Constructicons in theory and practice

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“The grammar of a language can be seen as a repertory of constructions, plus a set of principles which govern the nesting and superimposition of constructions into or upon one another” (Fillmore 1988: 37)

In constructionist theory, a constructicon is the set of constructions that presumably make up (the lexico-grammar of) a language, usually envisioned as some kind of inheritance network. This notion is widely assumed in cognitive linguistics and construction grammar, although the overall network structure remains largely unexplored, at least beyond case studies of subsets of closely related constructions.

In descriptive practice, a constructicon is a repository of construction descriptions, i.e. a kind of knowledge-base. Constructicons of the latter kind are under more or less active development for English (Fillmore et al. 2012), German (Boas & Ziem forthcoming), Japanese (Ohara 2013), Brazilian Portuguese (Torrent et al. 2014), Russian (Janda et al. forthcoming), and Swedish (Sköldberg et al. 2013). While such resources are of course applications of the theoretical notion of constructicon, they are also subject to practical conditions and considerations similar to those of e-lexicography. Hence, constructicon development is probably best characterized as a combination of construction grammar and lexicography, which may be called constructicography (cf. Lyngfelt et al. forthcoming).

In this paper, we will compare the two conceptions of constructicon, focusing on conflicts between the conditions for constructicography and principles of (construction) grammar. We will also address the notion of constructicon as network, which is at the same time conceptually central and strikingly underdeveloped in both domains.

References


