

## Reconstructing positional verb constructions from patterns in first language acquisition data

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Albeit acknowledged, the influence of different cognitive processes that facilitate the build-up and development of linguistic knowledge is rarely specified in current usage-based models of construction networks. Instead, previous works tend to rely on frequency as a quantitatively operationalizable criterion for measuring the entrenchment of a linguistic pattern - as has been criticized repeatedly (cf. Schmid 2010, Kasper 2022 among others) - and its constructional status. The present research aims to bridge a theoretically underspecified gap between the early entrenchment of chunk-like and partly schematized constructions in the construction network of a child (cf. Tomasello 2003, Behrens 2009a, among others) and its subsequent development into a highly branched, interconnected web of constructions that differ in schematicity, abstractness, idiomaticity, and productivity (for an overview, see Goldberg 2013, Ziem 2022). Drawing on cognitive constructionist approaches (cf. Goldberg 1995, 2006, Langacker 1999), I argue that the cognitive plausibility of a usage-based network model relies on the identification of network root nodes that are stored and schematized from the beginning of language acquisition, e.g. the onset of entrenchment of linguistic units in early childhood. On a theoretical level, this also concerns the question to what extent relations between constructions can be described as horizontally organized inheritance hierarchies (cf. Goldberg 1995, among others) or clustered by family resemblances (cf. Engelberg et al. 2011). I will present results from a corpus-study on early pattern-like usage of a set of positional verbs in German (e.g. *stehen* 'to be standing', *hängen* 'to be hanging' etc.) in children's speech on the basis of spoken language data (using part of the LEO corpus, cf. Behrens 2003) that addresses questions raised in previous studies on the acquisition of spatial referential expressions in German (Behrens 2003, 2006, Kutscher & Schultze-Berndt 2007, Bryant 2012, Madlener et al. 2017), which are considered to be of interest in regard to a cognitive plausible description of the semantics of positional verbs and the structuring of verb-specific construction networks. A main objective of the study presented in this talk is to determine whether children acquire a single "core" meaning of a positional verb as a starting point (cf. Behrens 2003, Theakston et al. 2002, centered around the location of an entity) or different variants of meaning and their corresponding syntactic patterns (including grammaticalized or semantically weakened patterns like *auf dem Kopf stehen* 'being positioned upside down') without necessarily mapping them onto each other (thus serving as initially independent root nodes in a construction network with separate event-related constructional meaning). Subsequently, the talk also addresses difficulties that arise when applying quantitative measures frequently used by (adult-speaker-targeted) constructionist approaches to children's spoken language.

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