

The emergence of multimodal grammatical construct(ion)s through pointing gestures

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Keywords: pointing gestures, multimodal construct(ion)s, argument structure, construction families

This contribution is situated at the crossroads between the paradigms of interactional and cognitive linguistics, from where it focuses on pointing gestures as a crucial semiotic resource for the multifaceted interpretation of a usage event. Accordingly, the overall objective of this paper is to demonstrate how pointing gestures may actively contribute to the multimodal realization of grammatical construct(ion)s. The empirical basis for this qualitative study is a corpus of two plenary debates in the Flemish Parliament, of which four video excerpts will be analyzed more closely.

It is generally accepted that pointing gestures cannot be categorized as mere reference markers (Kita 2003). Several studies have convincingly shown that these gestures may occur with many formal variations as well as in multimodal co-occurrences (Fricke 2007; Ladewig 2020). Mondada (2014) demonstrates that pointing gestures are dynamically adapted in function of different socio-material circumstances and interactional recipients whereas the dialogue-based account of Ginzburg & Lücking (2021) elaborates the existing semantic taxonomy of pointing gestures by four types of addressee pointing.

The present contribution will demonstrate by video excerpts taken from the corpus and transcribed as in the following examples (our translation), how pointing gestures may play a decisive role in the multimodal realization of a ditransitive construction (example 1), an argument structure underlying an attributive participle (*shared* in 2) and, finally, in the realization of a parenthetical construction. The underlined elements in these transcriptions mark co-occurrence with a pointing gesture.

- (1) ...a lot of questions have been asked here...
- (2) ...because I think that is a shared concern...
- (3) ... because (--) government investments also have a positive effect...

In (1) the speaker uses both hands to point at himself, thus indicating that all questions have been asked to him. In doing so, the gesture clearly impacts the syntactic organization of the argument structure as it provides a perfect realization of a multimodal ditransitive construction. In (2) the speaker points at herself and the previous speaker thus identifying two referents of the argument structure of the underlying verb 'share', which factors into the specific pragmatics of this utterance. In (3), during a short pause following the Dutch conjunct 'want', the speaker points to the previous speaker thus expressing a multimodal realization of the parenthetical construction along with a clear impact on the discursive and the pragmatic organization of the usage event.

Our focus on the integration of pointing gestures along with locally situated aspects of interaction in grammatical construct(ion)s may feed into a new debate about a) the status of non-verbal and multimodal structures within construction networks (Diessel 2020: 12; Zima 2014; Schoonjans et al. 2015; Bergs & Zima 2017), and b) the relative status (in terms of prominence) of different types of formal information (verbal vs. gestural) within a construction. With regard to the semantic pole of a construction, c), the integration of pointing gestures raises the cognitive linguistic issue of objective vs. subjective construal as a highly relevant and refining, but hitherto largely ignored dimension on the CxG agenda.

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