

SLE Workshop: Construction Grammar meets Sociolinguistics

Conveyors: Lotte Sommerer & Axel Bohmann (University of Freiburg)

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Description of the WS:

This workshop tries to bring together Usage-based Construction Grammar and (variationist) sociolinguistic research and its methodology. In general, CxG stresses that language is an emergent complex adaptive system (Diessel 2019) with a socio-cognitive basis and “must be understood in its interaction between social and cognitive exigencies” (Schmid 2020: 10; Harder 2010). Moreover, it is argued that linguistic knowledge is best conceptualized in the form of constructions. These are symbolic form-meaning pairings which directly map form (phonetic and syntactic code) onto function (conventionalized semantic and discourse-pragmatic knowledge) (e.g. Croft 2001; Goldberg 2006). More recent definitions of what a construction is explicitly state that the meaning side also includes social information; e.g. knowledge about genre and style conventions, dialectal/sociolectal/generational information (e.g. Hoffmann 2022; Ungerer & Hartmann 2023).

We argue that this sociolinguistic component has not yet been integrated sufficiently into current CxG research. Although the connection between Sociolinguistics and Cognitive Linguistics has already been established in the form of ‘Cognitive Sociolinguistics’ (e.g. Geeraerts, Kristiansen & Peirsman 2010; Kristiansen et al 2022) and although papers have already been published on more constructional issues (e.g. Hollmann 2013; Kerz & Wiechmann 2015; Vieira & Wiedemer 2019; Morin, Desagulier & Grieve 2020; Soukup 2022; Szmrecsanyi & Engel 2022; Röthlisberger & Tagliamonte 2021), we see room for a more thorough investigation of how to integrate sociolinguistic aspects when a) modeling constructional variation, spread and change b) sketching network relations in the construction and c) postulating generational, group or individual constructional templates.

We situate sociolinguistic variation at various scales of social organization. The traditional Labovian study of variation and change is concerned with relationships among the linguistic systems of different strata of a given speaker population, finding “orderly heterogeneity” (Weinreich et al. 1968) along demographic lines such as age, gender, and socio-economic status. More recent approaches in sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz & Hall 2008) or “third-wave” (Eckert 2012) variation studies have placed greater emphasis on identity and social meaning of individual forms in context. A central theoretical concept in this regard is indexicality, i.e. the anchoring of linguistic forms to the situation of utterance, which can have a presupposing (utterance form is predictable from context) and an entailing dimension (utterance form influences context). In this view, the social meaning of linguistic forms is understood as a range of potentials, organized in an “indexical field” (Eckert 2008). Finally, our understanding of sociolinguistic variation also encompasses register, both as conceptualized by Agha (2007) and Biber (e.g. 1988).

This leads to the following research questions:

- How, how much and what kind of sociolinguistic knowledge should be integrated into constructional templates and network sketches?
- How does one cater for the fact that there are different levels of conventionalization (regional, social, generational etc.)? How does this map onto a network sketch of the construction of a particular language?
- How should CxG model sociophonetic knowledge/variation?
- How are indexical presupposition and entailment to be integrated into constructional representations?
- How can the notion of an indexical field be incorporated into constructional accounts, i.e. the idea that many linguistic forms come with a range of meaning potentials, none of which is necessarily actualized in any given instance of use?
- How can register-sensitive language use be incorporated theoretically in variationist and constructional terms?
- In what ways do the data (sociolinguistic interviews and qualitative-ethnographic contextualization versus large corpora and controlled experiments) and methods of statistical analysis (mixed-effects regressions versus association measures) influence the results to be gained in the two fields and is there potential for mutual cross-fertilization at the methodological level? Where do methodologies clash?

We welcome papers which explicitly relate their presented empirical data and line of argumentation to the RQs above.

Call for papers:

The workshop (approx. 12-13 papers) will start with an introduction by the organizers and will be concluded with a final discussion. For our workshop proposal, we are soliciting abstracts of 300 words (excluding references). Abstracts should be emailed to lotte.sommerer@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de and axel.bohmann@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de by the **13th of November 2023**. Acceptance will be based on the quality and fit of the abstract. If the workshop proposal is accepted by the SLE, all the preliminary workshop participants must submit their full abstracts to EasyChair before **15 January 2024**. Please feel free to contact us, if you have any further questions.

Kind regards, Lotte Sommerer & Axel Bohmann

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