Modeling a constructional family without a mother?!

Bert Cappelle
Université de Lille & CNRS, UMR 8163 STL, bert.cappelle@univ-lille.fr

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Horizontal links between 'sister' constructions are increasingly recognized as playing a role in grammatical cognition (e.g., Goldberg 2013, Diessel 2019, Jackendoff & Audring 2020). It is not clear, though, whether when two sisters are linked, there is still an underspecified mother construction hovering above them (Cappelle 2006) or whether, at least in certain cases, a purely horizontal connection suffices (Audring 2019). Is there any way of arguing for or against either position? Hoffmann (2020: 150) answers in the negative and goes so far as to suggest that Construction Grammar may therefore be, in this respect, unfalsifiable.

It is true that psycholinguistic experiments involving structural priming (Branigan et al. 1995) cannot differentiate schema-to-daughter and sister-to-sister links, as a mother schema can only be presented via a daughter instantiation (Ungerer to appear). Falsification of a mother node via computational modelling (Dunn 2017a, b) is not an option either, if minimizing the size of the constructi-con is an inbuilt feature of the learning algorithm. The aim of this paper is to argue that we can use *purely linguistic observations* to demonstrate that, in the case that Hoffmann (2020: 150) mentions – transitive particle verbs in English ('joined': *turn off the lights* / 'split': *turn the lights off*) – *not* having an underspecified common schema would fly in the face of plausibility.

First, speakers may conceive of a lexical item *in abstracto*, without bothering about any instructions of how to use it, much like the lexical entry for a word like *cat* has little syntax about it. Second, the subschemas regulating the morphosyntactic realization of that lexical item may impose constraints that are too specific to be relevant (e.g. **Turn right off the lights!*). Third, there are more ways of using transitive particle verbs than just two, as is shown by the attested sentences in (1a-d):

(1) a. The following scripts can be used to count the number of times a computer **has been turned on**. (passive)
b. He told me to **turn on the radio loud** and jump all over the place. (with predicative argument)
c. McKenzie just **turned us some lights on**. (with benefactive argument)
d. my car … made a craaaazy noise …. So **off I turned it** and left it there. (preposing construction)

These structures (except, arguably, preposing) are available for both the joined and the split verb-particle alternative. The more independently existing constructions there are that can combine with instances of one subschema just as well as with instances of the other, the more strongly these two subschemas are connected. My argument for a unifying schema will be a *reductio ad absurdum*, involving the (to my mind not *overly* simplistic) analogy of a mechanic familiar with front-wheel drive and back-wheel drive cars but not with the concept of car.

As is also argued by Ungerer (to appear), I will show, finally, that a representation with a direct and *stable* horizontal link between sisters and a representation where their connection is mediated via a less specified mother node are notational variants.

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