A constructional approach to language in contact: Background and basic concepts of Diasystematic Construction Grammar
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Mainstream grammatical theory and traditional grammaticography concentrate on single languages or varieties, which are conceptualised as pre-existing, distinct entities and analysed in terms of coherent, static, ideally variation-free language systems. While everyone is in principle aware of the fact that this represents an idealised view, and while it still may be acceptable (if only for practical reasons) when analysing standard varieties or monolingual speech, it yields more serious problems when language contact comes into play.

Multilingual (as well as multilectal) speakers, particularly in stable multilingual communities, tend not to keep their different languages separate: various kinds of ad hoc and long-term transfer, ranging from code-switching and borrowing to large-scale convergence, are the rule in language contact rather than the exception. Consequently, contact linguists have come to assume that multilinguals integrate structural elements from all their languages into one ‘repertoire’ (e.g. Matras 2009: 308f.), from which they pick the ones that are appropriate depending on domain and communicative context.

Diasystematic Construction Grammar (DCxG; Höder 2012, 2014ab, forthc.) approaches this problem from a theoretical angle, aiming at a socio-cognitively adequate descriptive model. It assumes that multilingual speakers and communities organise their grammatical knowledge on the basis of the available input via processes of interlingual identification, abstraction, generalisation, and categorisation, in order to achieve a cognitively economic representation, regardless of language boundaries. Such processes result in multilingual constructicons that consist in part of language-specific constructions (‘idioconstructions’) and in part of constructions that are unspecified for language (‘diaconstructicons’). While language-specificity can normally be interpreted as part of the pragmatic meaning of a construction, diaconstructicons are associated with different degrees (and types) of formal and functional schematicity.

Based on studies on contact-induced change in North German varieties as well as Old Swedish, the lecture provides a theoretical outline of DCxG as well as a discussion of some more general implications for CxG in general, most notably those approaches that put an emphasis on psychological plausibility (CCxG) and the language-specificity of constructions (RCxG).

References
Höder, Steffen. Forthc. “Grammar is community-specific: Background and basic concepts of Diasystematic Construction Grammar”. In: Hans Boas & Steffen Höder (eds), Constructions in contact [working title].