

Multimodal constructions: Explorations in the framework of Interactional Construction Grammar

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Abstract

In the framework of construction grammar (CxG) and especially in the light of usage-based theory (c.f. Bybee 2013, Croft 2001, Langacker 1987, Tomasello 2003), there should be no doubt that linguistic constructions are at least potentially multimodal (e.g. Lanwer 2017; Zima 2014). If language structure is considered to be usage-based in nature, any facet of so called *usage events* might become entrenched as part of the feature structure of linguistic constructions – including non-verbal characteristics of human behavior (cf. Langacker 2001). Linguistic units emerge – as Langacker (2013:220) puts it – “via the progressive entrenchment of configurations that recur in a sufficient number of events to be established as cognitive routines.” Therefore, studies on the multimodality of linguistic constructions have tried to provide evidence for the ‘existence’ of multimodal constructions by quantifying correlations of verbal and non-verbal patterns in language use (cf. e.g. Mangelschots/Schoonjans 2017; Zima 2014). The aim of such studies is to show that verbal and non-verbal features of usage events are intertwined facets of one and the same recurrent behavioral pattern which thus has to be modelled as a multimodal form-side of a form-meaning pairing. But in fact, reducing the concept of recurrence to questions of mere frequency seems to be an improper oversimplification of the matters at hand. If we propose that constructions are “schematized patterns of action” (Langacker 2001:146), we have to admit that the constitutive processes of schematization can only operate on the basis of non-identical usage events (Lanwer 2017; Lanwer/Coussios to appear). Strictly speaking, every usage event is unique. Because of this, what makes natural language a suitable tool for human communication is – as Stetter (2002:29) puts it – a kind of ‘semblance of identity’. Therefore, recurrence should from the cognitive as well as from the methodological point of view be characterized as based on similarities between and not the identity of usage events. Following this line of argumentation, the fine grained formal and functional description of usage events with respect to their potentials of being identified as the ‘same’ should be the starting point of any analysis of linguistic constructions. In my talk it will be argued that the methodological tool case of Interactional CxG (Deppermann 2006; Deppermann 2011; Imo 2014; Imo 2015) fits these very analytical requirements. As Deppermann (2006:60) has already noted, the comparative analysis of so called data collections of usage events as performed by conversation analysts (e.g. Hutchby/Wooffitt 2008:88–112) and adapted in the framework of Interactional CxG seems to be an approach well suited for the analytical purposes just described (see also Barth-Weingarten 2006; Lanwer 2017; Lanwer to appear). An interactional approach to the analysis of linguistic constructions delivers a tool box for purposes of comparative, context-sensitive structural and especially functional investigations of verbal and non-verbal design features of usage events.

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