



Grammar politics and construction machines

Reading Deleuze and Guattari into construction grammar

- Introduction
- Radical Construction Grammar
- Deleuze & Guattari
- A heterogeneous union
- Futures
- Bibliography

Alex Redpath

University of Edinburgh

s1609592@sms.ed.ac.uk

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Abbreviations

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D&G Deleuze & Guattari

CG Construction Grammar

RCG *Radical Construction Grammar* (Croft 2001)

TP *A Thousand Plateaus* (D&G 1987)



Introduction

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- ▶ Building on several analyses of the linguistics of TP in relation to mainstream Anglophone approaches (Grisham 1991, Lecercle 2002, Aurora 2017)
- ▶ Aim of this project was to incorporate Croft's theory of RCG into the limited discussion that currently exists
- ▶ Research question: *What connections can we make between Croft's theoretical concerns in RCG and Deleuze and Guattari's project of critical pragmatics?*



'Construction Grammar'

- ▶ A number of approaches to grammar which treat 'grammatical constructions' as the relevant unit of grammatical analysis (Goldberg 2013: 15)

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- ▶ A number of approaches to grammar which treat 'grammatical constructions' as the relevant unit of grammatical analysis (Goldberg 2013: 15)
- ▶ 'Grammatical constructions'
 - ▶ "Conventional, learned form-function pairings at varying levels of complexity and abstraction" (*ibid.*)
 - ▶ Non-atomic realizations of the Saussurean sign (Hoffman & Trousdale 2013: 1–2)



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- ▶ 'Grammatical constructions'
 - ▶ "Conventional, learned form-function pairings at varying levels of complexity and abstraction" (*ibid.*)
 - ▶ Non-atomic realizations of the Saussurean sign (Hoffman & Trousdale 2013: 1–2)
- ▶ Typically associated with usage-based analyses
 - ▶ Mental grammar continuously shaped by exposure to particular constructions (Bybee 2013: 49)



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- ▶ More idiomatic constructions often analyzed as derivations of more general ones



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- ▶ More idiomatic constructions often analyzed as derivations of more general ones
- ▶ ‘Default inheritance network’ one explanation of this relationship (Goldberg 2013: 21)
 - ▶ Allows phrase structure-esque hierarchies, as well as something resembling parts of speech



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- ▶ More idiomatic constructions often analyzed as derivations of more general ones
- ▶ ‘Default inheritance network’ one explanation of this relationship (Goldberg 2013: 21)
 - ▶ Allows phrase structure-esque hierarchies, as well as something resembling parts of speech
- ▶ So maybe we can identify cross-linguistic syntactic categories from which all constructions are ultimately built?



'Radical' Construction Grammar

▶ No (RCG: 47–48)

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'Radical' Construction Grammar

- ▶ No (RCG: 47–48)
 - ▶ No proceeding from simple primitives (N, V, Adj etc.) to build more complex structures (NP, VP, S etc.)

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- ▶ No (RCG: 47–48)
 - ▶ No proceeding from simple primitives (N, V, Adj etc.) to build more complex structures (NP, VP, S etc.)
- ▶ If constructions define categories, then treating categories as primitives that represent the syntactic relations of constructions is circular (45)
 - ▶ Unless there are no 'mismatches' in categorical–constructional distribution
 - ▶ But Croft finds that these mismatches occur both within varieties and across them



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 - ▶ Unless there are no 'mismatches' in categorical–constructional distribution
 - ▶ But Croft finds that these mismatches occur both within varieties and across them
- ▶ Constructions are the true primitives of language (simple AND complex primitives)



Implications

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- ▶ Constructions no longer reducible to mere parts
 - ▶ Now the central means by which language is transmitted and the unit of transmission





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- ▶ Constructions no longer reducible to mere parts
 - ▶ Now the central means by which language is transmitted and the unit of transmission
- ▶ Croft begins with a problem that many linguists start from (variation) and advocates embracing it as a core feature of grammatical analysis
 - ▶ Via (in Croft's words) "the elimination of almost all representational commitments" (Croft 2013: 212)



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- ▶ “Our criticism of these [Saussurean and Chomskyan] linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field.” (TP: 7)



'Machine'

- ▶ Development from structures—signifier and signified

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- ▶ Development from structures—signifier and signified
- ▶ Guattari: “Temporalization penetrates the machine on all sides” (1984: 112)





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- ▶ Development from structures—signifier and signified
- ▶ Guattari: “Temporalization penetrates the machine on all sides” (1984: 112)
- ▶ Requires an external (‘paradoxical’) element outside of the correlations of structure (Aurora 2017: 410)





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- ▶ Requires an external (‘paradoxical’) element outside of the correlations of structure (Aurora 2017: 410)
- ▶ /sœʁ/ ‘sœur’ SISTER (Saussure 1986: 67 [100])
 - ▶ This structural relation exists because of contingent factors operating outside the logic of the system of relations
 - ▶ The machine attempts to capture this nuance of arbitrariness without relegating it to *parole* or diachrony (Aurora 2017: 410)



Language is neither informative nor communicative

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- ▶ The appropriate unit of language is the ‘order-word’, which supplies information only to the extent that this enables the transmission of commands (TP: 76)





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- ▶ The appropriate unit of language is the ‘order-word’, which supplies information only to the extent that this enables the transmission of commands (TP: 76)
- ▶ “Language is a map, not a tracing” (77)
 - ▶ ‘Language’ is the multiplicity of structural and non-structural variables at work at a given time (Aurora 2017: 422–423; TP: 79)
 - ▶ Pragmatics is the interface between structure and the outside that is nevertheless immanent and central to language (TP: 78, 82)



Pragmatics and the order-word

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- ▶ D&G see language as strictly performative and illocutionary (following and radicalizing Austin), always *doing* something, not neutrally exchanging information (Lecerle 2002: 86; TP: 77)
 - ▶ By 'commands' they do not only mean imperatives, but all the ways in which language produces a change in forces (i.e. through speech acts) (TP: 77)



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 - ▶ By ‘commands’ they do not only mean imperatives, but all the ways in which language produces a change in forces (i.e. through speech acts) (TP: 77)
- ▶ The order-word is variously defined as the speech act, the function co-extensive with language and “the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions” (TP: 79)



The order-word and the non-atomic construction

- ▶ The order-word complements constructions through the connections it establishes between the structural ‘internal’ and the social ‘external’

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- ▶ The order-word complements constructions through the connections it establishes between the structural 'internal' and the social 'external'
- ▶ Constructions themselves can be seen as generalizations of speech acts





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- ▶ Constructions themselves can be seen as generalizations of speech acts
 - ▶ Harder to justify if syntactic relations are conceived atomically—implies that there are structural elements independent of usage



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 - ▶ RCG relativizes formal relations between components of constructions to the level of construction, thus circumvents this issue



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 - ▶ Harder to justify if syntactic relations are conceived atomically—implies that there are structural elements independent of usage
 - ▶ RCG relativizes formal relations between components of constructions to the level of construction, thus circumvents this issue
- ▶ Language as the constructions and associated illocutionary forces presently at work (not merely the sum of well-formed constructions)



Constructions on the plane of immanence

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- ▶ RCG thus has potential as the structural basis for a machinic conception of language





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- ▶ This is reflected in other aspects of TP's critical pragmatics





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- ▶ RCG thus has potential as the structural basis for a machinic conception of language
- ▶ This is reflected in other aspects of TP's critical pragmatics
 - ▶ D&G believe grammatical judgments claim to be '*reflective*' (start from phenomena) but are actually '*determinative*' (start from abstracts) (Lecerclé 2002: 70–71)



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- ▶ This is reflected in other aspects of TP's critical pragmatics
 - ▶ D&G believe grammatical judgments claim to be '*reflective*' (start from phenomena) but are actually '*determinative*' (start from abstracts) (Lecerle 2002: 70–71)
 - ▶ At least on a semantic and syntactic level, RCG claims to avoid such abstracts (Croft 2013: 212)



A problem

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- ▶ Croft's 'universal' conceptual space following Langacker (RCG: 108)
 - ▶ Represents "universal aspects of human experience" (*ibid.*) resulting from the 'geography of the human mind' (364)





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- ▶ Croft's 'universal' conceptual space following Langacker (RCG: 108)
 - ▶ Represents "universal aspects of human experience" (*ibid.*) resulting from the 'geography of the human mind' (364)
- ▶ But for D&G the order-word always imposes "a different discipline [...] in a different configuration of power relations, a different encounter of forces" (Grisham 1991: 46)
 - ▶ i.e. there cannot be a fixed system underneath linguistic structures—it must be paradoxical (external to the system) and fluid



► Here I side with D&G

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- ▶ Here I side with D&G
- ▶ Polysemy of constructions implies connections between elements of the conceptual structure (RCG: 126–127)
 - ▶ So Croft is arguing that virtual meanings are determined by the structure of the mind



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 - ▶ So Croft is arguing that virtual meanings are determined by the structure of the mind
- ▶ Conceptual structures define all possible connections between concepts, so if polysemy/semantic shift is observed then it must be because conceptual space already made it possible



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 - ▶ So Croft is arguing that virtual meanings are determined by the structure of the mind
- ▶ Conceptual structures define all possible connections between concepts, so if polysemy/semantic shift is observed then it must be because conceptual space already made it possible
 - ▶ This is unpersuasive; we are meant to accept this purely on the basis of his critiques of naïve ‘semantic relativity’ (RCG: 110–126)



Does conceptual space need to be universal?

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- ▶ Croft has fallen afoul of TP's third postulate: asserting the existence of universals to maintain the homogeneity of the system (TP: 92)





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- ▶ A more nuanced form of 'semantic relativity' perhaps?





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- ▶ Croft has fallen afoul of TP's third postulate: asserting the existence of universals to maintain the homogeneity of the system (TP: 92)
- ▶ A more nuanced form of 'semantic relativity' perhaps?
 - ▶ Taking into account the complexity of interactions between brains, other machines and linguistic encounters





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- ▶ A more nuanced form of 'semantic relativity' perhaps?
 - ▶ Taking into account the complexity of interactions between brains, other machines and linguistic encounters
- ▶ Hypothesis: Semantic shift/conventionalization of constructions creates new associations between distant concepts



An example

- ▶ The polysemy of *avoir* in expressing body state and possession (cf. RCG: 111) implies different discursive potentialities, though different relations are expressed

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 - ▶ But references to this use of *avoir* within a text or ambiguities due to wordplay, parallelism, metaphor, general context etc. suggest very different possibilities of use



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- ▶ The polysemy of *avoir* in expressing body state and possession (cf. RCG: 111) implies different discursive potentialities, though different relations are expressed
- ▶ I translate *j'ai froid* as *I am cold*
 - ▶ But references to this use of *avoir* within a text or ambiguities due to wordplay, parallelism, metaphor, general context etc. suggest very different possibilities of use
- ▶ This is speculative (not to mention highly simplistic)
 - ▶ But here we see how a line could be drawn that lets us resume the path from CG-based approaches to TP



Vertical vs horizontal structure

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- ▶ D&G are highly critical of 'vertical' structure (Lecerle 2002: 170)





Vertical vs horizontal structure

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- ▶ D&G are highly critical of 'vertical' structure (Lecerle 2002: 170)
 - ▶ Prefer the horizontal logic of the assemblage (AND...AND...AND...) (TP: 98)





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- ▶ D&G are highly critical of ‘vertical’ structure (Lecerclé 2002: 170)
 - ▶ Prefer the horizontal logic of the assemblage (AND...AND...AND...) (TP: 98)
- ▶ RCG maintains hierarchies and embedding despite refusing to transcendentalize the syntactic relation
 - ▶ Through biunivocal relationships between syntactic and semantic structures, semantic and conceptual structures (cf. Croft 2001: 128)



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- ▶ RCG maintains hierarchies and embedding despite refusing to transcendentalize the syntactic relation
 - ▶ Through biunivocal relationships between syntactic and semantic structures, semantic and conceptual structures (cf. Croft 2001: 128)
- ▶ A kind of deep structure?



Politics and language structure

- ▶ By universalizing conceptual structure, Croft reproduces the methodological individualism central to modern linguistics (Lecerle 2002: 155)

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- ▶ By universalizing conceptual structure, Croft reproduces the methodological individualism central to modern linguistics (Lecercle 2002: 155)
 - ▶ Implying a ‘trash heap’ pragmatics (TP: 78), sidelined from structure, itself reproducing said individualism (as seen in Austin, Grice etc.) (Lecercle 2002: 162–164)





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- ▶ D&G’s project is about injecting the social and the historical into the study of language, (the ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’) and productively dissolving any kind of structure–use distinction



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- ▶ D&G’s project is about injecting the social and the historical into the study of language, (the ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’) and productively dissolving any kind of structure–use distinction
- ▶ Grisham: “[D&G’s pragmatics] cannot be evaluated using the objects, issues and methods proper to the discipline” (1991: 36)



Futures

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- ▶ My project is about making connections





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- ▶ My project is about making connections
- ▶ “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.” (TP: 9)





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- ▶ My project is about making connections
- ▶ “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.” (TP: 9)
- ▶ Future: Prescriptivism and structure? (e.g. through discussion of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ language)
 - ▶ Language policy, activism, shift etc.



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 - ▶ Language policy, activism, shift etc.
- ▶ Future: Deleuze and Hjelmlev - the pragmatics of the fourfold sign
- ▶ Future: Implications for usage-based CG approaches?



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