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Mismatch, coercion and procedural meaning:
insights from Construction Grammar and Relevance Theory

The aim of this paper is twofold. Combining insights from Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995, 2006) and Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995; Carston, 2002; Wilson and Sperber, 2012), the main goal is to understand more specifically what are the semantic and pragmatic constraints that govern the resolution process in case of a mismatch between a lexeme and its morpho-syntactic context. Then, on the basis of this discussion, I will focus on the main properties (formal and semantic) of the grammatical units that seem to trigger this process.

In Construction Grammar, the term *coercion* is often used to discuss those cases in which a lexeme directly inherits parts of its interpretation from the morpho-syntactic context in which it is used. (Lauwers and Willems, 2011: 1219) In the sentences in (1) and (2), for instance, the lexemes *behave* and *carrier pigeon* are interpreted in accordance with the semantics of the argument structure constructions in which they occur, i.e. respectively the WAY construction (i.e. SUBJ V *one's way* OBL, cf. Israel, 1996: 218) and the DITRANSITIVE construction (i.e. SUBJ V OBJ OBJ$_2$, cf. Goldberg, 1992: 46).

(1) You can't talk your way out of something you *behaved* your way into. You have to *behave* your way out of it. (Twitter)
(2) They *carrier pigeoned* me an invite this morning. (Twitter)

One of the main challenges from this perspective is to understand exactly the extent to which speakers are involved in the *coercion* process which enables to understand the lexemes. Following Leclercq (2017), I want to argue that although constructions can act as coercion triggers, the resolution process is primarily a pragmatic process. Bringing insights from Relevance Theory, as well as taking into account experimental findings (e.g. Nieuwland and van Berkum, 2006; Yoon, 2012), I will argue that hearers contextually reconstruct the meaning of these lexemes in accordance with their expectations of *relevance*.

Although being primarily a pragmatic process, however, coercion is linguistically trigerred (and, therefore, linguistically required) by the grammatical constructions with which the coerced lexemes occur. In order to better understand the coercion process, the rest of this paper therefore aims at identifying the formal and semantic properties shared by these grammatical constructions. On the formal side, I will generally follow the perspective adopted in Construction Grammar according to which units of the language that can trigger coercion are (partially) schematic constructions. (cf. Michaelis, 2011: 1384) That is, from this perspective, only constructions that need to be filled in with a specific lexical element can have some coercive force over that lexeme. (Both the WAY construction and the DITRANSITIVE construction identified above have this particular property.) Concerning the semantic pole of these constructions, I will argue that they encode some kind of procedural meaning. (Blakemore, 1990, 2002) This perspective has already been suggested in Relevance Theory by Escandell-Vidal and Leonetti (2011: 88) when they argue that units which carry conceptual meaning are coercible and only units that carry procedural meaning have a coercive force. However, I will challenge the notion of procedural meaning as it is curently formulated in Relevance Theory (and which is not always clearly defined, cf. Carston, 2016) and argue that procedures might be better described in terms of meta-conceptual representations which enable the use of concepts. The view adopted here—both at the formal and semantic levels—therefore has strong implications concerning the acquisition and use of these constructions.

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