

# What's Construction Grammar doing Usage-Based?

Hans C. Boas<sup>1</sup>, Jaakko Leino<sup>2</sup> & Benjamin Lyngfelt<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Texas at Austin, hcb@mail.utexas.edu <sup>2</sup>University of Helsinki, jaakko.leino@helsinki.fi

<sup>3</sup>University of Gothenburg, benjamin.lyngfelt@svenska.gu.se

**Keywords:** Construction Grammar, usage-based, metatheory, formalisms

What does “usage-based” mean to construction grammarians practicing different flavors of Construction Grammar (CxG)? To answer this question, this talk is structured into three parts. The first part briefly traces how the term “usage-based” has evolved in the literature since Langacker (1987) first coined the term “usage-based approach.” More specifically, we show how practitioners of different flavors of CxG such as Fillmore & Kay (1993), Goldberg (1995), Bergen & Chang (2005), and Sag (2012) employ the concept of “usage-based” in their CxG approaches. We propose that even though these different flavors of CxG all refer to the use of authentic, natural language as data for the formulation of their linguistic insights, they differ substantially in how they put this idea into practice.

Part two of the talk takes a different perspective by offering insights from an online questionnaire conducted in the spring of 2021 among construction grammarians, parts of which were presented at the ICCG Roundtable on the Future of Construction Grammar in Antwerp in the summer of 2021. To elicit thoughts and opinions from our colleagues, we included a statement “It’s my impression that all flavors of CxG are usage-based.” Participants provided their answers on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “I strongly agree” to “I strongly disagree,” and they were given the option of providing further insights in the comment section. The results to this question show that there appears to be widespread differences in opinion in how different flavors of CxG employ a usage-based methodology. 21% of participants strongly agreed with the statement, 31% somewhat agreed with it, while 12% neither agreed nor disagreed with it and 23% somewhat disagreed with it and 13% strongly disagreed with it.

The third part of the talk focuses on the verbal comments to the question mentioned above. While the comments rarely spell out explicitly what “usage-based” means to different respondents, they do reveal certain trends. A significant number of respondents point out that some variants of CxG are more usage-based than others. Notably, more formalization-oriented variants, such as Sign-Based CxG and Fluid CxG, are viewed as less usage-based than others. On the other hand, what seems like a vast majority of the respondents express a positive view towards usage-based approaches: whether or not they view some or all variants of CxG as usage-based, they feel that CxG at least should take a usage-based view.

Overall, we aim to point out different conceptions about the notion of “usage-based” among construction grammarians, and to correct the apparently common misconception that formalization, within CxG or in general, is somehow in conflict with the usage-based ideology. We also intend for this overview of different opinions about various notions of usage-based to inform both future discussion and, hopefully, future practice.

## References

- Langacker, Ronald W. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Fillmore, Charles J. & Paul Kay (1993). *Construction Grammar*. CSLI Lecture Notes. Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information. (Manuscript)
- Goldberg, Adele E. (1995). *Constructions. A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bergen, Benjamin & Nancy Chang (2005). Bergen, Benjamin and Nancy Chang. 2005. Embodied Construction Grammar in simulation-based language understanding. In J.-O. Östman and M. Fried (eds.), *Construction Grammars: Cognitive Grounding and Theoretical Extensions*, 147-190. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Sag, Ivan A. (2012). Sign-Based Construction Grammar: An informal synopsis. In H.C. Boas & I. Sag (eds.), *Sign-based Construction Grammar*. 69–202. Stanford: CSLI Publications.