



*Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study
in the Humanities and Social Sciences*

Constructional Change in the Languages of Europe

Workshop @ NIAS, Wassenaar 12 January – 14 January 2012

Workshop organisers

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Dr. Graeme Trousdale, University of Edinburgh

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Other workshop participants

Prof. dr. Elizabeth Traugott, Stanford University

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Dr. Jóhanna Barðdal, University of Bergen

Dr. Martin Hilpert, Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies

Dr. Ton van der Wouden, Meertens Institute & Frisian Academy

Dr. Gijsbert Rutten, Leiden University & Free University of Brussels

About the workshop

The purpose of this workshop will be to discuss the ways in which theories of linguistic change may benefit from adopting a construction-based model of language structure. This model, Diachronic Construction Grammar (DCxG), is a fairly recent offshoot of construction grammar – a superordinate term for linguistic theories that view all lexical and grammatical units, including those larger than words, as conventionalized symbolic pairings of form and meaning and/or function. Constructions, of all degrees of schematicity and complexity, consist of formal and semantic properties and the symbolic link between them. DCxG, like any diachronic linguistic discipline, is dynamic by definition, and seeks to explain how constructions change, how proto-constructions may be reconstructed, and how new constructions emerge in acquisition and through language use. Our main interest is to explore just how – and indeed whether – a constructional perspective goes beyond what current approaches to language change have to offer. What we are keen to do at the workshop is to explore why a construction grammar account might be useful for tracking changes in a group of languages, but also to see what the limits of the constructional approach may be.

Particularly, we are interested in exploring similarities and differences in the development of a range of European languages, in order to establish how a constructional model of language change can account for the evolution of properties shared by a number of European languages, as well as the structural differences which those languages exhibit. Case studies from the languages of Europe will be used to showcase some of the work that has been done in DCxG, but more importantly, will allow us to establish some of the constructional changes which appear to be shared across European languages. We see this workshop as the first step in developing a new direction for work on DCxG: a large-scale project which would bring together an international team of leading experts on constructional change in a variety of European languages, in order to identify cross-linguistic patterns of constructional change, as well as to determine the degree to which constructional change is language-specific. This workshop furthermore aims to formally establish a network of linguists working in DCxG and to explore possibilities for joint applications for funding.