

Graphemic constructions

Stefan Hartmann, HHU Düsseldorf, hartmast@hhu.de

Construction Grammar (CxG) has continuously extended its scope over the last decades, and has developed into a broad and comprehensive theory of language (see e.g. the overviews by Hilpert 2019, Hoffmann 2022, Author&Co-Author 2023). The recent multimodal turn in CxG bears witness to this development: On the one hand, some studies have applied the analytic toolkit of constructionist approaches to signed languages (e.g. Lepic & Occhino 2018, Hou 2022). On the other hand, more and more Construction Grammarians emphasize the multimodal nature of linguistic communication in general, taking aspects like co-speech gesture into account (e.g. Cienki 2017).

But one modality in which linguistic communication surfaces is arguably still a blind spot in CxG (a notable exception being Jackendoff & Audring 2020: Chapter 8.4), even though it plays a major role in our everyday lives: written language. This is quite understandable, given that writing has long been regarded as secondary to, and/or a mere representation of, spoken language. But recent years have seen increasing interest in the linguistic study of written language, giving rise to an emerging research field: grapholinguistics (Neef 2015, Meletis 2020, Meletis & Dürscheid 2022). While the theoretical spectrum of grapholinguistics is as broad as that of linguistics in general, there is a relatively broad consensus that written language is more than just a representation of spoken language. For one thing, writing affords a number of resources that are unique to this modality, such as capitalization and punctuation (Author et al. 2023). For another, there is psycho- and neurolinguistic evidence that the processes of reading and writing may not function with recourse to speech (see e.g. Meletis & Dürscheid 2022: 28f.; Dehaene 2009). This makes written language an intriguing object of study in its own right, including crucial questions of how exactly it relates to spoken language (Author & Co-Author 2023) and to other graphic codes (Morin et al. 2018).

In this programmatic paper, I discuss how CxG and grapholinguistics can cross-fertilize each other. Geyer et al. (2022: 247) have already pointed out that graphemic properties should be taken into consideration when describing the form side of constructions. I go one step further, arguing that the standard inventory of constructions that is typically assumed in constructionist approaches should be complemented by graphemic constructions, i.e. pairings of form and function specific to the written modality. Following Goldberg's (2019: 7) recent definition of constructions as "emergent clusters of lossy memory traces that are aligned within our high- (hyper!) dimensional conceptual space on the basis of shared form, function, and contextual dimensions", I argue that graphemic constructions are form-meaning pairs that involve written signs and that interact closely with constructions at other linguistic levels. Grapheme constructions often serve metalinguistic functions, e.g. indicating morphological or syntactic boundaries, but they can also have sociosemiotic implications that are independent from spoken language (Sebba 2012, Geyer 2018, Busch 2021). I will discuss how grapheme constructions can be identified, which challenges the concept entails, and which ramifications it may have for the 'architecture' of CxG at large.

References

- Busch, Florian. 2021. *Digitale Schreibregister. Digitale Schreibregister*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Cienki, Alan. 2017. Utterance Construction Grammar (UCxG) and the variable multimodality of constructions. *Linguistics Vanguard* 3(s1). <https://doi.org/DOI.10.1515/lingvan-2016-0048>.
- Dehaene, Stanislas. 2009. *Reading in the brain: the science and evolution of a human invention*. New York: Viking.
- Geyer, Klaus. 2018. Hadetalens 'grammatik'. *Ny forskning i grammatik* (25). <https://doi.org/10.7146/nfg.v26i25.109300>.
- Geyer, Klaus, Eckhard Bick & Andrea Kleene. 2022. 'I am no racist but ...': A Corpus-Based Analysis of Xenophobic Hate Speech Constructions in Danish and German Social Media Discourse. In Natalia Knoblock (ed.), *The Grammar of Hate*, 241–261. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108991841.013>.
- Goldberg, Adele. 2019. *Explain me this: creativity, competition, and the partial productivity of constructions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hilpert, Martin. 2019. *Construction grammar and its application to English* (Edinburgh Textbooks on the English Language. Advanced). Second edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hoffmann, Thomas. 2022. *Construction grammar* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139004213>.
- Hou, Lynn. 2022. A Usage-Based Proposal for Argument Structure of Directional Verbs in American Sign Language. *Frontiers in Psychology* 13. 808493. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.808493>.
- Jackendoff, Ray & Jenny Audring. 2020. *The texture of the lexicon: relational morphology and the parallel architecture*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lepic, Ryan & Corrine Occhino. 2018. A construction morphology approach to sign language analysis. In Geert E. Booij (ed.), *The Construction of Words. Advances in Construction Morphology*, 141–172. Berlin: Springer.
- Morin, Olivier, Piers Kelly & James Winters. 2018. Writing, Graphic Codes, and Asynchronous Communication. *Topics in Cognitive Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12386>.
- Meletis, Dimitrios. 2020. *The nature of writing a theory of grapholinguistics*. Brest: Fluxus Editions. <https://doi.org/10.36824/2020-meletis>.
- Meletis, Dimitrios & Christa Dürscheid. 2022. *Writing systems and their use* (Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs [TILSM] 369). An overview of grapholinguistics. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Neef, Martin. 2015. Writing systems as modular objects: proposals for theory design in grapholinguistics. *Open Linguistics* 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2015-0026>.
- Sebba, Mark. 2012. Orthography as social action: Scripts, spelling, identity and power. In Alexandra M. Jaffe, Jannis Androutsopoulos, Mark Sebba & Sally Johnson (eds.), *Orthography as social action: scripts, spelling, identity and power* (Language and Social Processes 3), 1–19. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.