

Exploring individual variation in constructional schematicity using random effects

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This paper builds on two theses: 1) language is an inventory of constructions at different levels of schematicity and 2) personal construct-i-cons vary as a function of usage. With repeated use, constructions move along the continuum from more schematic to more lexically specified through the process of chunking and can undergo reanalysis. A well-known example is *I don't know*, which is phonologically reduced and conveys an additional pragmatic function of mitigated disagreement when used as a unit (Bybee & Scheibman 1999). Reduction is a typical property of chunks and can serve as a diagnostic of a change in the internal structure of an expression. Given individuality of language usage, to what extent do different instantiations of constructions vary in schematicity in personal construct-i-cons?

As a case study, I used a 1.75-million-word corpus of comments posted by one blogger over 8 years. As a dependent variable, I chose the alternation between contracted and uncontracted forms of *it is* hypothesizing that it was more likely to be reduced in chunks. *It is* occurs in a wide variety of syntactic structures including clefts, progressives, passives, extraposed and copular structures: altogether 10,000 corpus occurrences of *it is/it's* were categorized into 15 frequent constructions. For each lexical item filling the open slot, I used delta P statistic to compute the degree to which it associates with a construction and the degree to which the construction associates with it (Gries & Ellis 2015). In addition, in a logistic regression model predicting the contracted form, I included possible priming and temporal order of occurrence as fixed effects and lexically specified instantiations of constructions as random effects. Variance in random intercepts showed variation of lexically specified instantiations in schematicity and variance in random slopes for the effect of temporal order showed change in schematicity over time.

References

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