

How to keep construction grammar relevant in the age of Large Language Models

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In recent months, several applications based on Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT have taken the world by storm, gathering hundreds of millions of users in record amounts of time. While many usage-based linguists have reacted cautiously optimistic to these developments (after all, these models confirm that it is possible to learn how to construct well-formed utterances based solely on the linguistic input), many others have questioned whether linguists can still remain relevant in the age of LLMs.

In this presentation, I will argue that construction grammarians are in a unique position to answer that question positively. On the one hand, construction grammar reunites all of the criteria that other sciences and real-world developers care about thanks to its “simple” meta-theory (to know a language is to know its constructions) and its ambition to account for all of the linguistic data instead of the most systematic and frequent expressions. On the other hand, construction grammar strongly focuses on meaning and understanding, which are exactly the areas in which other approaches and LLMs are still struggling. I will then present a number of tools and approaches that can help construction grammarians to dramatically scale up their work and thereby unleash the full potential of CxG.