A constructional approach to language in contact: Background and basic concepts of Diasystematic Construction Grammar

Steffen Höder (Kiel)
CxG as an exploratory expedition

language contact & multilingualism

HIC SVNT DRACONES
CxG as an exploratory expedition

Growing interest in CxG and multilingualism: earlier work
- different contact situations [Pietsch 2010, Doğruöz & Backus 2009, ...]
- second-language acquisition [Haberzettl 2007, Ellis 2013, ...]
- contrastive studies [Boas 2010, ...]

Growing interest in CxG and multilingualism: recent work
- individual projects [Wasserscheidt 2015, ...]
- FRIAS workshop: Constructions across grammars [Hilpert & Östman 2014]
- ICCG 8: Construction grammar and language contact [Boas & Höder forthc.]

Work on/in DCxG
- myself [Höder 2012, 2014abc, 2016ab, forthc.]
- collaborative work [Höder, Onysko, Tingsell & Prentice in prep.]
- others [Hendrikx, van Goethem & Meunier 2015, Colleman forthc., Weber forthc., Urban forthc., ...]
Structure

1 Background
   - What is (and what isn’t) Diasystematic Construction Grammar?
   - Insights from contact linguistics
   - Socio-cognitive realism in construction grammar

2 Basic concepts
   - Idioconstructions and diaconstructions
   - The multilingual repertoire as constructicon
   - Constructional generalization and reorganization

3 Two FAQs
   - Language-specific input, but diasystematic constructicon?
   - Generalization gone wild?
Background
What is (and what isn’t) DCxG?

Yet another approach?

- no new flavour of CxG
- usage-based CxG, applied to language contact situations

CxG and contact linguistics
Insights from contact linguistics

Centuries-old debate: Language contact within or outside the system?

The early contact linguist’s view

“es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache
[there is no totally unmixed language] [Schuchardt 1884: 5]

VS

The traditional systematicist’s view

“languages are never mixed [Müller 1861/1994, vol. 1, 69]

“es giebt keine gemischte Sprache, so wenig als ein Individuum, ein Organismus jemals Anderes ist als eine strenge Einheit [there is no mixed language, nor can an individual or an organism ever be anything but a strict unity] [Schleicher 1850/1983: 27]
Insights from contact linguistics
Language contact is everywhere

- most communities/individuals are multilingual [Lüdi 1996: 234ff.]
- at least some knowledge and use of different languages for different communicative purposes is globally and historically normal [Oksaar 1980: 43]
Languages interact in multilingual speakers’ cognition

- ‘wholistic view’ of multilingualism
  - linguistic knowledge is not the sum of monolingual competences
- joint processing
  - different languages are not stored/processed in isolation
Insights from contact linguistics

Language contact affects language structure

- typical: convergence to some degree  [Kühl & Braunmüller 2014]
- potential endpoint: isomorphism
  - ‘construction-per-construction intertranslatability’  [Höder 2014a: 149]
  - ‘exact structural equivalence’  [Heine & Kuteva 2005: 179ff.]
  - ‘metatypy’  [Ross 2007]
Insights from contact linguistics

Multilingualism serves a community’s needs

- ‘complementarity principle’ [Grosjean 2008: 22ff.]
  - polyglossic distribution in whole societies
  - association with specific domains in smaller groups
What is a ‘language’ anyway?

- “a shprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un flot” [Weinreich 1945: 13]
- fuzzy language boundaries in diffuse situations [Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985]
- no one is monolectal: mult/ectalism is literally everywhere [Höder 2014a: 137]
- upper limit on number of grammars?
  - one discrete grammar per language/dialect/variety leads to an enormous number of coexisting grammars [Croft 2000: 52]
Insights from contact linguistics

monolingual view on multilingualism

multiple grammars = coexisting, but separate systems

overlapping sets of linguistic structures

common ‘repertoire’ [Matras 2009: 308f.]

multilingual view on multilingualism

discrete sets of linguistic structures
Socio-cognitive realism in construction grammar

The ‘creed’ of DCxG [Höder 2014a: 140]

“The grammatical description of a language system in a multilingual environment – i.e. the socially conventionalised set of all structural elements shared by a specific speaker group as well as cognitively stored and processed by the individual speakers – must include structures of all languages or varieties involved, and the social establishment and individual acquisition of such a system must be inherently multilingual.

A ‘diasystem’ can be constructed by the linguistic analyst out of any two systems which have partial similarities […]. But this does not mean that it is always a scientist’s construction only: a ‘diasystem’ is experienced in a very real way by bilingual (including ‘bidialectal’) speakers […]. [Weinreich 1954: 390]
Socio-cognitive realism in construction grammar

Grammar is community-specific [Höder forthc.]

“[D]escribing and analysing the grammar of ‘languages’ is rather pointless, unless they coincide with the entire set of linguistic structures used by a particular community. Strictly speaking, this will hardly ever be the case, given the discrepancies between the linguistic knowledge of individual speakers even within monolingual groups, but it is most definitely not true for multilingual communities.

“A multilingual community’s grammar of a given language may be essentially different from a monolingual community’s grammar of the same language.”
Socio-cognitive realism in construction grammar

Getting rid of the ‘Procrustean Cornet’

RCxG is ‘vanilla CxG’ with no toppings
[Croft 2005: 277]

DCxG is vanilla CxG without the ‘Procrustean Cornet’ of *a priori* language-specificity
[Höder 2014c: 216]
Basic concepts
Idioconstructions and diaconstructions

Language-specificity is not a given

- **High German-Low German** code-switching [Höder 2012: 244]
  - Keinen Muckefuck, richtigen Kaffe, dat smeckt goot.
    no coffee.substitute real coffee that tastes good
  - An dat Licht kann de Hausmeister nix ännern.
    at the light can the janitor nothing change
  - In Kiel mag Anna nich wahren.
    in Kiel likes Anna not live

- ambiguous (or, rather: unspecific) cxns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>schematicity</th>
<th>lexical</th>
<th>[Kaffe]</th>
<th>[nix]</th>
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<td>Declarative Main Clause [\textsc{TOP} V\textsubscript{fin} ...]</td>
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Idioconstructions and diaconstructions

Division of labour

- multilingual(s’) utterances instantiate
  - language-specific idiocxn (< idiosyncratic cxns)
  - language-unspecific diacxn (< diasystematic cxns)
Idioconstructions and diaconstructions

Language-specificity as pragmatic meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cxn</th>
<th>form</th>
<th>syntactic</th>
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<tr>
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<td>morphological</td>
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|            | meaning/function          | referential |
|            |                          | grammatical |
|            |                          | socio-pragmatic |
|            |                          | ...         |

Differences in form mark differences in function

- language choice
  - is functional and conventional (complementarity principle)
- language-specificity
  - marks the current context as belonging to a specific set of communicative settings typically associated with ‘language X’ ['communicative frames’, Fischer 2010]
  - shorthand notation $<C_X>$
The multilingual repertoire as constructicon

Constructional network

- idiocxns and diacxns linked via inheritance links

```
form X
meaning X

form X + ...
meaning X + ... <C_A>

form X + ...
meaning X + ... <C_B>
```

```
Mädchen_ω,N,NEUTR
‘girl’ <C_HG>

Deern_ω,N,FEM
‘girl’ <C_LG>
```
The multilingual repertoire as constructicon

Constructional network

- **Inchoative Pseudo-Co-ordination** [Höder 2014a: 147ff.]
  - Und denn gehen sie bei und machen Kaffe.
  - Un denn gaht se bi un maakt Kaffee.
  - and then go they at and make coffee

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)
The multilingual repertoire as constructicon

Schematicity in diacxns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematicity</th>
<th>Coffee</th>
<th>[Kaffe]</th>
<th>Nothing</th>
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<tr>
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<td>[lach-...]</td>
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<td>House</td>
<td>[h\ldots V_{[\text{au}, \text{u}]}\text{s}]</td>
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<td>Nominal Plural</td>
<td>[N-SUFFIX]</td>
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<td>Declarative Main Clause</td>
<td>[TOP \ V_{\text{fin} \ldots}]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inchoative Pseudo-Coordination</td>
<td>[AT-GO, AND, V]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>[\ldots_{\omega,N}]</td>
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lexical cxn, partly phonologically schematic

lexical cxn, partly lexically filled

lexical cxn, phonologically schematic
Constructional generalization and reorganization

Usage-based approaches

- general cognitive mechanisms shape organization of constructional knowledge
  - instance-based abstraction and generalisation

- preference for more general cxns, issues of economy vs redundancy notwithstanding [cf. Goldberg 2006: 67ff.]
  - entrenchment, frequency effects, pre-emption, ...
  - broad discussion in (Cognitive) CxG in general, no specific issue in DCxG
Constructional generalization and reorganization

No difference between multilingual and monolingual constructicons

- diacxns established via the same mechanisms as any other cxn

- ‘interlingual identification’ of (subjectively, conventionally) equivalent structures in the input

- based on (perceived) similarity of form and/or function
  - e.g. Declarative Main Clause [TOP V_fin ...] in HG/LG input
Constructional generalization and reorganization

Degree of diasystematicity

- broadly definable as the proportion of diacxns in the multilingual constructicon
- higher DoD in constructicons comprising typologically similar languages
- higher DoD entails simpler overall system

General prediction

- language contact will lead to an increase in diasystematicity over time
- if contact-induced change occurs, it will be ‘pro-diasystematic’
  [Höder 2012, 2014abc, forthc.]
- in most cases, pro-diasystematic change will ‘surface’ as structural convergence
  [Höder 2014b]
- pro-diasystematic change means simplification
Constructional generalization and reorganization

Pro-diasystematic change

- Relativization in 14th/15th Old Swedish/Latin

  - [BirgAutA 74]
    \textit{þin vikarius þær sittar i þinum stap / hafar ...}
    your deputy \textit{REL} sits in your place has

  - [Sermones 101]
    The \textit{preste som væl foresta} \textit{sino æmbete} ... the priests \textit{REL} well administer their office

  - [BirgOSw 149]
    \textit{... kærlekin hwIkin høxth ær j allom dygdom}
    love-DEF.M.SG \textit{REL-M.SG.NOM} highest is in all virtues

  - [BirgLat 164]
    \textit{... Petrus, qui fuit princeps apostolorum}
    Peter-M.SG.NOM \textit{REL-M.SG.NOM} was prince \textit{apostle-GEN.PL}

\textit{older Old Sw: uninflected relative particle}

\textit{Latin and younger Old Sw: inflected relative pronoun}
## Constructional generalization and reorganization

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<th>separate idiocxns</th>
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Language-specific input, but diasystematic constructicon?

Q: How can diacxns be acquired on the basis of the speaker’s linguistic input, if all input is language-specific?

A: It isn’t.

- During acquisition, a cxns’s meaning is limited to a cognitively useful minimum of contextually relevant knowledge.
  - A will be interpreted to mean *whatever is recurring* in contexts where A is used (as opposed to B and C)

- Only cxns restricted to specific communicative contexts will be acquired as idiocxns.
  - holds both for filled and schematic cxns
  - language-specific lexical material in the input does not imply language-specific schematic patterns
Generalization gone wild?

Q: Isn’t DCxG relatively far from WYSIWYG, considering extreme phonological schematicity and the like?

A: No more than vanilla usage-based CxG in general.

- There are (or so we assume) limits to generalization, but those are domain-general and not language-specific, let alone DCxG-specific.

- Extreme phonological schematicity is needed in monolingual systems as well.
  - construction morphology, especially non-concatenative morphology, ...
    [Höder 2014c: 207ff.]
  - intonation patterns encoding illocutionary force
  - phonaesthemes, meaningful submorphemic elements [cf. Bergen 2004]

- Similarly broad generalizations in other cxn types.
  - word-class cxns, clause type cxns, ...
Summary
Summary

DCxG provides a way of modelling the linguistic repertoire in a socio-cognitively realistic way that ties in with both current contact linguistic approaches and CxG.

One key mechanism:

- generalisation over all instances in constructions across all languages the speakers are exposed to

No fundamentally new concepts necessary:

- the same general cognitive mechanisms that are involved in constructional organisation anyway
A constructional approach to language in contact: Background and basic concepts of Diasystematic Construction Grammar

Construction grammar: new advances in theoretical and applied linguistics (PLIN Day 2017)
Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, 12 May 2017

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