

REVIEWS

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Debra Ziegeler, *Converging grammars: Constructions in Singapore English* (Language Contact and Bilingualism 11). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015. Pp. xiv + 294. ISBN 9781614514091 (hardback).

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Over the past thirty years, Construction Grammar approaches (see e.g. Croft 2001; Goldberg 2006; Hoffmann & Trousdale 2013) have received substantial support from psycho- and neurolinguistics as well as from research on L1 (Diessel 2013) and L2 (Ellis 2013) acquisition. It is therefore not surprising that recently a considerable number of studies on World English varieties have emerged that adopt a Construction Grammar perspective (*inter alia*, Mukherjee & Hoffmann 2006; Mukherjee & Gries 2009; van Rooy 2010; Hoffmann 2011, 2014; Gilquin 2016). In the present book, Debra Ziegeler now provides a Construction Grammar analysis of Singapore English. Drawing on the results of four previously published studies, she outlines how contact varieties can give rise to so-called ‘merger constructions’, pairings of form, meaning and function that combine properties of the contact standard variety, the local vernacular as well as other local languages of contact or substrates.

In chapter 1 (‘Introduction’, pp. 1–14), Ziegeler first of all introduces the main varieties under investigation: the local standard variety (Standard Singapore English (SSE)) and the local vernacular dialect (Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) / Singlish). She then goes on to offer a first glimpse of the challenges that the English-contact varieties of Singapore pose for a Construction Grammar analysis. This is followed by a short section in which important terms and notions of the book are defined and discussed (including ‘contact variety’, ‘lexifier’, ‘substrate–superstrate’, ‘model and replica language’ and ‘semantic continuity’). After that, Ziegler gives a concise overview of the following seven chapters of the book.

Next, chapter 2 (‘Singapore English’, pp. 15–40) tracks the historical evolution of SSE and SCE, describing the rich linguistic ecology in which these varieties emerged (which included Malay, numerous Chinese dialects, such as Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew, as well as various Indian languages). Following that, the present-day sociolinguistic situation is surveyed. As Ziegeler shows, the relationship between SSE and SCE is a diglossic one in which the two varieties are not completely mutually exclusive and the choice of code also has important indexical meaning (with SCE acting as a marker of local Singaporean identity even for educated speakers). She then presents a number of grammatical features of Singapore English, some of which can be attributed to substrate influence (such as bare modal *can*), while others seem to arise due to universals of language development (such as the use of stative verbs with the progressive construction).

‘Construction grammars and the paradox of “mixed” construction types’ are the focus of chapter 3 (pp. 41–75). In this chapter, Ziegeler first of all presents various competing Construction Grammar definitions of constructions (as non-compositional and/or frequent and/or conventional form–meaning pairings), which lead her to maintain that ‘it is sometimes difficult to tell what is *not* a construction’ (p. 44). She goes on to critically discuss the various processes of identifying and labelling constructions based on form, meaning or function in synchronic approaches such as Goldberg’s Cognitive Grammar, Croft’s Radical Construction Grammar as well as Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar. As she argues, the most feasible approach might in fact be to define constructions as constituent-like sense packages. After that, she turns to constructionalisation models and emphasises that these illustrate how constructions increase in generality diachronically from specific, lexical micro-constructions to more and more schematic meso- and macro-constructions. From this diachronic perspective, she develops her own model of the synchronic extensions and generalisation of constructions, which discards problematic coercion-based explanations (as these, for example, cannot explain the unacceptability of utterances such as ??*Sam blinked the napkin off the table*, which according to a coercion account should be licensed by the abstract Resultative construction and should, accordingly, receive a construction-based resultative meaning). Ziegeler, instead, suggests that the starting point of constructional extension is a Lexical Prototype Construction, which ‘carries a lexical blueprint that may be generalised to enable future productivity’ (p. 69). The constraints of the Lexical Prototype Construction then interact with the cognitive principles of metonymy and metaphor to license new lexical material in the construction, which in turns leads to an increased distributional generalisation. All these claims are supported independently by usage-based Construction Grammar approaches (Bybee 2013; Barðdal 2008) that relate increasing schematicity to a higher type frequency of prototype-based constructional generalisations (even though such usage-based constructionist approaches are, unfortunately, not mentioned and discussed in the present book). Besides, considering that SSE arose as a second language (L2) variety of English, it is somewhat disappointing that Ziegeler does not incorporate any findings from Construction Grammar research into L2 acquisition (which, for instance, highlight the degree to which L2 learners’ computations are often affected by transfer, with expectations guided by their L1 Constructicon and selective attention; Ellis 2013: 366).

Chapter 4 (‘Transitivity and causativity’, pp. 77–115) then presents the first of four case studies: in so-called ‘conventionalised scenario’ structures, a causative event (e.g. a hairdresser cutting someone’s hair) is realised in an apparently transitive frame (Subject Verb Object) without the presence of an overt causer (as, e.g., in *I cut my hair*, meaning ‘I had my hair cut by someone’). These ‘conventionalised scenario’ structures compete with a causative–resultative alternative in standard L1 varieties of English (Subject Verb Object $V_{past-participle}$), which can also leave the causer role unexpressed (cf. *I had my hair cut*). Drawing on a questionnaire study with Singaporean and British subjects designed to elicit causative structures, Ziegeler

shows that both groups of subjects use conventionalised scenario constructions to verbalise causative situations. At the same time, across all test items, Singaporean speakers consistently use conventionalised scenario constructions considerably more often than British speakers (71 per cent of all elicited items were conventionalised scenario constructions in the Singaporean group compared to only 8.75 per cent in the British group; p. 105). In light of these data, she argues for a multi-factorial explanation: on the one hand, the conventionalised scenario construction is supported by the causative–resultative construction through an ACTION FOR RESULT metonymy link in both dialects. On the other hand, the contact variety Singapore English shows a much greater propensity for conventionalised scenario constructions due to contact and substrate influence (such as the strong topic prominence and resulting weaker selectional restrictions between subject and verb in the local substrate languages).

In chapter 5 (pp. 117–42), Ziegeler turns to ‘Experiential aspect’ in Singapore English. In SCE the adverb *ever* can be used to express experiential aspect with a meaning of ‘at least once’ (e.g. *I ever go dere* ‘I have been there at least once’, p. 120). Carefully surveying the expression of experiential markers in the local languages, she concludes that experiential *ever* is not the result of direct transfer from the substrate languages. Instead, the SCE construction selectively replicates only one out of many typical functions of experiential markers in the Chinese substrate (‘the marking of minimal existence’, p. 142). Moreover, Ziegeler argues that neither replica grammaticalisation nor ordinary contact grammaticalisation can explain the choice of *ever* for this function. Alternatively, she suggests a grammaticalisation path of interlingual identification in which the meaning of minimal event-existence implied by its original negative-polarity use in English is identified with the minimal event-existence of experiential aspect in the substrate languages (pp. 140–1).

Chapter 6 (‘The past tense construction’, pp. 143–79) moves on to the tense construction system of SCE and investigates uses of the past tense in the variety that would normally be expressed by a simple present construction in Standard English (e.g. habitual readings as in *Usually I finished work at around six o’clock* (p. 146) for Standard English *Usually I finish work at around six o’clock*). Analysing a corpus of Singaporean teenagers’ internet posts, Ziegeler shows that while such uses are neither obligatory nor particularly frequent (amounting to less than 10 per cent in one of her samples), they nevertheless seem to share a common core meaning of encoding precedence of an event, while at the same time having implications for potential future or present situations.

The final empirical study on ‘Bare noun constructions’ is the topic of chapter 7 (pp. 181–214). In contrast to Standard British English and SSE, SCE does not seem to entertain a count noun–mass noun distinction. Consequently, whereas the use of bare nouns in Standard British and SSE is limited to mass nouns (e.g. *I want milk*), SCE also has nouns that are construed as countable in other dialects which appear without any modifier or determiner (e.g. *She got car or not?* ‘Does she have a car?’, p. 183). After an introduction to the phenomenon in SCE, Ziegeler then discusses the role of specific reference, bare noun constructions in creole languages as well

as empirical data from an informally collected corpus of advertisements and the Singaporean teenagers' internet posts mentioned above. She shows that the bare noun construction in SCE is a pairing of an unmodified noun without any determiner that has the function of expressing non-specific reference. As Ziegeler points out, this SCE construction can only partly be attributed to substrate influence, since bare noun constructions do exist in the local languages, but are not limited to non-referential readings and can also express a specific and definite referential meaning. In the following, she then critically assesses and refutes coercion-based analyses of SCE bare noun constructions and instead offers an explanation that relies on the metaphorical or metonymical extension of a Lexical Prototype construction (in accordance with the discussion of chapter 3). While I, in general, fully agree with Ziegeler's criticism of coercion analyses, I must confess that I did not quite understand why these were adduced as possible explanations of SCE bare noun constructions in the first place. Regardless of an available local standard with count–mass distinction (SSE) or the fact that some of the bare noun constructions appear in institutional usage (p. 209), it is clear that the family of referential noun constructions in SCE differ crucially from their corresponding noun phrase constructions in Standard British or SSE: in line with Croft's Radical Construction Grammar approach, we, therefore, have no evidence to postulate any count–mass distinction in SCE, and the fact that other Standard varieties have such a distinction is immaterial to the synchronic description of the variety at hand. SCE, on the one hand, and Standard British English/SSE, on the other hand, simply differ in the way that the noun phrase constructions encode the cognitive semantic map of referential meaning. However, if we cannot reasonably postulate a count–mass distinction for SCE, then there is no need to consider at all any count-to-mass coercion-based analysis for SCE bare noun constructions. Ziegeler explicitly tries to defend her decision to do this on p. 209, but as I just outlined I do not find her reasons for doing so convincing.

Next, in chapter 8 'The Merger Construction: A model for construction convergence' (pp. 215–60), Ziegeler presents her Construction Grammar analysis of the SCE and SSE phenomena discussed in the previous four chapters. She first goes on to review the previous literature on contact construction development (including convergence, material and pattern copying, grammaticalisation, equivalence, relexification and systematic transfer) as well as two previous Construction Grammar approaches to contact constructions (Pietsch 2010 and Höder 2014). As she notes, all of these analyses fail to adequately explain the four phenomena in SCE under investigation (the extended range of conventionalised scenario constructions, the *ever* construction with experiential aspect, the habitual past tense construction and the bare noun construction). In particular, earlier analyses cannot account for the fact that in all these constructions, functions from the model languages (that is, either from substrate varieties or SSE) are only selectively transferred to the replica language (SCE) or can even be considered innovations in contact. Due to the doubtful influence of substrate transfer in these cases, Ziegeler instead puts forward the concept of a Merger Construction – 'a descriptive device, consisting of a merger between the

pre-contact replica language [SSE] and the contact replica language [SCE]' (p. 249). These Merger Constructions are Form-Function-Meaning triplets, with the pairing of Form and Function being specific to SSE and SCE, but the Meaning pole being shared by the two varieties. As an example, consider the Transitive Merger-Construction (p. 250): in SSE a Form pole [NP V NP] is symbolically linked to a Function pole specified as Transitivity, while in SCE a Form pole [NP V NP] is linked to Function Indirect causatives (CSs). Both these Form-Function pairs are then linked to a common ('merged') Meaning pole of Causativity. This approach raises some questions, e.g. how Function and Meaning are separated in this model (the Function of Indirect causatives (CSs) must clearly involve semantic roles such as a causer-recipient and patient (see p. 109) – so why should these have to be part of the Function pole and not the Meaning pole of the construction?). Moreover, I think that the analysis does not fully exploit the possibilities of a constructional analysis. Ziegeler very convincingly shows that substrate influence does not play a major role in any of the four constructions surveyed in the present book. Yet, from this it does not follow that a constructional analysis has to limit itself to only focusing on the effect of the pre-contact replica language (SSE). Multiple inheritance (Croft & Cruse 2004: 262–5), the fact that multiple input constructions license a particular token of use (i.e. a construct), is a major tenet of all current Construction Grammar approaches. In fact, the simultaneous integration of multiple input constructions into a construct in the working memory of a speaker receives a straightforward explanation by Fauconnier & Turner's (2002) notion of Conceptual Blending. Blending is, of course, a general cognitive process in which two or more input spaces are selectively compressed into a new, blended space. As Ungerer & Schmid (2006: 276) have shown, however, even resultative constructs such as *Frank sneezed the tissue off the table* can be analysed as a complex conceptual blend of various input spaces (the sneezing frame, the fall frame, the push frame and the resultative construction). For the SCE conventionalised scenario construction, for example, one can assume that the most influential input constructions were the SSE Transitive construction and an Indirect Causative construction, which due to their common Causativity meaning established a vital relation and selectively projected the Form pole of the Transitive construction and the Function/Meaning pole of indirect causation into the blended SCE conventionalised scenario construction. On top of the two already mentioned input spaces, however, this analysis also allows for additional input spaces to participate in the blending process. The strong topic prominence of the substrate languages can therefore be seen as another input space that is also participating in this process and thus additionally reinforces the use and entrenchment of blended SCE conventionalised scenario construction. Since Conceptual Blending offers a model for selective projection of properties of the input spaces as well as the creation of innovative structures, it is a powerful mechanism that can considerably enrich the explanatory power of Construction Grammar approaches to language contact. Future constructionist studies on language contact should therefore not limit their analysis to only two potential input sources, but explore Conceptual Blending approaches or any other process that allows for the integration of multiple input constructions.

The book then ends with a few ‘Concluding remarks’ (chapter 9, pp. 261–70) that contextualise the results of the present studies and summarise again all of Ziegeler’s main findings.

All in all, I would like to emphasise that the critical points I raised above should not detract from the significant contribution that the present book makes to our understanding of contact languages as well as Construction Grammar as a theoretical framework. In particular, Ziegeler convincingly shows that the choice of the features selected for transfer from SSE to SCE is not random, but motivated by common semantic properties (such as causativity in the case of the conventionalised scenario construction and the Transitive construction). Moreover, she outlines how problematic coercion analyses can be replaced by independently motivated cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy. And, finally, she provides an insightful constructionist account of vibrant and fascinating contact varieties of English. All of these findings should be of great interest to researchers working on language contact, New Englishes and Construction Grammar, and the book will hopefully spawn much needed future research on language contact from a Construction Grammar view. Future research should, however, pay more attention to multiple input constructions and the role of the working memory.

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The development of scientific writing is an important aspect of English language studies and has drawn considerable attention over the past decades, with much of the emerging research in the field relying on corpus linguistics approaches. The ongoing project of the *Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing* (CC) is an important