

Constructions in learner language: corpus-linguistic and experimental evidence

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In Construction Grammar, frequent syntactic configurations are assumed to be stored as symbolic units in the mental lexicon alongside words. For L1 data, there is a growing body of research in favor of constructions; examples include Goldberg's (1995) study on systematic meaning differences between one verb in several syntactic frames, the priming of constructions (cf. Hare & Goldberg 1999), sorting experiments (cf. Bencini & Goldberg 2000), and language acquisition (cf. Tomasello 1998). The many studies supporting the existence of constructions in L1 data raise the question if, and to what extent, constructions also characterize learner language. This paper reports the main findings of the two studies investigating advanced German learners' constructional knowledge of double object constructions (*Stefan gave Steffi the book vs. Stefan gave the book to Steffi*; Gries & Wulff 2005) and complementation constructions (*Steffi began to write the paper vs. Steffi began writing the paper*; Gries & Wulff 2009). In these studies, we combined native speaker and second language learner corpus-linguistic data with experimental data from a syntactic priming and a semantic sorting study. In sum, the learners exhibited behavior that is fully in line with a constructionist account, and the results particularly emphasize the similarity of the speakers' first and second language with regard to the mental representation of constructions.

References

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