Challenging Construction Grammar: New insights from morphology

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Conference overview

The conference took place on April 8-12, 2024, at Monte Verità in Switzerland, hosted at the Congressi Stefano Franscini. It was organized by Elena Smirnova (Université de Neuchâtel), Martin Hilpert (Université de Neuchâtel) and Jenny Audring (Universiteit Leiden), and included plenary talks by Francesca Masini, Steffen Höder, Muriel Norde, Kristel Van Goethem and Livio Gaeta. Besides the invited speakers, there were 12 talks by PhD students and post-doc researchers.

The conference venue was situated at Monte Verità and offered breathtaking views of Lago Maggiore. The small size and location of the conference facilitated engaging conversations with people whom I might not have had the opportunity to connect with otherwise. Getting to know other researchers in such a setting has created invaluable connections and enabled exchange about facets of academia beyond the research topic itself.

The conference also included workshops on data visualization and regression modelling strategies with R taught by Stefan Hartmann (HHU Düsseldorf). Both workshops were beneficial for my own present and future research: While I had previously used R to create data visualizations and was now able to refine my skills, I had not yet used regression models in my research. This workshop has certainly opened up new avenues for future research.

My contribution to the conference

Title of the talk: *Downlifting*. Distinguishing vertical and horizontal links in a network of antonymous morphological constructions

In my talk I presented two antonymous morphological constructions, namely the [up-x] and [down-x] constructions (e.g., *upriver, downstairs, upheaval, downfall*). I used different corpus methods to investigate the properties of both constructions and compare their constraints. I concluded with a discussion of the types of links that can be assumed to connect the constructions in the constructicon.

Being the first participant to present on the first day of the conference, I was especially curious of the kind of feedback that would be given. My presentation was perceived to cover a topical issue, namely the nodes between links in the constructicon. While traditional Construction Grammar and Construction Morphology accounts distinguish between vertical and horizontal links, this metaphor has recently been criticized. Therefore, it was positively received that my talk aimed at showing examples and data supporting both processes but that the problematic nature of the topic was still highlighted.

The exchange of ideas with other researchers was immensely enriching, and I feel privileged to be able to learn from their experience and feedback. The feedback I received after my presentation mainly centered around theoretical questions about contested concepts addressed in my talk. For example, constructionhood is often considered to be a gradual notion; yet, annotation requires a definite decision by the researcher. In addition, it is often difficult –

or sometimes considered impossible and irrelevant – to distinguish analogy from productivity, but both processes have their significance in word formation.

I am happy to report that my talk was awarded one of two 2nd places of the "Best Presentation Award" of the conference. I am honored by the recognition of my research and am grateful to CIPL for making the participation at this conference possible.

General discussion of the theory of Construction Morphology
Through the presentations and plenary talks, I was able to get to know different perspectives on the theory of Construction Morphology and the multitude of methods that can be employed to tackle related questions, as well as the application of the theory to different languages. The talks held by my peers provided me with a broader perspective on the framework and inspired new research questions of my own.

An especially valuable aspect of the conference was the concluding discussion of the insights that the talks of the conference offered to the framework as a whole. As Construction Morphology is a relatively young and still under-researched field, PhD students and senior researchers alike discussed theoretical issues that the presentations helped elucidate as well as questions that still remain open. As these are also questions that still remain puzzling in my own research, it was reassuring to hear that these are generally contested issues. An example of such a problematic topic is the distinction between productivity, creativity and analogy: Based on existing literature, these concepts are difficult to distinguish from one another, but some of the presentations were able to shed light on this distinction by differentiating between different types of creativity. Another relevant aspect for my own research was the use of corpus data to represent speakers' knowledge of language: While the constructicon is often thought to be speaker-specific, a corpus can most often only provide a database of collective language use and thus offers a highly abstract representation of the constructicon.

All things considered, it was invaluable to have made connections with researchers tackling similar questions and facing similar problems. My experience at this conference was highly enriching and contributed significantly to my understanding of the framework and research skills. This conference facilitated stimulating discussions and was certainly an important step toward advancing the framework but also to point out topics that still remain contested and demand further research.