

## **On cross-linguistic variation in syntax. Parameter setting or diverging constructional specificity in clausal organization?**

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In this study, I suggest some principles for cross-linguistic variation in syntax that may be a challenge to the parameter theory envisioned in Chomsky (1981) and defended recently in an important study by Snyder (2001). The present study is based on corpus data, mainly from parallel corpora (project syndicate) and from the Spanish monolingual corpus CREA. The theoretical framework is Construction Grammar (CXG) (e.g. Goldberg 2006).

Snyder provides converging evidence from child language acquisition and comparative syntax for the existence of a syntactic compounding parameter in the classical sense of Chomsky (1981). He identifies the compounding parameter in some languages, but not other languages, in two independent syntactic domains, and shows, using L1 acquisition data, that the existence of this parameter in these two domains of the grammar is correlated in English. The parameter determines, thus, both the availability of productive root compounding, and the availability of a range of syntactic complex-predicate constructions. For instance, Germanic languages permit complex-predicate constructions, such as resultatives (e.g. *he hammered the metal flat*) and productive, not overtly marked, root compounding (e.g., *frogman*). According to Snyder, Romance languages do not permit the former neither the latter.

I will argue that there is in principle no reason why Snyder's findings should be taken exclusively as evidence for a parametric understanding of cross-linguistic variation in syntax. Snyder's data may rather reflect a cross-linguistic difference of organizational principles. CXG suggests that clausal core information is organized by integrating at least two construction types: A) schematic constructions, B) lexical constructions. In addition, clausal expressions are supposed to be built on language-specific construction types (Croft 2001).

On the basis of previous research (Author 2009a, 2009b, submitted), I hypothesize that languages may differ according to the level of constructional specificity at which the core information is organized. English (and other Germanic languages) tends to organize the principal information (e.g. resultative meaning) in schematic constructions (diagrams), leaving secondary information for lexical elaboration and further constructional specification. Spanish (and other Romance languages) seems to organize the principal information in lexical constructions, leaving secondary information for schematically organized specification.

I will demonstrate that this CXG typology of organizational principles accounts for Snyder's data, at least regarding Germanic languages versus Romance languages. It also makes important predictions that cannot be made in Snyder's parametric framework. In his study, a language is judged to have productive N-N compounding only if it permits truly novel (nonlexical) N-N compounds and do not require any overt connective to combine the nouns. The present framework, in addition of predicting the absence of N-N compounding in e.g. Romance languages, also predicts the extended use of overt syntactic connectives (a schematically organized specification) as an alternative strategy for productive N-N compounding in these languages. Moreover, an implication of Snyder's analysis is that complex predicates of the English type are systematically excluded in a Romance language like Spanish (due to the absence of a compounding parameter). Nevertheless, the proposed framework accounts for the fact that very similar types of, for instance, resultatives and dative double-object expressions do exist in Spanish, with the restriction that they have to be licensed by the verbal predicate.

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