

Hans Boas, ed. 2010: *Contrastive Studies in Construction Grammar*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. VII + 244 pp. ISBN 978 90 272 0432 5

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This book, published within the Benjamins series devoted to Constructional Approaches to Languages, is a collection of eight papers on Construction Grammar(s) and their possible application to contrastive studies, edited by Hans Boas, one of the first researchers to apply this framework to languages other than English (Boas 2003).¹ The book, as the editor suggests (15–16), has two main goals: (1) to offer the first steps for a future methodology on how to carry out contrastive analysis within Construction Grammar, and (2) to show that the notion of construction is a useful tool for typological/cross-linguistic research.

In the first chapter, ‘Comparing Constructions across Languages,’ after a brief review on previous studies on Construction Grammar, Boas suggests that there are two reasons for the lack of contrastive construction grammar studies, one historical and one internal. The former goes back to the traditional methodology which used to focus on just one single language, usually English, in order to provide in-depth analyses and then apply these results to study different languages individually; the latter is related to the claim by researchers, such as Croft (2001), that constructions cannot be but language-specific. In order to overcome these setbacks, Boas proposes a bottom-up framework that starts with the creation of a ‘constructicon’ —an inventory of constructions— in each given language, then goes on with the contrastive analysis of similar forms and meanings in two languages, only to end up with a whole set of possible candidates for serious typological constructional generalisations. This framework builds up on two main premises: the need to use semantic frames (Fillmore 1982, 1985) as a *tertium comparationis* to describe conceptual spaces, and the requirement to develop constructional inventories at different levels of abstraction for each language. The chapter finishes with an overview of the remaining papers —which are divided into three sections according to the languages they contrast: English and Indo-European, English and non-Indo-European, and a large-scale group of languages— and general results from the book.

The next chapter is Martin Hilpert’s ‘Comparing Comparatives. A Corpus-based Study of Comparative Constructions in English and Swedish.’ As the title suggests, the author

¹ Financial support for the preparation of this review has been provided by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (ref. FFI2010-14903).

offers a detailed analysis on comparative constructions in these two languages based on a careful analysis of data from the British National Corpus and the PAROLE corpus. His main argument is that, although these constructions are structurally very similar —both languages have two typical structures, one morphological with a comparative suffix (*-er, -are*) and one periphrastic with a comparative element (*more, mer*)— there are significant linguistic and usage differences that are worth taking into account and that only a constructional approach can reveal. For example, as far as the phonology is concerned, the number of syllables in the adjective in Swedish is not a key factor to determine the choice of a morphological or periphrastic comparative, as it is in English. Similarly, the tendency to use the periphrastic form in monosyllabic adjectives ending in /-l/ in English is not shared in Swedish. Morphologically, there is a different case assignment for the standard of comparison. Swedish prefers the nominative case (*taller than I*), whereas English largely prefers the accusative case (*taller than me*). Syntactically, English only marginally accepts the use of non-referring *what* in sentences that denote a standard of comparison as in *taller than what I am*, whereas this construction is widely accepted in Swedish (*vä 'what'*). Morphological comparisons in Swedish, contrary to English, which tends to favour periphrastic comparisons, show higher tolerance to both longer adjectives and infinitive complement clauses following *än* 'than'. From a pragmatic point of view, Hilpert argues that, although both morphological and periphrastic comparison constructions exhibit the same behaviour in both languages, the former is more salient in Swedish, as it is the preferred means to express increasing intensity. He concludes that these particular constructional properties in each language call for a more language-based constructional analysis that complements a more general study.

Chapter 3, by González-García, focuses on the differences between English and Spanish *Accusative cum Infinitive* (ACI) constructions with cognition and communication verbs. The main claim is that these constructions in English and Spanish are different on the basis of their inherent semantic properties, especially those related to subjectivity, as well as on their discourse characteristics, namely, focus and topic. Based on an examination of extensive synchronic and diachronic data from corpora (Survey of English Usage, LOB, Brown Corpus of American English, International Corpus of English, BNC, Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual), González-García offers a detailed and well-documented Goldberian analysis of the *subjective-within-objective* transitive —defined as “X (NP₁) expresses an other-initiated, mediated, tentative involvement towards Y (NP₂ XPCOMP)” (55)— and of the *subjective-transitive* —which refers to “X (NP₁) expresses a forceful, direct and personal involvement towards Y (NP₂ XPCOMP)” (48)— constructions in these two languages. He demonstrates that, despite some similarities, the distribution and the productivity of these constructions depend on different factors in each language. While the Spanish *subjective-within-objective transitive* construction gives preference to information structure factors and topicalisation, the English counterpart favours semantic factors. González-García also claims that, from a diachronic viewpoint, this construction does not only evolve on the basis of subjectification, but also on further restrictions on syntactic

productivity, e.g. tense and aspect marking, types of infinites, etc. As a consequence, the construction is less productive and integrated into the grammar of Spanish than that of English.

In chapter 4, Gurevich examines conditional constructions in English and Russian. This author argues that the basic constructions are functionally very similar, despite morphological differences. In both languages, the protasis starts with a particle (*if, esli* 'if') and the apodosis has an optional element (*then, to* 'then'). However, there are differences in predictive and counterfactual conditionals. In the former, the protasis and the apodosis are in the same tense in Russian, but the apodosis is usually backshifted in English. In the latter, protasis and apodosis are marked with the conditional *by* in Russian, but in English the protasis is backshifted and the apodosis is marked with *would*. Bringing together insights from both Construction Grammar and previous analyses on conditionals within the Mental Spaces theory (Dancygier and Sweetser 2005), Gurevich shows that Russian and English conditionals differ on the grammatical encoding of pragmatic and discourse factors, such as viewpoint and epistemic distance. Whereas English counterfactual conditionals can express different degrees of epistemic distance by means of past-tense morphology, Russian is unable to reflect these levels since all counterfactual conditionals have to be construed with the particle *by* and the past tense. On the other hand, the two types of Russian conditionals, imperative and non-imperative, are chosen on the basis of viewpoint. If the speaker emphasises a specific viewpoint, the former is chosen. This distinction is not present in the corresponding English conditional constructions.

In the following chapter, 'Results, Cases, and Constructions. Argument Structure Constructions in English and Finnish', Leino discusses the differences and similarities in ditransitive, caused-motion and resultative constructions in Finnish and English. While the morpho-syntactic characteristics of these languages are remarkably different due to typological factors (case marking vs. prepositions, agglutinating vs. isolating morphology), Leino argues that these constructions share semantic and pragmatic correlations. A major point in this paper is the notion of 'construction correspondence', i.e. semantic as well as formal, structural and morpho-syntactic similarity. According to Leino's analysis, these three constructions are unarguably different and independent in English, but the situation is different in Finnish; the ditransitive and the caused-motion constructions in this language cannot be treated separately. Stemming from these results, Leino concludes that constructions are language-specific, mainly due to typological, information structure and cultural factors, but that they are perceived as similar when they are used to describe "*humanly relevant scenes*: situation types which occur in an essentially similar form across language communities and cultures" (131; emphasis in original). He proposes that construction correspondence is a matter of degree, and cannot be judged in absolute terms, because correspondence is not based on one feature similarity, but on a cluster "of similarities in different domains and respects" (132).

Chapter 6, by Timyam and Bergen, also focuses on argument structure constructions and contrasts the caused-motion and ditransitive constructions in English and Thai. Based

on both experimental and corpus data, Timyan and Bergen show that these constructions are functionally different in the two languages. Both caused-motion and ditransitive constructions denote transfer of possession in Thai. In English, on the other hand, it is only the latter that suggests this meaning, whereas the former activates the reading of forced motion along the path. As a consequence, the group of verbs selected in English is different for each construction, while it is the same in Thai. Another difference is that the ditransitive construction in Thai is less productive than in English, and in terms of cognitive processing, Thai speakers tend to interpret the construction as caused-motion whenever the post-verbal NP constituents are heavy. Although the analysis of English and Thai suggests that constructions are language-specific, these authors also argue that there is a set of underlying universal characteristics shared by all grammatical constructions—e.g. meaning and distribution relationship, argument structure associated with certain verbs, choice of construction based on pragmatic strategies—that allow cross-linguistic analysis.

In the next chapter, Hasegawa et al. offer a contrastive study on measurement and comparison constructions in English and Japanese. These authors show that constructions with a scalar adjective plus a measurement phrase behave differently in Japanese and English. In Japanese, the value of the scalar adjective is always evaluative, and, as a result, the construction is interpreted as a comparison. In English, on the other hand, this interpretation is not possible because the scalar adjective is not evaluative, and, as a consequence, this construction “merely evokes a relevant scale on which the measured valued is located” (198). Data—constructions and examples—in this paper are drawn from the English FrameNet project (Fillmore et al. 2003), and due to these mismatches in the interpretation of Japanese measurement constructions, Hasegawa et al. conclude that FrameNet should be complemented with tools from Sign-based construction grammar (Sag forthcoming) in order to account for these differences, and therefore, offer a consistent and uniform analysis of these constructions.

The last chapter, by Croft et al., is a proposal to revise Talmy’s (1985, 1991) theory of lexicalization patterns, or as the authors call it “the typological classification of complex event constructions” (201). They propose to basically keep Talmy’s typology but expanding it to account for symmetric constructions such as serial verbs, compounding and coordination constructions, that pose problems from Talmy’s original two-way typology. They also argue that the typology, instead of comparing languages as a whole, should use as “the basic unit of comparison and contrast . . . each construction that is used to express an equivalent state of affairs” (202). Based on some examples from five languages—English, Dutch, Bulgarian, Icelandic, and Japanese—they claim that each language employs different encoding strategies for different event types and propose an implicational universal that explains the relation that exists between event types and encoding strategies. They also suggest two grammaticalisation paths—from coordination to verb-satellite fusion and from coordination to verbal compounding—that result “in a single morphologically bound predicate form” (231), that is, in morpho-syntactically more integrated event-encoding constructions.

Perhaps the main achievement of this book is that it demonstrates that Construction Grammar can be successfully applied to compare and contrast languages. Furthermore, it shows that this framework can even provide possible typological syntactic tools—universals?—for typology. All chapters in this book prove that constructions in different languages can indeed be contrasted on the basis of some general functional principles, but that this analysis also requires the fine-grained examination of language-specific constructional properties in order to achieve a full-fledged tool for cross-linguistic research. Boas, in his chapter, summarises the results of this book as follows: “constructions are viable descriptive and analytical tools for cross-linguistic comparisons . . . enable linguists to state generalisations across languages at different levels of granularity . . . may be constrained by typological differences between languages . . . [and] allow the researcher to arrive at results involving all levels of grammatical structure across languages” (15). In general, I agree with the editor that this book provides, at least partially, these results. However, there are inherent problems in this collection of papers. One is the overpresence of English throughout the book; every chapter compares English with another (non)-Indo-European language. While it is true that this is the first book of its kind, and that the starting point for all these studies is English, the argument would gain in credibility if there were papers comparing constructions in other languages within the same family—e.g. Spanish-French—and from different families with totally different morpho-syntactic features—e.g. Russian-Japanese.

Another issue, which although in itself an interesting line of research, still poses problems for readers, is the juxtaposition of different frameworks in the papers included in this book. The label of Construction Grammar, as happens with that of Cognitive Linguistics, is an umbrella term that subsumes different ‘subtypes’ of constructional models (see González-García 2012, for a review). By far, the most widely-known model is Goldberg’s (1995, 2006) Construction Grammar (CxG) as is demonstrated in this book, since the majority of papers take this model as their main, if not exclusive, theoretical framework (Hilpert, González-García, Gurevich, Leino, Timyam and Bergen). However, there are other subtypes of constructional models that are either hardly represented, e.g. Berkeley Construction Grammar (Fillmore and Kay 1996) in Leino’s paper, Sign-Based Construction Grammar (Sag forthcoming; Michaelis 2009) in Hasegawa et al.’s paper, or not mentioned at all: Fluid Construction Grammar (Steels and de Beule 2006). The difficulty lies not only in that these models are underrepresented, but also in the fact that the authors do not take the time to explain the basics of these more restrictively used/known approaches. Hasegawa et al.’s paper is an example: the authors propose formalisations to the reader, but little is explained about how to interpret them. While some papers offer ‘pure’ Construction Grammar descriptions (e.g. González-García), others resort to other frameworks to build up their analyses, mostly Fillmore’s (1982, 1985) frame semantics (Boas, Hasegawa), and Fauconnier’s (1997) mental spaces (Gurevich). In general, the idea of picking up theoretical constructs and mechanisms from different approaches in order to produce a more accurate account of a linguistic phenomenon is enriching, and

this is also a very positive feature of the book: demonstrating that different approaches, constructional or not, are complementary; however, when the author does not reach this perfect blend and one of the models seems forced, the result is superficial rather than positive, as is the case with Gurevich's contribution.

One final shortcoming in this book is the lack of substantive real data in some chapters, especially in Croft et al.'s paper, where the authors include examples of dubious grammaticality and existence to build up their arguments —cf. Spanish example *El libro deslizó hasta el suelo* (211). Boas himself criticises Croft's previous work on voice and transitivity on these grounds: "Croft's results . . . may be perhaps incomplete because of his reliance on relatively small amounts of data from each language" (6). This flaw is still unfortunately lingering there. Most of the chapters, however, draw their examples from well-known corpora in their languages, although the usage of these corpora is somewhat unbalanced. Whereas some chapters deal with a large amount of data and offer quite sophisticated and detailed frequency analyses (Hilpert, González-García, Timyam and Bergen), others make use of a very limited amount of data (Gurevich, Leino, Hasegawa et al.). It is true that in these cases examples are at least real and attested, but still a framework that defends a usage-based approach deserves more careful and detailed treatment of examples. These are not just simple illustrations of constructions, as some papers would suggest (e.g. Hasegawa et al., Croft et al.), but the basis for defending the emergence of constructions per se.

All in all, this volume is a successful first step into the new subfield of Contrastive Construction Grammar. It shows that constructions can be used for cross-linguistic comparison, and that there is a whole incipient and promising research area to be explored. The book can be considered a blueprint for this type of analysis and the beginning of a beautiful friendship between Construction Grammar and Contrastive Studies.

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Received 19 September 2011

Accepted 29 March 2012

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