

Book Review

Nick C. Ellis, Ute Römer and Matthew Brook O'Donnell. *Usage-based approaches to language acquisition and processing: Cognitive and corpus investigations of construction grammar.* Language Learning Monograph Series. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, 359 pp., ISBN 978-1-1192-9652-2. Paperback and E-book. 41.95 USD.

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Usage-based approaches to language acquisition and processing: Cognitive and corpus investigations of construction grammar is an ambitious book which takes on large, long standing questions regarding the nature of language and language learning, such as: To what degree are the abstract patterns of language learnable from noisy, variable input? Does the same model account for the structure of language and for acquisition, including the similarities and differences between learning a first language and learning a second (or third and beyond)? Compiling and synthesizing an impressive body of both established and new empirical data, Ellis, Römer and O'Donnell provide a forceful answer in support of a Cognitive Linguistic (CL)/usage-based(UB) approach which places heavy emphasis on learners acquiring language through general cognitive processes, such as category formation, while engaging in communication. Their ultimate answer is that careful study of language usage and processing shows that the shape of language, as viewed through the lens of Verb Argument Constructions (VACs), is thickly populated with the key attributes which the psychology of learning has shown encourages association and category learning. Concentrating on the central role of VACs and the distribution patterns of their associated verbs, Ellis et al. provide new experimental evidence that frequency, context, contingency and similarity – the major forces of cognition generally – are also central to language structure, processing and learning. The match between human cognition and language makes language efficiently learnable. Finally, corpus analysis and simulation modelling provide evidence that language is best understood as an ever changing, complex adaptive system.

The volume makes multiple contributions which promise to inspire language researchers for a long time: (1) It provides a well articulated overview of key theoretical tenets of CL/UB, with a special focus on conceptualizing language as a complex, dynamic system which can be fully accounted for by