Claimed advantages of Construction Grammar

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Summarized from Adele E. Goldberg’s (1996)
“Constructions”
with some commentary

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The syntactic complement configuration of a clause is taken to be uniquely predictable from the semantic representation of the matrix verb. (G:8)

Different syntactic complement configurations therefore reflect differences in the semantic representations of the main verb.

Different verb senses are related by generative lexical rules.

Differences in semantics are not necessarily truth-functional differences (may represent different construals by speaker-hearer)

Comment: These are predictable once we radically lexicalize a person’s grammar.
Argument structure (subj, obj1, obj2)

relation

Participant structure (agent, recipient, patient)

ditransitive construction (see Michaelis)
All examples from AEG book unless specified.

(1) a. He sneezed the napkin off the table.
    b. She baked him a cake.
    c. Dan talked himself blue in the face.

G:9 In none of these cases does the verb intuitively require the DO complement.

Comment: can we interpret them as syntactically intransitive and semantically intransitive?

? Dan talked Sam blue in the face
Claim 2: circularity is avoided

(2) a. Pat kicked the wall.
b. Pat kicked Bob black and blue.
c. Pat kicked the football into the stadium.
d. Pat kicked Bob the football.
e. Pat kicked his way out of the operating room.

G:11 Circularity arises from arguing that a verb is n-ary, and “therefore” has n complements when and only when it has n complements. The relations are directly associated with skeletal constructions.

The circularity claim is due to projection principle.

Comment: radically lexicalize and circularity disappears.
(3) a. She slid Susan/*the door the present.
b. She slid the present to Susan/to the door.

G:12 Two distinct senses of slide with two syn. frames.

Comment: Can we passivize like one and serialize like the other?

*The present was slid Susan

*Susan was slid the present to the door
claim 4: compositionality is preserved

A construction is claimed to exist if and only if its form-meaning-use is not strictly predictable from other aspects of grammar.

one example: The way construction: Pat fought her way into the room.

cf. Steedman & Baldridge for a critique

Can we predict? *Pat fought John’s way into the room*
(4)  a. Bill set the alarm clock onto the shelf.
    b. Bill set the alarm clock for six.
    c. Bill loaded the truck onto the ship.
    d. Bill loaded the truck with bricks.

PS claim: misinterpreted lexical ambiguity creates more marked processing load increase than misinterpreted uses of the same verb.

G:17 This is predictable: different uses of the same verb does not entail different senses of the verb.

Comment: we need statistics in radically lexicalized categories.
G:21  By recognizing skeletal syntactic constructions as meaningful in their own right it is possible to allow for multiple syntactic frames to be used as an aid in acq. of verb meaning.

ex: eight different senses of the word *kick*.

Comment: can we acquire all of them without ever using a kick-like verb in a similar situation? Can we transfer that knowledge to 'kick' once we’ve seen it?
• Language might be a list of constructions, as CxG claims.
• But we are in the business of explaining why only certain constructions and certain constituents are possible.
• CxG seems to want to inventorize language and its use, rather than explain it.
• That seems to be another way to say rules must be fed by data and stats.
• If we need a theory of the lexicon, CxG, HPSG and LFG can help.
• That is different than a theory of grammar.