The concept of a construction as a methodological tool

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In recent years, the usage-based approaches have been widely adopted in SLA (see Ellis 2014). In the usage-based approach, the concept of language is based on constructions. A construction has a form, meaning and function. Even if it is emphasized that constructions emerge in communication, most studies focus on form only.

In our presentation, we discuss the theoretical and methodological applications and extensions of the concept of a construction in the field of second language learning research. Our research questions are:

How could all three dimensions of a construction – the core of the usage-based approach – be balanced when describing and interpreting SLA?

How could the social context of second language development be better taken into account?

Our view is based on three studies, in which the concept of a construction has been used. These studies are part of the CEFLING project, which investigates the linguistic basis of the CEFR. The data (1116 texts) consist of two pseudo-longitudinal corpora: texts written by adult and young learners of Finnish. The former comes from the National Certificate of Language Proficiency tests and the latter from pupils aged 13-16.

The constructions examined are the transitive construction, indirect references, and expressions of place and space. All three aspects of constructions are considered from the usage-based and socio-cultural approaches. This provides a more comprehensive picture of the emergence and usage of the constructions in language use contexts. The more holistic sociocognitive view of analyzing constructions also calls attention to resources and learning environments, which fundamentally influence the ways constructions appear, emerge, extend, and vary in second language. Thus, the studies contribute to creating a model that describes the development of the use of constructions.

References


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