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ARGUING ONE'S WAY TO CONSTRUCTIONS
AND CONSTRUCTICONS

This article aims to outline the basic ideas of constructionist theory. Furthermore, it explores how the meaning of the English WAY construction can be expressed in German or Russian. Finally, it will be shown how Construction Grammar can be used to create a new type of linguistic reference work – a constructicon.

K e y   w o r d s: *constructions, Construction Grammar, constructicon, way construction, unpredictability, collo-profiles.*

1. The framework

This article is based on and aims to propagate Construction Grammar – a linguistic theory that is based on the assumption that speakers' knowledge of language consists of a network of constructions. The term construction is used here to refer to a pairing of form and meaning, as described by A. Goldberg: «… constructions are understood to be emergent clusters of lossy memory traces that are aligned within our high- (hyper!) dimensional conceptual space on the basis of shared form, function, and contextual dimensions» [1, p. 7].

The constructionist approach – or, if you like, constructionist approaches – emerged during the last two decades of the 20th century in the works of such scholars as Ch. Fillmore and A. Goldberg and are strongly related to Langacker's Cognitive Grammar [2; 3].[1] Construction Grammar is finding increasing support as an alternative to the generative model developed by N. Chomsky, which had dominated linguistic theory for a very long time. It is thus not surprising that constructionist ideas were welcomed by a large group of linguists, especially in Europe, who had always been skeptical of the generative approach. So, there have been attempts to integrate quite a number of approaches such as Valency Theory [4; 5; 6; 7], Word Grammar [8], and to certain extent also Pattern Grammar [9; 10] into the constructionist framework [11]. The reasons for this are quite simple: Firstly, Construction Grammar takes up the essential findings of corpus linguistics and the resulting view of language in terms of Sinclair's [12; 13] idiom principle, which stresses the role of recurrent chunks and phraseological units (aspects of language grossly neglected in generative linguistics). Secondly, the development of the approach has been accompanied by a vast amount of experimental research on the use and learning of language, which provides it with a high degree of plausibility [14; 15; 16].

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[1] For details of these developments see Fischer & Stefanowitsch [20], Hoffmann & Trousdale [21], or Hilpert [22].

There are a number of crucial differences in the assumptions that are fundamental to the constructionist (or usage-based) approach and Chomskyan linguistics [17; 18] – the most important one being that usage-based researchers consider assumptions about any kind of language-specific genetic determination of human beings in the form of a Universal Grammar as totally misguided [14; 19]. Rather, constructionists pursue the idea that languages – or more precisely the constructions that make up a language – can be learnt and that this learning takes place on the basis of domain-general processes that are involved in the development of other cognitive skills as well [16]. This is not to deny that there must be a genetic predisposition for developing speech organs and certain cognitive abilities specific to humans.

2. Applying Construction Grammar: the idea of a reference constructicon

Since Construction Grammar rejects the idea of a sharp dividing line between lexis and grammar and the notion of construction covers the whole range of form-meaning pairings from words via phraseological or quasi-phraseological units like the WAY construction to very abstract syntactic constructions, the traditional and centuries-old distinction between dictionaries and grammars seems rather unsatisfactory. It thus seems desirable to create a new type of reference work, an electronic constructicon, that ideally comprises all types of constructions and thus provides all the information traditionally given in two different types of reference works, dictionaries and grammars within one theoretical framework [23; 24].

At the time of writing, a number of research teams are working their way towards constructicons for English, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Swedish (see the articles in Lyngfelt et al. 2018 [25], and the thematic part of *Lexicographica* 2019 [26; 27; 28; 29; 30]). It is obvious that the precise design of such a constructicon will be determined by its intended group of users and its main purpose [24]. In what follows, however, we would like to outline some of the linguistic considerations with respect to the design of a constructicon.

3. The WAY construction

3.1. The slots of the construction

Let us begin by looking at a construction which was one of the first to be described in a constructionist framework, the so-called WAY construction [31, p. 199–218], exemplified by sentences such as:

1) a. *Robyn Penrose is making her way to Lecture Room A, along corridors and down staircases thronged with students changing classes* [32];

b. *And next, President Trump muscling his way to the front during a tour of NATO headquarters* [33];

c. *These five will make their way to the ISS as part of a four-year collaboration between the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) and the Center for the Advancement of Science in Space* [33];

d. *Evelyn pushed her way in …* [33].

As will be shown below, these sentences can be seen as instantiations of a construction in the Construction Grammar sense of the word, because a certain

constellation of linguistic forms can be analyzed as expressing a particular meaning.[1] As is the case with many constructions, the various slots of the construction can be described at different levels of abstraction, namely

– at the level of phrases (noun phrase and prepositional phrase[2]),
– in terms of word class (verb and genitive of personal pronoun[3]) and
– in the form of lexical specification (*way*).

The WAY construction				
NP	VERB	PERS PRON$_{gen}$	way	PP
Robyn Penrose	is making	her	way	to Lecture Room A

Fig. 1. Slots of the WAY construction

3.2. Formal specification of the construction

One important aspect of the construction is that the *way*-NP must contain a genitive personal pronoun (or possessive determiner), which must be referentially identical with the subject-NP. As A. Goldberg [31, p. 199] points out, there is a difference between sentences such as (2a), which is an instance of the construction, and (2b), which is not:

2) a. *They found their way to the Railway Station and the train back to N. Y....* [32];

   b. *The hardest part is finding the way to the factory shop in the first place* [32];

In the case of (2b), the prepositional phrase PP(to) is part of the NP headed by *way*, in (2a) we can analyze it as separate constituent.[4] However, not all uses of *way* with a genitive personal pronoun are instances of the *way*-construction:

3) a. *... Trump might get his way on a number of things in the United States Senate* [33];

   b. *Bush was determined to have his way in spite of protests from friend and foe* [33];

4) a. *'I drive past there every day on my way to work,' he said* [32];

   b. *I'm on my way to talk to Dr. Tate* [32].

3.3. Semantic specification of the construction

The meaning of the construction has been the subject of much discussion (even before the emergence of Construction Grammar).[5]

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[1] See also Israel [34, p. 218].

[2] Prepositional phrase in the sense of Huddleston & Pullum [36] or Herbst & Schüller [37]. Goldberg [31] uses OBL (oblique) as a category label.

[3] Goldberg [31] uses the label POSS. We describe the words that can occur in this slot as genitives of personal pronouns in order to rule out words such as mine or theirs; see Herbst & Schüller [37].

[4] Note that there is no way in which their way to the Railway Station etc. could be replaced by a pro-form it or be the subject of a passive clause maintaining the meaning of (2a).

[5] See Jespersen [35, p. 233], Kuno & Takami [38], see also Hilpert [39, p. 36–39].

(i) *Means and manner senses.* A. Goldberg [31, p. 203–220] argues that the construction in many cases – (1) and (2a), for instance – entails the creation of a way in order to follow a certain PATH or achieve a particular GOAL [35, p. 233; 31, p. 203–204]. Cases such as (5a), in which the action described by the verb is not necessarily instrumental to motion in a PATH or towards a GOAL, A. Goldberg [31, p. 203], taking up the distinction between a means-interpretation and a manner-interpretation made by Levin & Rapoport [40] and R. Jackendoff [41], treats as extensions of the more central means-sense of the construction.

5) a. *It whistles its way at top speed through grade crossings in small towns to make the schedule* [33];

    b. *... her neighbour whistled his way through a catchy series of 1920s dance hits* [33];

    c. *... a group of N. Y.kids singing their way into the hearts of millions around the world* [33].

As shown by 5) b and 5) c, the distinction is not always clear-cut. Israel, in his diachronic account of the construction, comes to the conclusion that the construction is best seen as «... an example of a syntactic blend – that is, as a specialized grammatical pattern serving to combine disparate conceptual contents in a single, compact linguistic form. Essentially, the modern construction provides a way to blend the conceptual content of an activity verb with the basic idea of motion along a path» [34, p. 226].

(ii) *Difficulty.* The construction also expresses a certain difficulty in getting to the GOAL [31, p. 204], as illustrated very nicely by (6):

6) *Robyn picks her way across the floor, putting her shapely boots down carefully in the spaces between books, back numbers of Critical Inquiry and Women's Review, LP albums by Bach, Philip Glass and Phil Collins (her musical tastes are eclectic) and the occasional wineglass or coffee cup, to the desk* [32].
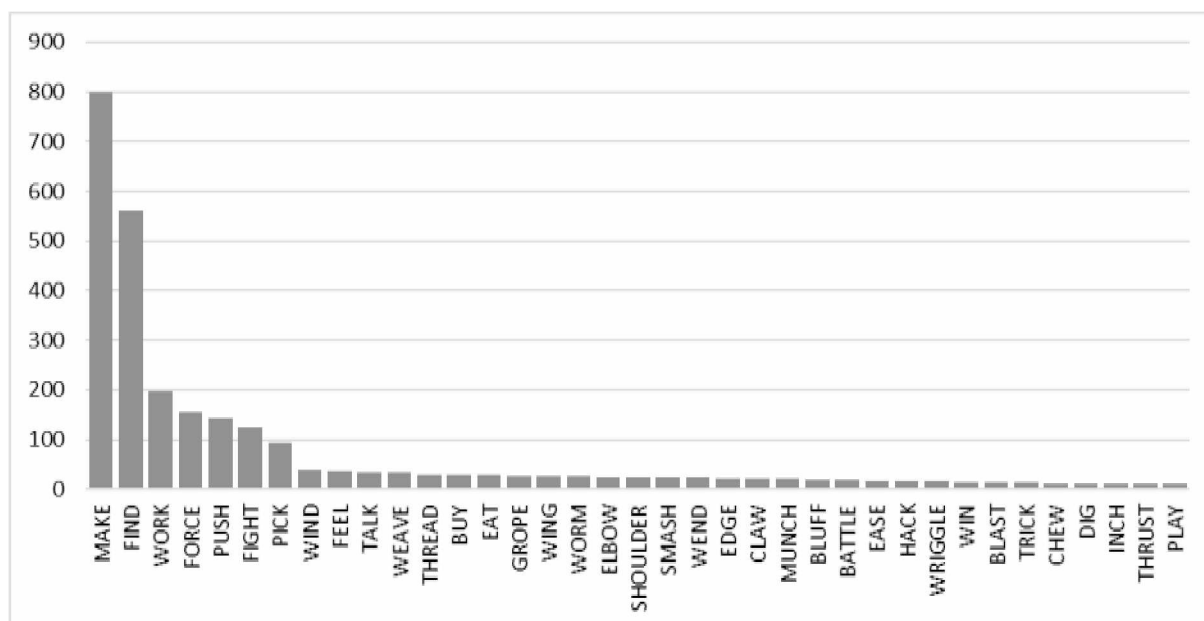
3.4. Verbs occurring in the WAY construction

What makes this construction particularly interesting is that it can be used to express a motion event without making use of motion verbs.[1] In a BNC search we identified 3473 produced instances of the construction, with the verbs occurring in the construction showing a kind of Zipfian distribution:[2] *make,* which Goldberg [31, p. 209] also attributes a special status because of its meaning of creation, makes up over 20 % of the data, followed by *find* with 16 %. The effect of one item dominating the construction is not as strong as with *give* in the case of the ditransitive construction, which takes the lion's share (see Herbst [42]) but rather similar to that of *nice* and *good* in the NICE-OF-YOU construction [43].

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[1] For a more detailed account see R. Jackendoff [44, p. 218], C. Broccias [45, p. 740–41] for a historical account.

[2] Based on the following searches in the BNC: {*/V} (my|our|your|his|her|its|their) way (to|into| towards|in|on|onto|out|under|over|through|toward|across|behind|beyond) and {*/V} (my|our|your|his|her| its|their) way (there|here).

Distribution of verbs in the English WAY construction
(based on BNC, showing hits > 9)

It is worth noting that some of the verbs that have a relatively high ITeCX1- or attraction-value are not particularly frequent in the corpus as a whole, which means that they have a relatively high ITECX2/reliance value, as shown in Tabl. 2.[1]

T a b l e 2

ITECX1 and ITECX2-values for 7 verbs in the WAY construction (BNC)

verb lemma	occurrences of verb in WAY construction	ITECX1, %	total occurrences of verb in BNC	ITECX2, %
make	**800**	**23,03**	**210,266**	**0,38**
find	**561**	**16,05**	**95,621**	**0,59**
thread	30	0,86	436	6,88
grope	27	0,78	294	9,18
wing	26	0,75	124	20,97
worm	26	0,75	79	32,91
wend	23	0,66	66	34,85

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[1] This kind of analysis is based on the basic ideas of collostructional analysis as developed by Stefanowitsch & Gries [46] and Gries & Stefanowitsch [47; 48]. For a discussion of the terms attraction and reliance, and, respectively ITeCX1 (percentage an item makes up in a construction) and ITECX2 (percentage of the use of an item in a construction compared with the total of its uses in a corpus), see Schmid [49] and Herbst [50; 42].

3.5. Interim conclusions with regard to the design of a constructicon

Summing up, we would argue that the description of constructions such as the WAY construction should comprise information about
- the form (and where appropriate syntactic function) of the slot-fillers,[1]
- the generalized meaning of the construction as such, and
- the items occurring in central slots of the construction in established usage, which we refer to as a collo-profile.

4. Language-internal unpredictability: collo-profiles

The collo-profiles provided in the kind of constructicon we have in mind can be seen as a direct reflection of the conviction that speakers not only learn [51, p. 382] but also store words through and together with the constructions in which they occur. It is part of a native speakers' knowledge of a lexical unit such as *read* 'read out aloud' that it can occur both in the ditransitive and the caused-motion construction and of their knowledge of *say* that it does not occur in the ditransitive construction. Correspondingly, speakers' knowledge of constructions can be taken to encompass knowledge of the items occurring in them:

7) a. *May I read you a story?* [33];
   b. *...he's going to read a story to his daughter* [33].
8) a. *?? I said Putin hello.*
   b. *And while I was there, I said hello to Putin* [33].

Views on how speakers come to acquire such facts about their language vary: while A. Stefanowitsch [52] makes a case in favor of what he calls «negative entrenchment», A. Goldberg [1] argues in favor of statistical pre-emption as the only relevant factor. For the purposes of building a constructicon the only thing that matters is that the relation between items and more abstract constructions must be shown.

That lexical items with similar meanings do not necessarily occur in the same syntactic patterns is not a particularly new insight (e.g. [53; 54; 4; 55]). If this were not the case, there would hardly be a justification for valency dictionaries (such as e.g. Helbig & Schenkel [56] and VALBU [57] for German or Th. Herbst et al. [58] for English) or for the specification of syntactic patterns in learners' dictionaries such as the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (OALD) [59] or the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE) [60].

5. Cross-linguistic unpredictability

5.1. A note of caution

«Constructions are language-specific», as W. Croft puts it [61, p. 3, 363]. When we talk about «the» ditransitive construction in various languages, we usually do this because we find the same «formal» constellation of subject, verb and two objects in these languages, but it must be understood that this must not

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[1] Strictly speaking, subject and object are not formal categories. For the need to include formal category labels in A. Goldberg's [62] argument structure constructions see Th. Herbst [4, p. 350–352; 5, p. 178–181].

automatically be taken to mean they necessarily have the same meaning – just as there very often is no total equivalence in the meanings of words. For this reason, great caution must be exercised when it comes to cross-linguistic comparisons.

Obviously, cross-linguistic considerations are not directly relevant to the design of a monolingual constructicon, they may well be worth noting with respect to the process of learning a foreign language learning and thus also to potential users of a constructicon.

5.2. Do «equivalent» verbs always occur in «equivalent» constructions?

Since, as pointed out in the previous section, it has been shown beyond doubt that it is not possible to predict whether or not an item is established in a particular construction on the basis of a semantic description of the construction, it would indeed be more than surprising if we could reliably predict which items can occur in a particular language on the basis of another language. But, quite obviously, we are not in for such a surprise. Let us look at the equivalents of *read* and *say* in German and Russian. German *vorlesen* 'read out loud' can only occur in the ditransitive construction but not in the caused-motion construction, whereas *sagen* 'say' does:

9) *Dort kann er ... seinem Kind Geschichten vorlesen* [63];
    'There he can – his child – stories read.'

10) a. *Warum sollte ich Ihnen das sagen müssen?* [63]
'Why should – I – you – that – say?

   b. *Es finden sich nicht mehr viele Leute, die das zu ihm sagen* [63].
      'You won't find many more people, who – that – to him – say'

However, the situation is further complicated by the fact that there is an important difference in meaning between uses of the ditransitive and the caused-motion construction with *sagen* in German. The direct object in sentences such as (10a) refers to the content of a message, that of (10b) to the message in a verbatim manner.

In Russian, both *читать вслух* 'read out aloud' and *сказать* 'say' only occur in the ditransitive construction:

11) *Мне придётся сказать вам несколько неприятностей* [64].
    'I – have to – say – you – a few – unpleasant things'

12) *Стёпа читал няне вслух какой-то текст с экрана компьютера...* [64].
    'Styopa – read – nanny$_{DAT}$ – outloud – some – text – from – screen – computer'

5.3. Equivalent constructions

While we can make out a case for ditransitive constructions and caused-motion constructions in German and Russian, this does not in any way mean that we can always find constructional «equivalence» of this sort. In fact, most of the examples given for the English WAY construction above, cannot be translated into German or Russian by using *poss Weg* or poss *путь*, although some such examples can be found:

13) a. *Exemplare finden ihren Weg auch nach Großbritannien* [65].
      'Copies – find – their way – also – to Great Britain'

b. *Unbeeindruckt von all dem befremdlichen Treiben bahnt sich ein junges Paar seinen Weg durch die Schlemmeretage* [65].

'Unimpressed by the strange goings-on, a young couple – makes – its way – through the gourmet level'.

14) a. *Я вдруг заметил, что одна из звезд быстро движется по небу, прочерчивая свой путь от созвездия к созвездию* [64].

'I suddenly noticed that one of the stars was quickly moving in the sky drawing its way from constellation to constellation.'

These uses do not seem particularly productive, however. Rather, we find creative uses of the caused-motion construction in German and Russian, which seem to serve a similar communicative purpose to that of the English WAY construction:

15) a. *Juventus verteidigte sich zwar 2015 und 2017 ins Finale...*[63] 'Juventus – did defend – itself – into the finals ...'.

b. *Du schießt uns ins Finale* [65].

'You – I'l kick – us – to the final'.

c. *Und man klingelt sich nicht gnadenlos eine Gasse durch den zittrigen Ausflug des Seniorenheims* [65].

'One – doesn't ring – oneself – a path through the trembling excursion ...'.

In Russian, this seems to be restricted to the constructions with a reflexive marker:

16) a. *Индийские фильмы стали **пробиваться** в китайский прокат несколько лет назад* [64].

'Indian films began to break through into the Chinese distribution....'

b. *Первые слухи о возможных кадровых перестановках в руководстве партии **просочились** в печать еще прошлой осенью* [64].

'First gossip about possible personnel changes in the party leadership leaked_{REFL} into press last autumn';

c. *Была поставлена задача **пробиться** в финал...* [64]

'There was a task to break through to the cup final...'

What the German and the Russian examples have in common with the English WAY construction is that a verb that does not express the motion of the referent of the direct object to the GOAL is used in the caused-motion construction, thus creating a blend of the action of the subject expressed by the verb and the reaching of the GOAL expressed by the construction. We do not want to go into the question of whether such uses should be seen as separate constructions in German or Russian or as a particular type of creativity. It is quite possible, however, that – since such uses can be regarded as a typical phenomenon of sports commentaries in both languages – they are quite established in particular genres.[1] These findings would then have to be included in constructicons of German and Russian respectively.

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[1] One argument in favor of this is that in German sports language there is a noun Zittersieg, which corresponds to the use of zittern in sentences such as Der VfL Bochum zittert sich zum Sieg gegen Eintracht Frankfurt [65]. (Thanks to Peter Uhrig for drawing our attention to this.)

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6. A constructicon entry for the English WAY construction

On the basis of the data discussed above and with a slight modification of the argument roles employed by A. Goldberg [31, p. 207], an entry for the way construction could take the following form:[1]

The WAY construction				
A CREATOR creates an EFFECTED way of getting to a GOAL				
CREATOR			EFFECTED	PATH/GOAL
NP	**make** find work force push fight pick wind feel talk weave thread buy eat grope wing worm elbow shoulder smash etc.	PERS PRON$_{gen}$	way	PP
Robyn Penrose	is making	her	way	to Lecture Room A
Note: The construction can also be used to describe an activity (usually one of producing sounds): ... *a group of N. Y.kids singing their way into the hearts of millions around the world.*$_{COCA09S}$				

Fig. 2. A representation of the way construction indicating its meaning, argument roles and argument realizations. (Different size type face provides an indication of frequency)

This kind of constructicon entry contains information about the form of the construction, its meaning and a collo-profile[2] showing all or the most common lexical units occurring in a constructional slot. There will be links to the entries for the items listed in the collo-profile so that users get a survey of all the syntactic constructions a lexical item is used in.

7. The point of a constructicon

Apart from the fact that it is much more convenient to have to consult only one reference tool instead of two, which is an obvious advantage from the users' point of view, linguistically, a constructicon-type of description seems attractive because it combines

– showing generalizations characterizing (abstract) constructions [31; 61] with

– relating items to constructions and constructions to items (thus recognizing the level of mini-constructions or valency constructions).[3]

A further important part of working on reference constructicons is that the attempt of using the constructionist approach to provide a comprehensive

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[1] For details of the constructicon project that we are currently working on at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg see Herbst [50], Herbst & Uhrig [66]. For a project carried out at the University of Birmingham see Patten & Perek [10].

[2] For a discussion of constraints on verbs occurring in the construction see Goldberg [31, p. 212–217] and Kuno & Takami [38, p. 78–94].

[3] See Boas [67; 68], Herbst [4; 5; 6] and also the approach advocated by Croft [69; 70, p. 378–383].

description of a language (or at least certain areas of a language) opens up a completely new perspective of constructionist research. This is all the more important since a considerable amount of work in Construction Grammar has focused in an almost Chomskyan type of way on a relatively few number of relatively hand-picked examples). Like full text analysis, working towards a constructicon can be seen as an important change of methodology by forcing researchers to account for all the data in a certain area of a language. The insights gained through an exhaustive data-driven approach are needed to complement, confirm or modify the picture that has emerged from the detailed descriptions about the character, learning and processing of constructions provided by constructionist linguists so far, as will further psychological and neurolinguistic experiments, of course.

Work leading towards a reference constructicon is thus not (merely) a kind of pedestrian descriptive exercise to be carried out by Dr. Johnson's harmless drudges, but it can be expected to make an important contribution to constructionist theory and our understanding of the mental constructicon as "a complex dynamic network" [1, p. 36].

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