson (2001), Boas (2003)). G's use of a wide range of empirical data from electronic corpora and psycholinguistic experiments shows how such data is essential for arriving at the appropriate level of linguistic generalization (among many other insights) in constructional research. Third, G's references are extensive (more than thirty pages!), allowing newcomers to get a detailed overview of the wide scope of constructional research.

As indicated above, G's work is extraordinarily detailed and well-argued, and is a must-read for anyone interested in CxG. However, the overall scope of the book has left me a bit disappointed as I had expected significantly more novel results that go beyond G's well-established results published in various venues since 1995. For example, the first three chapters (1-65) read like an extensive summary of her first book. They review the most important properties of the caused-motion, ditransitive, resultative, and *way*-constructions, and explain at length some of the fundamental ideas underlying constructional research such as the theoretical status of argument structure constructions, the role of the verb, frame semantic knowledge, usage-based data, conventionality and redundancy, and inheritance hierarchies. Chapter two ("Surface Generalizations") is a modified version of Goldberg (2002) with some additional data. The only new insights I gained from reading the first three chapters come from child language acquisition data (58-61) and interesting cross-linguistic data illustrating how argument structure constructions are prevalent in other languages such as Croatian, French, Maasai, German, and Russian (7-9). In my view, the first part of the book could have been significantly condensed by providing the reader with the necessary pointers to relevant references. Readers familiar with G's prior work should thus feel free to pass over the first part of the book.

While the second part of G's book provides a series of significant insights into the mechanisms of how generalizations are learned, many of the results are not entirely new to readers of her prior research. For example, chapter four is based almost entirely on Goldberg, Casenhiser, and Sethurman (2004, 2005) and Casenhiser and Goldberg (2005). Similarly, a large part of chapter six focuses on prior research by Hare and Goldberg (1999), Bencini and Goldberg (2000), Chang, Bock, and Goldberg (2003), and Goldberg, Casenhiser, and Sethurman (2005). G's heavy reliance on prior work should not detract from the quality of its results. However, it would have been nice to reduce the length of G's second part of the book (69-126) in favor of dramatically extending the truly original part of her contribution, which can be primarily found in the third part (129-230).

As such, the organization of the book makes it appealing for different audiences, but to varying degrees. For newcomers to CxG it offers an extremely detailed introduction and overview of the framework as well as a range of data analyses illustrating the central role that constructions play in language. The compilation of much prior research thus frees newcomers from reading up on a range of constructional research over the past decade. Linguists already familiar with G's research are likely to find the third part of her book most appealing as it contains various new insights into the structure and organization of constructions (see section 4 above).

Other issues that I find problematic to varying degrees include the following. First, in her discussion of the role of constructions and verbs in determining overall

sentence meaning G points out that Boas (2000), Thompson and Fox (2004), and Verhagen (2002) “seem to make the claim that the totality of what is stored are specific usage events.” She then claims that “there is ample evidence that generalizations are essential to language” and that “semantically similar verbs show a strong tendency to appear in the same argument structure constructions” (58). While G is certainly right that there is ample evidence for generalizations about semantically similar verbs appearing in the same argument structure constructions, she does not go into great detail about what type of semantic and pragmatic information is necessary to determine whether a verb is compatible with a particular construction. Consider the Correspondence Principle and the Semantic Coherence Principle (59-60), which help determine whether a verb can be fused with a particular argument structure construction. Iwata (2005) discusses Goldberg’s use of lexical entries such as *spray* in (1), which specify the roles of a verb and whether these roles are profiled or not (profiled roles are in bold).

(1) spray <sprayer, **target**, **liquid**>

Following Croft (1998: 43), Iwata (2005: 389) points out that the default profiling properties of verbs do not always make the right predictions about whether a given verb can fuse with a construction. For example, when *spray* occurs in the locative alternation, it may occur transitively with the theme role as the direct object as in (2). However, according to Iwata the licensing of *spray* in (2) should not be possible, given Goldberg’s Correspondence Principle that requires profiled roles to be mapped onto a profiled position.

(2) The broken fire hydrant sprayed water all afternoon.

Iwata explains the acceptability of (2) by proposing that *spray* in (2) is construed as a substance emission verb and thus acquires the syntax of a simple transitive construction similar to *emit*. On this view, world knowledge is important for licensing sentences such as (2) because it enables us to construe a spraying event as a substance emission event (Croft (1998: 43), Iwata (2005: 389)). Examples such as (2) lead Iwata to propose a more detailed analysis of verb meaning in which different construals of the same event become important. To arrive at a more detailed analysis of verb meaning it is necessary to “refer to the particulars of a frame semantic scene, rather than by merely matching role labels,” according to Iwata.

Similar arguments for the inclusion of more detailed frame semantic knowledge (Fillmore 1985) in G’s constructional framework are made by Nemoto (1998). Reviewing G’s discussion of how verbs fuse with constructions based on frame semantic specifications, Nemoto argues that the polysemy of ditransitive *save* cannot be explained without providing a precise analysis of three different types of background frames, namely the Rescue Frame (*An artificial heart could save his life*), the Storage Frame (*I decided to save the wine for later*), and the Waste Prevention Frame (*You can save fuel if you drive at a regular speed*). While all three senses can generally be subsumed under a more general sense of “keeping a valued object in a good condition” (Nemoto 1998: 229), they exhibit different properties when it comes to licensing ditransitive constructions. For example, Waste-Prevention SAVE allows for ditransitive syntax (*The*

change saved us valuable production hours (Nemoto 1998: 232)), while Rescue SAVE does not (**The doctor saved the baby cot death* (Nemoto 1998: 234)). Nemoto explains this difference by pointing to the different profiling patterns exhibited by the senses of *save* which evoke different frames: Waste-Prevention SAVE inherently involves a participant role which corresponds to a recipient role (a resource-possessor), while Rescue SAVE does not. Thus, Nemoto comes to the conclusion that there is a greater need for including more detailed frame semantic knowledge in order to determine under what exact circumstances a verb can fuse with a construction. Unfortunately, Nemoto's (1998) stimulating proposals on how to include more detailed frame semantic knowledge seem to have escaped G's attention. The importance of detailed frame semantic knowledge for the licensing of grammatical constructions is also highlighted by Boas (2005, 2006).

In discussing the distribution of resultative constructions and the locative alternation, Boas argues for a detailed analysis and representation of different verb senses, which he represents in terms of mini-constructions that specify detailed syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic selection restrictions (for details, see Boas 2003: 191-259). One of the main differences between G's approach and the one advocated by Boas is that the latter systematically restricts the occurrence of specific verbs (by including selection restrictions), while at the same time allowing verbs closely related in meaning to occur with resultatives, as the examples in (3) show.

- (3) a. Ulrich {ate/*chewed/*devoured/*swallowed} his plate clean.
- b. The audience {laughed/?smiled/*pouted} the poor guy off the stage.
- c. Ursula {sneezed/?wheezed/*exhaled/*snorted} the napkin off the table.

Another advantage of detailing specific frame semantic knowledge at the level of verb senses is that it allows us to account for collocational restrictions that hold for the postverbal object and resultative phrases. Again, by encoding detailed syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic selection restrictions in terms of mini-constructions representing verb senses, it becomes possible to restrict the range of resultative phrases as in the following examples (see Boas 2003: 215-260 for details of how collocational restrictions are encoded; see Boas 2003: 120 for licensing of postverbal objects).

- (4) a. And it seemed Rosa was intent on driving Gavin {crazy/*to craziness/*happy}.
- b. Natasha laughed herself {to death/*dead}.
- c. Claire wiped her plate {clean/*to cleanliness}.
- d. Lena shattered the vase {to pieces/*to cleanliness}.

While the analyses by Iwata, Nemoto, and Boas share the same goals as G's approach, they differ from hers in that they pay more attention to frame semantic knowledge associated with individual verbs in order to more efficiently constrain grammatical constructions from licensing unattested sentences. These lexical-constructional accounts not only explicitly spell out the detailed frame semantic information needed for determining the range of a construction's applicability, but they also acknowledge – contrary to what G appears to claim – the existence of higher-order abstract constructions that are generalizations over these exemplars (see Iwata 2005, 2006) and Boas (2005)). In

contrast, G focuses on the important role of generalizations, but remains largely silent when it comes to characterizing the precise structure and role of low-level exemplars. Since such information is central for ensuring that constructions do not over-generate, G's account would have benefited from recognizing the important role of exemplars in prohibiting verbs from fusing with constructions.

The second point which deserves attention is G's use of data throughout the book. Contrary to much work in syntax and semantics that almost exclusively relies on introspection (see Sampson 2001: 122-140), G claims to follow a usage-based approach to arrive at linguistic descriptions and analyses on the basis of real language materials (see Barlow and Kemmer 2000). Her use of corpus data and experimental data is exceptionally detailed and goes well beyond what is found in most other present-day work on the subject.

At the same time, however, it would have been nice if G had discussed in more detail the scope and limitations of her use and interpretation of data. For example, in discussing the ditransitive construction, G states that "a Google search was performed to attempt to quantify the dispreference (p137)." Her search resulted, among other things, in the insight that prepositional paraphrases outnumbered ditransitives forty to one. While G's use of corpus material from the World Wide Web reflects a growing trend in linguistics (see, e.g., Grefenstette and Kilgarriff 2003), it is not without problems. For example, for readers to follow G's arguments and to re-create her data-gathering procedure, it would have been a good idea to include the search parameters used to perform the data collection. More serious, however, is G's uncritical interpretation of corpus material gathered on the Internet. Due to increased globalization, more and more English texts on the Internet are composed by non-native speakers of English, a factor that should be controlled for, or at least mentioned (for example, the URL or message ID# could be included in data taken from the Internet). But note that even data from Internet domains located in English-speaking countries may not be reliable as it is typically not possible to judge whether a native speaker composed the text.

In my view, the potential inaccuracies of her web-based data could be partially offset by the use of semantically annotated data from a balanced corpus. For example, since 1997 the FrameNet project (Fillmore et al. 2003; <http://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu>) has been annotating data from the British National Corpus with frame semantic information to create an on-line dictionary that gives an exhaustive inventory of the semantic and syntactic combinatorial properties ("valences") of the multiple senses of words. FrameNet is based on Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1985), the semantic counterpart to Construction Grammar, repeatedly mentioned throughout G's book. Her analysis of generalized argument structure constructions such as the ditransitive could benefit tremendously by incorporating FrameNet data. For example, when analyzing the distribution of ditransitives one can query the FrameNet database to see how agents, themes, and recipients are realized syntactically with verbs from different semantic domains. These data can then be taken to formulate more precise generalizations. Another advantage of using corpus data annotated with frame semantic information is that it allows for a more precise characterization of selectional preferences for semantic roles (see Erk 2007).

A final, but not less important, comment on G's use of data concerns her uncritical claims about the significance of cross-linguistic data. It is usually bothersome

to be confronted with statements about the supposed universal nature of a particular linguistic phenomenon. Typically, the argumentation underlying what Croft (2001: 31) calls cross-linguistic methodological opportunism rests on the observation of a particular phenomenon in a select number of typologically unrelated languages. Because the phenomenon under study exhibits striking parallels in these few languages, it is too quickly labeled “universal.” G, unfortunately, is no exception to this on-going trend. For example, in explaining how her Pragmatic Mapping Generalizations work, she claims that “[i]n Kannada, as well as perhaps the majority of the world’s languages, recoverable arguments are regularly omitted” (190). However, except for a short list of languages that include Japanese, Korean, Thai, Hungarian, Russian, Hindi, and Lao, among others, she does not provide further evidence for her claim about the universal omission of arguments. Similarly, in concluding her discussion of SAI constructions in English, G proposes that for SAI “to indicate a non-prototypical sentence is rare cross-linguistically” (181) without providing any references. I find this problematic not only because her argument is not supported by data, but also because we do not have a complete inventory of descriptions of the world’s languages. As such, claims regarding cross-linguistic universals or rarity should always be regarded with extreme caution.

Along more nitpicky lines: The editing of the volume could have undergone a more rigorous review. For example, *saw* in the example sentence illustrating complex NPs on p. 134 should read *see*. Webelhuth and Ackerman (1998), cited on p. 214 and listed in the references, does not exist. The correct reference is Ackerman and Webelhuth (1998), which is also listed in the references. Casenhiser and Goldberg (forthcoming), cited on p. 69, is not listed in the references, I suspect that the update of the manuscript took place after the paper was published as Casenhiser and Goldberg (2005), which is listed in the references.

The preceding comments should not be taken as a dismissal of G’s book. On the contrary, I find that G’s recent contribution to CxG is outstanding, and I am certain that many of the issues raised in it will have to be addressed by future research. G shows in a convincing way that more consideration must be given to the central role of constructions in a psychologically plausible model of language. The presentation of usage-based data in the book is also exceptionally thorough and well argued. As such, the book is a superb resource for both newcomers to CxG as well as old hands. I have no doubt that *Constructions at Work* will have a strong impact on the study of semantics, pragmatics, and syntax in the future.

Reviewer’s address:

*Department of Germanic Studies
1 University Station, C3300
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX 78712-0304
U.S.A.
hcb@mail.utexas.edu*

References

Ackerman, F., and G. Webelhuth (1998). A theory of predicates. Stanford: CSLI

Publications.

- Barlow, M., and S. Kemmer (eds.) (2000). Usage-based models of language. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Bencini, G. M. L. and A. E. Goldberg (2000). The contribution of argument structure constructions to sentence meaning. *Journal of Memory and Language* 43: 640-51.
- Boas, H. C. (2000). Resultative constructions in English and German. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Boas, H. C. (2003). A constructional approach to resultatives. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Boas, H. C. (2005). Determining the productivity of resultative constructions: A reply to Goldberg & Jackendoff. *Language* 81: 448-464.
- Boas, H. C. (2006). A frame-semantic approach to identifying syntactically relevant elements of meaning. In Steiner, P., H. C. Boas, & S. Schierholz (eds.) *Contrastive studies and valency*. Frankfurt/New York: Peter Lang. 119-149.
- Borer, H. (2001). Exo-skeletal vs. endo-skeletal explanations: syntactic projections and the lexicon. Paper presented at the Explanations in Linguistics Conference, San Diego, CA.
- Brooks, P. and M. Tomasello (1999). How children constrain their argument structure constructions. *Language* 75: 720-38.
- Bybee, J. (1995). Regular morphology and the lexicon. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 10: 425-55.
- Casenhiser, D. and A. E. Goldberg (2005). Fast mapping of a phrasal form and meaning. *Developmental Science* 8: 500-508.
- Chafe, W. L. (1987). Cognitive constraints on information flow. In R. Tomlin (ed.) *Coherence and grounding in discourse*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins. 21-50.
- Chang, F., Bock, J. K., and A. E. Goldberg (2003). Can thematic roles leave traces of their places? *Cognition* 90: 29-49.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). *The minimalist program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2000). *New horizons in the study of language and mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Croft, W. (1998). Event structure and argument linking. In Butt, M. and W. Geuder (eds.) *The projection of arguments: Lexical and compositional factors*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. 21-63.
- Croft, W. (2001). *Radical construction grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dowty, D. (1991). Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language* 67: 547-619.
- Emonds, J. (1970). Root- and structure-preserving information. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT.
- Erk, K. (2007). A simple, similarity-based model for selectional preferences. *Proceedings of ACL 2007, Prague, Czech Republic*.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1985). Frames and the semantics of understanding. *Quadernie di Semantica* 6: 222-254.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1986). Pragmatically controlled zero anaphora. *BLS* 12 95-107.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1992). 'Corpus linguistics' vs. 'Computer-aided armchair linguistics'. In Svartvik, J. (ed.) *Directions in corpus linguistics*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 35-60.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1999). Inversion and constructional inheritance. In Webelhuth, G., J.-P.

- Koenig, and A. Kathol (eds.) Lexical and constructional aspects of linguistic explanation. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Fillmore, C. J., P. Kay, and C. O'Connor (1988). Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of 'let alone'. *Language* 64: 501-38.
- Fillmore, C. J., C. R. Johnson, and M. R. L. Petruck (2003). Background to FrameNet. *International Journal of Lexicography* 16: 235-252.
- Fried, M., and J.-O. Östman (2004). Construction Grammar: A thumbnail sketch. In Fried, M. and J.-O. Östman (eds.), *Construction Grammar in a cross-language perspective*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 11-86.
- Gleitman, L. (1994). The structural sources of verb meanings. In Bloom, P. (ed.), *Language acquisition: core readings*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 174-221.
- Goldberg, A. E. (1995). *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, A. E. (2002). Surface generalizations: an alternative to alternations. *Cognitive Linguistics* 13: 327-56.
- Goldberg, A. E., Casenhiser, D. and N. Sethurman (2004). Learning argument structure generalizations. *Cognitive Linguistics* 14: 289-316.
- Goldberg, A. E., Casenhiser, D., and N. Sethurman (2005). The role of prediction in construction learning. *Journal of Child Language* 32: 407-426.
- Goldberg, A. E., and R. Jackendoff (2004). The resultative as a family of constructions. *Language* 80: 532-68.
- Green, G. M. (1985). The description of inversions in generalized phrase structure grammar. Paper presented at the 11th annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistic Society.
- Grefenstette, G. and A. Kilgarriff (2003). Introduction to the Special Issue on Web as Corpus. *Computational Linguistics* 29.
- Gries, S., and A. Stefanowitsch (2005). Covarying collexemes. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* 1.1: 1-43.
- Hale, K., and S. Keyser (1997). On the complex nature of simple predicators. In Alsina, A., Bresnan, J., and P. Sells (eds.) *Complex Predicates*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. 29-65.
- Hare, M. and A. E. Goldberg (1999). Structural priming: purely syntactic? Paper presented at the proceedings of the cognitive science society.
- Iwata, S. (2005). Locative alternation and two levels of verb meaning. *Cognitive Linguistics* 16: 355-407.
- Iwata, S. (2006). Where do Constructions Come from? *English Linguistics* 23: 493-533.
- Jurafsky, D. (1996). A probabilistic model of lexical and syntactic access and disambiguation. *Cognitive Science* 20: 137-94.
- Kay, P. and C. J. Fillmore (1999). Grammatical constructions and linguistic generalizations: the what's X doing Y? construction. *Language* 75: 1-34.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lambrecht, K. (1994). *Information structure and sentence form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Langacker, R. (1987). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Langacker, R. (1990). *Concept, image, and symbol: The cognitive basis of grammar*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lidz, J., Gleitman, H. and L. Gleitman (2003). Understanding how input matters: verb learning and the footprint of universal grammar. *Cognition* 87: 151-78.
- Levin, B., and M. Rappaport Hovav (1995). *Unaccusativity: at the syntax-lexical semantics interface*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nemoto, N. (1998). On the polysemy of ditransitive *save*: The role of Frame Semantics in Construction Grammar. *English Linguistics* 15: 219-42.
- Newmeyer, F. (2000). *Language form and language function*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pinker, S. (1989). *Learnability and cognition: The acquisition of argument structure*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pinker, S. and R. Jackendoff (2005). The faculty of language: what's special about it? *Cognition* 95: 201-36.
- Resnik, P. and Elkiss (2005). The Linguist's Search Engine: an overview. *Proceedings of ACL 2005*.
- Sampson, G. (2001). *Empirical Linguistics*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Thompson, S. A. and B. Fox (2004). *Relative clauses in English conversation: relativizers, frequency and the notion of construction*. Unpublished manuscript. University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Tomasello, M. (1992). *First verbs: a case study of early grammatical development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomasello, M. (2003). *Constructing a language: A usage-based theory of language acquisition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Verhagen, A. (2002). From parts to wholes and back again. *Cognitive Linguistics* 13: 403-39.

In your opinion, how have grammar skills fared in the 21st Century? What is the quickest way to learn English (speaking)? What is the best way to practice speaking English? Tony Baker, Grumpy old man. Answered Jan 7, 2018 · Author has 755 answers and 201.4k answer views. Originally Answered: Why is English important in the 21st century? At school in the U.K., you would tend to learn French, or German, Spanish, Italian, or possibly Portuguese or Dutch or Russian or Chinese. My apologies for any omissions.Â The 20th to the USA and probably the 21st will belong to China. However English has become the dominant trading, technical and travel language, and this situation is likely to remain. 52 views Â· View 1 Upvoter. In the end, 21st century skills, and using them in the classroom, is not really about teaching at all. These skills, and truly the skills that will spell success for our learners in the future, are going to be how capable they are as independent and curious individuals. Our real challenge as educators is to model a desire to embrace the known, the unknown, and the just plain unknowable. As Alvin Toffler, writer and futurist, put it: "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." This article was first publishe