Discourse-level constructions and frame analysis of policy discourse: Case of evaluation of university teaching

Dominik Lukeš
http://www.dominiklukes.net
University of East Anglia

Outline

- Theoretical prerequisites: Constructional view of language and its implications
- Text-level constructions (incl. genre)
- Frames and constructions
- Evidence for frames
- Examples of frames as constructions
- Conclusions

Theoretical prerequisites 1

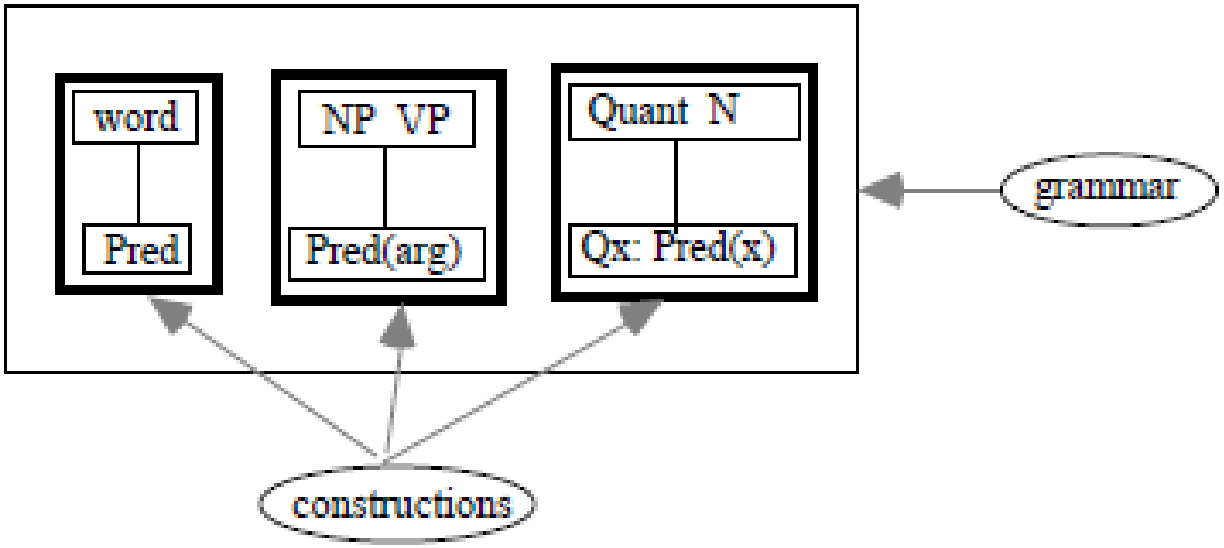
(Radical cognitivist constructionism)

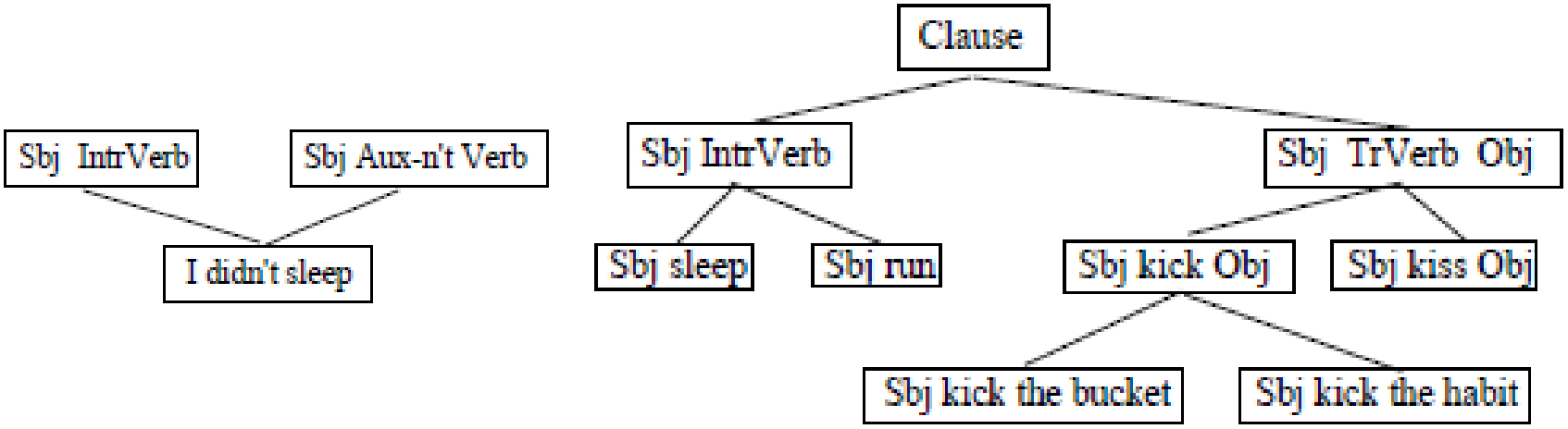
- Language is a structured inventory of symbolic units
- Units are best described as constructions linking form and meaning
- Knowledge of linguistic units is the same kind of knowledge as other kinds of knowledge (encyclopedic) and exhibits the same kinds of organizational, cognitive and social properties (incl. basic-level hierarchies, prototype category effects, underspecification, redundancy, conventionalization, culture/language-specificity, explication, negotiation)
- Formal and semantic compositionality (incl. ostension and attribution) is the process of conceptual integration (which is constrained, underspecified, opportunistic, dynamic, conventionalized)

Theoretical prerequisites 2

- Meaning of constructions can be very rich (encyclopedic/lexical – ‘horse’) or very schematic (grammatical ‘N’, ‘N+pl’)
- Form can be representational (‘horse’, ‘horses’) or paradigmatic (‘hor/[s,z,sh,zh]-iz/’, ‘traps /-s/’, ‘buddies /-iz/’, buds /-z/, ‘sheep’, ‘oxen’; noun-like behavior)
- Inventory structuring connections occur both at the semantic (‘horse’, ‘foal’, ‘mare’, ‘stallion’, ‘quadruped’, ‘horse racing’, ‘evolution of horses’, ‘equine statues’…) and formal (‘horse-guy’, ‘horse-racing’, ‘horsing-around’) poles
- Form can be ‘elevated’ toward the meaning pole through hypostasis (‘Did you mean horse or hoarse?’, ‘Stop that /clapitty clack/’), and meaning can be ‘elevated’ to formal level (‘Match this picture with this word.’, cross-word puzzles)
- People have more than one type of access to this inventory and as such it may exhibit different processual properties (blending, pseudo-modularity, algorithmic processing)
- Constructional description applies at all levels of magnification: language, discourse types, discourse events, sentence-like patterns, clause-like patterns, word-like patterns, morpheme-like patterns, sound patterns

Construction inventory
(Croft and Cruse 2004)





Text-level constructions

***because* construction**

meaning:
profile logical cause in the discourse space; activate logical prosody of causation

form: [because] clause-initial (stressed) position + collocational patterns

English causal cohesive harmony construction

meaning: profile necessary (logical) causal coherence links through connectives *plus* direction and/or semantic prosody of logical inference

form: zero, for, because, so, therefore, thus, which is why, then *plus* English elegant variation

Genre constructions

***linguistic academic paper* construction**

meaning:

profile author; activate old statements & conceptual spaces; profile aspects of old spaces to contrast with new space or new items in old space; profile connections to other work

form:

context of publication, title, name, affiliation, introduction, argument, conclusion, references, citation format; vocabulary selection, sentence length; local grammars of definition, argumentation; written text cohesion patterns, elegant variation, ostension/deixis substitution, …

Evidence for text constructions

Hypostasis of large text patterns

("People now cannot string a sentence together. It is nice to work with someone who has a good command of the rules of sentence structure." - comment by a senior academic)

- Fakes (The Sokal hoax)
- Parody (The Onion)
- Teaching/Learning (Manual of Style, Headway)

Local grammars (easy identification of definitions, arguments, listing, etc.) (see Hunston and Sinclair 2000)

Text colonies (dictionaries, lists, academic journals, publishers' lists, library shelf, film festival, etc.) (see Hoey 2001)

Normativity and conventionality (next slide)

Instant recognition (see next slide)

Ease of production (see next slide)

Examples of constructional blending

You know, when you look at it, this one sort of looks like it might be X and that one sort of looks like it might be Y. You know, just like what Langacker was talking about in that paper, you know, that paper he wrote with those funny drawings.

At first glance the former appears to belong to X whereas the latter has the markings of Y reminiscent of Langacker's (1999) distinctive visual representations of constructional form.

Formal blends: lexical choice, cohesion, elegant variation, intertextuality, ostension and deixis substitution

Semantic blends: profiling of date, profiling of topic, backgrounding of attentional negotiation ('you know', 'funny')

Topos constructions

***introduction* construction**

meaning:

identify genre; activate conceptual spaces for blending; hypostasize entrenched blends and activate gaps; establish credibility of author

form:

local grammars of introduction: opening statement, definition, anecdote (it is said, when I), analogy (just like), name-drop (it is Lakoff's claim), statement of generality (language is one of the most complex systems), statement of agreement (the concensus is)

Narrative structure constructions

‘Underdog’ narratives

- Meaning
  - an agent not expected to succeed succeeds
- Form
  - sequence: establish incompetence or handicap, provide motivation, provide process, provide success
  - identification: display agent in contrast, display friends, focus attention on differing perception of agent and others, display emotional reaction of agent at others at success

“Bring it On”

- Meaning
  - if you try hard enough, you can win, honest winning is better than dishonest
- Form
  - white team is initially expected to win but through narrative events becomes underdog and has to undergo transformational process
  - black team is shown as better but not expected to win through economic hardship and actions of previous white team members
  - both teams overcome respective hardships
  - black team wins (having been shown as more deserving; and also in accordance with culturally-established underdog narrative expectations)
  - white teams is second but their position is emotionally and processually made seen as being as good as a win

Frames as constructions 1

- Conceptual frames have become a popular tool of discourse analysis in a variety of disciplines (going by other names: perspective, footing, cognitive model, schema, script, cultural scripts, etc.)
- Knowledge can be seen as organized in frames that instantiate online mental spaces for blending; frames are maintained through negotiation and entrenchment

Frames as constructions 2

- Frames have been treated as if existing without any specific form (from Becker 1961 or Goffman 1974 to Schön and Rein 1994 or Lakoff 1996) and their reconstruction seen as natural (‘riding a bicycle’ , Potter and Wetherell 1987)
- Frames need to be seen as constructions; ie. we need to (always?) associate them with a formal pole (or see them as the semantic pole in a construction)
- Attempts at identifying textual evidence for frames have been generic listings of frame ‘triggers’ (Tannen 1993, Goatly 1997, Goddard 2006, Lukeš 2007)

Frame triggers (evidence)

Evaluations; Definitions; Hypostasis; Analogies (and other tropes); Lists; Categorical hierarchies; Hypercorrection; Linguistic purism; Cohesive patterns; Elegant variation; Quotations; Prefacing; Freezes; Terminology; Disclaimers; Sourcing (paragons); (Pop culture) references; Stories; Images; Exegesis; Expression of expectation; Semantic prosody; Cohesive harmony; Pronoun reference; Participant role description; Summaries; Spelling; Graphical organization of text; Genre context; Social context

(Lukeš Ch 7 in Hart, C., and D. Lukeš eds. 2007. *Cognitive Linguistics in Critical Discourse Studies: Application and Theory*. *Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing*. Incorporating and elaborating Goatly and Tannen)

Evidence for cultural scripts

1. Cultural keywords
2. Proverbs and common sayings
3. Common words and expressions
4. Words for speech acts and genres
5. Terms of address
6. Interactional routines
7. Phraseological patterns
8. Patterns of 'turn taking' and other conversational management strategies
9. Derivational morphology expressive of social meanings
10. Discourse particles and interjections

Goddard, Cliff ed. 2006. *Ethnopragmatics: Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter*.

Frames as constructions 3 (more than evidence): Metaphor negotiation construction(s)

Metaphor negotiation

- Meaning
  - folk theory of analogy
  - folk theory of categorization
  - folk theory of truth
  - folk theory of logical inference
- Form
  - exegesis
  - postulations of domain and investigation of mapping
  - attribution of truth or adequacy
  - limits of aptness

Education as a marketplace

- Meaning
  - “education is like a market-place”
  - this is either true or not true
  - things follow from the above
  - elements of the domain of education have correspondences in the domain of business
  - any one disanalogy invalidates any correspondence
- Form
  - X claims Y is like Z
  - y in Y is (not) z in Z ergo X is right/wrong
  - partial correspondence is enough to go on

Example 1

Most examples are too long to present (e.g. Henig 1994 – an entire volume)

"**A college is a complex mechanism that is responsible for transforming a variety of inputs of examples, students' time, teachers' time, consumable materials, equipment, buildings, into knowledge products usually in the forms of qualified people and intellectual property. The latter is the research component of knowledge. These products, in their turn, generate goods and services for society. The transformation is highly value added, although the means of which the mechanism carries out the transformation process is often obscure.** *The way in which people learn and develop ideas is closely individualistic and not easily understood. It is based largely on human interactions and relationships. The means used for measuring and manipulating aspects of the transformation have proved historically taxing and interference in the teaching traditions has caused resentment. In particular, the measurement of quality is an emotive issue*."

(Ashworth, Allan, and Roger C. Harvey. 1993. *Assessing Quality in Further and Higher Education. London; Bristol, Penn.: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.* p. 4)

Example 2

"Veblen (1918) was right when he said that the chief function of grading systems was not educational, but rather to help the Tycoons of Erudition who ran the universities provide the kind of quantified production controls the Captains of Solvency who sat on their governing boards were accustomed to." (Becker, Geer, and Hughes. 1968. *Making the Grade: The Academic Side of College Life. New York,: Wiley*.)

"[R. M. Miller's view is that] metaphors have all the advantage over explicit language as does theft over honest toil." (Petrie, H. G. 1979. Metaphor and Learning In *Metaphor and Thought*, *ed*. *Ortony*, *Andrew*. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*. **about** R. M. Miller 1976, The dubious case for metaphors in educational writing, Educational Theory, 26, 174-181)

Conclusions and Implications 1

- Constructions are a useful unit of description at all levels of text: remind us that all form has meaning but also that all meaning has some form (albeit schematic)
- All conventions in language are part of the constructional inventory (but conventionality needs to be established) beware of logistical spandrels)
- Processing and negotiation: There are multiple avenues of access to the inventory (cognitive, textual, social). In fact, social (meanings) patterns are a part of the same inventory
- Discourse studies: Frame analysis must take into account the constructional nature of conceptual patterns (and conversely construction/cognitive grammar must take into account conceptual frames)
- A construction may belong to several knowledge organizational hierarchies at different levels

Conclusions and Implications 2

- Notation: Visual representation of constructions can obscure the underlying complexity (rather a task-appropriate system of notation should be adopted)
- Tradition: Far from rejecting earlier descriptions: Cognitive/construction grammar in a way finally offers a path to treating language holistically started as long ago as the Prague School
- Part of the power of constructional approach is that earlier descriptive approaches need not be rejected or replicated
- However, it is not clear, how useful this will be to non-theoretician practitioners (teachers, text-editors, ‘language-mavens’, legal experts)

http://dominiklukes.net

I keep a blog at

http://hermeneuticheretic.net