LEGE ARTIS

CONSTRUCTION PRAGMATICS IN A WIDER CONTEXT.
AN ADDITION TO WEN (2022)

Ad Foolen 🆔

Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Abstract: This contribution reflects on Wen's (2022) proposal to develop Construction Pragmatics as a new field of research. On the one hand, this proposal is fully supported, on the other hand, this paper brings together some existing literature that can be considered as already inspiring representations of research from the perspective of Construction Pragmatics. The paper also reflects on the way pragmatics and semantics are demarcated by different authors and stresses the importance of awareness of such differences. Such an awareness is a condition for a successful integration of different research fields as is aimed at in the enterprise of Construction Pragmatics.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Construction Grammar, Construction Pragmatics, Pragmatic particles, Semantics.

1. Introduction

In *Lege artis* VII (1), Xu Wen (2022) pleaded for more research in what he calls *Construction Pragmatics*. By this label, Wen means the study of pragmatic aspects of constructions, which, according to him, "are not investigated quite enough" (ibid., 249). He clearly shares the view of Kay (2006: 696), who observed that "we have almost everything to learn about the ways pragmatic information is incorporated into grammatical constructions".

I fully support Wen and Kay's pleas for investing more work in this research line. What I want to do here is just to show that, upon closer inspection, there is already more literature available than might be thought at first sight. I also want to show that this kind of research can be seen as part of a wider movement aiming at exchange and integration of Pragmatics on the one hand and Cognitive Linguistics, including Construction Grammar, on the other.

Exchange can take place by transferring and applying theorization from one field to another. Cognitive Linguistics has abundantly shown that analogy and transfer between different domains is a strong force in everyday human cognition and we can observe similar processes in science, i.e. analogy and transfer between research domains.

A few examples may illustrate the kind of transfer meant here. Enghels and Sansiñena (2021: 7) point out with reference to the relevant literature that "dialogic exchanges can be understood as multi-sentential constructions with conventional makeup". In addition, in the same way as a construction is described in the context of a network of vertical and horizontal relations to other constructions, we need "a 'network' understanding of conversational patterns" (idem). Here, theorizing in Construction Grammar (CxG) is transferred to the research domain of Conversation Analysis and Text Linguistics.

A second example of theory transfer is provided by Panther's (2022) book *Introduction to cognitive pragmatics*. The title of the book is meant to indicate that insights from Cognitive Linguistics can be helpful for a better understanding of pragmatic interpretation processes. Panther argues, for example, that the interpretation process related to indirect speech acts can be analyzed in terms of metonymy, cf. Panther (ibid., 264): "Building on the concept of illocutionary frame […], the target senses of indirect illocutionary acts were described [in Chapter 9 and 10] in terms of metonymic inferencing within illocutionary frames". Finally, I take the liberty to mention Foolen (2019), where the notion of *participatory sense-making*, taken from phenomenological philosophy, is proposed as helpful for understanding what takes place in conversational interpretation processes.

Exchange is one thing, integration another. The latter is more ambitious, aiming at an integrated research field. Construction Pragmatics is an example of such an ambitious enterprise, aiming at integration of Construction Grammar and Pragmatics. Both Construction Grammar and Pragmatics exist in different varieties and definitions. In Section 2, I will illustrate this variation focusing on Pragmatics. In Section 3, some literature will be put together, showing that there is already quite some literature available representing Construction Pragmatics. Pragmatic particles will be used as an example. Section 4 concludes this contribution, which wholeheartedly shares the dedication of this Special Issue to Nataliya Panasenko, whose inspiring contributions to Cognitive Linguistics (see, for example, Panasenko 2021) and her editorial work for *Lege artis* may continue for many years to come.

2. Pragmatics: Demarcations and subdivisions

2.1 P1 and P2 pragmatics

In a naive view on language, words and constructions have as their one and only function the representation of the world, so that language users can exchange information about that world. In the 20th century, the new discipline of pragmatics corrected this simplified view. Talking about the world always takes place in a communicative context and this is not just a fact in the background, it is a fact with strong impact on language and language use. Part of the language inventory (words, morphemes, constructions, intonation) consists of 'indexes' which help to embed the content of an utterance in the communicative context. In turn, the communicative context strongly contributes to the efficiency and clarity of communicative processes. Context is, thus, the central, defining notion of pragmatics: Linguistic Pragmatics is the study of language and language use from the perspective of communicative context.

As soon as this perspective is taken seriously, two types of questions arise. The first type of questions relates to the context: What is context, how many aspects should we distinguish within the complex concept of context, what should we include and exclude, and which cognitive processes should we assume for relating utterances to context? *Conversational implicature* (Grice 1975) is of course the classic notion when it comes to interpretations generated by the interaction of utterances and context. Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Levinson (2000) continued Grice's line of thinking, generating a lot of further discussion and publications. The second type of questions addresses properties of language: Which words, constructions, and intonation patterns have as their primary function to indicate how an utterance should be connected to the context? Where can such 'functional forms' be found in the linear order of utterances? Do languages differ in the range of functional elements they possess?

In the history of pragmatics, these two types of questions have led to two subfields of pragmatics, which have been labeled differently, for example, 'inferential pragmatics' versus 'grammatical pragmatics' (Ariel 2008). These subfields deal with somewhat different phenomena such as interpretation processes vs. coded meaning, and conversational vs. conventional implicature respectively. For ease of reference, I will use the abbreviated labels P1 (for pragmatics focusing on context and interpretation processes) and P2 (for pragmatics focusing on linguistic forms with pragmatic function). Of course, there is no fixed absolute distinction between the two, as regular patterns of interaction and inference can diachronically undergo what Schmid (2020: 163) calls 'pragmaticalization', which is "the sedimentation of conversational patterns in the linguistic system" (Schmid 2016: 551).

For some authors, pragmatics is either P1 or P2. But to be clear, and research history has confirmed this, in the practice of research these subfields should not be completely separated. On the one hand, we need analyses of all aspects of context in order to understand the function of specific linguistic means. Specific aspects of the context are apparently relevant for communication, otherwise languages would not have 'invested' in developing forms which contextualize content. (P2 research needing P1 insights). On the other hand, the available forms with pragmatic meanings can function as a heuristic for discovering those aspects of the context that play a role in communicative processes (P2 findings relevant for P1 studies). In this sense, pragmatics is a united field with context as the defining notion. This does not mean that every researcher defines pragmatics in exactly the same way. Authors differ in how broad they understand the field to be. Which aspects of the context (on the P1 side), and of the coded meaning (the P2 side) should be included or excluded? This is the question of demarcation of pragmatics to 'non-pragmatics', for example in relation to socio- and cultural linguistics on the contextual side, and to propositional content on the language side.

Let me illustrate the demarcation issue with an example. Cheng analyzed a Chinese greeting formula from a CxG perspective:

"*The greeting utterance ni chi le mo? ['How are you', lit. 'Have you eaten', AF] [...] is hence a construction that pairs the meaning of greeting with its fixed form. Its form is fixed in the same way as the form of any other construction is fixed in a language. It is no different from the passive construction in English. [...] From this we see that the construction grammar approach does not have to create a separate category for this set of fixed expressions*" (2019: 210).

Cheng thus stresses the unity of CxG. Coded pragmatic meaning does not require a separate treatment, it is not qualitatively different from coded propositional meaning. Cheng reserves the label 'pragmatics' for what is 'outside' coded meaning:

"*The reason why the expression ni chi le mo? has been used in the relevant speech community as a way of greeting is cultural specific, and cultural specificity is not – and should probably not be – an objective of the theory of construction grammar, a theory aimed at explaining the overall architecture of human language. It is precisely here that pragmatics comes in handy, as its major objective is to study language use in context*" (2019: 211).

This second quotation shows that Cheng extends P1 pragmatics to the cultural-historical context that played a role in the choice of exactly this expression as a greeting formula in a specific community.

2.2 Pragmatics and semantics

Like pragmatics, semantics is a field that has been demarcated by different researchers in different ways. Two main definitions can be distinguished. On the one hand, semantics is seen as the discipline that deals with all coded meaning, including coded pragmatic meaning. On the other hand, there is

the more restricted view which identifies semantics as concerned with meaning that contributes to the propositional content. Traditional semantics tended to the first, broader definition; formal (truth-conditional) semantics to the more restricted view. In recent years, however, formal semantics has expanded its formalisms to coded pragmatic meanings, which are explicated in terms of use-conditional features (cf. Potts 2007; Gutzmann 2015).

It is of course somewhat confusing for newcomers to observe that such central notions like *pragmatics* and *semantics* have no fixed use in the literature, and that a reader of linguistic texts has to be aware that those labels can be used in different ways by different authors. Even in recent publications, we find reflections on demarcations and subdivisions of the fields of semantics and pragmatics. I will illustrate this with a few quotes, taken from Cappelle (2017), Leclercq (2020), and Finkbeiner (2019).

Cappelle stresses the unity of P1 and P2: "[T]here cannot be any sharp distinction between stored aspects of language and computed aspects of language" (2017: 143). At the same time, he reserves the label semantics for propositional meaning:

"*I find it useful to make a distinction between lexical or propositional semantics, which in the canonical let alone construction further specifies that the second proposition is semantically entailed by the first, and pragmatic information, which encompasses those aspects of a speaker's knowledge of a linguistic expression that are treated as falling outside the domain of lexical or propositional semantics*" (ibid., 122).

Cappelle discusses the so-called Reminder Existential Construction, analyzed by Lakoff (1987: 561ff.), which typically is used in lists: *There's the cat to feed, the dog to walk, the horse to brush, ...* The question is where such knowledge about listing belongs:

"*While a definitive answer awaits more careful consideration, it is clear for now that this kind of information does not belong in the Semantics (Sem) part, which Construction Grammarians like to reserve for propositional semantics (...), thematic roles, or the basic, core meaning of an item*" (2017: 143).

Accordingly, Cappelle proposes this listing feature of the construction as belonging to the pragmatic part of the native speaker's knowledge of language: "There is much pragmatics that is *conventionally* linked to constructions. Semantics and pragmatics can live peacefully side by side in a single construction" (ibid., 145).

Leclercq (2020: 227) subscribes to a similar labeling of the fields of study discussed here: "I will argue that the terms semantics and pragmatics are most explanatory when defined in truth-conditional terms, and that constructionists would benefit from adopting a similar view". According to Leclercq (ibid., 231-232), "constructionists show an increasing need to distinguish between different types of

encoded content, and this difference is not accounted for by any other terms in the theory. It seems more appropriate to use the terms semantics and pragmatics in relation to this difference, which, as mentioned before, relates to truth-conditionality".

In contrast to Cappelle and Leclercq, Finkbeiner stresses the unity of conventional knowledge of language:

"*To account for conventional pragmatic aspects is, by definition, not a problem for Construction Grammar, which holds a maximalist view on linguistic meaning. Under a maximalist view, the meaning side of a construction is conceptualized as including not only truth-functional aspects, but all kinds of additional aspects, such as speech act force, information structural restrictions, or genre restrictions*" (2019: 173).

Against the background of this quote, the following passage, later in Finkbeiner's paper, is somewhat puzzling:

"*[T]here is no doubt that even a theory of grammar needs a precise notion of pragmatics and a thorough reflection of the dividing lines between semantics, conventionalized pragmatics, and inferential pragmatics; otherwise, it cannot tell, in a systematic fashion, where grammar stops and where pragmatics starts*" (2019: 179).

In the first part of this quotation, pragmatics is subdivided in P2 and P1. In the last part, pragmatics is opposed to grammar, suggesting a P1 definition of pragmatics. A few lines later, Finkbeiner (2019: 179) argues for "an integrated theory of constructional meaning which includes both semantic aspects, 'grammatical pragmatic' aspects and 'inferential pragmatic' aspects". This phrasing comes close to Cappelle's view, in that semantics is opposed to P1 and P2.

How difficult it is to handle the different definitions of pragmatics in a consistent way can also be illustrated by a quote from Wen (2022: 263): "Pragmatic information is combined in grammatical constructions, so that construction grammar and pragmatics [P2] can be integrated and studied. Construction grammar is a theory of linguistic knowledge, and pragmatics [P1] is the study of linguistic meaning in context". [P2] and [P1] have been inserted in this quote in order to indicate that *pragmatics* is used in one and the same sentence in two different ways. The reader who is acquainted with the ambiguity of the label will have no problem reading this passage, but for a beginner, this can be very confusing.

3. Construction Pragmatics: Pragmatic particles as an example

Wen (2022) mentions several aspects of linguistic structure that contribute to contextualizing utterances, and are thus objects of study for Construction Pragmatics. In this view, Construction Pragmatics (CxP for ease of reference) is a theoretical variety of P2-pragmatics, the study of coded

pragmatic meanings in the framework of Construction Grammar. One of the topics that Wen proposes to be treated in a CxP perspective is information structure. He refers to Lambrecht (1994), which is indeed an early example of application of CxG to P2-phenomena. Other interesting topics for CxP mentioned by Wen are marked constructions like the Incredulity Response Construction (*What, me worry?*, Lambrecht 1990) and the WXDY-Construction (*What's this fly doing in my soup?*, Kay & Fillmore 1999), metalinguistic expressions like *loosely speaking*, and fixed phrases which belong to typical situations, cf. Wen (2022: 255): *Good morning/afternoon*; *There, there*; *Once upon a time*; *I pronounce you husband and wife*.

A topic missing in Wen's overview is pragmatic particles. That is why I will use it here to illustrate my earlier claim that there is more CxP literature available than one might think at first sight. In the past, pragmatic particles (also known as discourse particles or pragmatic markers) have been studied from a variety of perspectives such as Conversational Analysis (Schiffrin 1987), Text Linguistics (Volkova 2017), and Cognitive Semantics as part of Cognitive Linguistics, where polysemy has been a focus of attention from the beginning (cf. Thijs 2021 for a good example of this type of research). In the present overview, however, we will focus on pragmatic particles research in the perspective of Construction Grammar. This implies that special attention is given to the embedding of the particles in the network of constructions.

It is appropriate to start with a quote from Fillmore, the father of Construction Grammar:

"*When it comes to acknowledging parts of grammar that are inherently pragmatic, even the purest separatists are likely to accept as belonging to such a domain the special category of words known as pragmatic particles. These are the little noises, occurring more abundantly in some languages than others, that have such conventional functions as signaling that the speaker is engaged in insisting or pleading, expressing dominance or hostility, marking the boundaries in and around speech events, signaling the difference between foregrounded and backgrounded information, and so on*" (Fillmore 1996: 56).

Fried and Östman (2005), both strongly involved in the development of CxG, described pragmatic particles in their respective mother tongue, Czech and Solv (a Swedish dialect spoken in Finland). As Cappelle (2017: 127) points out, Fried and Östman introduced a rather wide range of pragmatic parameters which are needed to characterize the function of the particles. These include "the type of speech act (question, request, assertion, etc.), speaker information (male/female, younger/older, etc.), specification of whether or not the particle, as used in a particular sentence type, marks a shift of discourse topic, whether or not it expects the hearer to give a more or less specific response, how formal or informal it is felt to be, whether it conveys distance, deference or camaraderie, whether the speaker is positively or negatively involved, and so on". In Fried (2021), a pragmatic use of the Czech dative is analyzed, which indicates "the speaker's assessment of the addressee's interest in what is

being talked about. [This type of dative] is thus functionally more akin to pragmatic markers, serving specific interactional needs; I will refer to these uses collectively as 'interactional datives' ".

It was Fillmore who introduced the idea of interactional frames which represent elements of communicative events, in addition or contrast to cognitive frames, which represent basic human experiences, cf. Fillmore (1987). Blyth and Koike (2014: 93) argued that "interactive frames […] should be included in accounts of constructional meaning", and Kuzai (2020) applied this idea in his analysis of the Hebrew discourse marker *'at/a yode'a/'at* ('know.prs.m/f.sg'. 'you know'). According to Kuzai, interactional frames are the basis for what he calls 'interactional patterns, by which he means meaning attributes of discourse markers, cf. Kuzai (2020: 219): "an interactional pattern is part of speakers' knowledge of a construction, abstracted away in the course of constructionalization". Along the same line of thinking, Czulo et al. (2020) presented a CxG analysis of the interactive function of tag questions, which, in a wider sense, can also be considered as belonging to the category of pragmatic markers.

Another example of CxP description is Alm et al. who analyzed German modal particles in a constructional perspective, paying special attention to the different levels of abstraction in the constructional network:

"*To account for the sentence type restrictions, we suggested that mps [modal particles] and sentence type constructions interact on several different levels: First, every particle has an individual, invariant core meaning that remains consistent between the different word classes in which that particle can be used (...). Second, there is the word-class construction of mps, the meaning of which, we argue, is not of an inherently illocutionary nature but rather operates on the interlocutors' argumentative common ground. Third, there are the form and meaning of the individual sentence type constructions. The mps can interact with both, and not always on the highest schematic level possible of the sentence type construction in question. Fourth, there are item specific interactions between specific mps and the form- and meaning features of the grammatical sentence type constructions in which they can occur, represented as item specific constructions*" (2018: 28).

These few examples may suffice to show that pragmatic particles have been a productive topic for constructional pragmatic research. Of course, they will attract continued interest the more Construction Pragmatics develops.

4. Concluding remarks

Which linguistic items can be studied from the perspective of CxP is not fixed in advance. Take, as a last example, negation, which at first sight is a propositional operator par excellence. And indeed, its contribution to truth-conditional meaning has been formalized in formal semantics. But as Verhagen (2005; 2015) has shown convincingly, negation can also be considered from a CxP interactional

perspective, and in that perspective, it can be characterized as an argumentative operator in the same way as, for example, *but* and *barely*.

Wen (2022: 263) concludes his sketch of Construction Pragmatics by saying that "this new discipline has just started and is in need of further exploration". In the present paper, which is meant as a comment on and addition to Wen (ibid.), I hope to have shown that the claim that Construction Pragmatics "has just started" is too strong, but at the same time that the second part of the claim, namely that it "is in need of further exploration" is fully justified. Encouragement to follow this path can already be found in Fillmore (1996: 57), where he says: "I wish to regard the pragmatic dimension as an inherent part of every grammatical construction". Wen (2022) can therefore be read as a recent reminder of Fillmore's statement.

List of abbreviations

CxG – Construction Grammar

CxP – Construction Pragmatics

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Contact data

name:	**Ad Foolen**
academic title / rank:	PhD in Linguistics
	Retired
department:	Department of Language and Communication
institution:	Radboud University
	PO Box 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen, Netherlands
e-mail:	ad.foolen@ru.nl
fields of interest:	Language and emotion, discourse markers, history of linguistics.