WHERE DO CONSTRUCTIONS COME FROM?

SEIZI IWATA

Osaka City University*


Keywords: Construction Grammar, usage-based view, item-based construction, argument structure construction, ditransitive

1. Introduction

William Croft is a renowned typologist, and as the subtitle indicates, the book under review (Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective) is written from a typological perspective. In my opinion, however, it will be a pity if many insightful ideas contained in this book are accessible only to typologists. Since the appearance of Goldberg (1995), more and more people are turning to constructions as useful tools for linguistic analysis, particularly in the field of research on argument structure. This book surely helps those interested in constructions and Construction Grammar to understand what constructions are, and suggests one promising direction in which future constructional research should proceed.

With this understanding of the readership in mind, this review article is written from a non-typological perspective. This article is organized

* I would like to thank Hans Christian Boas, Ian Richards and Tony Higgins for their help at various stages of the preparation of this article. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their comments. This work is financially supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C), No. 15520315, 2003–2005 from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

© 2006 by the English Linguistic Society of Japan
as follows. After outlining the Radical Construction Grammar (henceforth RCG) conception of constructions in sections 2 and 3, section 4 discusses Croft’s view of verbs and argument structure constructions. Section 5 takes up English ditransitives with verbs of refusal to indicate how a RCG perspective allows us to solve an apparent puzzle that defies a systematic account.\footnote{In order to clarify Croft’s view, reference will be made to Croft (2003) and Croft and Cruse (2004) as well.}

2. Constructions and Construction Grammar

2.1. Construction Grammar as Opposed to the GB Model

Croft elucidates Construction Grammar by comparing it with the componential model of the organization of a grammar, where the componential model is a cover term for various syntactic theories, chief among them being the GB theory. According to Croft, Construction Grammar represents a reaction to the componential model. In the componential model, the sound structure, the syntax and the meaning of an utterance are represented in different components, each of which consists of rules operating over primitive elements of the relevant types. The word is the only level where information from different components meets together. Correspondence at higher levels could be accommodated only by resorting to linking rules that link complex syntactic structures to their semantic interpretation or to their phonological realization, as has been done in recent years by those who recognize the need to do so at all (Jackendoff (1997, 2002), Culicover and Jackendoff (2005)).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{componential_model.png}
\caption{The componential model of the organization of a grammar}
\end{figure}

\footnote{In order to clarify Croft’s view, reference will be made to Croft (2003) and Croft and Cruse (2004) as well.}
Many current theories are built upon the basic concept of the componential model: grammatical properties of different types are placed in separate components, except for the lexicon.

However, there is a problematic phenomenon for the componential model, namely idioms. Idioms are linguistic expressions that are syntactically and/or semantically idiosyncratic in various ways, but are larger than words, and hence cannot be assigned to the lexicon without some special mechanism: the comparative conditional construction *The X-er, the Y-er* as in *The longer you practice, the better you will become*; the "cousin" construction *Nth cousin* (M times removed), as in *second cousin three times removed*; *pull one's leg* "joke with NP" as in *Don’t pull my leg*, and so on. All these idioms are semantically idiosyncratic, which means that they do not follow general rules of semantic interpretation. Instead, they have their own rules of semantic interpretation. However, the form-meaning correlation at levels larger than the word cannot be captured in the componential model, where form and meaning are correlated only in the lexicon, as noted above.

In sharp contrast to the componential model, Construction Grammar holds that constructions are fundamentally symbolic units. That is, grammatical constructions consist of pairings of form and meaning that are at least partially arbitrary.

![Figure 2: The symbolic structure of a construction](image)

Moreover, Construction Grammar does not assume a strict dichotomy between lexicon and syntax. Rather, there is a continuum between the lexicon and syntactic constructions. So everything from words to the
most general syntactic and semantic rules like passives can be represented as constructions. Accordingly, schematic idioms like those noted above can be readily accommodated within Construction Grammar.

While the need to recognize the close correlation between form and meaning has been noted by some scholars working within the componential model (as broadly conceived) (Pinker (1989), Jackendoff (1990, 1997, 2002), Culicover and Jackendoff (2005)), there is one crucial difference between componential syntactic theories and Construction Grammar: the symbolic link between form and meaning is internal to a construction in Construction Grammar, but is external to the syntactic and semantic components in the componential model. In the componential model, the various syntactic structures are organized independently of the corresponding semantic structures, as represented by the bold boxes in Figure 3. Therefore, linking rules are necessary to ensure the form-meaning correspondence.

Figure 3: The relation between form and function in a componential syntactic theory

In contrast, in Construction Grammar, the basic linguistic units are symbolic, and are organized as symbolic units, as represented by the bold boxes in Figure 4.
This crucial difference between the componential model and Construction Grammar can be further appreciated by comparing the two ways of representing a concrete example. Figure 5 (a) is a simplified representation of *Heather sings* in generative grammar, and Figure 5 (b) a simplified representation of the same in Construction Grammar.

(a) Generative grammar:    (b) Construction Grammar:

\[
[[\text{Heather}]_{NP} [\text{sings}]_{VP}]_{S}
\]

The two representations are rather similar, but crucially the Construction Grammar representation is symbolic.

Thus while attempts have been made in generative grammar to achieve the same effect as constructions, there is one fundamental difference: there can be no "linking rules" in Construction Grammar. After all, form and meaning are paired from the start.²

² While Jackendoff’s theory has been becoming more and more “constructional”
2.2. The Organization of Constructions

As shown in Figure 4, Construction Grammar is an inventory of constructions, where constructions range from morphemes, words to syntactic constructions. Constructions, however, are not merely an unstructured list. Rather, they form a structured inventory of a speaker’s knowledge of the conventions of their language. This structured inventory is usually represented in terms of a taxonomic network of constructions.

Any construction with unique, idiosyncratic properties must be represented as an independent node in the constructional network in order to capture a speaker’s knowledge of their language. Thus the idiom [Sbj kick the bucket] must be represented as an independent node. The more schematic but verb-specific construction [Sbj kick Obj] must also be represented as an independent node in order to specify its argument linking pattern (which corresponds to the subcategorization frame in generative grammar). Finally, the highly schematic construction [Sbj Verb Obj] must be described as an independent node (corresponding to the phrase structures S → NP VP and VP → V NP).

Of course, kick the bucket has the same argument structure pattern as ordinary transitive uses of kick like kick the habit, and ordinary transitive uses of kick follow the same argument structure pattern as other transitive verb phrases like [kiss Obj]. Thus, the three constructions [Sbj kick the bucket], [Sbj kick Obj], and [Sbj Verb Obj] can be represented in a taxonomic hierarchy, as in Figure 6.

![Figure 6: A taxonomic hierarchy of clause types](image)

over the years (Jackendoff (1997, 2002), Culicover and Jackendoff (2005)), this crucial difference still persists.
Grammatical constructions do not form a strict taxonomic hierarchy, though. The hierarchy in Figure 6 is only about argument structure constructions. If other aspects of an utterance (e.g. tense, aspect, mood, negation, etc.) are included, then any construction in the hierarchy has multiple parents. For instance, the sentence [I didn’t sleep] instantiates both the intransitive clause construction and the negative construction, as shown in Figure 7.

Such multiple parents are the norm rather than the exception, since a construction typically provides only a partial specification of the structure of an utterance. For example, the ditransitive construction [Subj DitrVerb Obj1 Obj2] only specifies the predicate and the linking to its arguments. It does not specify the order of elements. Thus both (1a) and (1b) instantiate the ditransitive construction, but the order of elements is different between the two cases, because (1b) instantiates the cleft construction as well. Similarly, (1c) and (1d) also instantiate the ditransitive construction, but they contain additional materials, which are due to other schematic constructions.

(1) a. He gave her a book.
   b. It was a book that he gave her.
   c. He won’t give her the book.
   d. Wouldn’t he give her the book?

Hence, any specific utterance’s structure is specified by a number of distinct schematic constructions.

Another thing worth noting is that constructions display many of the same properties that lexical items show, such as polysemy and metaphorical extensions. For instance, the English present perfect construction exhibits both existential and “hot news” readings.

(2) a. President Clinton has visited Kosovo.
   [existential reading]
   b. President Clinton has announced that America will invade Kosovo!
      [“hot news” reading]

Also, the perceptual deictic there-construction, illustrated in (3), is a
metaphorical extension from the central deictic there-construction as in (4) (Lakoff (1987: 511, 509)).

(3)  
a. Here comes the beep.
    b. There’s the beep.

(4) There’s Harry.

All this indicates that constructions, like lexical items, represent categories. Therefore, Construction Grammar may well draw on cognitive theories of categorization in its modeling of construction taxonomies.

3. What Is Special about RCG?

3.1. Constructions Come First

The discussion so far has been concerned with constructions in general. What, then, is the main feature that distinguishes RCG from other versions of Construction Grammar (Goldberg (1995), Michaelis and Lambrecht (1996), Kay and Fillmore (1999), Kay (2002))? The key to this question is probably to be found in the following statement: “Constructions, not categories and relations, are the basic, primitive units of syntactic representation.” (p. 46)

Most syntactic theories posit certain grammatical categories as primitives (which are allegedly universal) and use them to define grammatical constructions. In RCG, however, the direction is opposite: constructions are used to define grammatical categories. Croft even suggests that “syntactic categories are derivative of—in fact epiphenomenal to—the representation of grammatical knowledge.” (p. 46)

Grammatical categories can be defined either (1) construction-specifically, as the class of fillers of a particular role in a single construction, or (2) cross-constructionally, as the class of fillers that has an identical distribution across the relevant roles for all constructions of the language. (p. 46) For instance, the label ‘Subject’ defines a grammatical category, namely those words or phrases that can fill the Subject role. Thus when we say that Heather is the subject of the intransitive clause Heather sings, we are defining the grammatical category of Subject in relation to the intransitive clause construction, as in Figure 8.
WHERE DO CONSTRUCTIONS COME FROM?

On the other hand, the grammatical category 'Subject' may well be defined over a number of constructions, including intransitive and transitive clause constructions. This is the sense in which the NPs in bold are subjects in (5).

(5)  a. Jennifer ran across the field.
    b. Larry found $20.
    c. The car hit a tree.

Thus there is nothing strange or peculiar about the claim that constructions are used to define grammatical categories. After all, we all do this in analyzing the data. (Those who are skeptical are advised to try to identify a subject or an object in an unfamiliar language.) In formal linguistic theories, however, grammatical categories are taken as primitive elements of syntactic representation and are used to define constructions. Croft points out that this approach is circular (p. 45).

3.2. Categories are Construction-Specific

Given that grammatical categories are definable only in relation to particular constructions, what appears to be a single grammatical category may well turn out to be otherwise. This is indeed the case. Thus Croft argues that the grammatical categories defined by the roles in the transitive construction are not identical to those defined by the roles in the intransitive construction. (p. 54) After all, not all verbs that occur in the intransitive construction can occur in the transitive construction, or vice versa.

Consequently, while we have the category Intransitive Verb and the category Transitive Verb, there is no global category Verb which is neutral with regard to transitivity. Moreover, this reasoning applies with equal force to other categories (e.g. Subject, Object) as well. Accordingly, in RCG the intransitive clause construction and transitive clause construction are represented by means of [IntrSbj IntrVerb] and [TrSbj TrVerb TrObj], respectively, rather than [Sbj V] and [Sbj V Obj], for strictly, the subject and the verb are defined by different constructions.

Figure 8: Roles in the Intransitive construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heather</th>
<th>sings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Intransitive Construction

Subject  Predicate
between the two cases. Croft argues that it is absolutely essential to recognize that the commonalities across the subcategories found in various constructions must be justified linguistically (p. 55). In the absence of any justification, then, categories cannot be deemed necessary.

Fortunately for those who find objectionable the idea that there is no category Verb, however, there is a justification for a category subsuming Intransitive and Transitive verbs. Both Intransitive Verb and Transitive Verb exhibit the same Tense-Agreement inflection. It is therefore reasonable to posit a morphological construction of Tense-Agreement (TA) inflection, where the Morphological Verb category can be defined.

![Figure 9: Radical Construction Grammar representation of verbal categories](image)

Figure 9: Radical Construction Grammar representation of verbal categories

It must be emphasized, though, that this justification comes from outside the purview of argument structure constructions.

In short, constructions come first in RCG. Grammatical categories are derivative of constructions, and are not primitives. An important consequence is that there are no atomic grammatical primitives. Even within a particular language, grammatical primitives do not exist, as shown above.\(^3\) Since languages differ in the constructions that they possess (constructions are language-specific), there cannot possibly be universal primitives.\(^4\)

---

3 Notice that constructions in this sense are not necessarily the same as constructions in other versions of Construction Grammar.

4 This does not mean that Croft denies the existence of universals. He is simply saying that the universals of language are to be found in semantic structure and in symbolic structure, not in syntactic primitives (or syntactic templates or syntactic relations, for that matter).
3.3. A Fundamentally Usage-based View of Constructions

Conceivably, some people may still find it difficult to make sense out of the claim that constructions, rather than grammatical categories, are the basic units of syntactic representation. However, it makes perfect sense once one realizes that this claim is a reflection of the basic tenet of functionally-oriented scholars, namely that everything starts with an utterance. Croft maintains that constructions are utterance types, that is to say, constructions are obtained by categorizing utterances into their types in terms of grammatical properties. Since grammatical categories are arrived at only after analyzing constructions into smaller units, they are far removed from actual utterances in context, and therefore should be granted only a derivative status.

In this sense, RCG can be characterized as a version of Construction Grammar that takes a fundamentally usage-based view of constructions. It is not difficult to see why Croft has arrived at this conception of constructions. As a typologist, Croft naturally came to notice that putative “universal primitives” as claimed in generative theories are illusions, for virtually no universal grammatical categories can be found across languages. Instead, in conducting his typological studies, he has to assume the position that everything starts with an utterance.

Anyway, this characterization gives us a good idea of what RCG is. Thus constructions are inevitably symbolic, for in our daily linguistic activities, utterances always come with both form and meaning. Moreover, since constructions are nothing more than abstractions over usage events, Croft is naturally reluctant to pursue rigorous formalism.

Now in this connection, recall that constructions are organized in a taxonomic hierarchy as seen in 2.2, in which the higher-order abstract construction is instantiated by a verb-class-specific construction, which is in turn instantiated by the more concrete linguistic expression. At first sight, this might appear to be redundant—and hence not desirable. But in RCG, there is nothing problematic about redundantly representing grammatical information. In line with a number of scholars adopting a usage-based view of language (Langacker (1987, 1991, 1999), Bybee (2002), Taylor (2002), among others), Croft claims that just because a higher-level construction can be abstracted does not mean that lower-level constructions are wiped out from memory.

A high token frequency of a particular word form or syntactic construction will lead to the storage or entrenchment of that word form or construction even if its grammatical properties are
predictable from taxonomically superordinate constructions.

Thus both higher-level and lower-level constructions are stored in long-term memory.

If anything, Croft suggests that maximally general categories (and rules) are highly likely not to be psychologically real (p. 5), in line with the usage-based view.

Lower-level schemas, expressing regularities of only limited scope, may on balance be more essential to language structure than high-level schemas representing the broadest generalizations.

(Langacker (1999: 118))

Thus not only does RCG allow for redundantly representing constructions at varying degrees of abstraction. RCG attaches more importance to lower-level constructions, like verb-class-specific constructions. This is where RCG departs radically from other versions of Construction Grammar, especially that of Kay & Fillmore (1999).5

3.4. Acquisition

Probably, the claim that constructions are abstractions over usage events can be best appreciated when viewed from the angle of language acquisition. Croft argues that since constructions are language-specific, virtually all of the formal syntactic properties of grammar are language-specific and therefore must be learned inductively. Thus RCG holds that a child, being exposed to utterances in context, categorizes utterances into their types in terms of the grammatical properties of the utterances that the child is able to perceive, thereby acquiring constructions (p. 58).

Remarkably, this view of language acquisition is fully in accord with that of Tomasello (1992, 2003). According to Tomasello (2003: 139), children’s use of syntactic symbols proceeds along the following developmental stages. First are holophrases (i.e. one-word utterances like “Rockin,” “Phone,” or “Play-Play”), in which children use a single linguistic symbol to express their communicative intentions about an entire experiential scene. Second are pivot schemas and other word combinations in which children use multiple words (More ____, ____ gone) to

5 For further differences between RCG and other versions of Construction Grammar, see Chapter 10 of Croft and Cruse (2004).
express their communicative intentions (at around 18 months). No syntactic symbols are involved up until this stage. At the third stage (2 years), however, *item-based constructions* appear, in which children use syntactic marking such as word order or grammatical morphology to indicate explicitly some participant roles in scenes.

Significantly, the syntactic marking in item-based constructions is verb-specific, depending upon how a child has heard a particular verb being used. That is, children acquire verbs first in a single argument structure construction, and then learn to apply that verb to other constructions. Tomasello refers to this phenomenon with the label “Verb Island Hypothesis,” since each verb seems like its own island of organization in an otherwise unorganized language system.

Thus, during exactly the same developmental period some verbs were used in only one type of construction and that construction was quite simple (Cut _), whereas other verbs were used in more complex frames of several different types (Draw __, Draw ___ on __, Draw ___ for __, ___ draw on __).

(Tomasello (2003: 117))

In other words, when a child is observed to produce an utterance in which the verb *draw* is used in the transitive frame accompanied by a PP, this simply indicates that the child has acquired this construction only for *draw* alone. It is quite possible that the child still has not learned that there are other verbs that can also appear in this frame in the adult grammar.

When children who are themselves producing many transitive utterances are taught a new verb in any one of many different constructions, they mostly cannot transfer their knowledge of word order from their existing item-based constructions to this new item until after their third birthdays.

(Tomasello (2003: 119))

It is not until the next, fourth stage when children’s use of grammatical symbols becomes verb-general. At this stage, abstract constructions are arrived at by generalizing over a significantly large number of verb-specific constructions. Now children can express their communicative intentions through utterances that indicate relatively abstract and adult-like linguistic constructions.

Thus not only do Croft and Tomasello agree as to inductive learning. Language acquisition proceeds in a way exactly consonant with Croft’s conception of constructions at varying degrees of abstraction. Children
first acquire a verb-specific construction, and then extend it to other verbs. Eventually, a certain number of verbs are known to occur in that construction, leading to the verb-class-specific construction. After a certain amount of verb-class-specific constructions are acquired, a still higher-level construction may be obtained.

As a matter of fact, Tomasello (2003) explicitly admits the fundamental similarity between his acquisition theory and Croft's view of constructions. Thus Tomasello (2003: 119) suggests depicting item-based constructions as in (6), following the convention of RCG.

(6)  a. HIT-SUBJ's hitting HIT-OBJ
    b. BREAK-SUBJ's broken

Tomasello also concurs with Croft as to the primary importance of concrete, lower-level constructions.

When a higher abstraction is made the lower-level, more concrete constructions and expressions do not necessarily go away but may remain available for use—especially if they are used frequently. (Tomasello (2003: 106))

Now the very basic idea of RCG presents itself. A theoretical analysis of linguistic phenomena starts with utterances in context, and language acquisition starts with utterances in context. So why not construct a linguistic theory in a way compatible with all these facts?

4. Consequences for a Theory of Argument Structure Constructions

4.1. Comparison with Goldberg's Theory

Having gone through a general outline of RCG, let us next turn to the issue of what RCG has to say about argument structure constructions. The first thing to be done is, of course, to compare RCG with Goldberg's (1995) Construction Grammar. Goldberg is generally held to define a construction as a linguistic expression whose meaning cannot be compositionally computed from its component parts. In fact, Goldberg (1995) gives an explicit definition to this effect:

C is a construction iff\_def C is a form-meaning pair <F_i, S_i> such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established constructions. (Goldberg (1995: 4))

It may appear, then, that the fundamental difference between RCG and Goldberg's theory lies in whether the complex expression is compositional or not.
In actual practice, however, Goldberg is ambivalent on this point. Quite often, she uses the term ‘construction’ without bothering about the (non-)compositionality of the linguistic expression in question. In fact, Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004) and Goldberg (2005) explicitly state that fully compositional expressions may count as constructions:

Construction grammar defines constructions to be any stored pairings of form and function; ... In addition, stored (typically highly frequent) regularities between form and meaning are considered constructions even if they are fully compositional. (Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004: 533, fn. 1), emphasis mine)

Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency. (Goldberg (2005: 5), emphasis mine)

Despite appearances, therefore, the definition of constructions is virtually the same between Goldberg’s theory and RCG.

Rather, the real difference has to do with the kind of phenomena targeted. While Goldberg is quite happy about calling any pairing of form and meaning a construction as just seen, her emphasis is more upon those cases in which constructions superimpose their syntax and semantics upon lexical verbs, like those exemplified in (7).

(7)  
   a. He sneezed the napkin off the table.
   b. She baked him a cake.
   c. Pat fought her way into the room.

Notice that the representation which Goldberg employs is suited for capturing the top-down character of constructions. Thus Figure 10, which is the representation for (7a), visually expresses that the syntax and semantics of the caused-motion construction are superimposed upon the verb sneeze.⁶

⁶ One may well get the impression that Goldberg is sometimes overemphasizing the role of constructions. But this is not her intent. Adele Goldberg (personal communication) has told me that at the time when she was working on her dissertation (Goldberg (1992)), everyone paid exclusive attention to verb meanings. She simply wanted to swing the pendulum in the other direction by drawing attention to the top-down character of constructions.
On the other hand, such overriding cases are not mentioned in RCG.

4.2. How Special Are Overriding Constructions?

At this point, it is instructive to make a short digression and consider the implications of overriding cases like (7) for RCG. As just noted, the central thesis of Goldberg is that argument structure is not determined by the verbal head alone, but by the composite effects of the verb and the construction. Put differently, Construction Grammar is non-projectionistic, in sharp contrast to projectionists in generative lexical semantic studies (Pinker (1989), Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (2005), among many others).

Now given that in RCG constructions are intended to be the basic units of grammatical description, and not some special mechanisms suited to handle recalcitrant cases like (7), does this mean that overriding cases like the above are no less problematic for RCG than for projectionists?

In my opinion, the answer is an emphatic NO. Chapter 7 of RCG ("Heads, Arguments, and Adjuncts") contains many insightful discussions that are directly relevant to theories of argument structure, one of which can be brought to bear on this issue, namely the definition of "head" (7.4). In Cognitive Grammar, the notion of head is semantically defined. Specifically, Langacker uses the term profile to name the part of a semantic structure that is actually symbolized by a construction. In discussing how the profile of a composite construction is related to the profiles of its component parts, Langacker claims as follows:

For the most part, a composite structure simply inherits the profile of one of its components. The component structure whose profile is inherited will be termed the profile determinant of the
construction. (Langacker (1987: 289))

For example, in *broke vase*, *vase* is the profile determinant because the whole phrase profiles the vase. And in *the vase broke*, *broke* is the profile determinant because the clause profiles the breaking event. And so on.

Croft points out, however, that this does not always work. On the one hand, in some constructions the profile of the whole is identical not to just one but both of the component profiles, like the English appositive construction (e.g. *my brother the geophysicist*). On the other hand, in some constructions no element determines the profile of the whole construction, because no element has a profile that is identical to that of the whole construction. This is the case with exocentric or headless constructions, like headless relative clauses as in (8a) and sentential complements as in (8b).

(8) a. [What really bothers me] are all of those square brackets.
   b. I said [(that) I was going to do it].

Coordinate constructions (e.g. *Matt and Rina*) are another example of an exocentric construction, in that the entity denoted by the whole is a pair of people, which is not denoted by either proper name or by the conjunct.

Drawing upon cases like these, Croft argues that Langacker’s ‘profile determinant’ needs to be modified as follows.

(9) Profile equivalent: In a combination X + Y, X is the profile equivalent if X profiles/describes a kind of the thing profiled/described by X + Y. (Croft (2001: 257))

The upshot is that the direction of determination of headhood is reversed from ‘word to construction’ to ‘construction to word,’ another reflection of the fundamentally usage-based view: by analyzing a complex expression into its parts, one may or may not come across a single element whose profile matches that of the whole expression. If one does come across such an element, then it corresponds to what has traditionally been called ‘head.’ But this need not always be the case.

Now that the notion of head is not a necessary feature of every construction, there is no reason to assume that argument structure must be exclusively determined by the verbal head. Accordingly, there is no reason to exclude overriding cases from the scope of RCG. It is just that Goldberg specifically focuses upon cases like (7) to demonstrate the top-down character of constructions, but that this is not the primary
concern of Croft.

4.3. Verb-Class-Specific Construction and Verb-Specific Construction

Let us return to the comparison between Goldberg’s theory and RCG. Another feature worth mentioning is that RCG emphasizes the usage-based aspect of constructions far more than Goldberg does. Although Goldberg professes to adopt the usage-based model, so far she has not incorporated degrees of schematicity into her theory. This point can be appreciated when we turn to Croft (2003), in which Croft compares his view of constructions with Goldberg’s by using the ditransitive construction as an illustration. As is well-known, Goldberg (1995: 38) claims that there are six related constructional meanings for the ditransitive, five of which are extensions of the first, central sense. These meanings are associated with verb classes as given in (10).

(10) A. Central sense: agent successfully causes recipient to receive patient
   1. Verbs that inherently signify acts of giving: give, pass, hand, serve, feed, ...
   2. Verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion: throw, toss, slap, kick, poke, fling, shoot, ...
   3. Verbs of continuous causation in a deictically specified direction: bring, take, ...

B. Conditions of satisfaction imply that agent causes recipient to receive patient
   1. Verbs of giving with associated satisfaction conditions: guarantee, promise, owe, ...

C. Agent causes recipient not to receive patient
   1. Verbs of refusal: refuse, deny

D. Agent acts to cause recipient to receive patient at some future point in time
   1. Verbs of future transfer: leave, bequeath, allocate, reserve, grant, ...

E. Agent enables recipient to receive patient
   1. Verbs of permission: permit, allow

F. Agent intends to cause recipient to receive patient
   1. Verbs involved in scenes of creation: bake, make, build, cook, sew, knit, ...
   2. Verbs of obtaining: get, grab, win, earn, ...
On the assumption that these form a case of constructional polysemy, Goldberg associates one and the same syntactic frame \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]\) with these six senses.

(11)  
A. \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{actual XPoss}]\)  
B. \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{conditional XPoss}]\)  
C. \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{negative XPoss}]\)  
D. \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{future XPoss}]\)  
E. \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{enabling XPoss}]\)  
F. \([\text{Sbj V Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{intended XPoss}]\)  

(adapted from Goldberg (1995: 38))

Croft points out that there is a problem with this constructional polysemy thesis, however:

If the ditransitive construction were truly polysemous, one might expect that the verb *bring*, for example, would be found with ditransitive sense F, resulting in a meaning like ‘X brings Z with the intention of causing Y to receive Z,’ or *kick* could also occur with ditransitive sense C, resulting in a meaning like ‘X kicks Z causing Y not to receive Z.’ (Croft (2003: 56))

Actually, the different ‘senses’ of the ditransitive construction are very closely tied to the verb classes that each ‘sense’ occurs with. Croft argues that in order to capture this close correlation between the constructional ‘senses’ and the verb classes, there should be a distinct syntactic schema for each constructional ‘sense’ specifying the verb classes found with each meaning, with corresponding specific meaning. That is, we need to posit the verb-class-specific constructions as in (12).

(12)  
A. \([\text{Sbj GIVING.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{actual XPoss}]\)  
\([\text{Sbj BALL.MOT.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{actual XPoss via ballistic motion}]\)  
\([\text{Sbj DEIC.CAUS.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{actual XPoss via deictic caused motion}]\)  
B. \([\text{Sbj COND.GIVING.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{conditional XPoss}]\)  
C. \([\text{Sbj REFUSE. VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{negative XPoss}]\)  
D. \([\text{Sbj FUT.GIVING.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{future XPoss}]\)  
E. \([\text{Sbj PERMIT.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{enabling XPoss}]\)  
F. \([\text{Sbj CREATE.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{intended XPoss after creation}]\)  
\([\text{Sbj OBTAIN.VERB Obj1 Obj2}]/[\text{intended XPoss after obtaining}]\)
This is not enough, though. Not every permission and refusal verb occurs in the ditransitive construction. (Goldberg (1995: 130))

(13)  
   a. Sally permitted/allowed/*let/*enabled Bob a kiss.  
   b. Sally refused/denied/*prevented/*disallowed/*forbade him a kiss.

Croft argues that in order to capture these facts, therefore, a representation of these two ‘classes’ would have to specify each verb that occurs in the ditransitive construction:

(14)  
   a. [[SBJ permit OBJ1 OBJ2]/[enabling XPoss by permitting]]  
   b. [[SBJ allow OBJ1 OBJ2]/[enabling XPoss by allowing]]  

(15)  
   a. [[SBJ refuse OBJ1 OBJ2]/[negative XPoss by refusing]]  
   b. [[SBJ deny OBJ1 OBJ2]/[negative XPoss by denying]]

Thus these verb-specific constructions are also necessary.

In short, while Goldberg virtually limits herself to schematic, abstract constructions in emphasizing the top-down character of constructions, Croft pays more attention to more concrete constructions, in which the verb meaning and the constructional meaning are close to each other.

4.4. The Division of Labor between Verbs and Constructions

Croft’s view of how verbs and constructions interact is more explicitly stated in Croft (2003) than in Croft (2001), so let us continue with Croft (2003). We have already seen that an essentially usage-based view entails that constructions are abstractions over usage events: when we categorize utterances into their types in terms of the syntactic frames like [Sbj V] or [Sbj V Obj Obj], then we get argument structure constructions. Now an entirely parallel thing can be said of verbs: verb meanings are also abstractions over usage events. Verb meanings are arrived at only as a result of abstracting the commonality from the usage events involving those verbs. (cf. Kilgarriff (1997))

A significant fact which needs to be remembered in this connection is that, in our daily linguistic activities, neither constructions nor verbs appear in isolation. Accordingly, one must stop to consider what is meant by the ‘basic’ or ‘single’ verb meaning often spoken of in the literature.

The ‘basic’ or ‘single’ verb meaning is actually the meaning of the verb when it occurs in some other argument structure construction such as the transitive construction. Verb meanings can-
not be defined in pure isolation; they are only definable with respect to the construction(s) they occur in. (Croft (2003: 64))

Given that actual usage events are necessarily composites of verbs and constructions, then, one might suppose that the verb meaning can be identified by removing the constructional meaning from the meaning of an utterance. It is true that certain components of an utterance can be straightforwardly attributed to the verb, like the core of meaning that differentiates verbs of the same semantic class such as throw, toss, kick, etc. ("verbal constants" in Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998)). But beyond this, identifying the verb meaning is not as easy as might appear at first sight.

For one thing, RCG allows for constructions at varying degrees of schematicity. Depending upon which level of construction one is talking about, therefore, what is to be attributed to the verb may well vary. As already noted, lower-level constructions take precedence over higher-level, abstract constructions. Thus with the ditransitive, the speaker need not induce any construction more abstract than the verb-class-specific constructions in (12) or verb-specific constructions like (14) and (15). But nothing prevents the speaker from inducing a more schematic construction, either, in which case the meaning attributed to the verb will be far richer. Linguists, however, cannot determine which construction plays an active role in the speaker's mind.

Also, there is no reason why the verb meaning and the constructional meaning should not overlap. After all, in a usage-based theory grammatical information is redundantly represented.

Consequently, Croft says that this question is not decidable by purely linguistic evidence (Croft (2003: 63)). Ultimately, only psycholinguistic experimentation might be able to establish the generalizations formed by individual speakers (Croft (2003: 64)).

5. Ditransitives

It should be obvious by now that RCG is a theory which takes a consistently usage-based view of constructions. Practitioners of Construction Grammar generally avow themselves to endorse the usage-based model, but Croft's commitment is quite pronounced. In working out a usage-based theory of constructions, Croft has succeeded in clarifying many points concerning the nature of constructions. In this section let us see what can be gained by pursuing this line of inquiry.
5.1. Ditransitives with Verbs of Refusal

Certain negative verbs like refuse and deny are known to occur ditransitively.

(16)  
   a. Joe refused Bob a raise in salary.  
   b. His mother denied Billy a birthday cake.  

(Goldberg (1995: 33))

In Goldberg's (1995) analysis of English ditransitives, five 'senses' are extensions from the central sense. Thus in the case of negative verbs, this amounts to saying that the semantics of the central sense "X causes Y to receive Z" is related by a polysemy link to "X causes Y not to receive Y."

![Diagram of sense extensions]

Figure 11: The link between class A and class C

Since the verb meanings of refuse and deny are apparently so distant from the constructional meaning, ditransitive-refuse and ditransitive-deny seem to testify well to the claim that constructions contribute much of the syntax and semantics of the resulting expression, as Goldberg (1995) argues.
However, not all negative verbs participate in the ditransitive pattern, as noted above.

(17) (=13b) Sally {refused/denied/*prevented/*disallowed/*forbade} him a kiss.

If refuse and deny can be fused with the construction as described in Figure 11, why is this not possible with other negative verbs as well? Goldberg’s analysis cannot answer this question, except to say that these are conventionalized facts of English. 7

As seen in 4.3, Croft argues for the need to posit verb-specific constructions to capture the facts in (17). It is true that this level of description is necessary anyway, and that this is an improvement over Goldberg’s treatment. However, by merely positing lower-level constructions, the facts may be described but not explained. Thus positing verb-specific constructions is not the end of the story. It remains to explain why a given verb allows for a particular verb-specific construction in the first place.

Fortunately, a usage-based view of constructions allows us to proceed further to that end. In Goldberg’s account, the focus is upon the construction, whose syntax and semantics virtually determine the syntax and semantics of the composite expression. However, in her representation, in which participant roles and argument roles are matched, exactly what is contributed by the construction is rather hard to see. By contrast, in a RCG view, lower entities are more “real.” By generalizing over usage events, verb-specific constructions are obtained. By generalizing still further over verb-specific constructions, a verb-class-specific construction is arrived at.

---

7 Some scholars have proposed that modality like negation does not count, as far as linking goes (Davis (2001), Koenig and Davis (2001), Kay (2005)). None of these analyses help, either.
Under this view, the composite expression is prior to the construction. Accordingly, the constructional meaning of the ‘refuse’-class is nothing more than an abstraction from the two verb-specific constructions for refusing and denying. Now the distance between the constructional meaning and the verb meaning is expected to be much smaller than Goldberg’s exposition will have us believe. This is indeed the case, as will be shown below.

### 5.2. The ‘Refuse’-Class-Specific Construction

#### 5.2.1. The Constructional Meaning

In Goldberg’s account, the constructional meaning of the ‘refuse’-class is “Agent causes recipient not to receive patient.” (Goldberg (1992, 1995)) Evidently, Goldberg settles on this constructional meaning out of consideration of a minimal link to the central sense “Agent causes recipient to receive patient.” Notice, however, that there is no strong reason why the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction should be thus related to class A.

If anything, ditransitive-refuse and ditransitive-deny are to be assimilated to ditransitive-allow, as Wierzbicka (1988) observes.

(18) a. John denied Mary access to the children.
    b. The Dean refused John permission to go to an overseas conference in the middle of the term.
    c. Dr Brown allowed John two cigarettes a day.

(Wierzbicka (1988: 381))

According to Wierzbicka (1988: 382), allow, refuse and deny all imply a specifiable and emotionally charged effect on Y, without implying any specifiable effect on Z. Moreover, with all three verbs the direct object tends not to stand for a specific, tangible object.

(19) a. *John denied Mary the flower.
    b. *Father refused John the ball.
    c. *Mother allowed Mary the doll. (Wierzbicka (1988: 382))
As a matter of fact, the same range of entities (permission, access, right, entry) appear as the direct object across ditransitive-refuse, ditransitive-deny, and ditransitive-allow.

(20) a. He would refuse them permission for a play.
   b. Hospital administration can refuse patients access to their own money.
   c. Fearnley Whittingstall wished to address the jury, but the coroner refused him the right to do so.
   d. Western correspondents have been refused entry to the country.

(21) a. It is conceivable that they could even be denied permission to reproduce their own work.
   b. He was denied access to a lawyer for over three weeks.
   c. Congress denied the people the right to express its will by a referendum.
   d. The party leader, Franz Schönhuber, was repeatedly denied entry to the country.

(22) a. The Post Office reluctantly gave way and allowed its canvassers “informal permission” to canvass for Electrophone installations “outside their official hours.”
   b. In Germany, they were not allowed access to the main stations.
   c. The Law Society holds hearings in private but allows the defendant the right to opt for a public hearing if he or she so wishes.
   d. It allows four of you entry for just £3.75 per person instead of the usual £7.95.

(all from BNC (=British National Corpus))

Given the affinity between ditransitive-refuse and ditransitive-deny on the one hand and ditransitive-allow on the other, it follows then that the semantics of the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction is “X does not allow Y to receive Z.”

With this constructional meaning, we can now see why Goldberg’s proposed constructional meaning looks plausible at first sight: “X does not allow Y to receive Z” normally implies “X causes Y not to have X” (unless Y can obtain Z without permission from Z). In this sense her proposed characterization does capture the meanings of ditransitive-refuse and ditransitive-deny (though partly). However, by identifying the semantics of the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction as “X does not
allow Y to receive Z,” the puzzle noted at the outset of this subsection can be solved, as will be seen below.

5.2.2. Refuse

In working out how the verb meaning of refuse is related to the proposed constructional meaning, we have to first identify the verb meaning of refuse. The verb refuse may appear in the simple transitive frame and mean “to not agree to do something,” as in (23a), or “to not accept something that is offered,” as in (23b). Refuse may also take a to-infinitival complement as in (24), indicating that what is refused is a future-oriented action.

(23) a. refuse one's {consent/help/permission}
    b. refuse {a gift/an offer/an invitation}

(24) I refuse to take part in anything that's illegal. (OALD)

Probably everyone will agree that these uses reflect the lexical encoding of refuse. It seems safe to say, then, that the verb meaning of refuse is “to say that he/she will not do something.”

This verb meaning certainly does not include the sense of causing a transfer of an object. Notice, however, that nothing in this verb meaning is incompatible with the sense of refusing to cause a transfer, either. In fact, by substituting “allow somebody to receive something” for the “do something” component of this verb meaning, we get “to say that he/she will not allow somebody to receive something,” which essentially amounts to “to not allow somebody to receive something.” This is exactly what we have identified above as the semantics of the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction: “X does not allow Y to receive Z.” Thus the meaning of ditransitive-refuse is arrived at by elaborating the semantics of refuse.

5.2.3. Deny

The case of deny is more complex. It seems instructive to start by clarifying the fundamental difference between deny and refuse. Deny may take a gerundive complement which refers to a situation simultaneous with or prior to the speech act of denying. Thus (25) means that she said she was not working for the enemy (LDOCE).

---

8 Recall the discussion in 4.4.
(25)  a. She denied working for the enemy.
    b. She said she was not working for the enemy.

Compare (25) with (26), where the object of refusal is an unrealized, future action.

(26) She refused to work for the enemy.  (LDOCE)

As a matter of fact, deny and refuse exhibit a complementary distribution with regard to complementation. Deny may take a gerund but not a to-infinitive, whereas refuse may take a to-infinitive but not a gerund.

(27)  a. *She denied to work for the enemy.
    b. *She refused working for the enemy.

All this indicates that a future action cannot be "denied."

Rather, the objects of denial are statements or facts, i.e. entities that can be either true or false. The verb meaning of deny thus seems to be something like "to say that something is not the case." The object of denial may appear either as an NP or as a that-clause, besides appearing as a gerund.

(28)  a. deny {a statement/a claim/an accusation/a charge}
    b. He denied that he had been involved.  (OALD)

Again, this verb meaning in itself does not specify the sense of causing a transfer of an object. However, by substituting "that he/she allows somebody to receive something" for the "something" component, we get "to say that it is not the case that somebody can receive something," which once again amounts to "to not allow somebody to receive something." Thus the distance between the verb meaning of deny and the meaning of ditransitive-deny is not so wide as might appear at first sight. After all, the meaning of ditransitive-deny is arrived at by elaborating the verb meaning of deny.

5.2.4. Forbid

Goldberg (1995) excludes forbid from the class of negative verbs that ditransitivize, as in (17). And as far as I know, this verb has not been cited as a ditransitivizable verb in the literature on ditransitives (Green (1974), Oehrle (1976), Wierzbicka (1988), Pinker (1989), among others). However, I have come across the following attested data.

(29)  a. ... if he should continue to molest his wife and daughter

9 Levin (1993: 47) is a notable exception.
the law allows an injunction to be brought against him, *forbidding him access* to the marital home.

b. Irenius insists that any social contact between English and Irish be suppressed and expressly advocates *forbidding the English the opportunity* of learning Gaelic.

c. *The prisoner was forbidden all human rights,* to communicate with his family, to be represented by a lawyer, to protest against the torture, or even to be put on trial.

d. *Some,* labelled “specials” or “chickenheads”, damaged by the radiation, have failed to pass a basic IQ test and *are forbidden emigration,* others remain because of their jobs.

e. *Duart is forbidden visitors* today, my lady, so that in two days he may be fit for the ceremony.

f. He said he had been unable to take it in moderation, and then, in a long illness, *he was forbidden liquor,* so when the habit had been broken he never returned to it.

(all from BNC)

So ditransitive-*forbid* should also be covered in our discussion.

The verb *forbid* can appear in the [Verb NP from V-ing] frame as in (30a) and in the [Verb NP to V] frame as in (30b), with the meaning “to state that something is not allowed, according to a rule, law, or custom.” (Macmillan)

(30) a. Army policy forbids soldiers in uniform from talking to the news media.

b. International law forbids outsiders to interfere in civil wars. (Macmillan)

Notice that starting with the verb meaning “to state that something is not allowed,” the semantics of the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction can be easily arrived at: by substituting “somebody’s receiving something” for “something (not to be allowed),” we get “to not allow somebody to receive something.” Again, the fact that *forbid* may appear ditransitively is motivated by the verb meaning, like *refuse* and *deny*.

Thus the availability of the ditransitive version of *refuse, deny* and *forbid* is far from an arbitrary fact. In each case, the verb and the construction are compatible in the sense that the semantics “to not allow somebody to receive something” can be arrived at by elaborating a component of the verb meaning, as summarized in Figure 13.
where do constructions come from? 521

negative verbs used ditransitively certainly argue in favor of the constructional approach, rather than the projectionist approach, in that the verb meaning alone cannot determine the ditransitive syntax. however, goldberg’s (1995) analysis is not strictly correct on the following two points: first, the relevant construction is the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction, rather than the more abstract, all-encompassing ditransitive construction. second, while the syntax and semantics of the construction can be said to be superimposed upon individual verbs, the interaction between verb and construction cannot be captured in terms of semantic roles alone.

5.3. disallow and prevent
5.3.1. an apparent puzzle

let us now turn to two other negative verbs, i.e. disallow and prevent. these two verbs have never been included among the class of ditransitivizable verbs in the literature, and i have not found a single instance of ditransitive-disallow or ditransitive-prevent on the bnc. however, an anonymous reviewer reports that he has found the following examples on the web.10

10 this reviewer suggests a complex predicate analysis, seemingly in the generative framework, according to which the verb and access form a complex predicate,
Indeed, by using the Google search engine, I have come across similar examples. Examples involving *disallow* were found rather easily, as in (31).

(31) a. Normal users were *disallowed any access* to any parts of the file system holding a jail. (http://www.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/FreeBSD-Security/2002-09/11579.html)
b. I told my boss what had happened, that I was *disallowed web access* during that Sunday. (http://www.squid-cache.org/mail-archive/squid-users/199907/0830.html)
c. The results were that browsers which didn’t automatically send authentication info were *disallowed access*, and you could reasonably easily bypass the server authentication mechanism if objects themselves didn’t authenticate. (http://mail.zope.org/pipermail/zope-dev/2000-May/004734.html)

Examples involving *prevent* as in (32), however, were much smaller in number, and I have so far been unable to find a single instance involving *block*.

(32) a. The Finance Sector Union (FSU) campaigned strongly against the agreement, but were *prevented full access* to the workforce by management. (http://www.cpa.org.au/garchive/961fsu.htm)
b. “It seems to me that anyone who is *prevented full access* to information and ideas—or the means to express themselves as individuals—has a type of disabili-
ty.”—Star Wars Director George Lucas, Summer 1998
(http://www.tecsoc.org/equity/equity.htm)

How are we to interpret these data?

The existence of all these attested data does not necessarily mean that disallow and prevent are to be included in the class of ditransitivizable verbs. Note that the apparent ditransitive expressions are possible only in the passive form. Their corresponding active forms are judged significantly worse.

(33)  
  a. ??She disallowed him access. 
  b. ??They disallowed him entry into the US. 
  c. ??The new occupant prevented him access to the flat. 
  d. *They blocked me access to my own web site.

In this respect, disallow and prevent sharply contrast with truly ditransitivizable verbs (i.e. refuse, deny, and forbid), which are acceptable both in active and passive forms.

(34)  
  a. He was refused access to a lawyer. 
  b. She refused him access to a lawyer.

(35)  
  a. He was denied access to a lawyer. 
  b. She denied him access to a lawyer.

(36)  
  a. He was forbidden access to a lawyer. 
  b. She forbade him access to a lawyer.

This strongly indicates that despite the existence of attested data like (31) and (32), disallow and prevent (let alone block) are not true ditransitivizable verbs, after all.

Thus the facts seen so far actually pose a complex question consisting of two parts: (1) why disallow and prevent do not ditransitivize, and (2) why these verbs are nevertheless acceptable in the passive ditransitive form.

5.3.2. Why Disallow and Prevent Cannot Ditransitivize

The first part can be straightforwardly accounted for by following the same line of reasoning as before. Since the possibility of occurring in the ditransitive pattern is a matter of compatibility between the negative verb and the ‘refuse’-class-specific construction, it is expected that the verb meaning of disallow, prevent, or block cannot be elaborated into the semantics “to not allow somebody to receive something.” This prediction is in fact borne out.

Macmillan English Dictionary defines disallow as “to say officially that something cannot be accepted because it is illegal or not allowed
by the rules." That is, disallow basically means "to not accept something as valid."

(37) a. England scored again, but the whistle had gone and the goal was disallowed.

b. It was a shock to hear him rule that my testimony would be disallowed.

(COBUILD)

This is entirely different from the ditransitive version of refuse, deny and forbid, where the subject entity is in a position to allow somebody to do something, but chooses not to do so. It is no wonder, then, that disallow does not appear ditransitively.

What about prevent? This verb may appear in the [Verb NP from V-ing] frame as in (38), like forbid.

(38) He said this would prevent companies from creating new jobs. (COBUILD)

Apparently, prevent is very similar to forbid. Crucially, however, the notion of "to not allow" is lacking: "to stop something from happening" (Macmillan); to stop (something) happening or (someone) doing something" (CIDE); "to ensure that something does not happen" (COBUILD). Again, the subject entity is not in a position to allow somebody to do something, like disallow. Consequently, the verb meaning of prevent cannot be elaborated into "to not allow somebody to receive something." This is why prevent cannot appear ditransitively.

Similarly with block. Again, the notion of "to not allow" is lacking: "to stop something from moving through or along something else" (Macmillan); "to prevent movement through (something)" (CIDE). Since the verb meaning cannot be elaborated into "to not allow somebody to receive something," it is only natural that block cannot appear ditransitively.

Thus just as the availability of ditransitive-refuse, ditransitive-deny and ditransitive-forbid is a consequence of the verb meanings, so is the unavailability of ditransitive-prevent, ditransitive-disallow, or ditransitive-block. This close correlation between the verb meaning and the availability of the ditransitive version is quite natural, given the hierarchy of constructions as summarized in Figure 12.

5.3.3. Why Disallow and Prevent Are Found in the Passive Ditransitive Form

Given that disallow and prevent are not semantically compatible with the 'refuse'-class-specific construction, the apparent passive ditransitives
in (31) and (32) should be treated differently from the passive ditransitiv- 
es in (34b), (35b), and (36b).

In a usage-based theory, newly encountered expressions are accept-
able, and meaningful, to the extent that they can be associated with lin-
guistic structures that already have unit status. There are two ways of 
association. On the one hand, the novel expression may count as an 
instance of a schema. On the other, it may be assimilated, via similarity, 
to an already established unit. If the novel expression fails both of 
the routes, then it is judged unacceptable (Langacker (1987, 1991), 
Taylor (2002), among others).

Now the passive ditransitives of verbs like deny are sanctioned by the 
first way of association: instantiation. Thus, utterances like He was 
denied access to a lawyer simultaneously instantiate both the ‘refuse’-
class-specific construction and the passive construction, as shown in 
Figure 14.

By contrast, instances of apparent passive ditransitives involving disal-
low and prevent are sanctioned by the second way of association: being 
assimilated to an already established unit. But what is that established 
unit? I claim that it is none other than utterances like He was denied 
access to a lawyer. In other words, examples like these utterances are 
analogical extensions from He was denied access to a lawyer.

Choosing He was denied access to a lawyer as the base for extension 
is justified by the following considerations. First, by manually counting 
the occurrences in the BNC, it turns out that passive ditransitives 
involving access, entry, permission and right far outnumber their corre-
sponding active ditransitives, an indication that passive ditransitives are 
more frequent than active ditransitives. Second, be denied access is far 
more frequent than be refused access, let alone be forbidden access.
Now the process of extension involves not only the base and the target. When one linguistic expression is assimilated to another via similarity, a higher-order schema needs to be extracted which captures the commonality between the two expressions (Langacker (1987, 1991, 1999), Taylor (2002)). Accordingly, the extension in question is described as in Figure 15. First, a higher-order schema is extracted from *He was denied access to a lawyer*. The higher-order schema then sanctions *He was disallowed web access*.

![Figure 15: Base, target and higher-order schema](image)

Table 1: Number of occurrences in the BNC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>passive ditransitive</th>
<th>active ditransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>access</td>
<td>be denied access</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be refused access</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be forbidden access</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entry</td>
<td>be denied entry</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be refused entry</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be forbidden entry</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>permission</td>
<td>be denied permission</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be refused permission</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be forbidden permission</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right</td>
<td>be denied the right</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be refused the right</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be forbidden the right</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now the process of extension involves not only the base and the target. When one linguistic expression is assimilated to another via similarity, a higher-order schema needs to be extracted which captures the commonality between the two expressions (Langacker (1987, 1991, 1999), Taylor (2002)). Accordingly, the extension in question is described as in Figure 15. First, a higher-order schema is extracted from *He was denied access to a lawyer*. The higher-order schema then sanctions *He was disallowed web access*.

Significantly, the higher-order schema thus extracted need not include the ditransitive semantics "to not allow somebody to receive something." This point can be appreciated by recognizing that the recipient argument behaves differently for actives and passives. Goldberg (2005) observes that the passive ditransitive recipient, unlike the active ditransitive recipient, can be freely questioned or relativized.
Goldberg argues that this is because the passive ditransitive recipient, being a subject, is the primary topic in a clause. Given that the passive ditransitive recipient is the primary topic, passive ditransitives like *He was denied access to a lawyer* are open to an interpretation something like "As for him, access was denied." Under this interpretation, the passive ditransitive recipient bears a looser relation to *access* than the active ditransitive recipient.

Note that this is exactly the semantics of the higher-order schema extracted above. Accordingly, the analogical extension in question can be described as in Figure 16.

\[
[[\text{Sbj be NegVerb-en} \text{ access}] / [\text{As for X, access is denied}]]
\]

\[
[[\text{He was denied access to a lawyer}] / [\ldots]]
\]

\[
[[\text{He was disallowed web access}] / [\ldots]]
\]

**Figure 16**: Analogical extension from *be denied access* to *be disallowed access*

Since this higher-order schema sanctions passive ditransitive forms quite independently of the ditransitive semantics, it can sanction expressions like *He was disallowed web access*. This is why *He was disallowed web access* is acceptable, despite the fact that *disallow* itself is not compatible with the 'refuse'-class-specific construction.\(^{11}\)

This is not the whole story, though. Another factor contributing to the acceptability of the apparent passive ditransitives in question concerns frequency. As Bolinger (1975) observes, an act that is frequently done or spoken about is more likely to form a good pseudo-passive. Thus (41a) is acceptable but (41b) is not, because the collocation *tell lies about* is more frequent than *spread lies about*.

\(^{11}\) For similar views of apparent passives without their corresponding actives, see Quirk (1965) and Iwata (2004).
(41)  a. I don't like to be told lies about.
    b. *I don't like to be spread lies about. (Bolinger (1975: 61))
Now disallow, prevent, and block are all quite often found with access on the web.

(42)  a. IE5 "Access disallowed"
    b. Objects in your store can be Published, Unpublished, or Access Prevented.
(http://ftp.ablecommerce.com/ac5docs/merchant/webhelp/Categories_(CMS)/Published_Unpublished_and_Access_Prevented.htm)
(http://www.freepress.net/news/13651)
The high-frequency of these collocations certainly helps these verbs to form acceptable passives with access.

Incidentally, note that when disallow and prevent are found in the apparent passive ditransitive form, as in (31) and (32), access is almost exclusively understood in the sense of "web access" or "Internet access," on a par with (42). This seems to suggest that the apparent passive ditransitive in question is a relatively recent development, triggered by the high-frequency of the collocations in (42) found on the web.\(^{12}\)

Finally, let us address the question of why disallow, prevent, and block are not equally acceptable in the passive ditransitive form: As noted above, examples involving disallow were found rather abundantly. But those involving prevent are much rarer, and virtually no example involving block was found. Again, the observed variation can be easily accommodated in a usage-based theory.

As noted above, "newly encountered expressions are acceptable, and meaningful, to the extent that they can be associated with linguistic structures that already have unit status." The phrase "to the extent that," rather than "if," is intended to mean that the acceptability is a matter of degree, rather than a matter of all or none. Accordingly,

\(^{12}\) Thus part of the reason why no examples of analogical extension involving verbs like disallow are found on the BNC might be that the corpus simply does not contain the kinds of material found on the web nowadays.
when negative verbs appear in the passive ditransitive form, they are judged acceptable to the extent that they can be assimilated to *He was denied access*.

Of the three verbs, clearly *disallow* is the most similar to *deny*. Both are clearly negative verbs, and the first syllable, not receiving primary stress, is very similar (/dis/ and /di/). Next comes *prevent*, which evinces no morphological similarity to *deny* but which is nevertheless a full-fledged negative verb. Now *block* bears the least resemblance to *deny*. In fact, it can even be said that this is not a negative verb in the first place. This explains why attested examples of passive ditransitive *block* are hardly found even on the web.

If this reasoning is correct, we can expect that verbs whose status as a negative verb is uncontroversial are more likely to be found in the passive ditransitive form than *block*. This prediction is in fact borne out. Even *prohibit*, *preclude* and *reject* are found to appear in this form.

(43) a. Because of this government grant, the natives were declared illegal occupants of their ancestral lands and were *prohibited free access* to their communal forests. (http://www.asiatour.com/philippines/e-06ceno/ep-cen10.htm)

   b. ... as our reporters were *prohibited unfettered access* to the nation’s most important political institution, WorldNetDaily is about to file lawsuits in federal court to secure its rights. (http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=28837)

(44) “I wondered how far a small winery could go with a marketing plan if they were *precluded access* to (out-of-state) markets.” (http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2002/11/25/story3.html)

(45) a. Because of the temporary split Supergrass replaced the band and to add insult Carl was *rejected stage access*. (http://www.able2uk.com/glasto2004.htm)

   b. One of the instances didn’t occur very often but was a pain when it did; the writer was *rejected write access* due to another instance of itself actually writing to the file.
Again, the passives of all these verbs are frequently found with access.

(46) a. Unauthorized access via yahMAIL is prohibited!

b. Access should not be precluded through the use of javascript, java, applets, flash, or other technology.

c. IzyMail always acts on behalf of and with permission from you, our users, but access is now rejected.

Thus the fact that disallow is most likely to be found in the passive ditransitive form, followed by prevent, prohibit, preclude, reject, and finally block (if possible at all) can be coherently accounted for.

6. Conclusion

The claim that constructions are the basic units of syntactic representation, and categories are derived from the construction(s) in which they appear, may well strike one as radical—so radical in fact that one has difficulty in making out what is really meant.

However, one can begin to understand Croft’s intent once one realizes that RCG is a version of Construction Grammar which takes a consistently usage-based view of constructions.\(^\text{13}\) Since constructions are nothing more than schematic form-meaning pairings abstracted from usage events, they are prior to grammatical categories like nouns and verbs.

In a sense, it is a truism that everything starts with concrete usage events, and that analysis entails abstraction. It is one thing to recognize it as obvious, quite another to construct a linguistic theory in accordance with this truism, though. Croft’s confession that it took him a long time to figure out what he thinks syntax is (p. xiii) testifies to the general difficulty one has to overcome in order to free oneself of many hidden assumptions of theoretical linguistics. It seems to me,

\(^{13}\) For other constructional analyses based on a similar conception of constructions, see Boas (2003, 2005) and Iwata (2004).
therefore, that the significance of this book cannot be overemphasized. It goes without saying that RCG is still quite programmatic. In order to convince people of the validity of RCG, much more work needs to be done. Detailed research on the interaction between verbs and constructions is especially called for. In fact, as shown in section 5, by making use of lower-level constructions we can expect to gain insights into those linguistic phenomena which have so far defied a principled explanation.

So far, Croft himself has not fully exploited this potential of his theory. This, however, is asking too much from a single person. Maybe this is the task left for those who find the main idea of RCG quite appealing.

REFERENCES

Family of Constructions,” *Language* 80, 532–568.


Quirk, Randolph (1965) “Descriptive Statement and Serial Relationship,”


Dictionaries


English Department
Graduate School of Literature and Human Sciences
Osaka City University
3–3–138 Sugimoto, Sumiyoshi-ku
Osaka 558–8585
e-mail: s_iwata@kcc.zaq.ne.jp