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Diachronic construction grammar: A state of the art

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This paper offers an impression of the state of the art in diachronic construction grammar. ¹ It assumes no familiarity with any particular brand of construction grammar, only with the basic tenets of constructionist linguistics (for introductions to these, see Goldberg 2003; Goldberg & Casenhiser 2006, Hoffman & Trousdale 2013, Goldberg 2013).

As far as I know, the term "diachronic construction grammar" was used for the first time as a name for a linguistic discipline in a paper by Deborah Ziegeler on a diachronic study of the English causative have construction that underscored the relevance of constructions to grammaticalization as well as the mutual relevance of construction grammar and grammaticalization theory (Ziegeler 2004). Ziegeler used the term to refer to work on grammaticalization only, as a synonym for grammaticalization theory. However, in a paper I published in 2007 entitled "Diachronic construction grammar and grammaticalization theory" (Noël 2007), I argued in favour of a discipline dealing with the development of the taxonomically organized inventory of the constructions of languages, also known as their "constructi-c-ons" (cf. Goldberg 2003), that was wider than grammaticalization theory. The reason behind this was that some of the phenomena grammaticalization theorists had been trying to squeeze in under the heading of grammaticalization appeared to be very different in nature from what had for a long time constituted the core business of grammaticalization studies, i.e. lexical material getting to be used to signal grammatical meanings. Indeed a lot of energy has been spent, and continues to be spent (a recent such effort is Trousdale 2010), on arguing that the development of schematic, lexically non-specific, constructions is grammaticalization just like the development of lexically-specific grammatical constructions, i.e. that the same mechanisms are at work in both developments, but perhaps more can be gained by broadening one's perspective rather than by focussing on that fairly narrow question. Elizabeth Traugott (Forthcoming) has recently stated that in diachronic construction grammar "attention is not on the source but rather on the outcome of a change" and that this "readily allows grammatical constructionalization to encompass cases of grammaticalization that have various sources", i.e. not just "standard examples of lexical to grammatical change" but also "cases of grammaticalization with no or only marginal lexical sources".

In a footnote to the 2007 paper I wrote that a discipline dealing with the history of constructions with a wider scope, or a different focus, than grammaticalization theory was also needed because certain questions need to be addressed which are not the specific focus of grammaticalization theory. The questions I listed were the following: "How do constructions accumulate meanings [once they have come into

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¹ This paper is an expanded adaptation of the first part of a lecture delivered at the IV Seminário Internacional do Grupo de Estudos Discurso & Gramática, TEORIA DA GRAMATICALIZAÇÃO E GRAMÁTICA DE CONSTRUÇÕES, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Brazil, 27 November 2012.

being]? What universal or language specific extension mechanisms play a part in this? [And, I would like to add now, how do constructions lose meanings?] How do fluctuations between constructional prototypes and constructional peripheries evolve? How do the relationships between competing constructions develop?" This was not intended to be an exhaustive list, or a programme for diachronic construction grammar, but not much constructionist research addressing questions like these had surfaced when I wrote that footnote. Obviously certain things were already going on then and floated up soon after, and more has been happening since then, so that one can safely say that the development of diachronic construction grammar as a discipline is truly under way now. Evidence that diachronic construction grammar has started to become established as a field of investigation in linguistics is the organization of workshops that explicitly situate themselves in this area, and the appearance of the discipline name on the lists of areas of interest mentioned in calls for papers of conferences, most notably those targeting cognitive linguists generally or construction grammarians specifically. There is some typographic indeterminacy, however, between "Diachronic Construction Grammar" (Barðdal 2011, Hilpert Forthcoming), with capitalization of all three words in the discipline name, "diachronic Construction Grammar" (Trousdale 2012a), which capitalizes only Construction Grammar, and "diachronic construction grammar", without any capitalization (Noël 2007, Trousdale 2012b, Traugott Forthcoming).

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So what is happening in diachronic construction grammar, i.e. in historical constructionist linguistics, or constructionist historical linguistics? I consider there to be two main strands in the research that is contributing to the development of the discipline. One of these I will simply call the "construction grammar" strand. It consists of work by people who have come to *diachronic* construction grammar from *synchronic* construction grammar. The other major strand has its origin in grammaticalization theory, a discipline whose roots are of course much older than those of construction grammar.

Starting with the latter, the discipline name "diachronic construction grammar" also captures — as explicitly recognized by some of the major protagonists in the field, most notably Elizabeth Traugott and Graeme Trousdale — the research efforts of those working within grammaticalization theory who have relatively recently come to recognize that the most central theoretical concept of construction grammar is a highly relevant and useful one in the description of and theorizing about grammaticalization changes and who have now even started to use the term "constructionalization" in lieu of "grammaticalization" (e.g. Traugott 2011, Forthcoming; Trousdale & Norde 2013), or more precisely "grammatical constructionalization", as opposed to "lexical constructionalization". The pioneer in this line of work is undoubtedly Elizabeth Traugott. Her distinction between "micro-constructions" (individual construction types), "meso-constructions" (sets of similarly-behaving specific constructions) and "macro-constructions" (schematic form-meaning pairings like the NP-of-NP Degree Modifier Construction) is very compatible with the constructional taxonomies of construction grammar (see, e.g., Traugott 2008). In fact, she has very recently abandoned this terminology in part, aligning it more with standard constructionist terminology, replacing the term "macro-construction" with "schema" and "mesoconstruction" with "subschema", but retaining the term "micro-construction" (Traugott Forthcoming).

Intuitively, though, the discipline name "diachronic construction grammar" seems to most naturally cover diachronic work that is rooted in construction grammar, i.e. work by people who first and foremost profile themselves as construction gram-

marians and who consider from a historical perspective constructions that have received a lot of attention from a synchronic one. Within this strand there are three areas of investigation, or sub-strands of the construction grammar strand in diachronic construction grammar, which I would like to draw attention to.

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A first sub-strand consists of work by Goldbergian construction grammarians who consider particular argument structure constructions from a historical perspective, gauging the semantic evolution of such constructions on the basis of the type frequency of the verbs entering them. Three representative examples are Barðdal (2007) and (2011), and Colleman & De Clerck (2011). Barðdal (2007) and Colleman & De Clerck (2011) both look at the history of the ditransitive construction, the former (mainly) in Scandinavian languages and the latter in English. The study by Barðdal is an exercise in comparative linguistics. It compares the range of meaning extensions of the ditransitive construction in various Germanic languages and dialects to reconstruct the semantic structure of the construction in Proto-Germanic. Barðdal observes that the range of meaning extensions is the widest in Icelandic and that all the meaning extensions present in the other Germanic dialects looked at are also present in Icelandic, and she concludes that the situation in Icelandic is likely to come closest to the situation in Proto-Germanic. Colleman & De Clerck make the theoretical point that, just like lexical items, schematic syntactic patterns are vulnerable to semasiological shifts (in other words, semantic change). Comparing data from 18th-century Late Modern English with Present-day English, they show that the semantic evolution of the English ditransitive, or double object, construction presents a case of what they call "specialization", in the sense that the range of meanings associated with the construction has become much narrower over time. Verbs that could at one time enter the construction can now no longer do so. The type frequency of the construction consequently decreased (there are fewer types of it), while its semantic transparency increased. (In other words, the construction moved more in the direction of "One Form, One Meaning"). Barðdal (2011) found that something similar has occurred in the evolution of the Dative Subject Construction in Icelandic, which went through "a narrowing and focusing of its semantic scope", making it "more coherent semantically". A correlated change is a reduction in the type frequency of the construction. It nevertheless became more productive, because it replaced the Accusative Subject Construction as a result of its increased semantic transparency, which allows Barðdal (2011: 77) to argue, pace Bybee (1995), that type frequency is not "the most important factor for productivity".

The difference between this first sub-strand of the construction grammar strand and the grammaticalization strand in diachronic construction grammar already makes clear that while the grammaticalization strand is concerned with the question of how languages acquire constructions, this is not necessarily the case in the construction grammar strand. A prominent concern in the Goldbergian construction grammatical strand is diachronic semantic variation in existing schematic constructions like argument structure constructions.

Looked at from a different angle, the study by Barðdal just talked about on Dative Substitution can also be brought under the heading of a second thread of research I would like to distinguish in the construction grammatical tradition. The "ousting of accusative subjects by dative subjects" (Barðdal 2011: 60) can indeed be looked at as a case of what Timothy Colleman and myself have called "constructional attrition" (Colleman & Noël 2012), since the rise of dative subjects meant the demise of accusative subjects. In the very recent text already referred to, Traugott (Forthcoming) identifies this as one of several possible "post-constructionalization"

"constructional changes", which she calls "obsolescence". As an example of obsolescence she points to the decline in the use of the modal auxiliaries in English in the second half of the 20th century, which was established in research by Geoffrey Leech and a number of collaborators (Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith 2009: Chapter 4).

Constructional attrition revealed itself as an area of inquiry in diachronic construction grammar in a study by Trousdale (2008) on the disappearance of the impersonal construction in English and in contrastive research by Timothy Colleman and myself on the diachronic evolution of the frequency and the inclusiveness of *believe*-type raising-to-object and raising-to-subject constructions in English and Dutch (Noël & Colleman 2010; Colleman & Noël 2012). Since diachronic construction grammar, unlike grammaticalization theory, is less exclusively pre-occupied with the question of how languages acquire grammar, it can indeed also ask the opposite question of whether languages sometimes lose grammar.

Trousdale (2008) was the first study to discuss the loss of a construction from a construction grammatical perspective, i.e. from a perspective which considers constructions as symbolic form-meaning pairings that form a network of taxonomies. It connects the demise of the English impersonal construction (of which the archaism methinks is a still familiar relic) with the rise of the transitive construction, i.e. with an increase of the schematicity of the transitive construction, in the sense that it became more productive (e.g. allowing a wider range of subject types), more general (the arguments of the verb could express a wider range of roles) and less compositional (e.g. some variants of the construction became less clearly telic). As a result of this increased schematicity, the transitive construction became a "superordinate category" which also took in the semantic niche that was previously reserved to the impersonal construction. Trousdale offers this diachronic construction grammatical account, which makes reference to changes in the composition of the construction of a language, as an alternative to a previous, purely formal, account which attributed the loss of the impersonal construction to a gradual rejection of the option of lexically case-marking subjects.

My joint research with Timothy Colleman on English and Dutch *believe*-type raising-to-subject (or "nominative and infinitive", or "NCI") constructions, which documented the drastic reduction in the productivity or inclusiveness of the NCI in Dutch, also explains constructional attrition with reference to the competition constructions face from other constructions in the construction. It is contrastive research, and the contrastive dimension not only helps to identify constructional areas of interest but also offers explanations for either the presence or the absence of certain form-meaning pairings in the construction of a language by pinpointing differences in the competition existing between constructions in particular areas of the constructional taxonomies of different languages. The contrastive dimension is not essential to it, however.

This is different from the research in the third area of investigation, which appeals to language contact and borrowing to explain the presence of a construction in the construction of a language. Let's call this the "constructional borrowing" substrand of the construction grammar strand of diachronic construction grammar. The term was first used by Adele Goldberg in an early short text (Goldberg 1990) written during her student days in Berkeley, which is downloadable from her website but which, as far as I can tell, never made it into print. It is about a number of originally Yiddish constructions that "have been assimilated by a group of native English speakers", like the ones illustrated by *What's to forgive?*, *She's a crazy!*, and *Milk shmilk*. A more serious contribution to this strand is Mithun (2008), in which "an

apparent structural anomaly" (p. 225) in some languages of the Northwest coast of North America is accounted for with reference to the borrowing of a construction from a language spoken in the same "linguistic area" but genetically unrelated to them. Work of my own (Noël 2008), some of it jointly with Timothy Colleman (Colleman & Noël 2013), contributes to this strand as well. This is first of all work which argues that not only the nominative and infinitive, or NCI, pattern in English generally is a borrowing from Latin, but also the "evidential" NCI construction; and second, work that deals with the question of how Dutch ended up with a deontic construction that is cognate with English deontic *be supposed to*. We suggest that this is the result of language contact rather than grammaticalization. Speakers of Dutch who already had constructions in their constructions which were formally similar to and which shared a meaning with the more polysemous English pattern *be supposed to* copied that polysemy as a result of extensive contact with English and started to use the Dutch cognate patterns with the additional meaning.

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The work that can be considered to be a continuation of the grammaticalization paradigm represents by far the largest body of research falling under the heading of diachronic construction grammar, however. As mentioned above, perhaps the two central theoreticians that need to be mentioned here are Elizabeth Traugott and Graeme Trousdale, who have been contributing to this strand of research both individually and jointly, an eagerly awaited publication being their co-authored book on Constructionalization and constructional changes (Traugott & Trousdale Forthcoming). Other scholars that need to be mentioned are Joan Bybee (e.g. Bybee 2003, 2010), Hendrik De Smet (e.g. 2009, 2012, 2013), Mirjam Fried (2008, 2009, 2013) and Olga Fischer (e.g. Fischer 2007, 2008, 2010), but this short list is by no means exhaustive. Work in this strand has moved from establishing the centrality of constructions to grammaticalization changes and the appropriateness of a usage-based approach (see Kemmer & Barlow 2000; Tomasello 2003; Bybee 2013) in studying grammaticalization, over discussions of whether schematic constructions grammaticalize just like substantive ones do, to distinguishing between grammaticalization and lexicalization in constructionist terms, i.e. between "grammatical constructionalization" and "lexical constructionalization", and, most recently, between "constructionalization" and "constructional changes" (in Traugott Forthcoming, which summarizes parts of Traugott & Trousdale Forthcoming). That is, with relation to the latter distinction, whereas at first the terms "grammatical constructionalization" and "grammaticalization" appeared to be used interchangeably, "grammaticalization" is now used as a cover term subsuming constructionalization and constructional changes. (Grammatical) constructionalization is said by Traugott (Forthcoming) to be "approximately equivalent" with what she previously termed "primary grammaticalization" (in Traugott 2002), i.e. it happens when "a new micro-construction or schema is added to the [constructional] network, because a new conventional symbolic unit, and hence a new type node, has been created", i.e. "[w]hen there have been morphosyntactic and semantic reanalyses that are shared across speakers and hearers in a social network" (Traugott Forthcoming). Contructionalization is preceded by and can be followed by "constructional changes". The pre-constructionalization constructional change is analogically motivated semantic reanalysis, resulting from the association of "an invited inference from a construct [or token] with the semantics of an existing construction in the constructional network". Post-constructionalization constructional change may be collocational expansion, reduction of form as a result of routinization and token frequency, or obsolescence (referred to as "attrition" above).

Notice that there is reference here to analogy as a precondition for constructionalization, and indeed a focus on the operation of analogy in language change is one of the hallmarks of diachronic construction grammar, but reanalysis appears to be more central to Traugott's definition of constructionalization. In other words, taking a diachronic construction grammatical approach seems not to resolve the outstanding issue of whether or not grammaticalization involves reanalysis. This is probably the result, first of all, of the fact that many who have come to diachronic construction grammar from grammaticalization theory think in terms of sources and outcomes (cf. Hendery 2013, who calls grammaticalization a source-outcome model). This is captured very nicely by Fried's (2013: 422) characterization of grammaticalization as being "concerned with identifying changes in the relationship between form and function within a particular linguistic pattern", as when deontic be bound to is seen to be the source of "epistemic" be bound to (example from Noël 2011). A second likely cause for the inclination to think in terms of reanalysis is that, in spite of one's usagebased outlook, one is analysing chronologically ordered snapshots of the external linguistic system (linguists' descriptions of observed data), instead of focussing on speakers' internal ("cognitively instantiated") systems (cf. Kemmer & Barlow 2000: viii). As I have mentioned elsewhere (Noël 2011), however, speakers for whom, for instance, deontic be bound to served a perfectly good use are unlikely to have started putting it to a different use, added to which there is evidence that the form bound developed its epistemic meaning outside of the pattern be bound to. "Deontic be bound to > epistemic be bound to" might consequently, using Fischer's (2009: 18-19) words, merely be "an analyst's generalization, a convenient summary but not something that has actually happened". The way forward may be a more radically usage-based approach that takes into consideration "multiple sources" (Hendery 2013) and "a multiplicity of causes" (Fischer 2013).

To conclude, however, let me emphasize that Traugott's (Forthcoming) distinction between constructionalization and constructional changes provides a potentially useful framework for organizing the phenomena dealt with in diachronic construction grammar. As far as the ones mentioned in this paper are concerned, constructional attrition is obviously a post-constructionalization constructional change, and so are the semasiological shifts of the work on argument structure constructions referred to. Constructional borrowing is evidently a kind of constructionalization because it creates new type nodes in the constructional network.

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