Structures, patterns, constructions – studying variation and change in lexico-grammar

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As is typical for language in general, in the study of the structure of language many terms are often used for one and the same thing. This also applies to the very concept of *structure*. Combinations of words or phrases with other elements, constituting functional units, are occasionally referred to by linguists as "structures", "constructions", "patterns" – or, indeed, "combinations" or "units". The combinations may make up phrases, clauses or entire sentences, the structures of which may be considered in their own right. For example, the co-occurrences of adjectives and nouns within the same phrase may be of great interest, as certain types of members of these word classes are more likely to co-occur with each other than with other types.

There may be different reasons for the variety of expressions used for similar things in the linguistic literature, and in some cases authors may have clear preferences for using a particular term for particular types of elements. For one thing, some theoretical approaches have such terms in their names, e.g. Pattern Grammar (see e.g. Hunston and Francis 1999) and Construction Grammar (see e.g. Goldberg 1995 or Hilpert 2014), which

have their own sets of theoretical positions as well as practical tools employed in the description of language, and the terms used are reflective of how different linguistic elements and their roles are understood or defined. There are instances in which the introduction of new terms for relatively closely related concepts can be regarded as justified. For example, while the term *collocation* is generally used of the adjacency or co-occurrence of lexical items – and the study of collocations with corpus linguistic methods has undoubtedly changed the face of language study in several applied fields, such as lexicography – one can extend the analysis of the co-occurrence of lexical items with each other to that of lexical items with grammatical structures with more or less clearly definable functions. Examples in this regard would be ditransitive structures (i.e. patterns of the type of *He gave me a book*) or verbs with *to*-infinitival clausal complements (*He remembered to mention it*). For the observation of groups of lexical items that are more (or less) likely to occur in such structures, the term *collostruction* has also been introduced (e.g. Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003, Hilpert 2014).

Although the use of expressions such as "patterns", "structures" and "constructions" may reflect adherence to a particular theoretical approach in linguistics, it is still possible that some authors use these terms in free variation, perhaps for the simple reason of avoiding repetition. Furthermore, even greater differences in the use of terminology in general should not override the overall goal of describing the nature of language, which is

shared by all approaches. It is worth noting, as observed by McEnery and Hardie (2012: 162) in their discussion on the differences between so-called neo-Firthian linguistics and functional linguistics, that the "different camps often arrive at similar conclusions as a result of their studies."

The observation made by McEnery and Hardie also serves as one of the guiding principles in the compilation of contributions to the present volume, which brings together 11 chapters by authors in various stages of their academic careers examining various aspects in the occurrence and variation of different structural elements in English and other languages. The aim has not been to focus strictly on any particular theoretical framework; instead, different frameworks are applied, referred to and commented on. Likewise, the methods employed in these studies vary, with some of them basing their argumentation on corpus linguistic evidence, while others discuss details of theoretical issues in a contemplative fashion. However, the collection is not a random mixture of loosely connected studies; there are clear themes that tie the chapters together. These include

(i)   the description of the structure and functions of different types of complementation patterns

(ii) the examination and/or compilation of diachronic and synchronic corpus data in the study of complementation patterns, and

(iii) the study of variation of usage in different registers and regional varieties.

These themes will be discussed next in greater detail.

(i) *The study of complementation patterns.* In the study of the English language, a great deal of attention has been paid to the complementation patterns of verbs, adjectives, and nouns. These items can vary as regards their selection of clausal and/or non-clausal complements, with some items selecting, for example, non-finite as well as finite clausal complements. In the first half of the twentieth century, grammarians such as Kruisinga (1922), Poutsma (1929), Curme (1931), and Jespersen (1940) made observations about the behaviour of verbs, adjectives, and nouns in this regard, making great inroads into the description of the occurrence and use of various patterns.

The continued efforts in this field have benefited from the introduction of sizable electronic corpora in ways that cannot be overstated – corpora have made it possible to examine both large-scale diachronic developments as well as analyse the significance of individual factors in the selection of complement types. As regards historical trends, certain key changes in the wider system of complementation have been perceived by several scholars as having occurred over the last couple of centuries, a set of developments to which Rohdenburg (2006) applied the term The Great Complement Shift. This includes the spread in the use of gerundial non-finite complement clauses at the expense of infinitival complements (see e.g. Fanego 1996, 1997; Vosberg 2003, Egan 2008, and Rudanko 2015, 2017).

In addition to examining which kinds of complements are attested in connection with different matrix verbs, adjectives and nouns, attention has also been paid to different types of factors that may influence the choice between alternative complementation patterns. Such factors may be syntactic or semantic as regards their nature. For example, in cases where matrix predicates may select different types of complements, features contributing to the complexity of the syntactic structure of the sentence – such as passivization, or extraction of a syntactic element – are likely to result in the use of grammatically more explicit complementation patterns, e.g. infinitives instead of gerundial complements. This tendency has been termed the Complexity Principle (Rohdenburg 1996, see also Vosberg 2006, Mondorf 2009, and Berlage 2014). As regards semantic factors, Rudanko (2010, 2011, 2017) has examined the role of agentivity in connection with the selection of complements, a tendency which is referred to as the Choice Principle. The influence of these factors are also examined in the present volume in the contributions by Rohdenburg and Höglund.

The studies in the present volume focus mainly on the complementation of verbs, and include the following types of patterns:

- matrix verb + finite/non-finite clausal complement where the subject of the matrix verb is also the subject of the lower-level verb (e.g. the English *propose* + *that*-clause/*to*-infinitive/-*ing* clause, the Finnish *rakastaa* ('love') + infinitive)

- matrix verb + NP + non-finite clausal complement, with the object NP being the subject of the verb in the complement clause (*let/allow* + NP + *to*-infinitive)

- matrix verb (+ NP) + preposition + non-finite clausal complement (e.g. the intransitive particle verb *hold off* + (*from*) *-ing*, *put* NP *off* (*from*) *-ing*, *talk/convince/force/*etc. + NP + *into* + *-ing*)

- matrix verb (+ preposition) + NP (i.e. verbs taking either a direct object or a prepositional object)

In addition to verbs, adjectives and nouns can take clausal complements; these also receive attention in the present volume (variation between *to*-infinitive and *of -ing* complements with the adjective *ashamed,* and the omissibility of *that*-complementizer with nouns).

(ii) *The use of corpora*. The availability of large collections of authentic data has changed the face of the study of complementation, and the wide variety of corpora we now have access to allows a greater range of possibilities for the examination of different types of variation. For the present volume, some of the contributors make good use of a number of older, well-known corpora, and others use some of the newer corpora that have recently been compiled specifically for the purpose of studying individual regional varieties of English. To give an idea of the breadth and sheer volume of language data investigated, it may be helpful to list all the

corpora and text archives examined in the papers included in the present volume:

- Nineteenth Century Fiction database (37.5 million words, British English)

- The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMET, version 1; 1710-1920, totaling approximately 10 million words, British English)

- The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA; 400 million words, 1810s-2000s)

- The Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (LOB; 1 million words, 1961 British English)

- The British National Corpus (BNC; 100 million words, 1960-1994)

- The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; 520 million words, 1990-2015)

- The Corpus of New Zealand Newspaper English (CNZNE, 1995-98 and 2010-12, approximately 100 million words)

- The Global Web-based Corpus of English (GloWbE, GB and US sections; approximately 774 million words)

- The NOW Corpus (News on the Web; 3.8 billion words of newspaper data; 20 regional varieties of English)

- CD-ROM issues of British and American newspapers (sets of yearly issues between 1990 and 2005; altogether approximately 3.1 billion words)

- newspaper data compiled from the *Straits Times* newspaper (from the years 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011; 158 million words; Singapore English)

- The Archives of Finnish Syntax (Finnish newspapers and magazines from the 1990s and 2000s; 80 million words)

- Suomi24 Corpus (database of Finnish online discussions; 2.6 billion words)

As can be seen in the list of corpora above, they vary considerably as regards their size as well as the registers and varieties that they represent. Ultimately the choice of analyzing a particular corpus depends largely on the frequency of the examined subject at hand. Even corpora such as the one-million-word LOB corpus, compiled at the dawn of the modern corpus era, are still highly relevant in the exploration and description of certain areas of language use, as the study by Rohdenburg in the present volume attests.

Considering the methodological challenges in analyzing corpus data, the authors have taken great care to clarify what kinds of conclusions can be justifiably drawn based on the findings, as due caution is often needed. Both Callies and Hoffmann, for example, observe some of the potential problems

in the contents of the GloWbE corpus, reminding the reader that some sections of the corpus may not entirely reflect usages of the particular varieties. In similar fashion, authors do well in pointing out the idiosyncratic uses affecting the frequencies in their results, as well as giving examples of some false positives among the search hits. Such reminders are of great importance, as knowledge of the contents of the corpora and close scrutiny of the concordance lines form the solid basis on which the analysis of the data can be built. To further ensure the reproducibility of the studies, the authors also detail the actual search queries or query strings. When relevant, the significance of the findings has been assessed with statistical methods.

(iii) *Examining regional variation in the use of complementation patterns*. In recent years, the description of grammatical patterns found in different regional varieties of English has taken great steps forward. The first electronic corpora represented the major varieties, British and American English, but with new, specialized corpora other varieties and genres can be examined in more detail. The study of World Englishes with representative corpus data makes it possible to contribute to the theoretical models used for the classification and evolution of varieties, such as Kachru's (1985) three-circle model with the Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle varieties, and Schneider's (2003, 2007) five-phase model outlining the steps in the evolution of a new regional variety. The present volume contains studies on the differences between the main varieties (the contributions by Rohdenburg and Callies), as well as ones focusing on a

single regional variety, with comparisons made to more dominant varieties (Rickman & Kaunisto on New Zealand English, and Hoffmann on Singapore English).

The studies on individual varieties provide us with greater insights into the trend lines in the developments of colonial varieties and/or varieties of English spoken as a second or foreign language. With regard to the changes seen between British English and other varieties, differences have been also examined in terms of retention of older forms (also referred to as "colonial lag") or innovation (or "colonial lead") (see e.g. Görlach 1987, Montgomery 2001, Hundt 2009). As is noted in the studies in the present volume, characterizing the differences as reflecting one or the other type in relation to another variant is a complex issue. This also applies to the process of new, emerging complementation patterns or rival patterns in languages other than English; in the present volume, two studies focusing on Finnish (Hietaranta) and Sri Lankan Malay (Slomanson) discuss the possible factors behind the introduction of novel structures into the grammatical system of these languages.

The volume has been structured to present the studies according to three main themes as regards their main focus and/or methodological approaches, namely

   1. the semantic and functional descriptions of constructions

2. corpus studies describing the distribution of complementation patterns

3. studies on innovative patterns.

This division is, of course, not entirely clear-cut; instead, in many instances the discussion in the studies is relevant from the perspective of more than just one of the above-mentioned themes.

Part 1, 'Semantic descriptions of constructions' includes studies in which the emphasis is on the semantic content of the structures under investigation. The studies discuss and comment on the ways in which relationships between linguistic structures and meaning are described, commenting on the theoretical frameworks of Construction Grammar and Cognitive Grammar. **Patrick Duffley** discusses the causative constructions *talk* NP *into -ing* and *convince* NP *to* + infinitive, and offers critical viewpoints on some of the earlier accounts of the structures, and in particular on the Construction Grammar approach. Duffley proposes that the structures themselves on the whole do not form unique combinations to which specific meanings are assigned but that the verbs found in such structures are predictable based on the meanings of the components of the structure. Thus in the case of the V NP *into -ing* pattern, it is the fundamental meaning of the preposition *into* that explains much of the attested usage of the pattern. **Jouni Rostila** also makes observations on the Construction Grammar approach into the analysis of structures in his

contribution on the argument structure construction termed the Rely On construction. Commenting on Goldberg's (2014) account of the structure, Rostila finds Goldberg's model semantically too broad and vague, a criticism seen also in previous reactions to argument structure constructions (or ASCs) in the literature. Rather than rejecting the idea of ASCs altogether, he offers his own model to describe the construction, influenced by contrastive observations of similar structures in German. In his conclusion, Rostila generally recommends the contrastive method as a possible path to making inspired observations and analyses of constructions, as long as principles relevant to the target languages are kept in mind.

Thomas Egan's paper examines the verb *let* and why it is very seldom found in the passive permissive construction as in *They should not be let (to) leave so soon.* Egan compares this characteristic of *let* with other verbs, such as *allow* and *permit*, which are commonly found in comparable passive constructions. Using data from the British National Corpus, the Corpus of Contemporary American English, and the Corpus of Historical American English to back up his observations, Egan discusses the differences in the force dynamic relations of the verbs as well as in the fundamental meanings between *to* infinitives and bare infinitives. In his discussion of the meanings of verbs expressing permission, Egan points out that it is used to signal different types of permission, namely 'barrier-removal' and 'non-imposition of barrier', and their negative counterparts 'barrier-retention' and 'imposition of barrier'. He notes that differences between *let* and *allow* can

be seen in this regard even in their usage as matrix verbs both in the active and passive. With the semantic feature encoded typically by *let* in the active being 'non-imposition', its passive form counterpart would be largely uninformative, which thus explains why it is not often used.

Part 2 of the volume, 'Variation and change in complementation patterns' presents corpus-based studies observing issues relating to complementation from a number of different perspectives. **Paul Rickman & Mark Kaunisto** examine the host of verbs used in the V NP *into -ing* pattern in New Zealand English, comparing the type and token frequencies as well as semantic characteristics of such verbs against similar studies conducted on American English. They examine New Zealand newspaper data from two periods, 1995-98 and 2010-12 and observe whether there are perceivable changes in the uses of the pattern. The results suggest that the productivity of the pattern has continued to be relatively high, as is also the case in present-day American English. Rickman & Kaunisto also highlight matrix verbs found in the data which were not previously attested in earlier surveys and which thus may be considered to be localized, New Zealand-based innovations in the transitive *into -ing* pattern. **Mikko Höglund** focuses on the different complements selected by the matrix adjective *ashamed*, and as data, he uses the Corpus of Historical American English and the Corpus of Contemporary American English. Höglund conducts a diachronic survey into the frequencies of different types of complements, including *to*-infinitives, *that*-clauses, *of -ing* patterns, *of* + NP patterns, as

well as instances without complements. Höglund finds that, in accordance with the general tendencies predicted by the Great Complement Shift, the frequency of the *to*-infinitive complements with *ashamed* has been declining, but this does not seem to have coincided with an increase in the use of the gerundial *of -ing* pattern. In addition, Höglund investigates different factors that might have an effect on the selection between two non-finite complement types, the *to*-infinitive and *of -ing*, and observes that, for example, copula or negation in the complement clause attract the gerundial complement type. In a paper based on her MA thesis, **Veera Saarimäki** examines the sentential complementation patterns of the matrix verb *propose* from the late 18th century to the 1990s, using the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts and the British National Corpus as sources of data. She first presents an overview of how the use of the verb with different types of complements has been described in dictionaries and grammars, and then looks at diachronic corpus data to track changes in the proportions of different sentential complements with the verb. In terms of the use of different types of complements, the diachronic changes in connection with the verb *propose* are not in line with the Great Complement Shift as *to*-infinitival complements appear to have increased their proportional frequency while *-ing* clauses have become less frequent. In addition to the occurrences of different complementation patterns, Saarimäki also makes observations on the use of *propose* in relation to the notion of control, i.e. the notion that the lower-level verbs have understood subjects which are co-

referent with (mostly) either the subject or object of the higher-level clause. Saarimäki notes that while the majority of occurrences of the verb with clausal complements manifest subject control, some examples of object control, PP object control, as well as unspecified control, can be detected as well. **Günter Rohdenburg** contributes to the volume with a study on the factors influencing the presence of a set of optional complement markers, including the complementizer *that*, the infinitival marker *to*, the modal verb *should* after mandative predicates, and the preposition *from* when introducing gerundial complements after particle verbs. In addition, he looks into the optionality of prepositions when they introduce interrogative complement clauses. With each type of complement marker, Rohdenburg examines the influence of factors adding to the grammatical complexity of the structures in which the complement markers are found. In doing so, Rohdenburg makes use of a number of corpora and databases of British and American English. For the most part, the focus is on the influence of passivization on the omissibility of the complement markers, but other factors are also considered. In the conclusion, Rohdenburg discusses what the findings contribute to the explanatory power of the Complexity Principle in the selection between alternative complementation patterns and forms. Concluding Part 2, **Marcus Callies** examines a tendency seen in major varieties of English in connection with a number of verbs increasingly selecting direct object noun phrases instead of prepositional objects, as in *They fled [from] the extreme weather conditions* or *People were protesting*

[against] the idea. Callies observes that earlier commentaries and studies on this issue offer contradictory views on the historical stages of the tendency and on whether it is nowadays more common to omit the preposition in such cases in British or American English. In an earlier study, Rohdenburg (2009) had examined this tendency in connection with a group of antagonistic verbs (e.g. *fight, protest,* and *offend*) and verbs of leaving (e.g. *flee, escape,* and *depart*). Callies studies three other verbs – *graduate, impact,* and *shop* – that have shown signs of allowing omission of the preposition (or "direct transitivization"), and focuses on the variation between the direct object and prepositional object patterns in British and American English corpus data.

The papers in Part 3 of the volume, 'The emergence of new patterns', focuses on the processes of innovation in the use of patterns of complementation. While much of the study of English complementation patterns deals with the occurrence of the patterns in main varieties of English, increasing attention is also given to variation seen in non-native Englishes, used as a second or a foreign language. Furthermore, structural analyses of languages other than English can be conducted by observing parallels between English and the other languages – even non-Indo-European ones – a method which has only become more relevant from the point of view of language contacts in a world where the influence of English is more and more pervasive. Like Callies, **Sebastian Hoffmann** also looks into the question of particle verb usage, focusing on the ESL variety of

Singapore English. This variety manifests a trend that is in a sense opposite to that examined by Callies in that Singapore English data contains instances of prepositional verbs which in main varieties would take a direct object without a preposition (e.g. *discuss (about) something* and *emphasise (on) something*). In order to examine the diachronic developments in the use of such items, Hoffmann compiled a 158-million-word corpus containing data from one Singaporean newspaper, the *Straits Times,* from the period spanning the years 1951 and 2011. The closer studies of four prepositional verbs attested in Singapore English (*enter into, await for, request for*, and *leverage on*), also examined in historical and present-day native English databases and corpora, show that different reasons may be suggested for why prepositions are used in connection with these verbs in SingE. The evidence of the use of the preposition as instances of retention of older, nowadays obsolete forms of British English is not very prominent. Instead, analogy and innovation in an ESL context appear to be more likely explanations, and Hoffmann points out that there is room for more work on the phenomenon on the whole.

While new, more specialized corpora are being compiled at an ever-increasing speed, it is worth noting that there are still many languages for which representative corpora are not available. The paper by **Peter Slomanson** shows how the characterization and description of structural changes seen in rare languages benefits from observations of parallel developments across different languages. Basing his observations on his

ongoing fieldwork involving interviews and recordings made in rural Sri Lanka, Slomanson discusses the development of infinitival complementation in Sri Lankan Malay, a South Asian contact language which earlier did not show finiteness contrast, and points to similarities that can be perceived in how comparable structures emerged in Old English. The root in the rise of the infinitive in Sri Lankan Malay is seen to have emerged from a prepositional phrase with a dative marker. Contrasts and contacts between languages as well as sociolinguistic factors are also examined by **Pertti Hietaranta**, who discusses a syntactic change occurring in Finnish today, which allows the verb *rakastaa* ('to love') as a matrix verb to be followed by an infinitival verb form, as in *rakastan puhua* ('I love to speak') instead of the standard structure *rakastan puhumista* ('I love speaking'). He observes that although the influence of English into Finnish through translation is one possible explanation for the growing popularity of the new construction, ideological factors, new means of communication and fashion may, in fact, play a more prominent role.

One final point which deserves to be made has to do with how the studies in the present volume vary as regards the scope of examination. There are both surveys which have the aim of detecting broader patterns of use that are common to larger groups of matrix words (e.g. the paper by Rickman and Kaunisto on verbs selecting NP + *into -ing* complements), and studies with a focus on a single matrix word. Studies of both such types make valid contributions to the overall knowledge on complementation,

although it is important to note the comment made by Leech et al. (2009) on studies with a broad or narrow focus:

> If we decide to focus on a specific non-finite complement structure – such as, say, the *to*-infinitive clause or the gerund with possessive/genitive modifier – we will find these structures serving a large variety of functions, with most of them not being involved in current diachronic change. If, on the other hand, we decide to focus on more specific constructions – combinations of particular superordinate predicates and particular patterns of complementation (such as, for example, variation between infinitives and gerunds with *accustomed to*) – we can easily home in on areas of ongoing diachronic change, without, however, being able to correlate individual shifts in usage preferences with general trends in the evolution of the system of English non-finite verbal forms. (Leech et al. 2009: 181)

In other words, there are pros and cons inherent in both approaches. However, individual matrix predicates may show tendencies of use which can go against those of similar words, and explanations may be found in the semantic component of the words themselves. In-depth analyses of individual items may therefore reveal important aspects affecting the linguistic behaviour of the items that may be unique to those very items.

This knowledge can then be taken into account when making generalizations on a broader scale.

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