DOI: https://doi.org/10.18309/ranpoll.v52iesp.1596

Constructional variation - unveiling aspects of linguistic knowledge: Interview with Bert Cappelle

Variação construcional – desvendando aspectos do conhecimento linguístico: Entrevista com Bert Cappelle

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Abstract: Bert Cappelle is associate professor in English linguistics at the University of Lille. He is the author of several articles dealing with linguistic phenomena analyzed in the light of usage-based cognitive Construction Grammar. He defends the idea that a speaker's grammar is constructed gradually. Dr Cappelle has contributed to the study of variation in a socio-constructionist perspective. The concept of allostruction, proposed by him, has been a pillar for the development of research that follows this perspective. We formulated ten questions for the scientist that can assist in the debate, in Brazil, of works related to Construction Grammar.

Keywords: Allostruction; Cognition; Constructicon; Construction Grammar; Discourse; Pragmatics; Variation

Resumo: Bert Cappelle é professor associado de Linguística Inglesa na Universidade de Lille. Ele é autor de diversos artigos que versam sobre fenômenos linguísticos analisados à luz da Gramática de Construções

cognitiva baseada no uso. Ele defende a ideia de que a gramática de um falante é construída gradualmente. Dr. Cappelle tem contribuído para o estudo da variação sob uma perspectiva socioconstrucionista. O conceito de aloconstrução, proposto por ele, tem sido um pilar para o desenvolvimento das pesquisas que seguem essa perspectiva. Nós formulamos dez questões para o cientista, que podem auxiliar no debate, no Brasil, de trabalhos vinculados à Gramática de Construções.

Palavras-chave: Aloconstrução; Cognição; Constructicon; Gramática de Construções; Discurso; Pragmática; Variação

Interviewers (I): *Dr. Cappelle, could you briefly tell us about your research projects and interests?*

Bert Cappelle (BC): I'm interested in how speakers use language. That's putting it rather simply, of course, so to be a little more specific, I've looked at a wide range of constructional topics: particle verbs (*find out*, *sod off*, *speed things up*, etc.), expressions of spatial movement and visual perception (*walk / look around the room*), valency and argument structure (e.g., resultative and related constructions), correlative comparatives (*the X-er..., the Y-er...*), existential constructions, modal verbs and, more recently, negation and clause fragments. I've no doubt missed a few grammatical phenomena. Anything that catches my attention at a given point in time is likely to be turned into an object of study. Looking at many patterns is both a blessing and a curse: it allows me to know at least *something* about many parts of grammar but it also means that whenever I'm asked about my speciality, I find it hard to say what exactly it is. I don't necessarily conduct my research in the context of funded research projects. Right now, though, I *am* involved in a collaborative project on modal verb constructions in English, whereby 'traditional' corpus-linguistic methods are compared or complemented with a machine-learning approach and with theoretical insights about semantics and pragmatics. My own private unfunded pet project is writing a fresh book on sentence analysis for the complete uninitiated, a kind of syntax for dummies, infused with my beliefs about how grammar works.

My overarching concern is to find out how language is linked with cognition, more specifically how speakers store in their mind the multitude of language units that they use on a day-to-day basis and how these units interlock. We use words, word endings and

syntactic patterns, and it's just fascinating to see how everything so nicely fits together when we talk and write. As a usage-based constructionist, I don't believe that speakers are born with a rule system, one for which, at most, they have to flick a few switches, as in the principles-and-parameters approach, and that they then just have to learn the words in their language. Instead, what I think happens is that they hear around them recurrent combinations, which they commit to memory, and that they extract 'local', low-level generalizations from similar-sounding or similar-meaning sequences. This view is in line with cognitive and usage-based Construction Grammar (cf. BOAS, 2013; DIESSEL, 2015).

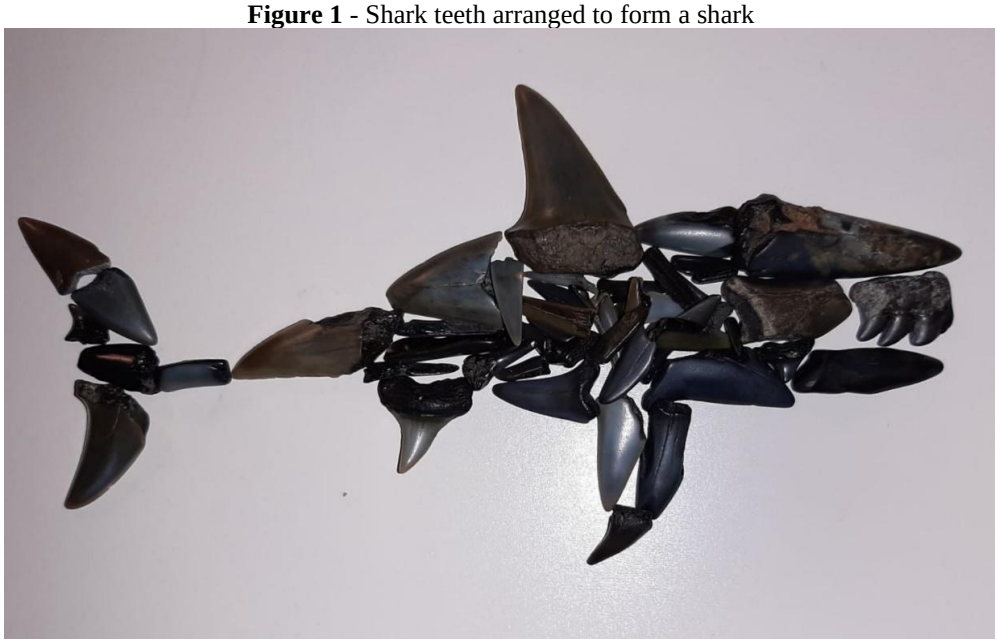
While I have done most of my research on phenomena in English, this is largely an accidental consequence of being offered to do doctoral research within the domain of descriptive English linguistics after obtaining my master's degree, for which I majored in Dutch. I occasionally do study some Dutch constructions, but more as a hobbyist. I've sporadically also carried out some contrastive research comparing Dutch and English on the one hand with French on the other. As is well known, the former two are typologically closer to each other than either of them is to French.

In my research, I usually adopt a corpus-linguistic approach, but I may on occasion use some other empirical methodologies, such as subjecting volunteers to psycholinguistic tests, for instance acceptability rating tasks. However, I tend not to dabble with any advanced methods that I don't master, unless I can team up with people who are experts in them. The most exciting research I've conducted out of my comfort zone was in collaboration with neuroscientists. Together, we looked at people's brain activity as they heard acceptable or unacceptable word combinations, such as *rise up* and **fall up*, respectively. We found that acceptable, common word combinations, even semantically compositional and syntactically discontinuous ones, can produce the same kind of activity in the brain as single words, which suggests that, like words, they're stored as lexical units, without having to be assembled by means of a language's syntax (CAPPELLE et al., 2010; HANNA et al., 2017).

Before I go on to answer the next question you have in store for me, let me just say that I may be wrong to believe that speakers aren't born with any rule system at all. Perhaps usage-based linguists' emphasis on 'emergent grammar' may tell only part of the story. I don't reject out of hand that humans have a biological endowment to put

hierarchical structures in place, which would explain the naturalness with which sounds form words, words form phrases, phrases form clauses, and so on. But even if that's the case, this propensity for using multi-level structuring is not to be confused with proof that speakers are born with a syntactic rule system – it would merely be evidence that they're born with the *ability* to construct such a system. Moreover, this hierarchical structure building that humans engage in is not restricted to language. Just the other day, my thirteen-year-old son went hunting for fossil shark teeth. He found a decent few on a beach near where we live and once home, he fashioned a shark out of them (cf. Fig. 1).

Figure 1 - Shark teeth arranged to form a shark



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This representation of a shark isn't a pure example of 'mise-en-abyme', which we often find in art, both high and low (cf. Fig. 2 for an example of the latter). In any case, there's something extraordinarily pleasing about any object that is made out of itself – or, in the case of the 'shark' above, something made out of *parts* of (several specimens of) itself. Looking at it gives us a mental kick. At least, it does to me. I get a thrill when I realize that an item can be included into something of its own kind, but I guess I'm not the only one.

Figure 2 - Packaging for a brand of soft cheese, using the recursive Droste effect, a graphical form of *mise en abyme*

Whether we get a kick out of it or not, it takes a special skill to deal with units within larger units: it requires us to mentally 'see' the hierarchical structure. This special cognitive ability is probably unique to us as a species. Some other species can also build structures – birds build nests, termites build mounds – but that's no match for what we can do. Also, it's well known that some birds can mimic the songs of other birds, or even of humans – do look up some clips on YouTube![1] – but when that happens, there's probably little or no awareness in these birds that they're 'quoting' a particular specimen or individual. Humans, by contrast, pepper their conversations with markers such as "And I said: ..." (or "I was like…") and "And then she said: ..." (or "and she was like…"), by which they explicitly include previously made utterances by themselves and others in new discourse. This isn't hard for humans to do and I believe it betrays our species' distinctive gift to embed one element inside another. Indeed, in human language, recursive structures are all over the place. Here are just a few examples:

[1] For example here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WL9Orh7auA&list=RDQM5wyvmXOHZHY&start_radio=1, retrieved January 31, 2021.

(1)

a. successive 'framing' of a situation by *when*-clauses:
[*When I was a kid,* [*when I had a bad day,* [...]]]

b. *and* joining two coordinates in which *and* joins two coordinates:
[[[*Tom*] *and* [*Jerry*]] *and* [[*Itchy*] *and* [*Scratchy*]]]

c. a noun-noun compound in which the first noun is a noun-noun compound in which the first noun is a noun-noun compound:
[[[[*sea*] *level*] *rise*] *map*]

d. a noun phrase in which the post-head modifier contains a noun phrase in which the post-head modifier contains a noun phrase:
[*the bird* [*on* [*the alligator* [*in* [*the water*]]]]]

e. A clause whose verb is complemented by a clause whose verb is complemented by a clause whose verb is complemented by a clause:
[*I think* [*he thinks* [*I think* [*he's asleep*]]]].[2]

The final word hasn't been said about recursion – what exactly it is, whether all human languages use it, and whether all animals completely lack it (for discussion, see, e.g., ČADKOVÁ, 2015). My point is, though, that *even if* there's probably something about the human mind that it can handle multiple embedding with amazing efficiency, humans also store many preformed sequences. Thus, apart from being creative (in the Chomskyan sense of being capable to form an unlimited number of sentences using limited means), we're also creatures of habit, which means we often fall back on the combinations we're familiar with. And even in novel sentences, never uttered before, there are usually quite a few portions that are routine (cf., *inter alia*, ERMAN & WARREN, 2000). How the commonplace and the inventive go together is what intrigues me most about language. By the way, it's not so clear to me whether we can speak of 'inventive' language use in the case of ordinary slot-filling, when speakers replace a variable by material that simply fits the requirements for that variable. True creativity is a matter of bending the rules (CAPPELLE, 2020a).

[2] As in the title of a series of pictures showing a cat (seemingly?) asleep with its eyes open: https://imgur.com/t/tom/2aW1F, retrieved January 24, 2021.

I: *How do language users make constructional generalizations when they build construct-i-cons (within and between language(s)), as, for example, in L2 learning and translation? Rather than a "static constructional system", would it be better to think of a "flexible network" of constructions? How could Diasystemic Construction Grammar (in the sense of Steffen Höder and others) contribute to this?*

BC: I'm no expert in L2 learning but I would say that learning a second language is again a matter of storing lots of useful words, idioms, and grammar patterns which generalize over similar groupings of elements. In that respect, learning a second language isn't that different from acquiring one's first language (see, e.g., MACWHINNEY (2005) for a unified account of L1 and L2 learning). I think the difference between L1 and L2 learning is often overstated. It's true that there's more conscious reflection involved in the latter, but that's probably because you're older when you learn a second language, or a third or *however manieth*. See, I'm now very keenly aware of trying to do something that apparently isn't possible in English (cf. KÖNIG, 2020, p. 394) but would be perfectly fine in Dutch, my mother tongue: using an interrogative proform for an ordinal numeral. This kind of reflection is also something I regularly do for my first language. When we reach a certain age, we're capable of treating language phenomena as objects of scrutiny. Linguists have even turned this into a profession that earns them an income! Part of that introspection is that you compare a second or third language with the language you're most familiar with.

Maybe that comparison isn't always fully conscious and perhaps *comparison* is even the wrong word, as it implies that there are two distinct things involved, language A and language B. I have the impression, when I listen to the language output of my own children, who are teenagers, that there are no strict boundaries between the different languages they are mastering. In any case, in Flanders, where Dutch (or at least the Belgian variety of it) is the norm, youngsters appear to find it fashionable to intersperse their utterances with English vocabulary items, such as *savage*, *cute* or *hard to get*, and even full sentences, such as *Why is this so awkward?* They're probably developing not two fully distinct constructicons, then, but overlapping ones, containing both Dutch (or 'Flemish') and English language items. The English that they learn as a 'foreign' language isn't that foreign at all, and the more they can integrate some of it in their daily

Dutch conversations, the higher their social prestige among peers. I also notice that in my children's language output, some of the grammar patterns that work for Dutch can be extended to English words and expressions, even if these, strictly speaking don't lend themselves to this, from the point of view of English morpho-syntax. They may thus contort English items by squeezing them into Dutch constructions, as when they would say *outgemaked* (instead of *made out*): the particle *out* is used as a prefix, there's the Dutch morpheme *ge-* marking a past participle and a weird kind of regularization of the English verb *make*. I suspect that in such extreme cases of language mixing, those kids *are* aware of their language use. Youngsters probably know, for instance, they shouldn't use some of the English items in more formal Dutch, as when they're writing an essay for school. They must surely realize that what they're producing is correct neither in standard Dutch nor in English. Not that they care when they're among themselves: what matters is that they sound cool. (See, e.g., GEERAERTS; KRISTIANSEN (2015)) for a general introduction to the way in which speakers may use patterns that cross the boundaries of dialects and languages co-existing in their community.) In some cases, though, youngsters may have heard an English expression, such as *break up*, when said of relationships or music bands, and unknowingly use a (partial) calque based on that: *breken*. Just the other day, my son asked me whether John Lennon was killed before or after the Beatles (or the remaining three) had *gebroken*. When my son used this word, he really appeared unaware that this wasn't how you're supposed to talk about the splitting of bands or couples. Dutch uses *uit elkaar gaan* ('go separate ways').

It helps, of course, that Dutch and English are closely related languages, but it would be wrong to exaggerate that closeness. Linguistically speaking, Dutch and German are more closely related, but apart from a few isolated cases, these languages aren't mixed. I can think only of the now-ubiquitous discourse marker of agreement *sowieso*, which I don't think Dutch language users *perceive* as being of German origin, and which has developed a new meaning anyway, namely 'definitely', 'absolutely', rather than 'anyway', which is the meaning it had when it was first introduced into Dutch. So, you might say that (Flemish) speakers of Dutch keep their constructicon distinct from the constructicon for German, or at least from the specific vocabulary (lexical items and idioms) characterizing German. By contrast, the Dutch language has opened up more fully to English words and phrases. Because of popular culture (films, TV-series, music,

etc.) and the massive exposure to everything celebrities and influencers post on Instagram and other social media, English has an immediate and strong impact that no other language has to youngsters in my speech community. Besides, it's not *just* youngsters, but they're the ones that set the trend (HILTE et al., 2018, p. 78).

I believe Diasystemic Construction Grammar, as proposed by researchers like Höder (2012, 2014, 2018, 2019), is a suitable framework to deal with this extreme form of integration of two languages. There's quite likely something like a multi-lingual constructicon that's being put into place by teenagers in Flanders and the Netherlands, with several English-language items included in it. . Interestingly, they would probably have to look hard for an acceptable Dutch equivalent to, for instance, *savage*, which they use to describe someone who is headstrong, has a wicked sense of humour and doesn't mince their words. I tested this on my children, and my hypothesis about this somewhat random example was confirmed by this very small-scale experiment: no Dutch alternative could be given for this English adjective. This means that there are English vocabulary items that occupy a place of their own, not linked to any translation equivalent, in their overwhelmingly Dutch lexicon, rubbing shoulders as it were with Dutch words. People of a former generation would have a closely corresponding Dutch word such as *eigengereid* much more readily available and wouldn't necessarily know what the English translation was. If young speakers of Dutch are able to avoid using a word like *cute* depending on whom they're writing for or talking to – they might not use it when they're talking to their great-grandma, for instance – this means that the language-specificity of an item within such a multi-lingual constructicon is available as a piece of information included in constructions (in this case, in lexical constructions such as *savage* or *cute*). In Diasystemic Construction Grammar, this kind of information would probably be treated as some kind of pragmatic information, which I think is a valid solution, if pragmatics is seen as information on 'how/when to use a language item'.

Now, do language users build generalizations in their own language involving such 'foreign' items? I think they do. I have the impression that young speakers of Dutch have created a generalization in their grammar on how to integrate English complex verbs into Dutch prefixed verb constructions. However, I haven't attested a sufficient number of examples to be sure about this. Illustrations of more firmly established patterns can be found in youngsters' use of English intensifiers (for lack of a better term) like *fucking* and

hedges like *kinda*. Let me focus a little on the first item. If speakers of Dutch had borrowed *fucking* wholesale, we would find it in all the kinds of grammatical environments in which we find that word in English. But that's not the case. For instance, it is very rare to encounter it in Dutch sentences like?? *Ik kan je niet fucking horen!* 'I can't fucking hear you!'. What can we conclude from this? It appears as though Dutch-speaking youngsters have put in place in their largely Dutch constructicon only a subset of the patterns in which English *fucking* occurs. They can use it before a noun, as in *Wat voor een fucking gezever is dat nu weer?* ('What sort of fucking nonsense is this?'), before an adjective, as in *Da's echt fucking goe!* ('That's really fucking good!') and in a few other patterns. The question is: Are we dealing with Dutch patterns or with English patterns here? We simply can't tell! We may be dealing here with what Höder (2018) calls *diaconstructions*, constructions that cross the border between two or more languages. Dutch-speaking adolescents are probably also familiar with some other, exclusively English, patterns in which *fucking* is used, which haven't made it into their own conversations (yet). These can be called, again using Höder's (2018) terminology, *idioconstructions*. They're marked as 'to be used in English only'. By the way, my own children generally abstain from using this swear word. Having said this, my daughter does use *fudging* a lot, which is a supposedly acceptable alternative.

In Dutch more generally, so not just youth speak, we often find English nouns converted from particle verbs, such as *feedback*, *try-out*, *sit-ups*, and, of course, *lockdown*. The only difference is that there's often a stress shift, Dutch speakers erroneously accentuating the particle. This is an error only if you expect that the English words are kept fully intact, but (many) Dutch speakers apparently have their own expectations about the prosody of such nouns. I think that speakers of Dutch of a previous generation had been exposed primarily to English particle verbs, such as *come on*, *watch out*, and so on, where the stress really *is* on the particle, and hardly to deverbal nouns based on them. When they started borrowing some derived nouns, like *feedback* (which they may have found in written sources), they weren't really aware the stress was different. That seems to have led to a morphological and phonological pattern *in Dutch* for English verb-particle nouns. Newly borrowed terms, like *lockdown*, often comply with that Dutch pattern.

Translation may be a rather different story. Translating is not something people, other than translators, need to do on a daily basis. I mean, it's a somewhat artificial

activity, far removed from ordinary conversation. However, one might suggest that professional translators also have a multilingual constructicon, where items from language A and their translation equivalents in language B are linked in what's then essentially a sort of cognitive version of a translation memory. We shouldn't call these stored pairs of equivalents 'constructions', because that would stretch the notion of construction rather too much. At best, they could be considered a kind of 'alternations', but here again, that's using that term in an extended sense. But I see the point of your question. If the translation equivalents are structurally very similar, they're instantiations, or daughters, of a single language-unspecific diaconstruction, in Höder's sense. Such a construction would then exist at a more general level and subsume the language-specific items. In that respect, the particle verb construction, left unspecified as to internal word order, is a diaconstruction available to speakers of Germanic languages.

Are constructicons flexible networks of constructions? Without a doubt. Not only do different speakers have idiolects, hence slightly different constructicons from one person to the next, but the constructicon of any individual speaker is also in constant flux. Our individual constructicons change because we keep hearing and learning new items and probably also gradually stop using certain some other items that other speakers in our environment use less and less. In other words, it's all a matter of exposure, as usage-based linguists emphasise; see Schmid (2015, 2020) for a fully worked-out theory of how entrenchment of units in the minds of individual speakers interacts with conventionalization of words and expressions in the speech community.

We all develop our own particular verbal habits and even verbal 'tics'. Some of our lexical and grammatical preferences are quite peculiar, others less so but these can still be picked up by quantitative methods. Indeed, it's on the basis of our idiolects that scholars can run authorship attribution algorithms, as has been done, for instance, for the mysterious bestselling author Elena Ferrante; see Savoy's (2018) apparently definitive verdict on the matter. I sometimes wonder how we develop our individual speech habits. I've been told, for instance, that I use the word *so* a lot. Would it be too ludicrous to claim that, because I can't help exposing myself to my own output, some of the items that I previously used relatively sparingly can become more frequent in my own language use, the more I use them? And that the more I use them, the more I hear them, so that it's a sort of snowball effect, a positive feedback loop? ? This would definitely help explain, in

part, how each of our idiolects arises. Our environment by necessity includes ourselves: we can hear ourselves talk! Of course, our sentences are also planned before they're uttered (and to some extent *while* they're being uttered). As we are the ones who manage to finish our own sentences best, the production aspect of our utterances must surely leave its imprint on the mind, too (and probably more than the reception or processing aspect, come to think of it).

I: *Depending on the perspective in focus, can allostructions be a possible representation at a more schematic level (mesoconstruction and macroconstruction)? Would there be a limit for using such theoretical construct/representation at a network representation?*

BC: Yes, using allostructions at a schematic level is definitely warranted. When I coined the term allostruction (CAPPELLE, 2006), I meant it to be a constructional variant of a more unspecified 'mother' construction. As such, allostructions are themselves constructions. Insofar as constructions vary in their degree of schematicity, which is one of the basic tenets of Construction Grammar, we shouldn't be surprised to find allostructions at different levels of schematicity. Phrasal verbs, which made me come up with this concept, are a good example of this. We can say both [*make up my mind*] and [*make my mind up*]; although this split variant is less frequently used, it's something we can accept as grammatical, and maybe it's even stored in the minds of speakers, or at least in the minds of *some* speakers. This would mean that there are two allostructions of a more abstract construction [*make* {*up*} *my mind* {*up*}], where the position of the particle is left unspecified. If the two allostructions aren't stored at this low lexical level, they must surely be stored at a higher level, for instance at the level of the 'constructional idiom', in Jackendoff's (1997) terms: [*make up* PRO*'s mind*] / [*make* PRO*'s mind up*], where PRO stands for a possessive determiner bound by the Subject, such as *my* when the Subject is *I*, or *their* with a third-personal plural Subject. And if the allostructions aren't to be found at this somewhat higher level, they must exist still higher up in the network, for instance at the level of [*make up* NP] / [*make* NP *up*] (where the meaning is less specific) or at even higher levels, such as [verb *up* NP] / [verb NP *up*] or [*make* prt NP] / [*make* NP prt] (where prt stands for any particle). I claim that the allostructions also

exist at the schematic level of the maximally schematic transitive verb-particle construction: [verb prt NP] / [verb NP prt]. Crucially, the existence of an allostructional link between two items at one level doesn't mean that there can't be an allostructional link at any other level. As we know, there is redundancy in the network.

It's also possible that a speaker has stored only one of the alternatives at a very low, lexically specific level. For instance, a speaker may have conferred to memory *make up my mind* but not *make my mind up*. But if this speaker has access to an allostructional link at a higher link *and* perceives *make up my mind* as an instantiation of one of these allostructions, then the speaker can 'compute' the acceptability of *make my mind up* by drawing on that more schematic allostructional link. Almost paradoxically, it's also by means of this higher-level allostructional link that language users can know that they should *not* use a lexically specific variant, when this happens not to be a conventional option, even if that variant instantiates one of the higher-level allostructional alternatives. Here's an example of what I mean. We can say *keep up the good work* but it's odd to say *keep the good work up*. I've just looked this up in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; DAVIES, 2008-): the joined ordering, with verb and particle together, has almost 1,300 corpus hits, while the split ordering, with the verb and particle separated by *the good work* only has three; in other words, it occurs as good as never. Competent speakers of English may, subconsciously, have kept statistics on what they have and haven't heard. If a given form is licensed by a schematic allostruction – in this case the split particle verb construction, at whatever level of schematicity (i.e., with either *keep* or 'verb', and with either *up* or 'prt') – but if that form is never actually encountered despite being possible *in principle*, then a speaker will not risk being the first to use it in that seemingly deviant way. To make this a little more concrete: if a speaker has heard the expression ten times and none of these instances was of the split variant, then the speaker can conclude that this split variant is used conspicuously less often than could be expected. Their brain then tells them to stay away from the form they *should* have heard at least a few times but in fact haven't. In acquisition studies, this is what's referred to as 'pre-emption' by 'indirect negative evidence': the conventionalized form blocks out the non-conventional one, that is, the form that is 'repeatedly not heard', if you see what I mean. Adele Goldberg has done quite some work on this and it's the main topic of her recent (2019) book *Explain me this*, a book whose title provides another good example of

something that we should often hear, but don't, except in the output of non-native speakers.

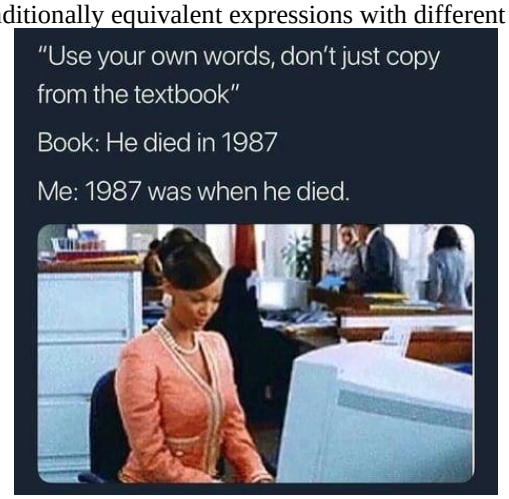
Now, as to whether there's a limit to the schematicity of an allostructional relation, I would say that this depends on whether or not a speaker has actually schematized over the 'alternating' structures. I use quotation marks here, because it's not clear up to what level of abstraction we can see templates as being in competition. If it's just the linguist that is capable of seeing a link between structures, and not also ordinary speakers, then the linguist shouldn't posit such a link. This whole issue reminds me strongly of an article by Sandra and Rice (1995) in the journal *Cognitive Linguistics*. The article, just like Goldberg's (1995) first book on Construction Grammar, appeared just a couple of years before I embarked on my doctoral research. Its title has left a lasting impression on me: "Network analyses of prepositional meaning: Mirroring whose mind – the linguist's or the language user's?". In the 1980s and 1990s and even later, it was popular in cognitive linguistics to propose semantic networks for prepositions, which are wildly polysemous – just consider the preposition *at* in *at the beach*, *at night* and *at your service*. George Lakoff had devoted a chapter to Claudia Brugman's MA thesis, 'The Story of *Over*' (published later as BRUGMAN, 1988) in his 1987 book *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. Ever since, polysemy networks were all the rage. The challenge was to find out which usage was central or prototypical and how the other meanings were extensions from it. Sometimes more than one usage was seen as prototypical and there were also proposals to have abstract schemas over more specific meanings.

I once argued against treating the spatial sense of a particle (which for some linguists is also a kind of preposition) as the basic meaning from which a temporal or aspectual use is then extended via metaphorical reasoning, claiming instead that the spatial meaning and the assumedly metaphorically extended meaning are stored separately (CAPPELLE, 2009a). However, in a later experimental study that I had the good fortune to conduct with Friedemann Pulvermüller and Yury Shtyrov, one of our findings didn't mesh well with that claim. Apparently, the area in the brain where speakers process movement is activated not only when the particle in a phrasal verb has a spatial meaning, as in *rise up*, but also when its meaning is more metaphorical, as in *heat up* (CAPPELLE et al., 2012), so there may be a link between the two kinds of usages after all. Anyway, looking at the early literature on networks for prepositional meaning,

it's fascinating to see how many of the questions we now ask about how constructions are linked were already being addressed then, for instance whether there are only 'vertical' relations between nodes, between schemas and their hierarchically subordinated instances, or also 'horizontal' relations between nodes at the same level of generality.

As for the issue of whether there's any cognitive plausibility to positing horizontal links between abstract phrasal or especially clausal templates, it has recently been argued by De Vaere et al. (2020) that allostructions may not be helpful, on account of the mother node (the schema or 'constructeme') being too vacuous, semantically and formally. Well, whether or not constructions are felt to be linked is an empirical issue. I'll have the opportunity to come back to this in my answer to your final question. Even so, we can also think about this at a theoretical level, using a kind of thought experiment. There's a meme, copied below as Figure 3, that is relevant to this discussion.

Figure 3 - Truth-conditionally equivalent expressions with different discursive properties



The meme is about plagiarism, but of course, the reworded proposition is a factual statement and not any original idea to be ascribed to anyone, so plagiarism isn't really at stake, which is partly what makes this meme funny. More to the point, the reworded version merely involves the same words used in a different sentence structure. That, too, contributes to the humorous effect. Indeed, there's clearly a high degree of semantic commonality between a canonical clause of the Subject+Predicate type and an inverted pseudo-cleft construction (X + *be* + *wh*-relative clause); the two sentences also bear a great deal of formal resemblance because of the shared lexical items. That's why we find the 'paraphrase' a dubious case of using one's own words to formulate a proposition.

What's also interesting here is that the 'reworded' version has particular discursive properties, which makes the sentence inappropriate in most contexts. Again, this is one of the elements that render this particular meme humorous: you can *think* you're being smart in fooling plagiarism detection software by using an alternative syntactic structure with pretty much the same lexical items, but you're not smart at all if you don't realize that such a cleft structure comes with its own constraints on how it's to be used in discourse. Now this is why I look at this as a thought experiment: suppose the canonical construction and the cleft construction weren't linked in any way, how would we be able to appreciate the humour conveyed here? Clearly, the two sentence patterns must be linked, because they can be used to express the same propositional content (though the cleft construction also has meaning going beyond mere truth-conditional semantics). If the meme had just rearranged words using the same sentence pattern (e.g., *1987 died in him*), I'm not sure we would have found it as funny.

The example also shows that there's a possibility that constructions can be linked horizontally while they aren't daughters of any plausible common mother construction (a 'constructeme'). Or if there *is* such a mother construction, it may be less strongly entrenched in the mind than the daughters are. Again, all of this is still a matter of conjecture and we need to find ways of resolving the question how clausal patterns are interconnected, if it all, experimentally.

I: *What do you think of the semantic-discursive-pragmatic relationship in the representation of the constructional network? How do you understand the functional part of the construction? Do you agree with the idea that there are several functional attributes (including semantics, discursive and pragmatics) at each schematic level?*

BC: As the example I just gave demonstrates, constructions may include discursive properties, having to do with, for instance, which components are foregrounded (i.e., under focus) and which ones are backgrounded (i.e., presupposed). Apart from information-structural properties, there may also be several (other) pragmatic properties, relating to illocutionary force: a construction may be used to express your disbelief, to make a request, to make a pledge, and so on. In other words, speech act information is definitely something that can be stored in the construction, at the functional

side of it. Other broadly functional information to be included in a construction can pertain to such things as whether the construction, as we've pointed out before (cf. again the case of the English word *savage* in youngsters' Dutch), is indigenous or of foreign origin; whether it's old-fashioned or trendy; whether it's formal, neutral or casual, even whether it's highly frequent, somewhat frequent, rather infrequent or uncommon, all of which is information that a usage-based approach to language predicts can be picked up on by language users. Constructions – lexical items and more skeletal patterns – are so much more than just bits of propositional meaning (cf. CAPPELLE, 2017). As a speaker you use them to assert your position in your speech community or in society at large. You hope your addressee will think you're down with the cool kids or you're doing your best to make your readers think you are well-read. In short, I think the functional side of constructions can include a broad array of specifications on how the construction is meant to be used in a discourse context and what its effect on the listeners or readers can be.

That we need functional information in constructions is clear, but I'd like to make several comments about how and whether this functional information should be stored.

First, it should be obvious that not *all* constructions have functional information of all the kinds just mentioned. Lexical items don't have any information-packaging instructions and unless they're one-word utterances such as *Hello!* or *What?!*, they don't have any speech act information either.

Second, I don't think it's a good idea to store all the functional information as an unorganized hotchpotch of semantic and pragmatic elements mixed together. On the one hand, I'm sympathetic to the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) approach (for an overview, see Goddard, 2018), which meshes essential semantic elements of meaning together with socio-cultural and ethno-pragmatic information in wonderfully simple-sounding 'explications', as they're called. On the other hand, I still believe it's useful, in the case of clausal patterns, to make a distinction between semantic and pragmatic information. Constructional semantics is reserved for such things as thematic role assignment and (non-cancellable) truth-conditional, propositional content. Pragmatic information includes such things as speech act meaning and (conventionalized) implicatures. For instance, if you ask me, *Can you speak Portuguese?*, there is a clear sense that this is purely a question about my ability to conduct a conversation in Portuguese, and when I answer 'No', this is an answer to this propositional meaning. But

if you ask me, as you did at the beginning of this interview, *Could you briefly tell us about your research?*, then your utterance is no longer about whether I have the ability (or opportunity) to do something. Or at least, it is not *exclusively* used to literally ask about that, as I can still start by saying, "Yes, sure", which shows that the semantic component is not completely wiped out when *could* is used in a request construction whose form is *Could you (please) VP?* Whether or not the semantic part is still present or accessible, it's obvious that the request meaning is what's really at stake, so that's why I immediately started carrying out the requested action, ignoring the truth-conditional aspect. Keeping semantics distinct from illocutionary force this way is also something that Stefanowitsch (2003) did in his constructionist treatment of indirect speech act constructions.

Many constructionists know this statement by Goldberg (1995, p. 7): "A notion rejected by Construction Grammar is that of a strict division between semantics and pragmatics." This could seem to suggest that we should mix everything together in an undifferentiated conglomerate of 'functional' aspects. After all, constructions are sometimes referred to as stored 'form-function units', so everything that isn't an aspect of form should then be an aspect of function. However, Goldberg's just-quoted statement is immediately followed by this: "Information about focused constituents, topicality, and register is presented in constructions alongside semantic information" (ibid.). The use of "alongside" suggests that these different bits of information are not of the same kind and can therefore still be kept apart. Indeed, Goldberg and Perek (2019), in a recent book chapter in which they approach ellipsis from a Construction Grammar perspective, make a distinction between form, function and register (the latter not included in function). Traugott (to appear), too, distinguishes between semantics, which is truth-conditional, and pragmatics, which isn't. Foundational Construction Grammar papers, such as Fillmore et al.'s (1988) article in *Language* on *let alone*, also distinguished between the semantics and the pragmatics of this construction. In short, it isn't necessary, nor perhaps desirable, to abandon any distinction between qualitatively different functional aspects of a construction. But I also believe there's no single *correct* way of organizing functional information in a constructional representation. It's more important that a description is right in spirit than that we follow a particular format imposed on us by anyone, one that would constrain us in dealing with what we feel are important aspects of what speakers know about a construction.

A third comment – and this is an answer to the follow-up question you asked – is that functional properties are not necessarily relevant at the different schematic levels in a constructional network we're setting up. Let's again take the example of the modal verb *can*. The most schematic construction just states that *can* is a modal auxiliary and states that its meaning involves possibility. There's no pragmatics involved at that general level. It's only at lower levels in the network, when the form of clauses is more fleshed out, that we can start adding illocutionary-force information. For instance, *How can* NP VP*?* is a conventional way to express one's objection to a situation, as in *How can we allow this crime to happen before our eyes?* This is not the only possible interpretation, because it's still possible to compositionally assemble the meaning, as in *How can we reduce the crime rate in our country?*, which isn't understood as a rhetorical question (cf. CAPPELLE; DEPRAETERE, 2016). But that isn't a reason to reject the claim that the pragmatic meaning can't be stored at this specific level. That would be almost like saying that *spill the beans* shouldn't be listed as an idiom, meaning 'tell people about a secret prematurely', because it's also possible to use these words literally, as when you knock over a can of baked beans.

I think it's fair to say that in general, the more specific the form is, the higher the likelihood that there are also conventionalized pragmatic properties associated with that specific form. It would be weird if it were the other way round. What would be the point of having a language with lots of concrete expressions that were fully filled in with lexical material but that didn't mean anything specific? Thus, the short question *How could you?*, which is complete in itself (as it requires no elements to be filled in), is listed in an online dictionary as "[a]n expression of shock, dismay, and displeasure over another's actions" (*Farlex Dictionary of Idioms*, 2015). For another example, *Not if I can help it!* is used to make a pledge not to let a contextually retrievable situation happen (CAPPELLE; DEPRAETERE, 2016; CAPPELLE, 2020b). Likewise, one could argue that the more general and schematic the form of a construction is, the less likely it will come with rich functional information. That's intuitively clear. I can't even start imagining constructions that are maximally schematic ones – basically just syntactic templates – that are functionally fully specified, complete with rich details about illocutionary force, register, and so on. One could suggest the English *wh*-exclamative construction (cf., e.g., Heine et al., 2020) as a counterexample. However, this pattern isn't *that* general: the *wh*-element

is restricted to *what* (e.g., *What a strange year 2020 was!*) or *how* (e.g., *How right you are!*) and virtually excludes any other *wh*-element (e.g., **Who I saw there!*) (MICHAELIS, 2001, p. 1046; SAG, 2010, p. 491– 492).

Fourth, functional information that is stored in a construction can also often be represented externally to it. That is another manifestation of how information can be redundantly stored. To give an example of this, several constructions in English may include information about which component tends to be given (recently mentioned) and which component tends to be new in the discourse (see, e.g., SZMRECSANYI et al., 2016). To the extent that the positioning of given components before new ones is a general tendency in the language, we can also posit a Given-X-new-Y construction, as is done by Stefanowitsch & Gries (2002). I've adopted that proposal in my treatment of the particle placement alternation (CAPPELLE, 2009b). Again, it shouldn't be an either-or matter. I don't believe information is *either* inside *or* outside the construction. Storing something in the construction only when it's idiosyncratic and outside the construction only when it's regular and shared by other constructions is reminiscent of the 'rule-list fallacy', which Langacker (1987) argued against.

I: *Are metaconstruction, metastructure and constructeme interchangeable theoretical constructs?*

BC: If you want to use these terms in a not very exact sense, they are. But if you want to be more precise they're interchangeable only to some extent. Some researchers make a point of stressing that language users can perceive the similarity between different constructions on a single 'horizontal plane' without there being any more schematic construction encompassing them, while others stress the need for such a more general construction. This discussion also depends on which data we're talking about. I'll explain myself more clearly in a bit. Let me first make some notes about the term *constructeme.*

I think I myself have used the term *metastructure* in the same way that Florent Perek uses *constructeme*. It's perhaps somewhat inconsistent that I coined the term *allostruction* but didn't coin any related term ending in *-eme*. Nevertheless, the term *constructeme* is often attributed to me – wrongly so, because it's Perek (2012), not me, who first used it in combination with *allostructions*. The situation is complicated, though,

because in a footnote in his *Cognitive Linguistics* article, he writes that I had suggested the term to him. I seem to have forgotten about this, and I only discovered this now because I just checked this. It's quite likely that Florent Perek and I had a conversation about this by email or at a conference.

Here's a bit more historical context about the pair of terms *allostructions* and *constructeme*. When I first made the case for *allostructions*, in 2006, the concept *allomorph* already existed; that's one of the basic linguistic terms we all have to learn as students. I was aware that Lambrecht (1994) had talked about *allosentences*, which was a term that had already been used by Daneš (1964). In Construction Grammar, one of the central claims was, and still is, that constructions come in various sizes, ranging from morphological constructions to sentence-level patterns (and beyond; see question 7) – basically, any form with which a meaning or function can be associated. It seemed then obvious to me to extend the notion of allomorph to all sorts of varying constructions that are semantically similar. Moreover, this was also shortly after Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) had introduced the term *collostruction* (a blend of *collocation* and *construction*), so there was a precursor for *-struction* being used as the second part of a word. The term *allostruction* was, if I remember my thoughts at the time correctly, a nod to that then-recently created portmanteau word. It sounded very similar.

Surely, if I wanted to be consistent with the pairs *allophone – phoneme* and *allomorph – morpheme*, I would have to use the terminological pair *allostruction – structioneme*, but there was no point in clipping *construction* again to *struction* to make it the host for a suffix rather than a prefix. On the other hand, the more sensible term *constructioneme* didn't have a nice ring to it. Stresswise, *constructeme* is a little weird, too. Most people seem to put the primary stress on the last syllable, while with *phoneme* and *morpheme* the stress is meant to be on the first syllable. I think that minor problem could be solved if we put the stress on *struct*. But even so, in *constructeme*, the (second) *t* has to be realized as a plosive, whilst in the word *construction* itself, there is a /ʃ/, so again the word *construction* is not optimally evoked. Inside *constructeme*, what we hear sounds more like *construct* than like *construction*. However, in (cognitive) Construction Grammar, the term *construct* is used for a very concrete realization of many different constructions – morphological, lexical and syntactic ones, to form a concrete sequence. As Goldberg (2013, p. 221) writes, "[a]n actual expression or 'construct' typically

involves the combination of at least half a dozen different constructions" and that's probably even an understatement. For instance, *What did John promise the kids?* is a construct and not itself a construction; it's the result of combining several constructions: the plural *-s* construction, the word-level constructions *John*, *promise*, *the*, *kid*, *what* and *did*, the ditransitive construction, the *wh*-interrogative construction, the Subject-auxiliary inversion construction, the verb phrase construction and the noun phrase construction. So, *construct* is a very specific object rather than an abstract one, and it's therefore not the association you want in *constructeme*. Looking back on it, all of this is probably why I preferred not to use that term for the more schematic construction that allostructions are – or can be – specific realizations of. (I'll say more about the "can be" shortly.) By the way, having done a bit of extra research, it may interest you that it was perhaps neither Florent Perek nor me who first came up with *constructeme*. It may have been Thomas Herbst, who first used *constructeme* on the Erlangen Valency Patternbank website, although the year is when that site was made, not necessarily when the following information appeared:

> One way of capturing the generalizations about the meanings of patterns and the idiosyncratic specific character of the occurrence of particular patterns with particular verbs is the notion of constructeme. A constructeme can be defined as the set of all valency constructions that share the same participant structures. (HERBST, 2009, p. 8)

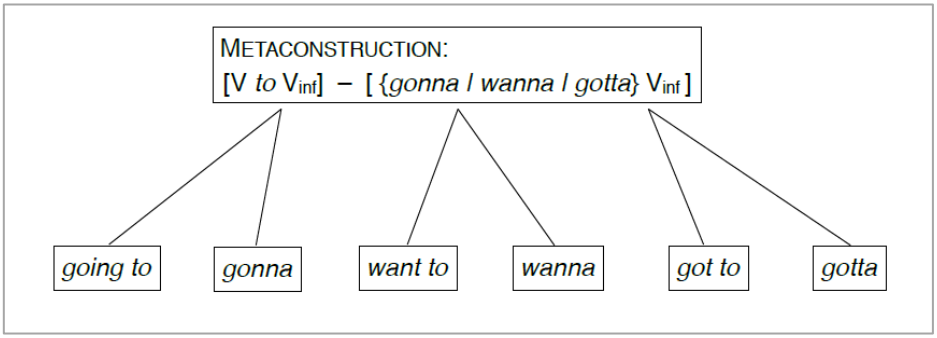
Herbst uses *constructeme* in a somewhat different sense from the sense in which it's used by Perek and (implicitly) by myself. If you look at how he presents the notion, there's no idea of any underspecification, quite to the contrary. His constructeme is more like a grid of same-level argument-structural patterns, together with the verbs that do or don't occur in them. Yet, somehow, his use of the term also captures the realization that several formally different patterns need to be viewed in their togetherness, not as isolated entities.

In my answer, which is becoming a long one, I've so far said something about *metastructure* (a word I used without thinking much about it) and *constructeme* (a term I seem to have suggested in personal communication but didn't use myself). There's another term you're asking about: *metaconstruction*. Does that cover the same thing?

It's not impossible that on one occasion or another I have used *metaconstruction* sloppily as an alternative to *metastructure* or *constructeme.* However, strictly speaking,

metaconstruction is a term introduced by Leino and Östman (2005) to talk about something similar but not quite identical to *metastructure*/*constructeme*. Metaconstructions "capture systematic similarities and differences which occur between several *pairs* of constructions" (p. 207, emphasis in the original). A metaconstruction is a generalization over constructions – that's the similar aspect – but what's different is that a metaconstruction is not a mother node. It's a statement of analogy between several elements: A is to B like C is to D, E is to F, and so on. Lorenz (2020) discusses and uses the concept to treat the analogical relation between *going to* and *gonna*, *want to* and *wanna*, and *got to* and *gotta*. I'm copy-pasting Lorenz's (2020) figure representing this systematic relation between several instantiations of V *to* and their contractions before infinitives (Fig. 4):

Figure 4 - Metaconstruction capturing the commonality between multiple horizontally linked nodes



Source: Lorenz's (2020)

We could add pairs like *ought to* and *oughta*, *have to* and *hafta*, *trying to* and *tryna*, and a few others – as they say, there's definitely a pattern going on there (cf. also Daugs (to appear), where the claim is made that contracted auxiliaries, such as *'ll*, *won't* and *can't*, have become autonomous with respect to their full forms over time). Lorenz stresses that, despite appearances, a metaconstruction is not a mother node: it's not something that is taxonomically higher than the items it links in each pair; rather it captures the analogy between the pairs involved. As such, it is a kind of horizontal link describing a paradigm in the lexicon. An intriguing approach to variation is that of Machado Vieira and Wiedemer (2019), who explicitly link the notion of allostructions with that of metaconstruction, understood as a space in the constructional network representing the horizontal similarities between alternatives.

What's called a *metaconstruction* by Leino and Östman and by Lorenz is called a *second-order schema* by some morphologists, for instance by Booij and Masini (2015) and Audring (2019), after Nesset (2008). A second-order schema, too, is a lateral, horizontal relation between units, for instance, [Ø *-id*]$_A$ – [Ø *-or*]$_N$, which links a dozen or so pairs of related items, such as *candid – candor*, *splendid – splendor*, or *horrid – horror*, and for which no common mother schema needs to be posited. (By the way, the Ø in the linked items stands for a root that doesn't independently occur as a word: there's no *cand*, *splend* or *horr*.) The relation here is not between near-synonymous items, so that's another difference with allostructions. Indeed, the link can be between opposites, like [N *-ful*]$_A$ and [N *-less*]$_A$. These schemas are called *second-order* schemas because they generalize over individual pairs of items that share a root. Thus, *helpful* and *helpless* make up a first-order schema, and so do *meaningful* and *meaningless* and many more antonymous pairs with the same noun in them. The abstraction from this multitude of pairs is a second-order relation. (It's not so clear to me why the first-order links are also called 'schemas'. There's nothing very schematic about them other than the observation you could make that they share a noun; but that noun only takes the form of a variable in the second-order schema, which therefore really *is* schematic.) Second-order schemas can also generalize over triplets or larger sets of words, as when they're used to verb endings making up a paradigm in an inflection-rich language (see, e.g., MASINI & AUDRING, 2019, p. 384). Thus, [Ø *-o*]$_V$, [Ø *-as*]$_V$, [Ø *-a*]$_V$, [Ø *-amos*]$_V$ [Ø *-ais*]$_V$ and [Ø *-am*]$_V$ constitute a second-order schema for Portuguese *-ar* verbs used in the present tense. The examples given here also demonstrate that second-order schemas can vary from being non-productive (e.g., *-id* and *-or*, for which the linked pairs can easily be counted), to fairly productive (e.g., *-ful* and *-less*, which occur in a larger number of pairs but which still have quite many exceptions; for example, we use *dreadful* but not **dreadless*, or *worthless* but not **worthful*), to fully productive (in the case of inflectional paradigms).

Audring (2019) provides a lucid discussion about the following question: When is a mother node needed and when do sister nodes suffice by themselves? She suggests that we can often do away with a level on top of linked sisters. Still, it's comforting for me to see that the term *allostruction* can be salvaged even in the absence of a mother node: Audring still refers to the sisters making up the particle placement alternation as allostructions but shows how a mother node isn't strictly needed, using instead coindexes

for the shared elements. As I pointed out before, I agree it's entirely possible that two (or more) constructions are linked to each other as allostructions – alternations of one another, keeping the meaning more or less constant, though differing in certain formal and discursive aspects – without also being the daughters of a more general construction. I mentioned that this is likely the case for different clausal constructions that express the same truth-conditional content. I would therefore agree with De Vaere et al. (2020) that any mother schema in that case is just *too* abstract, to the point of being formally and semantically almost vacuous (though not quite). However, I wouldn't for that reason throw out the horizontal links between the clausal patterns. Audring (2019) also suggests that a mother node has little use when there are few daughters but becomes more useful as the number of daughters increases, and that there are therefore more low-level mothers (which you might want to call 'meso-constructemes') than high-level ones ('macro-constructemes'):

> [A] pattern is more conspicuous – and hence more likely to be elevated to a schema – the more instantiations it has. […]. This consideration applies more widely: since taxonomic hierarchies are broader at the bottom, with more daughters on lower than on higher levels, lower-level mothers in general should be more likely than higher-level mothers (AUDRING, 2019, p. 283)

Speaking of family relations, Ray Jackendoff and Jenny Audring have worked out a theory they consider a 'cousin' to Construction Grammar, called Relational Morphology (JACKENDOFF; AUDRING, 2020). I must say that at this stage, I'm not yet 100% sure to what extent the proposal to link allostructions purely by means of co-indexed items is more than just a notational variant of a mother schema that presents the coindexed items either just once or, if there's positional variability, in two places, surrounded by curly brackets. Is it really that different? To me, what really counts is that two or more patterns that are linked in cognition are also recognized by the linguist as being linked, however that link is represented.

Hoffmann (2021), in a paper entitled 'What would it take for us to abandon Construction Grammar?' has recently wondered whether one can ever falsify the existence of a mother node like the one subsuming the two allostructions of the transitive verb-particle verb. After all, this general construction never licenses any specific construct. The point, however, is that this node, or Audring's horizontal alternative, is needed by speakers to allow them to 'know' that a construct such as *This grossed out his*

sister could also be realized as *This grossed his sister out.* Hoffmann himself acknowledges that the two allostructions need to be connected in the mind of speakers for that reason. Again, I may be missing something, but, as far as I can see, Audring's 'flat' representation and my 'triangular' one aren't different in any cognitively crucial way. If that is correct, then I would agree that deciding which representation is the right one is beyond what can be determined scientifically by falsification.

I believe Hoffmann is absolutely right to insist on scientific rigour and, hence, falsifiability. Too often, construction grammarians go about their daily business positing a construction here, a construction there, without ever concerning themselves with the cognitive plausibility of it all. But as I quipped to Thomas Hoffmann (p.c.), one does not simply commit matricide. I meant this in more senses than one, not just talking about eliminating a particular mother node whose existence one can't justify. It would also feel wrong to kill off the theory that has suckled us intellectually, just because aspects of it do not obviously lend themselves to falsification. Calling into question the validity of the whole theory feels a bit like denying one's mother. Moreover, in the case of Construction Grammar, many practitioners have grown up with Adele Goldberg's (1995) book on argument structure constructions as *the* standard reference. We have all absorbed her ideas that constructions are connected by means of taxonomical ('vertical') inheritance links, among other types of relations. In our typical network representations, these link higher-up mother nodes with one or more daughters below them. Goldberg, more than anyone else, is considered to be the theory's founding mother, even more so than Fillmore is viewed as the founding father. She's a sort of mother figure to many of us, so we should think twice before forsaking her and 'her' ideas!

This is not to say that one can never falsify the existence of a mother node. Taking again the case of particle verbs, there *are* two different falsifiable views, each pertaining to whether or not there is a more general node in the network. The first view is that individual pairs of transitive particle verbs are linked in the same way, but that there is no higher-level node representing the analogy. Thus, *mess something up* and *mess up something* are linked, as are *point something out* and *point out something* and many others; there's nothing, though, that 'links' these links at a higher level. The other view is that this multitude of pairwise links between individual particle verbs is represented by a mother node, which captures the regularity that speakers must have arrived at. The

existence of such a higher-order mother node, whatever its notational representation, is definitely something falsifiable (for some discussion, see HILPERT, 2919). I'll come back to this in my answer to your last question.

The question of whether a mother schema needs to be included in the grammar or whether the sisters suffice by themselves is also what's behind Kay's (2013) distinction between constructions proper, which are fully productive, and what he calls *patterns of coining*, which are not. A pattern of coining isn't part of one's grammar. Speakers use it to create, on a one-off basis, a novel combination, such as *green as the flames on ashwood*, in analogy with exemplars listed in one's linguistic memory, such as *green as grass*, *happy as a lark* or *snug as bug in a rug*. Kay himself realizes that a strict dichotomy between full versus partial productivity may be mistaken (see also NORDE, 2015) and may have little use in a framework such as usage-based grammar, which doesn't look at language in terms of 'words' (i.e., the lexicon, viewed as the repository of everything that is exceptional and idiosyncratic) vs. 'rules' (i.e., a module of fully productive morpho-syntax). This is what he writes:

> Within the broad generative tradition, it seems that the distinction between a pattern of coining, a source of potential but not guaranteed diachronic analogy, and a true grammatical construction is a relevant one. Within the usage-based approach, which sees grammar as essentially heterogeneous, redundant, statistical, and in a state of flux […] the utility of the distinction is less clear. Both approaches may find interest, however, in the empirical question according to which patterns gain and lose full productivity, according to the generative approach entering or exiting the synchronic grammar, according to the usage-based approach simply waxing and waning in relative strength. (KAY, 2013, p. 46 – 47)

I: *How may we capture pragmatic aspects of constructions in diachronic research? What do you think are the limits and the challenges to deal with?*

BC: I'll try to be briefer from now on. This question should be perfect for that, as I haven't exactly earned my stripes as a diachronic linguist. But things can change (or so I hear from people working on diachrony!). When I was still a doctoral student at the University of Leuven, many of my fellow doctoral students, most of them just a little younger than me, did fascinating research on language change and have become household names in diachronic linguistics: Tine Breban, Bert Cornillie, Hendrik De Smet, Peter Petré and Freek Van de Velde, to name but a few. In view of this fecund research

environment, it's a little surprising I'm not a diachronic linguist myself. At the time, I was acting in splendid isolation from them on a separate campus in the far west of Belgium, which I realize must sound ridiculous from the perspective of inhabitants of a vast country such as Brazil. Leuven was less than two hours' train ride away, yet it seemed like a distant place to me. In any case, I was working on synchronic, present-day English and thought that getting some of the facts right for contemporary English was already enough of a challenge. It's only in recent years that I'm also taking an interest in the wider historical picture, but only very tentatively so, and in collaboration with others, in the capacity of co-editor. Thus, I have had the honour recently to have been editing an edited volume on modality in diachronic Construction Grammar with Martin Hilpert and Ilse Depraetere (HILPERT et al., to appear). Ilse is an expert on modality and so is Martin, who, moreover, wrote a monograph that's widely viewed as a standard work on constructional change (HILPERT, 2013), alongside Traugott and Trousdale's (2013) standard work. As for Elizabeth Traugott, she contributed to a special issue of the journal *Constructions and Frames* that Ilse and I co-edited a few years ago (TRAUGOTT, 2016). So, all this is to hedge what's to come: what I have to say about diachrony is not informed by my own research and necessarily remains restricted to very general considerations.

To answer your question, if pragmatics is taken in a large sense, including knowledge of how a construction should be used in its discourse context, then historical and diachronic corpora enable us to look up how frequent a construction was in a given period, and whether it had general currency or was used only by certain groups in certain circumstances (genres and registers). Thus, doing corpus-based research about a previous period isn't all that different from doing corpus-based research on contemporary varieties. But diachronic researchers are not interested in just providing a range of time-slice descriptions. They're looking for answers about how and why languages change the way they do. What are the universal tendencies underlying change? *Are* there even universal tendencies at all? Studies on the pathways of grammaticalization are well known and the discussions this strand of research has provoked – for example, the question of whether changes always go in the same direction – are enduring achievements.

A concept that's been mentioned a lot lately is 'pragmaticalization', first used by Erman and Kotsinas (1993), who saw it as a distinct pathway of change. From what I understand, pragmaticalization concerns the way ordinary lexical items can change into

discourse markers and some related items. Insofar as discourse markers are elements that have diachronically moved outside of the 'core' syntax of the sentence, being driven to the margin and becoming prosodically non-integrated, they are sometimes seen, for instance by Norde (2009), as illustrating the very opposite of grammaticalization. After all, the latter concept (primarily) concerns a move of an erstwhile 'free' lexical item to greater syntactic integration, sometimes to the extreme point of becoming an inflectional suffix – think of the simple future in Romance languages (e.g., in Portuguese: *eu falar-ei* 'I will speak', *tu falar-ás* 'you will speak', etc., where the suffix derives from a verb meaning 'to have (to)'). There's been quite some discussion recently on whether or not pragmaticalization and grammaticalization are completely different processes; see, for instance,Degand and Evers-Vermeul (2015) and Heine (2018). Traugott (to appear) writes this about pragmaticalization: "In my view, it is [...] not a separate process, and is therefore ultimately not theoretically valuable" (p. 73 of the draft). I'm sure there will be some more debate about this in the years to come.

I myself find the term problematic, or at least potentially misleading, because the ending -(*al)ization* seems to suggest that the interpretation of a linguistic item becomes ever more pragmatic. Thus, it implies that the meaning *becomes* a matter of pragmatic inferencing, whilst what is meant by that term is exactly opposed to that, namely that language users no longer need to pragmatically work out the meaning of a sequence. Consider again *How can* NP VP*?*, which I said can be used to strongly disapprove of a situation. You might ask whether this aspect of meaning really has to be stored. Can't it be worked out by means of pragmatic reasoning, using Gricean maxims, for instance? Well, yes, it can, but the point is that this complex reasoning procedure gets bypassed after being used in the same way time and time again. We then say, following Morgan (1977), that the inferential meaning becomes 'short-circuited' – it is arrived at immediately, without the listener having to go through the laborious process of figuring out the meaning (cf. CAPPELLE; DEPRAETERE, 2016).

Looking at the pragmatics of constructions from a diachronic perspective is an interesting challenge in itself. One of the problems researchers have to overcome, I suppose, is to determine when and how an expression takes on a different meaning from what it literally says. For instance, when and how did *honestly* come to be used to express one's annoyance, as in *Honestly, why don't people just mind their own business?*

Something similar has happened to *seriously* but not to *sincerely* or *believe me*. For synchronic research, we have massive corpora that allow us to see in exactly what kinds of contexts certain words or word combinations are used. And if we don't have enough data from corpora, we can always set up an experiment to get acceptability ratings or collect data from other psycholinguistic experiments. Of course, for diachronic research on older periods, this just isn't possible, as speakers are long dead and surviving data are comparatively scare. These are obvious limitations, but they haven't stopped clever and dogged researchers from carrying out their diachronic research and obtaining fascinating results.

I: *Can a discursive pattern/discursive construction (such as textual genre and textual type, for example) be considered a pragmatic attribute of a construction, of its functional side?*

BC: Definitely. If all knowledge of language is captured in constructions, then it is an inevitable conclusion that knowledge about the typical genres or text types a construction is used in must be part of its specifications. Headlines are an example. We don't speak in headlines and we would reject them as normal utterances. Yet, we find them perfectly acceptable when they appear at the top of a piece of journalistic prose, listed in our news feeds or in the ticker of news channels. Thus, we could describe constructions used in what's called 'headlinese' and we would then have to mention this text type as a special constraint on the use of these constructions. An example of such a text-type-specific construction is the Italian noun-noun construction, as described by Baroni et al. (2009), which as far as I can tell also occurs in Portuguese (e.g., *Ataque Capitólio* 'Attack [on the] Capitol'). Another text type is labelese, which licenses argument omissions, e.g., *Contains nuts* (cf. RUPPENHOFER; MICHAELIS (2010), who discuss five constructions with omission tied to specific text types).

Your question seems to suggest that the text genre or text type itself can also be considered a pattern or a construction. That's perhaps a stretch in most cases, but examples can nonetheless be given. Recipes, for instance, standardly consist of the name of the dish, then a list of ingredients, and then some instructions (which, by the way, also generally exemplify a type of omission; see Culy (1996); Bender (1999)). Another rather

whacky example is provided by Hoffmann and Bergs (2012), who treat a particular kind of football chant as a construction.

Many constructions are larger than a single sentence-level utterance, without necessarily constituting whole genres or text types. We could then also talk of a 'discourse pattern' or a 'discourse construction'. An example of such a construction I have recently looked at is 'negative expansion' (CAPPELLE, to appear). That's the use of one or more negative fragments following a negative full-sentence utterance, as in *This will not happen. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever.* Two constructions are involved here: the *not*-fragment and the larger context in which we often (but not always) find it, the 'negative expansion construction'. I propose that the *not*-fragment construction used in this pattern comes with the following specification: "Discourse organization: often after a negative utterance by the same speaker". This specification appears in what you can rightly call the functional side, alongside details regarding the semantics and (other) pragmatic information, dealing with illocutionary force, register and speaker emotionality.

Again, how that functional side is structured is not so important, but I do want to repeat what I said in my answer to question 4, which is that the semantic information and the pragmatic information should be kept separate, as they pertain to different propositional content in *not*-fragments. For instance, if you tell me that your dog, whose name I know is Fifi, died last night and I then exclaim, "Not Fifi!", the semantics of my fragment concerns my (ostentatious) denial of the proposition 'Fifi died' – in other words, I seem to claim 'Fifi did not die!' (or 'Someone or some animal died, but it wasn't Fifi!'). Pragmatically, however, the fragment is an expression of shock not at this negative proposition but at the positive counterpart of it, namely that Fifi did die. This example about Fifi's shocking death illustrates we can use *not*-fragments outside the negative expansion construction. However, we do very often find *not*-fragments after an already negative utterance (and note, indeed, that I could say, "Oh no, he didn't die! Not Fifi!"). Thus, [negative utterance + *not*-fragment] can be argued to form a unit that is part of speakers' grammar. Consequently, apart from providing a constructional description of just *not*-fragments, Cappelle (to appear) also represents the formal and functional properties of this larger 'negative expansion *construction*', as a construction it truly is, linking a conventional form with a conventional function (including semantics and

pragmatics). I think much more work is to be done on describing constructions that span two or more utterances.

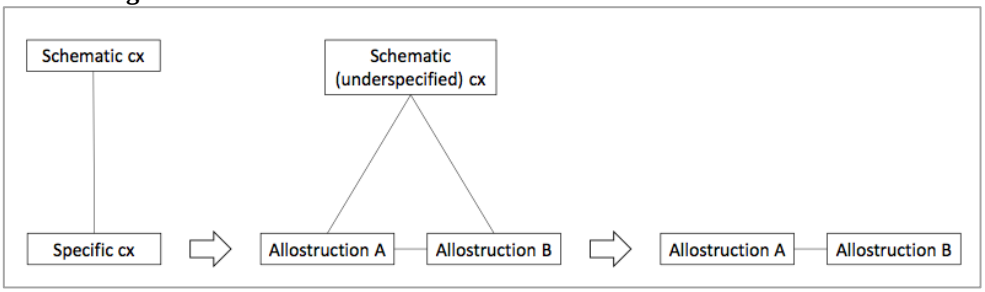
I: *What is the place of constructional variation in the representation of the constructional network? How do you see allostruction studies coming to the research agenda (considering, if possible, for instance the workshop that deals with it at https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/conferences/construction-grammars/scientific-program/accepted-workshops/alternations/)?*

BC: Here, all I can say is that for as long as I can remember, constructional variation has been something that researchers have been interested in. It used to be the case that syntacticians studied how one structure was transformed into another and generativists today are still obsessed with movement. In non-derivational frameworks, transformations gave way to alternations, but as I argued back in 2006, there was a tendency to throw away the baby with the bathwater: any link between two constructions looked suspect. Constructions had to be treated on their own terms, as *sui generis* entities. While constructions could be linked, these links were typically of the vertical kind, linking schematic constructions to their more concrete ('substantive') instantiations. Even in the 2020s, it seems to be customary to present the constructicon as a taxonomic network which only consists of top-down lines from, for instance, the ditransitive construction, whose form is maximally schematic ([X Verb OBJ1 OBJ2]), all the way down to expressions like [*give me a break*], where there are no more open slots. That there are also horizontal links in the constructicon still seems not to be part of a 'Construction Grammar 101' type of introduction. It's good to see, though, that in her upcoming book, Traugott (to appear), in a section called "the network metaphor", accords equal importance to "vertical" inheritance networks and "horizontal" networks. In fact, though, there's a single network, with both kinds of relations in it – something which Traugott also acknowledges.

Why do we always first talk about vertical links before recognizing, if at all, any 'lateral' links, which connect constructions at (roughly) the same level of generality in the network? The reason, I think, is that it's easier to understand that a schematic construction is a generalization across exemplars than to understand that language users

can also elevate the formal and functional similarity between constructional alternatives to the status of 'generalization'. Part of the problem is that all constructions are generalizations, but not all generalizations are constructions. It isn't hard to see that the ditransitive is a generalization, because it's also a construction. By contrast, even though we may agree there's some systematicity in the way *heat up the room* alternates with *heat the room up*, in the way *let out the dog* alternatives with *let the dog out*, in the way *put down the gun* alternates with *put the gun down*, and so on and so forth, we somehow hesitate to call that systemacitcity a kind of generalization, too. Yet, there's no reason not to call it that. Sure, the horizontal link itself is not a construction, but then again, the link between a schematic construction and a more substantive instantiation of it isn't a construction either. In retrospect, when I first proposed that speakers stored the link between allostructions in their linguistic memory – in other words, that this link was part of their mental grammar – I needed to link the allostructions to an underspecified mother construction. If all our knowledge of grammar takes the form of knowledge of *constructions*, as Goldberg claimed, then I had no other option but to represent these horizontal links in terms of a trinity. I think I needed to have this 'mother' node to make a convincing case for a link between 'sisters'. Figure 5 aims to show how at first, there were only vertical taxonomic links between constructions. (That's not entirely true, as there were also other sorts of links, such as polysemy links, about which I'll say a bit more in a minute.) Later, horizontal links were introduced, but that was possible only by treating each allostruction as part of a 'normal' mother-daughter relation, too. These days, horizontal links are part of the relations among nodes in the constructicon and they don't necessarily have a mother node, as it's possible – and according to some scholars sometimes even desirable – to state the shared properties directly in the allostructions themselves (cf. again AUDRING, 2019).

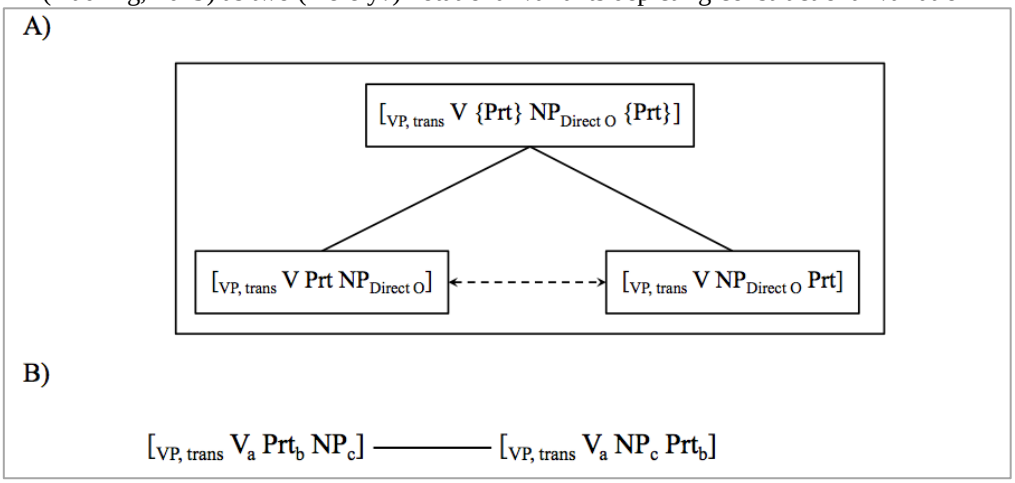
Figure 5 - How horizontal links 'evolved' from vertical inheritance links



Source: elaborated by Bert Cappelle.

I stated before that the middle representation and the one on the right may be merely notational variants, when all that differs between the allostructions is their word order. In Figure 6, the mother node involves curly brackets, while one can do away with them by using indices, as proposed by Audring (2019):

Figure 6 (a and b) - a) Triangular representation (Cappelle, 2006) vs. b) flat representation with indices (Audring, 2019) as two (merely?) notational variants depicting constructional variation



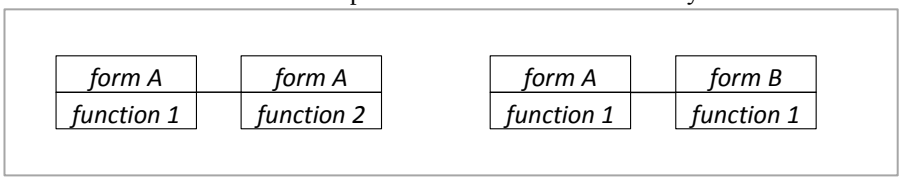
Source: Cappelle (2006) and Audring (2019)

Audring suggests that a mother node is needed to the extent that it can capture information not already encoded by the daughter nodes. I think that another reason for keeping a mother node might be that it allows information specific to the daughters to be wiped out. This needs some explaining. I have meanwhile realized that the triangular representation in Figure (6) is too simplistic. So is, accordingly, the flat one without the mother node underneath it. In this figure, no internal constituency is shown within the verb phrase (VP). However, in the joined ordering (left), it makes sense to assume that the verb and the particle form a compound verb, while in the split ordering (right), the particle is the head of a full-fledged, potentially complex, phrasal category, a particle phrase (PrtP): compare *This* [$_{VP}$ [$_{V}$ *freaked* (**right*) *out*] *my mom*] and *This* [$_{VP}$ *freaked my mom* [$_{PrtP}$ (*right*) *out*]]. Of course, this difference in constituency is best represented immediately in the daughters. At the same time, though, it could be argued that when a speaker selects *freak out* from their mental lexicon, they may at that stage not be interested yet in the precise morpho-syntactic structure this phrasal verb will take in the construct to be formed. So where else can that structurally neutral verbal idiom be represented than in a mother node?

Anyway, now that many constructionists are convinced there are horizontal links between nodes, with or without an overarching mother node, there is indeed a lot of research devoted to the actual place in the theory of constructional variation. Such horizontal relations appear indispensable. You mention that there's a workshop devoted to it at the International Conference on Construction Grammar in Antwerp (2021), but there are actual *two* workshops (out of four) that involve horizontal relations: not just the workshop 'Alternations in a usage-based construction grammar' but also the one on 'Paradigmatic relations in the constructicon'. The study of constructional variation and paradigmatic alternatives, I'm sure, is here to stay. Just like we'll never tire of studying lexical variation, we'll also keep wondering about the reasons why we use a particular grammatical pattern and not any of its near-synonymous alternatives.

Let me briefly come back to polysemy links, which have long been accepted, since at least Goldberg (1995). If we accept that a single form can have multiple meanings, we should also accept that a single function can be realized by multiple forms. After all, constructions are form-function pairings and just like the form can be held constant while the function varies (in the case of polysemy), so we should also be able to keep the function constant and see which forms are used for it (in the case of allostructions). I'm using 'function' here in the sense of 'meaning' (including speech act meaning), not in the sense of all sorts of finer differences in register, regional spread, and so on. Figure 7 shows the two kinds of variation – variation in 'function' on the left and in 'form' on the right:

Figure 7 - Two polysemous constructions (left) and two allostructions (right): either form or function is kept constant in these 'horizontally' linked nodes



Source: elaborated by Bert Cappelle.

Note that the two kinds of horizontal relations can also be combined in the constructional network: a single node can link to both its functional alternatives and its formal ones. These are not the only types of horizontal links that exist, however. As Audring (2019) demonstrates, we also have a horizontal link between, for instance, [N -

ful]$_A$ and [N -*less*]$_A$, where the two items have neither the exact same form nor the exact same function.

I: *Can conventionalization, through the influence of discursive and pragmatic aspects, contribute to neutralization that gives rise to allostructions? If so, how?*

BC: I must admit I haven't really thought about neutralization as a linguistic phenomenon or how it gives rise to allostructions. Seeing allostructions as involving neutralization of some sort of feature is somewhat new to me, although I may have alluded to it above when I said the joining mother node may wipe out some of the differences among daughters. I suppose what you have in mind is this: we can only say that construction A and construction B are allostructions of each other if they share a significant portion of their function. In other words, Goldberg's (1995) Principle of No Synonymy, which, as Van de Velde (2014), Uhrig (2015), De Smet et al. (2018) and others have argued, is overrated anyway, must be abandoned for allostructions, at least partially.

"Why partially?" you may ask. If we truly believe that individual constructions are to be described in rich semantic and pragmatic detail, then construction A will probably have ever so slightly different specifications compared to its allostructional alternative, construction B. Its informational-structural properties could differ, for instance. But despite some differences, there should be some functional overlap between the two alternatives. In other words, their expected functional difference must be neutralized to some extent – and who knows, in extreme cases, the difference may be neutralized completely. But that won't often be the case. While it's possible that in a given discourse setting, it doesn't really matter which of two alternating forms you pick (cf. CAPPELLE, 2009c), this doesn't mean that it *never* matters. De Smet et al. (2018) describe some cases of neutralisation, which they call 'attraction'; in their case studies, "variants start out with a clear division of labour, which subsequently becomes less pronounced, though without ever completely disappearing" (217-218).

The reason why I haven't myself conceptualized allostructions as resulting from neutralization is that I haven't taken a diachronic perspective on them. For instance, when I look at [verb – particle – NP] and [verb – NP – particle], the two allostructions involved in the by now overly familiar particle placement alternation, it's not as if I assumed that once upon a time, these two allostructions had meanings that were more different from

one another and that over time, this difference has been erased. Neutral*ization* hints at a diachronic process, whilst so far, I've merely been interested in the synchronic state of affairs. That's why I'd just say that the two allostructions *share* (a portion of) their function, rather than say a functional difference between has been (partially) *neutralized*. Did they not share this portion before? I don't know, and precisely because I don't, I'd personally rather stick to terms that don't make any suggestions of change.

Of course, I realize that the language system is always in flux, as pointed out before. I certainly don't exclude the possibility that constructions with similar meanings can drift apart or, conversely, that functionally quite different constructions can end up expressing strikingly similar things. In the latter case, you might then say, indeed, that their differences over time have gotten neutralized and that they've practically become synonyms. De Smet et al. (2018) suggest that when two constructions compete to express a certain meaning, they will over time become *more* alike, not less so (as is often assumed). Such cases of 'attraction' are the standard scenario, and cases of 'differentiation' are exceptional. (Being exceptional doesn't mean there's no explanation for them, as they show.)

Can conventionalization of pragmatic and discursive aspects play a role in this? Yes, I would think so. A nice example comes again from the expression of requests. You might say that it's by routinely deploying *Will you....?* (or *Would you... ?*) and *Can you...?* (or *Could you... ?*) in the service of asking someone to do something that these radically different forms – one basically (or originally) expressing willingness, the other ability or opportunity – language users have neutralized that semantic difference: in the part of the constructicon where we find request forms, these forms have become functionally fairly similar.

By the way, neutralization can also obtain at the formal pole of constructions. Again, not taking a diachronic point of view but a purely synchronic one, when I look at the conjugation of Portuguese verbs, I find tables on the internet that talk about *-ar, -er* and *-ir* verbs. This distinction makes *some* sense, as we have forms such as *-amos, -emos* and *-imos*, depending on these classes, but there also appear to be some places in the conjugational paradigm where two or all three of these different verb classes get the same ending: for the second person singular (*tu*), both *-er* and *-ir* verbs end in *-es* and for the third person singular (*ele*) and plural (*eles*), both these classes of verbs end in *-e* and *-em*, respectively; and in the first person singular, the ending is always *-o*, regardless of the verb class. You could call these shared endings a kind of neutralization at the form level. It would be a nice, easy exercise for students of a Construction Grammar class to represent

the present-tense inflectional paradigm of Portuguese verbs as a network. This network should contain mostly class-specific endings and, where available, some generalizations concerning identical forms across two or three classes.

I: *Speakers often understand two or more constructions – which trigger similar meanings – immediately. To what extent would this immediacy be an indication of the similarity among constructions? How can we investigate this? By experimental studies?*

BC: Well, I'm not so sure about the premise you're making. I don't know whether it's really the case that a speaker's communicative intention always, or even often, involves the simultaneous activation of multiple alternatives, like options on a menu. Kapatsinski (2018, p. 562) claims it's unlikely that a speaker makes use of an allostructional link between two syntactic patterns for reasons of reformulation: "How often does a speaker formulate a sentence using one of the near-synonymous constructions first and then, unsatisfied, transform it into the other?" That's a rhetorical question, so the answer, presumably, is: not often. Usually, in cases of alternation – for instance, between the ditransitive and the *to*-dative, there's just one formulation that sounds right in a given context. The alternative wouldn't even be considered. It's true that I suggested in a paper (CAPPELLE, 2009c), as I also pointed out in my answer to your previous question, that there are circumstances in which speakers seem to have 'free choice' to choose between two alternatives, namely when strong determining factors cancel each other out or when there simply aren't any applicable determining factors. But what does it mean then to choose freely? Is it weighing up the two options consciously? I would doubt it. I think such situations of apparent free choice are really cases where the linguist can't predict with any high degree of confidence what choice the speaker will make (or, actually, *did make*, for corpus data), just like one can't always predict how the weather will change. It's like saying that a coin has 'free choice' to land on heads or tails when what we really mean is that the outcome is unpredictable. From the perspective of the hearer, it's also far from obvious to me that hearers 'understand' different constructions (i.e., also ones not actually uttered).

For small-sized constructions, though, it is much more plausible that alternatives co-activate one another. For instance, it's likely that *gonna* activates *going to* VP. This could be tested psycholinguistically, for instance using masked priming. I could imagine an experiment – though have never done anything like this myself – in which *gonna* is briefly flashed onto a screen and participants are asked to decide whether sentences such

as (a) *I'm going to miss her* and (b) *I'm going to bed now* are acceptable. The hypothesis would be that (a) is primed by *gonna* but (b) isn't, or less so, and so the prediction would be that participants find (a) to be acceptable faster than (b) after having been subliminally exposed to *gonna*. The alternation between *gonna* and *going to* doesn't involve many words distributed across many different constituents in a clause. Yet, even for more 'syntactic' alternations, it should be feasible to conduct more experimentation to confirm the cognitive reality of allostructional links between nodes in the constructicon. Perek (2012) has done that, using a sorting experiment in which he asked test subjects to put cards with sentences on them in piles based on similar meanings. Sentences with a prepositional *to* dative, like *Audrey kicked something to Sue*, were found to be more similar to ditransitives, like *Kim lent Rose something*, than to locative caused-motion sentences, like *Lyn splashed something on Maggie* (in spite of having the same 'surface structure' as these). The latter sentences were most often grouped together not with the *to*-datives but with *with*-applicatives, such as *Dana plastered Marge with something*, with which they, in turn, form another alternation. Another experiment one could consider doing involves the particle placement alternation – my favourite! – involving three kinds of sentences: (a) with the joined verb-particle ordering, e.g., *Beth turned on the TV*, (b) with the split verb-particle ordering, e.g., *Beth switched the lights off* and (c) with a verb and prepositional phrase, e.g., *Beth turned on one leg* (in its most plausible interpretation). I haven't worked out how to set up the experiment exactly, but the aim would be to prove that (a) and (b) are more similar to each other than (a) and (c), despite the fact that (a) and (c) superficially look more alike.

You may find it odd to hear I haven't attempted to carry out any such psycholinguistic experiment. That is because, frankly, I haven't felt the need to prove by experimental means what is already clear beyond any doubt. Many particle verbs are highly idiomatic. For instance, *turn down* can mean 'refuse'. Wouldn't it be strange, then, if we said that there was an idiom, namely *turn down something* (such as *an offer*), and another idiom, namely *turn something* (such as *an offer*) *down*, which both shared much of their form and had the exact same meaning, but that they instantiated two distinct constructions which weren't linked in any way? We don't need to run an experiment to realize how absurd that would be. It would be missing an obvious generalization. In this case, it's also a generalization that speakers, and not just linguists, certainly have made. After having encountered many cases of a single verb-particle idiom used in two syntactically different forms, they must surely have extracted a rule about particle verbs.

This may be something of an armchair linguist's argument, but that doesn't mean it's worthless – or non-falsifiable (to recall Hoffmann's recent squib referred to above).

A similar argument could be set up for other alternations. One would have to look for idioms and then see in which manifestations they occur. This latter part can actually be done with corpus research. While some idioms resist being messed up, it's well known that there are many that exhibit syntactic variation (e.g., Fraser, 1970). Consider for example *let the cat out of the bag* (meaning 'carelessly reveal confidential information or a secret'), which has very normal syntax and accordingly occurs in different forms, all of which still make complete sense:

(2)

a. The cat was let out of the bag.
b. The cat is out of the bag.
c. The cat gets out of the bag.
d. With the cat out of the bag, …
e. (There'll be) no letting the cat out of the bag (until… .)
f. The letting of the cat out of the bag (was unfortunate.)

etc.

Are all of these variant forms instances of 'allostructions' in the sense I had in mind for the two variants making up the particle placement alternation? I honestly don't know. The point could be made, though, that the syntactic patterns shown here (the passive, the copular construction, the active *get*-construction, the absolute *with*-construction, several nominalization types) are somehow available to the language user, who can mould *a single idiom* into the desired shape for the communicative needs at hand. Not recognizing that there's just one idiom at play here would force us to accept that speakers store all the different manifestations of this idiom separately, in other words, *as different idioms*! That seems highly unlikely, especially because some of these manifestations are very infrequent but, for all their rarity, can be deemed acceptable. It would be a mystery, moreover, how these separately stored idioms all have such a similar meaning, all having to do with divulging a secret.

Speakers undoubtedly store some idioms together with some understanding of these idioms' internal constituent structure – with respect to the idiom *let the cat out of the bag*, for instance, they know that *the cat* is a noun phrase and *out of the bag* a prepositional phrase. Some idioms, in spite of their status as such, are also semantically

quite decomposable: we can readily see, for example, that *the cat* stands for the secret that should be 'hidden' from others and that as long as the cat stays in the bag, others won't know the secret. Depending on idioms' grammatical regularity and semantic transparency, such syntactic and semantic decomposing is also coupled with some insight into their argument structure – in this case, that *the cat* is a moving object (a 'Theme' argument) and *out of the bag* a source-cum-direction (a 'Path' argument). The grammar of the language then apparently takes care of the rest, which is how the component parts of a sufficiently regular and transparent idiom can end up in various patterns.

I take it there is no need to posit one single *über*-construction that holds all these grammatical constructions together. Different constructions containing a verb and its arguments all have their own specifications, relating to constituent and argument structure, so they can each of them individually unify with a particular idiom. However, a usage-based view on language will then suggest that because of the way several idioms, as well as fully transparent sequences, can appear in the same range of constructions, speakers will generalize over these recurrent 'facts of language' (the 'facts' here being that there are similar kinds of variant manifestation for verbs and their complements). In other words, the different constructions will inevitably become connected in cognition. I have little doubt that several schematic grammatical constructions are linked to each other, one way or another. How exactly Construction Grammar captures this rich connectivity in the construction is work that lies ahead of us.

Thank you very much for your interesting questions. They have allowed me to take stock of how I look at grammar, forced me to sharpen some of my views, and opened my eyes to things I still do not see with full clarity.

Contribution

Bert Cappelle: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – original draft; **Pâmela Fagundes Travassos:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & edition; **Nahendi Almeida Mota:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & edition; **Mariana Gonçalves da Costa:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & edition; **Letícia Freitas Nunes:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & edition; **Gabriel Lucas Martins:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & edition; **Marcia dos Santos Machado Vieira:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & edition.

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Received in: December 10, 2020
Accepted in: May 31, 2021
Published in September, 2021

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.18309/ranpoll.v52iesp.1596