

Constructionist Approaches to Creativity

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Creativity is an important evolutionary adaptation that allows humans to think original thoughts, to find solutions to problems that have never been encountered before and to fundamentally change the way we live (e.g., Goldberg 2018; Kaufman 2016; Sternberg 1999; Turner 2014). One particular domain of human cognition that has received considerable attention is linguistic creativity (Hoffmann 2018a,b, 2022; Turner & Fauconnier 1999; Turner 2018). Now, A. Goldberg, e.g., claimed that

[c]onstructionist approaches share with mainstream generative grammar the goal of accounting for the creative potential of language (Chomsky 1957: 1965). That is, it is clear that language is not a set of sentences that can be fixed in advance. Allowing constructions to combine freely as long as there are no conflicts, allows for the infinitely creative potential of language. (Goldberg 2006: 22).

Yet, most linguists, including Chomsky and Goldberg, only have a very narrow definition of verbal creativity that, essentially, boils down to productivity (Barödal 2008). In these cases, speakers make “original use of the established possibilities of the language (Leech 1969: 24; Sampson 2016 calls this “F(ixed)-creativity”). In contrast to this, too little attention has been paid to “E(nlarging/extending)-creativity” (Sampson 2016), i.e., when a speaker “creates new communicative possibilities which are not already in the language” (Leech 1969: 24; see also Bergs 2018)

In this talk, I will outline a constructionist analysis of linguistic F- and E-creativity that combines insights from psychology as well as cognitive sciences. I will argue that instead of unification or constrain satisfaction, it is the domain-general process of Conceptual Blending (Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 2002; Turner 2014, 2018) that underlies all constructional combination. As I will show, this allows for a straightforward analysis of *apo koinu* structures (Auer and Pfänder 2011: 6-7) such as *the more opaque that atmosphere is, the less conductive it is, the bigger the temperature difference you need to cross it* (a tripartite Comparative Correlative construct; Hoffmann 2017). Similarly, it can also explain seemingly contradictory utterances such as *Today is tomorrow*. (from the movie *Groundhog day*) or literary poetic E-creative constructs such as *Eins within a space and wearywide space it wast ere wohned a Mookse*. (James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*; cit. in: Leech 1969: 24)

In addition to this, however, I will emphasize that the study of creativity also requires a greater focus on inter-individual differences. As a considerable body of psychological research has revealed, personality traits such as openness and extroversion are significantly correlated with creativity (Kaufman 2016; Kandler *et al.* 2016). Individuals high in openness, e.g., are characterized by a “tolerance of ambiguity and willingness to grow, as well as cognitive flexibility, fantasy, open-mindedness, and having broad interests in several issues” (Kandler *et al.* 2016: 232). For a constructionist analysis of verbal creativity, this means that individuals high in openness will be much more likely to go beyond their entrenched constructions and be much E-creative than other members of the same speech community. In addition to this, a higher level of extroversion, i.e., a “general tendency to seek stimulation, orient attention to external stimuli, and enjoy social attention and interaction” (Kandler *et al.* 2016: 232), is also generally positively correlated with an individual’s creativity. The linguistic input that extroverted speakers are thus exposed to is much more varied and should consequently lead to the entrenchment of more elaborate constructional networks.

In this talk, I will show how constructionist approaches can further our understanding of linguistic creativity. Moreover, I will argue that the in-depth study of creativity also helps to make Construction Grammar a psychologically as well as cognitively more plausible theory of language.

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