

Modeling Usage Preferences in HPSG

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In line with recent research that has shown that usage statistics play an important role in the production of acceptability judgments, this paper proposes the idea that linguistic constructions are subject to **usage-preferences**, henceforth **UPs**, i.e. little studied but statistically quite significant preferences in usage, which can concern a wide variety of parameters (lexical semantics, semantics, syntax, discourse, ...).

I will start by illustrating the idea of UPs using data from a set of verbal anaphoric constructions in English, specifically (i) Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VPE), (ii) Pseudogapping (PG), (iii) *do so*, and (iv) *do it*, *do this*, *do that*. For instance:

- finite *do so* prefers to have a subject coreferential to that of its antecedent (98% of cases according to Miller 2011).
- finite *do so* prefers non stative antecedents (98% of cases according to Houser 2010:60).
- finite *do so* prefers to occur with a non-contrastive adjunct (83% of cases according to Miller 2011).

Violating a single UP usually has little or no effect on acceptability judgments (if the example is otherwise plausible). However multiple violations entail a strong degradation of acceptability. The question that arises is whether such cases should be considered to be ungrammatical (which is what usually happens in the literature). I argue that this is an untenable conclusion. The only sensible answer is to consider that they are strictly grammatical from a syntactic point of view. Any other position leads one to consider either that (i) combining violations that do not individually lead to ungrammaticality can lead to ungrammaticality or — if the UPs are taken to be, in fact, constraints on grammaticality — (ii) that some individual violations of grammaticality can have no influence on acceptability. It seems much more reasonable to claim that multiple violation of UPs can lead to strong unacceptability.

In the second part of the paper I will provide a proposal for representing UPs in the HPSG framework. This is obviously a necessity, since knowledge of these usage preferences is clearly part of the speaker's competence: it affects normal verbal behavior as well as acceptability judgments.

References

- Houser, Michael John. 2010. *The Syntax and Semantics of Do So Anaphora*. Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.
- Miller, Philip. 2011. The choice between verbal anaphors in discourse. In I. Hendrickx, S. Lalitha Devi, A. Branco, and R. Mitkov, eds., *Anaphora Processing and Applications: 8th Discourse Anaphora and Anaphor Resolution Colloquium, DAARC 2011*, Volume 7099 of *Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence*, 82–95. Berlin: Springer.