Introduction: Constructionist Approaches to Swedish

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Abstract

Swedish Construction Grammar originated in Finland. Fenno-Swede Jan-Ola Östman went to graduate school in Berkeley, California, and then brought Construction Grammar (CxG) back to Helsinki. In Fenno-Swedish linguistics, there are strong traditions in interactional linguistics and dialectology; hence, interaction and/or dialects feature strongly in Fenno-Swedish CxG as well (e.g. Östman 2006; Wide 2009; Lindström & Londen, this volume). CxG also quickly got established in Finnish linguistics, much due to Östman's student Jaakko Leino; and ICCG2, the Second International Conference on Construction Grammar, was held in Helsinki.

From there, CxG spread to Sweden. On the one hand, interactional linguists in Sweden caught on (e.g. Anward, this volume). On the other hand, CxG was adopted by Swedish linguists interested in the relation between grammar and lexicon. A key figure was Lars-Gunnar Andersson, who introduced CxG in Gothenburg. The approach was carried on by some of his students, and their students in turn, gradually developing a prominent CxG profile on the local grammar tradition.[1] In 2012, Gothenburg linguists started building a Swedish constructicon[2], in a cross-disciplinary collaboration between grammarians, computational linguists, lexicographers, and second language researchers (Lyngfelt et al. 2012; Sköldberg et al. 2013).[3] This undertaking is part of an international network of related constructicon projects for different languages (Fillmore 2008, Fillmore et al. 2012; Ohara 2013; Torrent et al. 2014; Bäckström et al. 2014; Boas 2014; Ziem et al. 2014).

Swedish and Fenno-Swedish constructionists have maintained close contact, and collaboration across the Baltic Sea is not uncommon (e.g. Lindström & Linell 2007; Wide & Lyngfelt 2009). There are also a few CxG studies of Swedish by linguists from non Swedish speaking countries (e.g. Hilpert 2006, 2010; Dooley, this volume).

In this introductory article, we will first provide a brief introduction to CxG (for a more thorough introduction, see e.g. Croft 2001; Fried & Östman 2004; Goldberg 2006; Hoffmann & Trousdale 2013; Hilpert 2014), with a focus on Swedish constructions, and then give an overview of the contributions in this volume.

1. A brief Introduction to Construction Grammar

Most models of language split it into a grammar and a lexicon, or even further stratified into phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. While recognizing such different perspectives is not only valid but often necessary, the adequacy of treating them as separate modules is less obvious. Consider, for instance, the following examples:

(1) – Var det en bra match igår?
   'Was it a good game yesterday?'

– Nja, *bra och bra*, vi vann åtminstone.
   'Well, *good and good*, we won at least'

The phrase *bra och bra* in (1) illustrates the so-called X-och-X construction in Swedish (cf. Lindström & Linell 2007; Norén & Linell 2007 and others). It is a reactive pattern, indicating that an expression in the previous utterance is not quite adequate, by repeating this expression twice in a coordinate structure. The pattern consists of the conjunction *och* ('and'), the syntactic coordination as such, and two occurrences of the variable X, which can be any expression (typically just one word) as long as it occurs in the previous utterance, with the combined pragmatic function to renegotiate the relevance of X. Hence, the constraints on X-och-X not only concern its internal structure and external function but also particular properties of a different sentence.

(2) Det är dags att *lägga korten på bordet*.
   'It's time to *lay the cards on the table*'

The highlighted expression in (2) is an idiom, which roughly means 'reveal the information'. Some of its elements are fixed – the verb *lägga* ('lay, put'), the preposition *på* and the definite noun *bordet* ('the table') – while the tense of the verb may vary, *korten* ('the cards') may be substituted by *papperen* ('the papers') and this noun phrase may be modified, typically by *alla* ('all'), in which case its definite form is no longer obligatory (Sköldberg 2003). Thus, the specific idiosyncratic restrictions on the idiom are combined with an amount of both lexical and grammatical variation.

(3) Vad gör den här repan på min bil?
   'What's this scratch doing on my car?'

The question in (3) is not an ordinary question, but rather an expression of incredulity and a demand for an explanation. It consists of the question adverb *Vad* ('what'), the verb form *gör* (present tense of *göra* 'do'), a noun phrase, and a locative adverbial (cf. the corresponding English construction *What's X doing Y?*; Kay & Fillmore 1999). It does not deviate formally from an ordinary question, which means that many instances are ambiguous, at least in principle; hence the familiar jokes on *Vad gör den här flugan i min soppa?* ('What's this fly doing in my soup?'). Still, the pairing of the particular formal configuration [*Vad gör* NP Advl?] and the incredulity function is strongly conventionalized.

(4) 1 R: [..] hh så kan man kolla me den hä:
               (.)kult*u*rföreningen (.)
               'then one can check with this
               cultural organization'
     2   PARTY X' kulturföreningen om di
               vill ge pengar? (.)
               'the cultural organization of party X
               if they want to give us money'
     3   di har nämligen p*e*ngar
               'because they have money'
     4 N: jå
               'yes'
     5 R: så kan man kolla m*e:*d ungdoms-
               (0.8) centralen
               'and then one can check with the
               youth centre'
     6   (1.5)
    →7 R: ***att** checka nu me di här* för nu sku
               de vara kiva att=
               'that check with these because it
               would be nice to'
     8   kunna ge någå arvode (.) [annars får
               vi bara g*e*=
               'be able to give remuneration,
               otherwise we can only give'
     9 (?):   [jå
                                'yes'
    10 R: =blommor
                'flowers'
(R = chair person, N = secretary; ex. fr. Lehti-Eklund 2002: 102)

Typically, *att*-clauses are employed as subordinate clauses in Swedish, roughly corresponding to *that*-clauses in English, but not so in example (4). The *att*-clause on line 7 is not syntactically subordinate to any preceding element in the discourse. Rather the clause has a function on the discourse-level: it is used in a situation when a transition between communicative acts is taking place. In lines 1–3 and 5, the chair of a board of a political youth organization suggests two possible funding sources

that the board should investigate. After the pause in line 6, a transition between acts takes place when the chair reformulates her suggestions as a directive. *Att*-clauses that are used in in communicative situations as the one shown in example (4), as well as in elaborations, conclusions and closings of topics, are particulary frequent in Fenno-Swedish (Lehti-Eklund 2002; Mertzlufft & Wide 2013; Wide 2014), which at least partly can be explained by language contact with Finnish, where *että* 'that'-clauses are frequently used as a communicative resource in interaction as well (Laury & Seppänen 2008).

Neither of these patterns are exclusively syntactic, lexical, pragmatic, or morphological, but rather employ a combination of different kinds of features. Indeed, such intermingling of linguistic levels seems to be the norm rather than the exception. What they all have in common, however, along with basically all linguistic patterns, is that a certain form is conventionally associated with a certain meaning/function. Such combinations of form and function may be called signs, symbolic units, or *constructions*. Recognizing these as the central units of language – rather than a set of lexical items on the one hand, and a set of grammatical rules to shape and combine them on the other – is the constituting idea behind Construction Grammar and related frameworks.

Constructions may be defined as "conventional, learned form-function pairings at varying levels of complexity and abstraction" (Goldberg 2013: 17). They may be morphemes, words (lexical constructions), idioms, phrasal and clausal templates, intonation patterns, etc. or any conventionalized combination thereof. Presumably, they are ordered in a network of constructions: a constructicon.[4] For example, a partial taxonomy of Swedish coordination constructions may be structured as in figure 1:
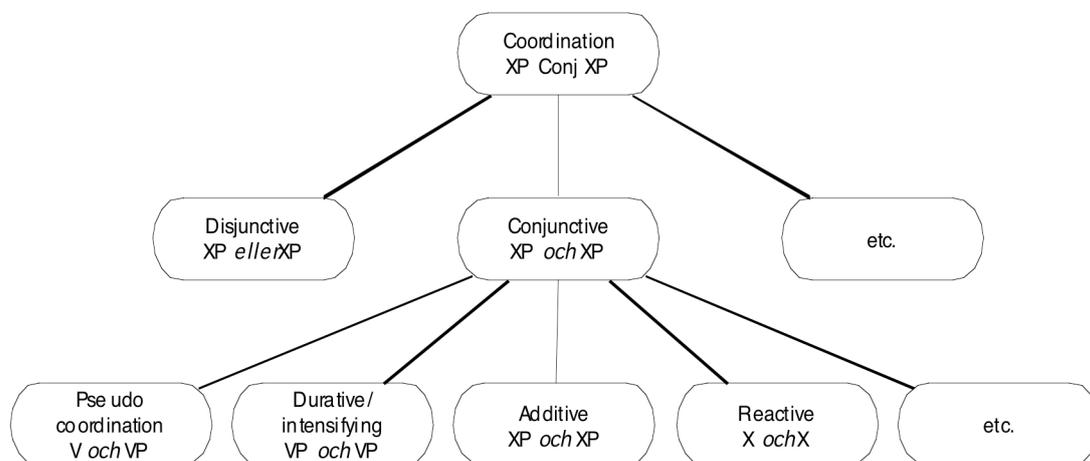

Figure 1. Coordination constructions in Swedish

Ordered by the coordinating relation, coordinations may be conjunctive, disjunctive, etc. Among the conjunctive coordination constructions, we may distinguish e.g. pseudo coordination (5), durative/intensifying coordination (6), additive conjunction (7), and reactive X-och-X (1). These types may then be further divided into more specific constructions. Thus, the approach is inherently multigrain, giving no *a priori* priority to any particular level of abstraction.

(5) Annika har suttit och läst hela dagen.
    Annika has sat and read-pst whole day-def
    'Annika has been reading all day.'

(6) Jag övar och övar, men det är för svårt.
    'I practice and practice, but it's too hard.'

(7) Det är bara Filippa och Håkan här idag.
    EXPL is only Filippa and Håkan here today
    'Only Filippa and Håkan are here today.'

These constructions may then interact with others; for instance, certain types of gapping (8) require coordination.[5] Note that the constructions are the patterns, not the expressions as such. Actual utterances consist of *constructs* – specific instantiations of the constructions – which are combined into phrases and sentences. Smaller constructs make up larger ones, and all of them represent constructions of different generality and complexity. For example, the sentence in (5) instantiate (at least) the following constructions: declarative sentence, pseudo coordination, proper noun, verb phrase, perfect tense, definite noun phrase, time adverbial, and the lexical constructions *Annika, ha, sitta, och, läsa, hel,* and *dag.* By combining the constructions *ha, sitta* and perfect tense, we get the particular construct *har suttit* etc.

(8) Jag sköt en älg och min bror _ två _.
    (example from Teleman et al. 1999, vol. I: 153)
    'I shot one elk and my brother (shot) two elks).'

2. The papers in this volume

This special issue on Swedish constructions contains six papers. Two of the papers (Anward; Lindström & Londen) explore the communicative function and structural properties of constructions in conversational data. As both papers show, constructions are manifested in conversations as open-ended linguistic and interactional patterns that can be reused, recontextualized and varied to different degrees within situated contexts. **Jan Anward** shows how participants in conversations recycle turns in the preceding context by keeping the over-all format but substituting a part of the old turn with a new expression. This method of recycling, which he calls *recycling with différance*, makes series of turns comparable to constructions, i.e.

entities with a constant and a variable part. By analyzing how the participants in a formal discussion of euthanasia build their argumentation on what has been said in the preceding context, he shows how the productivity of constructions in conversation is not primarily a linguistic question but rather a social one. Each new contribution is negotiated with the other participants but is at the same time positioned with respect to the tradition of languaging (i.e. language use when seen from the perspective of cognitive and communicative practices and activities rather than the linguistic system). Quoting Anward's own words, participants in conversations thus "replay on old scene, with variation, in a new context". His study confirms what previous studies on grammar in conversation have shown: constructions are always emerging and embedded in longer conversational stretches. As a device of interim structuring constructions form a powerful resource for further conversation.

Whereas Anward focuses on the recycling of turns in one specific conversation, **Jan Lindström & Anne-Marie Londen** discuss one specific interactional practice that is recurrent across conversations: the three-parted sequential structure of assertion, concession and reassertion. Previous studies on interactional practices of concession have focused on English (Antaki & Wetherell 1999; Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson 2000; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2005). Lindström & Londen show that the specific pattern in focus forms a powerful interactional resource, i.e. a construction, in Swedish as well. The practice includes both self-speaker concession and other-triggered concession, which display the same structure of three sequential moves. First an assertion is presented, then a counterargument is acknowledged and finally the relevance of the counterargument is downgraded, which strengthens the assertion in the first move. As argued by Lindström & Londen the three moves in the pattern can be seen as slots in a tripartite constructional schema. In addition to the three slots also other regularities, such as lexical markers and prosodic features as well as polarity and contrastive patterns can be found, which strengthens the constructional character of the interactional pattern and the projectability of parts of it. In a similar fashion as Anward, Lindström & Londen, however, show how constructions in interaction have an emergent nature and are sensitive to dialogic cooperation and understanding.

Both Dooley's and Hammarberg's contribution deal with constructions of comparison. **Sheila Dooley** investigates the Swedish comparative correlative construction, as in *ju förr desto bättre* ('the sooner the better'). It is a close counterpart to the more well-known English construction *the X-er the Y-er*, with corresponding constructions in many other languages as well. Dooley provides a detailed account of the Swedish CC construction, and covers

a large range of structural variation. She shows how the Swedish CC displays many cross-linguistically common properties, especially as regards its syntax and its global properties, as well as some language-particular idiosyncrasies, in particular regarding lexical variation.

Björn Hammarberg presents a typology of Swedish comparative constructions, based on dimensions such as *likeness* and *preference*, and relations like *exclusive/inclusive* and *superior/inferior*. The construction elements are characterized in terms of the functions *comparandum, standard, parameter, comparator,* and *standard marker*. Applying a usage-based and functional approach to the acquisition of the constructions distinguished by these parameters, Hammarberg compares their use in both native speaker- and learner speech, finding corresponding frequency relations in both corpora. He also connects frequency of use to communicative needs, advocating a functional perspective on the usage-based model.

Martola's and Olofsson's contributions are concerned with argument structure: passives and motion constructions, respectively. **Nina Martola** addresses the relation between lexicon and grammar in the realization of passives in Swedish. Starting out from verbs that tend to co-occur with the passive voice, she investigates to what extent they are employed with the morphological *s*-passive, the periphrastic *bli*-passive ('become'), and the periphrastic *vara*-passive ('be'). The analysis arrives at a large variety of patterns at different levels of generality, which Martola suggests are established though interplay between the general passive constructions and lexical constructions.

Joel Olofsson presents a usage-based approach to the productivity of constructions. His object of study is the Swedish motion construction verb.intr-*iväg* (verb.intr *off*), the use of which he investigates in a corpus of blogs and in the Swedish FrameNet. By a detailed analysis at both token and type level, he shows how *common prototypes* (highly entrenched instances of the construction with certain types of verbs) and *rare items* (verbs with a low token frequency in the construction) contribute to the productivity of the construction. Olofsson also presents a formalization of the verb.intr-*iväg* construction, where he includes semantic variability, which is rarely done in CxG formalizations. As he concludes, the challenge is how to account for both hard and soft constraints in the same analysis.

These six papers account for conventionalized connections between form and function at several different levels, thus illustrating the versatility and wide applicability of constructionist approaches. By addressing the considerable variation associated with many of the patterns, they also show the dynamic nature of constructions. As a sample of constructionist approaches to Swedish, the papers are about as representative as can be expected; while they treat a fairly diverse range of phenomena, another set of papers would have given a very different picture. This in itself is a good indication that Construction Grammar has become well established in Swedish linguistics.

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Notes

[1] For a bibliography of constructionist works in Gothenburg, see <http://www.svenska.gu.se/forskning/grammatik/konstruktionsgrammatik/>.

[2] The term 'constructicon' is polysemous in the same way as 'grammar' and 'lexicon'. On the one hand it represents a theoretical notion: the set of constructions that presumably make up the lexicogrammar of a language; on the other hand it refers to a descriptive resource: a collection of construction descriptions (Bäckström et al. 2014: 10).

[3] The Swedish constructicon, which is still under development, is freely available online at <http://spraakbanken.gu.se/swe/sweccn>.

[4] As of yet, the overall structure of such a network of constructions is largely unexplored. One approach is to picture a constructicon as an inheritance network, where specific constructions inherit properties from more general ones. The intended sense here is inheritance by default rather than strict inheritance, since properties of the superordinate construction may be over-ridden by specific constraints on the subtypes. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to inherit from more than one construction, so-called multiple inheritance. Another, more bottom-up and usage-based perspective is to view constructions as generalizations over instances, in principle reversing the dependency relation between general and specific constructions. Awaiting full-fledged constructicon models, the benefits and drawbacks of either view remains a matter of speculation.

[5] Note that only the first of the two null instantiations in the second conjunct of (7) requires coordination (the GAPPING construction in Fillmore et al. 2012; Bäckström et al. 2014). The second is a case of type anaphora (cf. Borthen 2004; Kay 2006; Ruppenhofer & Michaelis 2010; Lyngfelt 2012).

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