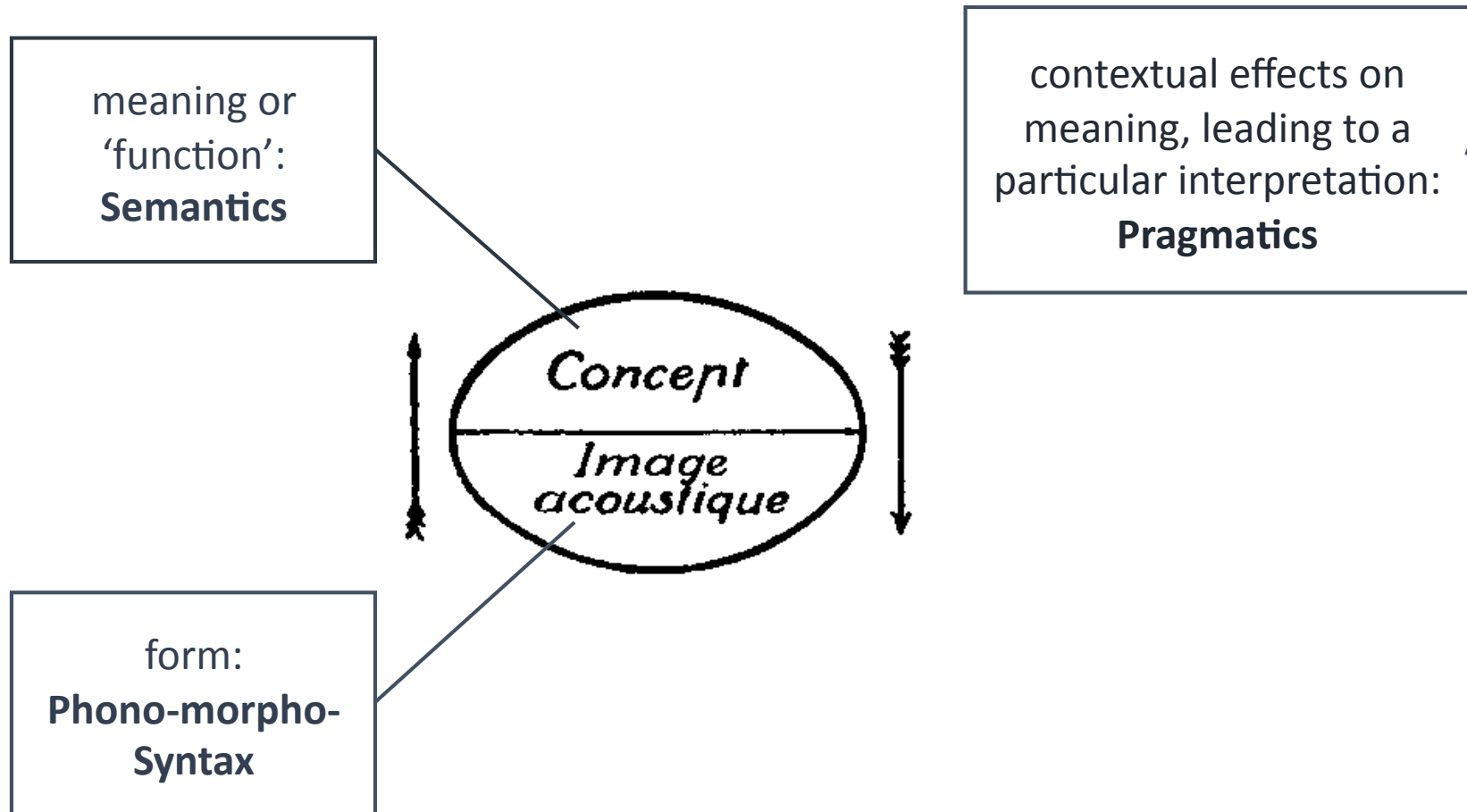


# **What's pragmatics doing outside constructions?**

Bert Cappelle

Université de Lille 3

# Simplistic view of constructions



So:

- constructions link form with function → okay
- **pragmatics doesn't have its place in constructions** → really?

# Why this view is too simplistic

*What's X doing Y?* (WXDY) construction (Fillmore & Kay 1999)

Diner: *"What's this fly doing in my soup?"*

Waiter: *"Madam, I believe that's the backstroke"*

- waiter answers a direct question about the fly's precise kind of activity
- diner isn't interested in this; she just wants to indicate her *indignation*: there is something incongruous about there being a fly in the soup



result of a conversational implicature?

1. Hearer first considers speaker's literal question
2. Hearer then deems this question as being beside the point
3. Hearer finally gets the speaker's drift ("something incongruous here")

→ Works for the old joke about the fly in the soup

→ But:

*What is this scratch doing on the table?*

*What do you think your name is doing in my book?*

*I wonder what the salesman will say this house is doing without a kitchen.*

"A scratch, a name, a house, and so on cannot be literally said to be 'doing' anything." (Kay and Fillmore 1999: 5)

**→ the special interpretation must be a part of the WXDY construction itself**

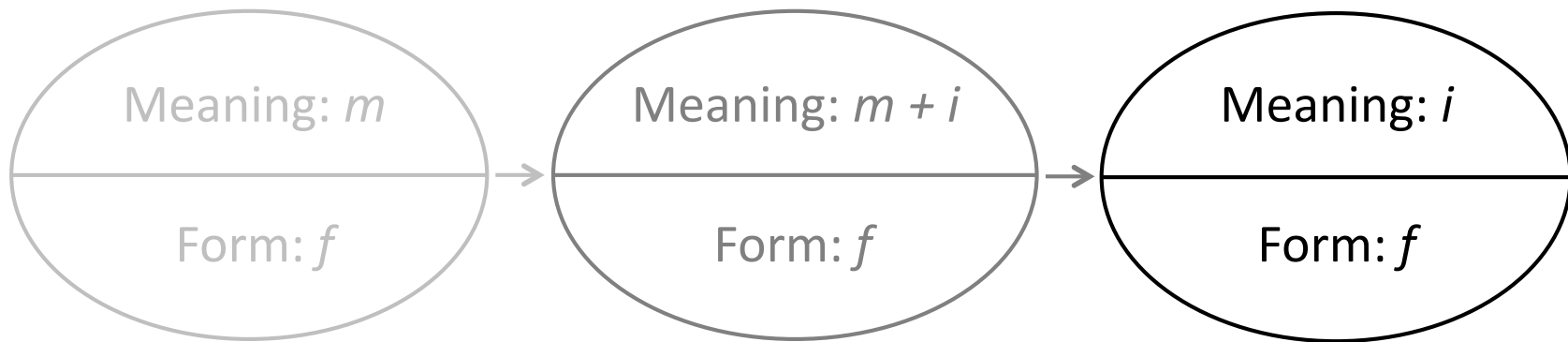
# Development: pragmatics becomes meaning?

The literally intended question may have played a role diachronically:

“While the WXDY construction may have had its origin in conversational implicature—through situations in which an individual A is clearly up to no good and B asks what A is doing—the **semantics** of incongruity is now CONVENTIONALLY associated with the special morphosyntax of WXDY constructs” (Kay and Fillmore 1999: 5; boldface mine)

“The conventionalization of implicature (or from the hearer’s point of view, inference) is also well-known from grammaticalization research [references omitted—B. C.]. It is thought that the frequent co-occurrence of an inference with a particular construction can lead to that inference being taken as **part of the meaning** of the construction. The originally inferential meaning can even **replace the earlier meaning.**” (Bybee 2013: 56; boldface mine)

Pragmatics: *i*



# Two questions

1. Can pragmatics really be part of constructions?  
Or is 'constructional pragmatics' a contradiction in terms?
2. Is constructional pragmatics just a kind of constructional semantics?



# Coming up

- Answer to question 1:

Yes, pragmatics can be part of constructions  
+ a test to find out whether a computable meaning has to be stored

- Answer to question 2:

No, constructional pragmatics isn't just a kind of constructional semantics;  
they can co-exist in the functional pole without coinciding with each other

- Disclaimer:

I present *a* but not necessarily *the* Construction Grammar (CxG) view on  
how to integrate pragmatics in constructions

So, first: overview of various pragmatic phenomena as studied in CxG

# Pragmatic phenomena studied in CxG

- CxG proclaims to account for “the rich semantic, pragmatic, and complex formal constraints” on grammatical patterns (Goldberg 2003: 220)

but

- “systematic studies of pragmatic aspects of constructions are still few and far between” (Ebensgaard 2014)
- *Oxford Handbook of Construction Grammar* (Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013):

---

	“semantic”	“pragmatics”
#References	100	12

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(several spanning multiple pages)

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- Yet, various phenomena have been studied by construction grammarians: Gricean maxims, information structure, speech acts, discourse patterns  
cf. Kay (2004), Nikiforidou (2009), Bergs and Diewald (2009), Lee-Goldman (2011)

# Gricean maxims (“Be relevant”, etc.)

- Maxim of Relation etc.: very general; even valid outside conversation  
→ Gricean pragmatics: perhaps just an add-on to grammar?
- Early CxG paper on the *let alone* construction (Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor 1988)

A: *Can the baby walk yet?*

B: *It can’t even sit up yet, **let alone** walk!*

Maxim of Quantity

Maxim of  
Relation

- Other use of the *let alone* construction (Cappelle, Dugas and Tobin to appear)  
*... her muscles were so limp that most activities like walking, **let alone** sitting up, seemed like an impossible dream ...* (www)  
‘afterthought’ use: just a matter of speakers “getting it wrong”?

“Where’s the father of your ten children?” Maxim of Relation  
Chelsea looked at me from over her book, “First, we don’t have ten children,  
**let alone one,** and second, he’s outside smoking his life away.” (www)

Maxim of  
Quantity

afterthought *let alone* construction

Syn:  $X_{\text{clause}}$  *let alone*  $Y_{\text{clause fragment}}$

Sem:  $X_{\text{weaker proposition}}$ , and  $Y_{\text{stronger proposition}}$

Prag: X is more relevant, Y is more informative

X could suffice on its own in the context, so it’s not necessary to state Y

Speaker states Y to cancel a conversational implicature triggered by X

Speaker portrays Y as not worthy of much attention

# Information structure (old, new, topic, focus, ...)

“[i]nformation structure is without any doubt the pragmatically oriented phenomenon or subject area that has received the most attention in the context of Construction Grammar.” (Leino 2013: 329)

Nominal extraposition construction (Michaelis and Lambrecht 1996: 216)

Announcer: *Hear what denture wearers all over America are saying.*

Denture wearer: *It's AMAZING the DIFFERENCE!* [Fixodent commercial]  
Focus Focus

Right-dislocation construction

Announcer: *Hear what denture wearers all over America are saying about the difference Fixodent has made in their lives.*

Denture wearer: *It's AMAZING, the difference!*  
Focus Pre-active

## Some other information-structure constructions

- Deprofiled Object construction (Goldberg 2000, 2004)

*The singer always aimed to dazzle.*

- Extraction from non-backgrounded complements (Ambridge and Goldberg 2008)

*Who did she {say/think/??mumble/??realize} that he saw \_\_\_ ?*

- Joined vs. split verb-particle construction (Gries 2003, Cappelle 2009)

*pick up the kids from school* (joined) / *pick the kids up from school* (split)

*pick up girls in a bar* (joined) / *?pick girls up in a bar* (split)

Lambrecht (1995, 2004), Kanetani (2009, 2012), Deulofeu & Debaisieux (2009), Hilpert (2014: Ch. 5)

# Speech acts

- Speech act (SA) constructions (Lakoff 1987)

deictic *there* cxs, negative questions, inverted and *wh*-exclamations:  
(in)compatible with certain clauses:

\* *I'm gonna have breakfast now, if am I ever hungry!*

*I'm gonna have breakfast now, because am I ever hungry!*

*because*-clauses are performative subordinate clauses:

- perform a speech act that by convention conveys a statement
  - provide this as a reason for the main clause statement
- 'Mad Magazine' or Incredulity Response construction (Akmaijan 1984, Lambrecht 1990)

*Him write a PhD thesis in neurolinguistics?! (Yeah, sure!)*

## Some other speech act constructions

- Indirect order/request constructions (Stefanowitsch 2003, Del Campo Martínez & Ruiz de Mendoza 2012, Del Campo Martínez 2013)

*Can you shut up for a minute?*

*Would you mind opening the door?*

Rather different proposals to account for such indirect SA constructions

- Illocutionary force parameter (cf. infra)
  - Cost-benefit cognitive model (the general knowledge that speakers are supposed to help each other if it is at all within their power to do so)
- West-Flemish *dè* construction (Haegeman 1994, Cappelle 2003)

*Ah, zie j'hier ook dè? ↗*

*Oe noemt ie were dè? ↘*

*oh, are you here too Prt*

*how names he again Prt*

*'Why, you're here too!' (+surprise)*

*'What's his name again?' (-surprise)*

*Dè* has different illocutionary functions in different sentence types

(For a related CxG approach to dialogic particles, see Fried and Östman (2005))



# Discourse patterns and beyond

- larger discourse patterns, exceeding the length of a single utterance, can be described as conventional constructions (Östman 2005)
  - news reports (Östman 1999)
  - postcards (Östman 2000)
  - football chants (Hoffmann and Bergs 2012)
- broad cross-cultural differences

“I understand some linguists like Hans Boas speak of “Contrastive Construction Grammar”. If Contrastive Construction Grammar is a meaningful endeavor, as I believe it is, then it should incorporate the general differences (whether typological or not) between languages, because particular languages such as Japanese and English have their own default preferences in construal and the mode of expression, which are expected to be inherited directly or indirectly by particular constructions in those languages. This way of thinking, I believe, is in keeping with the spirit of Construction Grammar.” (Yukio Hirose, p.c.)

(cf. Boas 2010)

# Interim conclusion and transition

→ No shortage of studies of specific pragmatic phenomena  
(but of course, the more, the better)

- urgent need for some more theoretical reflection about
  - what kind of pragmatic information should and should not be included in constructions
  - how, if at all, pragmatics differs from semantics

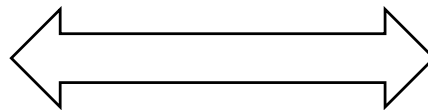
# Storage vs. online computation

“What aspects of an utterance *must* be stored in long-term memory, and what aspects *can* be constructed online in working memory?”

(Jackendoff 2002: 152, emphases in original)

separate storage of individual form-use pairings:

**[a/U1]** and **[a/U2]**  
(or **[ab/U2]**)



storage of just the most general meaning of forms but not of their derivable uses:  
**[a/U]** (and **[b/W]**) but not (a/U1) and (a/U2) (or (ab/U2))

*Independent entries model*

(Croft 1998)

*‘Discourse model’ or ‘Pragmatic model’ (Computation model)*

- Why would we have to store an expression like *red ball* in the lexicon
  - if its correct interpretation may be obvious even to a hearer who didn't know the expression
  - if, likewise, coming up with this expression to convey that interpretation could be an obvious choice for a speaker who didn't already have that expression stored in the mind
- Yet, storage may still be a possible scenario in that case:  
form-use units which fit a rule *can* of course be generated by this rule, *but they don't have to* – and in fact may not be
  - Cf. 'rule-list fallacy' (Langacker 1987)
  - entities that are very frequent in use are likely to be stored as such, regardless of whether or not they are fully regular

# Excluding the computation model

## *Question*

What can we do as 'ordinary' linguists, without having to become psycholinguists or neurolinguists?

## *Answer*

For any form-use association, we can exclude the computation model as soon as we find that this association is less than fully predictable. (Croft 1998)

## *Question*

How do we find out whether this association is not fully predictable?

## *Answer*

Check whether the translation equivalent in another language is formally equivalent (taking into account non-pertinent structural differences as well as trivial lexical differences). If there is no formal equivalence, then the use of that supposedly pragmatically derived unit must be considered to be stored as such in the first language, rather than being computed on-line.

“Cross-linguistic examination is crucial for [the] study of the grammar-context interface. It is possible to argue purely within English that *This is Kim* [as used to identify oneself on the phone – B.C.] instantiates a special construction, but there is always the question: could its use not simply be a matter of non-linguistic reasoning and inference, such as from Gricean maxims? Cross-linguistic comparison can defeat (or support) this objection: if another language has similar linguistic parts at its disposal but nonetheless cannot combine them in the same way, with the same interpretation or function, then it is doubtful that inference alone will account for the data.” (Lee-Goldman 2011: 8-9)

## A simple example: *water tower* (Croft 1998)

Surely this NN compound needn't be stored? What else could it be called?

But: French: *château d'eau* 'water castle', not *tour d'eau* 'water tower'

"This cross-linguistic difference is strong evidence that the pragmatic model is not appropriate for the derivation of this particular noun compound; otherwise speakers of both languages would come to the same solution to the naming of this object". (Croft 1998: 159)

Possible objections:

- Calling a water tower '*château d'eau*' is a marked choice in French; this doesn't mean that *water tower* is non-compositional in English
  - For speakers of French, calling a water tower '*château d'eau*' just reflects the abundance of castles in the non-linguistic environment and/or the resemblance with actual castles is closer in France
- These objections are not very convincing

- Yes, there are many castles in France (Loire valley, Dordogne, ...), but there are also many castles in England and even in the USA
- The NN compound *water tower* may seem compositional, but is not the only option one could imagine:

<i>water house</i> (cp. <i>light house</i> )	<i>water building</i>	<i>cistern tower</i>
<i>water supply tower</i>	<i>water storage tower</i>	<i>water pillar</i>
<i>water silo</i>	<i>water tank tower</i>	<i>hydrotower</i>
<i>water pressure tower</i>	<i>stand pipe</i>	...

- Many of the early water towers in the UK and the US exemplify the then-popular Gothic revival architecture no less than in France and so could also have been called *water castle*, *water keep*, *water fortress*, ...





So, what does this example teach us?

→ Alternative encodings in L2 help us realize that what *looks* like a fully compositional and computable expression in L1 may in fact have to be listed in the lexicon.

Further claim:

→ Once a combination is conventionalized, it is no longer assembled from scratch each time it is used, nor is it decoded inferentially each time the hearer comes across it.

# A more complex example: *cry one's eyes out*

Body Part *Off/Out* Construction (BPOC)

(Jackendoff 2002: 173–74, Glasbey 2003, Espinal and Mateu 2010, Kudo 2011)

*talk one's head off*      *sing one's heart out*      *cry one's eyes out*

Kudo (2011) proposes a computational model of representation:

Suppose we hear the utterance *John cried his eyes out*

1. We first process the literal interpretation
2. We then realize that, obviously, nobody literally causes his eyes to pop out of his head as a result of crying
3. We finally infer that the utterance must be understood as a hyperbole



Pictorial representation of a hyperbolic reading (Mateu & Espinal 2007)

This computational model sounds plausible, but is it correct?

- In Dutch, there is no perfect equivalent of the BPOC

- Closest expressions have a full PP, not a particle

*run one's legs off of one's body* (word-by-word translation from Dutch)

*sing one's lungs out of one's body* (idem)

*cry one's eyes out of one's head* (idem)

or: *run oneself the legs off of the/one's body* etc.

- More often: reflexive ditransitive pattern with Direct Object referring to a case of physical damage/deformation or a nasty (made-up) disease

*laugh oneself a fracture*

*sweat oneself an accident*

*search oneself a hunch*

*work oneself the pleurisy*

*startle oneself the typhus*

*bore oneself the plague*

*work oneself the monkey leprosy*

*startle oneself the pelican scabies*

(Cappelle 2014, Morris 2014)

- Given this formal non-equivalence between English and Dutch, we cannot just assume that the BPOC in English constitutes a set of expressions that are simply to be expected in the language.
  - Their interpretation may pose no problem for the hearer
  - But the speaker still has to learn that in English one says  
*run one's legs off*  
and not  
*run one's legs off of one's body* or *run oneself the pleurisy*

→ Again, more is stored in a language than one might at first sight assume. The cross-linguistic data show that BPOC construction has to be stored in English (i.e. in English speakers' mental lexicons), along with its standard interpretation of excess/intensification.

# *Can you X?*: applying the test in *one* language

*Can you open the door? Can you pass the salt? Can you just shut up?*

(i) 'Are you able to close the door?'      direct speech act: question

(ii) '(I request that you) close the door'      indirect speech act (ISA): request

"[T]he ISA has construction status in spite of the theoretical possibility to derive its meaning from the request scenario on-line (as must in fact be done in the case of non-conventionalized ISAs)." (Stefanowitsch 2003: 117)

Question: so, why would *Can you X?* be a construction?

Answer: because it has unpredictable properties

Language-internal comparison with equivalent expressions

*Can you (please) close the door?*

*Are you able to (\*please) close the door?*

*Is it possible (for you) to (\*please) close the door?*

# Pragmaticalization and short-circuiting

*Are you by any chance able to post this letter for me?* (Brown & Levinson 1987: 139)

*Is it possible to lay the table, do you think, for me?* (Leech 2014: 306)

- So, *Are you able to X?* and *Is it possible to X?* can *also* be used as ISAs
- But “*Are you able ...?* is not sufficiently “routinized” or *pragmaticalized* [...] as a directive formula in English to be able to co-occur with the overt directive pragmatic marker *please*.” (Leech 2014: 305-306)

*Pragmaticalization* is confusing as a term

≠ development whereby more and more room is given to language-independent processes of inferencing

= conventionalization of what was *once* a purely pragmatic interpretation

Cf. *short-circuited implicature* (Morgan 1977: 23)

= an implicature which is understood directly, without having to calculate it



*If you've seen one, you've seen them all*

conventionally used to convey:

*'They're all alike, so it's a waste of time to examine them separately'*

Cp.

*If you've seen one, you've seen all of them*

*You've seen them all if you've seen one*

might have the same implicature, but not as a matter of convention

*You can say that again* (cp. *You can repeat that*)

*How many times have I told you...* (cp. *Tell me how many times I've told you...*)

*It takes one to know one* (cp. *It requires one to recognize one*)

[Policeman to motorist] *Where's the fire?*

[Spouse to spouse] *I've got a headache*

*Your place or mine?*

*Are you crazy? / Have you lost your mind? / Are you out of your gourd?*

*Is the Pope Catholic?* [as an answer to an obvious question]

(Morgan 1977: 27 ff.)

# Interim conclusion and transition

→ Language is full of such clichéd sentences

- The interesting thing about them is that they are not quite idioms, since they still have a literal meaning which could in principle function as the basis for an inferential process
- This inference, however, has come to be by-passed and the erstwhile indirect reading is now a direct one
- Such sentences instantiate constructions with pre-installed pragmatics

- We will now address the question whether we can give **both** pragmatics **and** semantics a place in constructions without having to reduce either of them to the other.

# More on *Can you X?*

About *Can you pass the salt?* and the like:

“the request nature of the speech act is conveyed without the sort of indirect feeling we attribute to the presence of inference; the literal meaning is in some way latent, rather than the basis for an inference.”

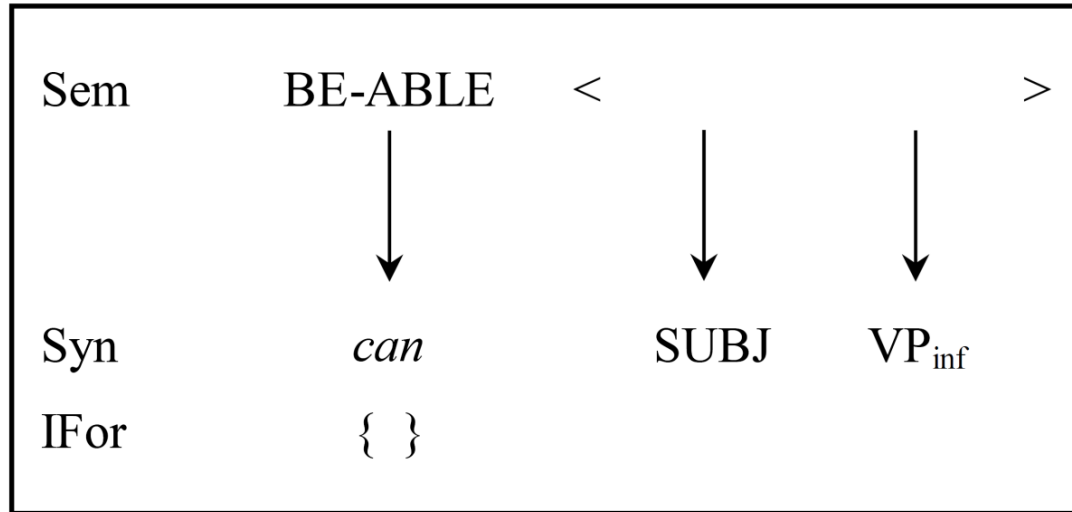
(Morgan 1977:23; emphasis mine)

but still present in the background

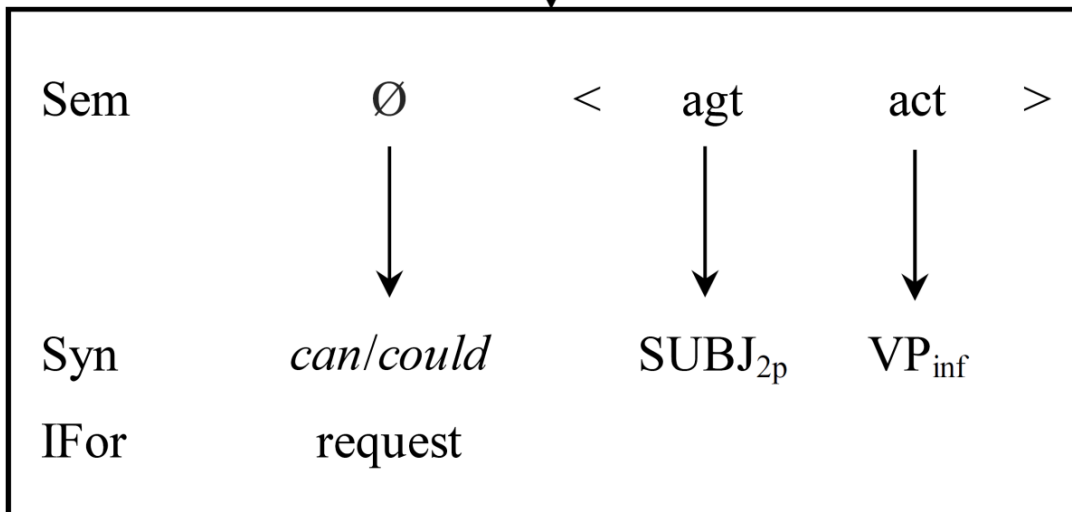
Cf.

“I will leave open the question whether *can* is actually completely empty, or whether it retains a weak trace of its meaning”

(Stefanowitsch 2003: 117)



I<sub>My</sub>: Ability for Action



# *Can* and *could*: semantics and pragmatics

- In the previous slide, *can* is specified as having the meaning ‘BE-ABLE’
- Out of context, *can* and *could* can have a small set of basic meanings: ‘BE-ABLE’ / ‘HAVE-PERMISSION’ / ‘HAVE-THE-OPPORTUNITY’ / ...
- There are many clichéd constructions containing *can* or *could* with conventionalized interpretations
- Following slides: constructions with *can* and *could* from *The Simpsons*.
  - Their conventionalized interpretation is revealed by the fact that it is deliberately or otherwise ignored by the speaker, for comic effect
- Not all of these have a short-circuited *implicature*; some of them have a preselected choice for what the basic *meaning* is
  - We can speak of a short-circuited *interpretation*, which may hold at the level of semantics and at the level of pragmatics alike

(Cappelle and Depraetere 2014)

# Modal constructions in *The Simpsons*

The *Not if I can help it* Construction

Lisa: *I guess that's it; these animals are all gonna die.*

Homer: ***Not if I can help it, Lisa.***

Lisa: *Do you have an idea?*

Homer: *Uh, no – sorry if it sounded like I did.*

- Meaning of *can* = 'HAVE-THE-OPPORTUNITY'
- in-built (short-circuited) implicature 'I'll prevent this from happening'
- The opportunity meaning doesn't have to be backgrounded or bleached by the pragmatic specification; they can sit alongside each other
- Related conventional items (e.g. *Not if I have anything to say about it*)
- Yet, the form is rather fixed:
  - \**If I can help it, (then) not.*
  - This won't happen if I can help it* (doesn't feel like a stored item)

syn *can*<sub>Modal</sub>  
sem possibility  
prag ∅

syn *Not if...*  
sem conditional  
prag 'I will prevent it'

syn *can*<sub>Modal</sub>  
sem non-epistemic possibility  
prag ∅

syn *can't*<sub>Modal</sub> + verb<sub>stative</sub>  
sem epistemic impossibility  
prag ∅

syn *can*<sub>Modal</sub>  
sem ability  
prag ∅

syn *can*<sub>Modal</sub>  
sem opportunity  
prag ∅

syn *can*<sub>Modal</sub>  
sem permission  
prag ∅

...

...

...

syn *Not if I can*<sub>Modal</sub> *help it*  
sem opportunity + conditional  
prag 'I will prevent it.'



## The *Kids can be so cruel* construction

[context: Homer complains to Marge about his classmates bullying him when he was a kid...]

Marge: *Kids can be so cruel.*

Bart: *We can? Thanks, Mom!* [starts hitting Lisa]

- Meaning of *can* = ‘GENERAL SITUATION POSSIBILITY’:  
‘{kids being very cruel} is possible’ (Depraetere & Reed 2011)
- Why a construction?
  - it’s a frequently used instantiation of NP<sub>generic</sub> *can* VP
  - existential reading (implying actualization) is a standard aspect  
cp. *Donations can be made via PayPal to cappelle.bert@gmail.com*:  
just general situation possibility without existential overlay
  - The form is relatively fixed (cp. *?\*Kids may be so unkind*)
- No short-circuited implicature but short-circuited interpretation

The (*Uh,*) *Vocative/Interjection, you can't X* construction

Homer: *Come on, boy. Let's get me a six-pack.*

Man: ***Uh, sir, you can't*** operate a boat under the influence of alcohol.

Homer: *That sounds like a wager to me!*

- Again short-circuited interpretation: meaning of *can't* = 'BE-PROHIBITED'
- Homer's reply sounds funny because he ignores this interpretation
- Speakers may have heard similar utterances and have stored the overlapping portion so that the interpretation becomes semi-automatic

*Uh, sir, you can't park here* (www)

*Uh, miss, you can't get on the bus with that umbrella open like that* (www)

*Uh, hey, you can't ask me about my religious beliefs* (www)

*Uh, excuse me, you can't actually do that* (www)

## More modal constructions from *The Simpsons*

Homer: *Ladies and gentlemen, **if I could just say a few words...** I'd be a better public speaker.*

Marge [to Homer]: *How's your back, Homey?*

Homer: ***I can't complain.***

[he then indicates a sign which reads: "No Complaining"]

Ned: *Aw, gee, the man's just trying to show his wife he cares for her. **How can we** sabotage his labor of love?*

Homer: *I dunno. Gasoline, acid, I got some stuff in the trunk.*

→ There are a lot of semi-fixed modal constructions in English which come pre-installed with a standard interpretation

- This interpretation may be just a disambiguated meaning (e.g. in the case of *can't*: prohibition, not inability)
- This interpretation may also include a standard implicature
- The notion of short-circuited *interpretation* covers both possibilities
- Semantics (e.g. epistemic vs. non-epistemic; ability vs. opportunity) can co-exist with further pragmatic specification in a single construction

# And then there's the reminder existential CX

The 'reminder' use of the existential construction

*There's always Harry.*

*But there's the dog!*

*There's still the remains of Christmas dinner in the freezer.*

(Lakoff 1987: 561)

“Examples of reminders are most commonly given in the form of lists:

- *There's the cat to feed, the dog to walk, the horse to brush, ...*
- *There'll be Max at the head of the table, Sally next to me, ...*

Lists of this sort are a general feature of English and are not peculiar to reminding uses of existentials. They apply to all sorts of other constructions:

- *Joan is prettier than Sue, richer than Melanie, smarter than Eliza, ...*
- *Bring the camera, the backpack, the canteen, ...*
- *I want to give Tom a sweater, Jeff an espresso-maker, ...*
- *Tom likes cats, Sally horses, Mike dogs, ...*

Existential lists are simply cases where the list construction has applied to an existential sentence. They are not part of the analysis of existentials at all.”

(Lakoff 1987: 561-562)

*The smartphone is typical of Amazon. There is the remorseless expansion: if you can deliver books and washing machines, why not a phone? There is the ability to switch between the real world of atoms and the digital world of bits (...). There is the drive for market share over immediate profits. And there is the slightly creepy feeling that Amazon knows too much about its users already. (The Economist, 21 June 2014, p. 9)*

→ Would be strange if there was just one occurrence of *There is the...*

*Question:*

If Lakoff states that the list use doesn't have to be stored as specific information in the Reminder Existential cx, how does he know that examples of this construction are most typically provided in list form?

*Answer:*

Because it *is* stored information!

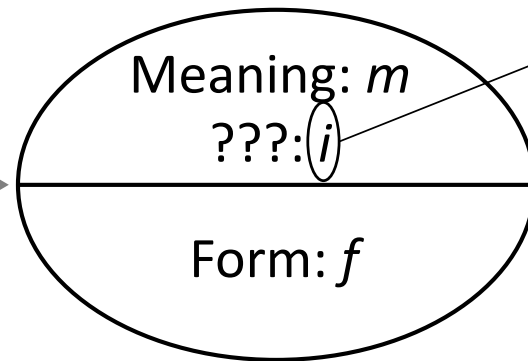
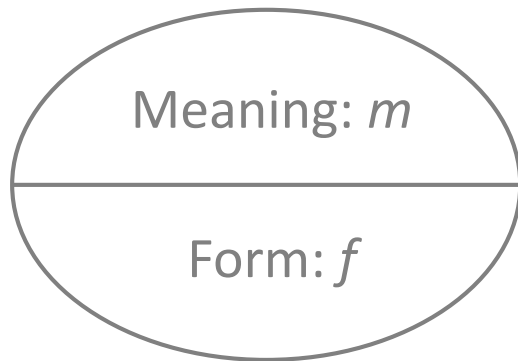
“It appears that listeners and speakers follow and keep track of the implications that occur in particular contexts. In order to know that a certain implication has occurred frequently and is associated with a certain string of words, speakers must register the context and the implications from the very first exposure.”

(Bybee 2006: 22)

→ There cannot be a sharp distinction between essential and ‘non-essential’ information.



Pragmatics: *i*



What exactly?

- Not part of semantics
- Not illocutionary force

→ Suggestion:

Separate section for  
information packaging,  
connotative value, register,  
region, ...

# Concluding reflections

Can pragmatics really be part of constructions? (= Question 1)

→ Yes.

- We have taken a look at various pragmatic phenomena
  - Gricean maxims
  - information structure
  - indirect speech acts
  - discourse patterns

and have seen how Cxs may contain specific information about them

- We have demonstrated how comparing equivalent structures cross-linguistically or intra-linguistically can reveal that the link between a given form and a given interpretation must be stored

• E.g. *cry one's eyes out*

*zich de ogen uit de kop huilen*

*Can you (please) X?*

*Are you able to (\*please) X?*

Is that stored pragmatic information just a kind of semantic information (question 2)?

Construction grammarians aren't clear about this.

- For Charles Fillmore, grammatical constructions are “the rules that unite formal and semantic information into various kinds of linguistic objects”  
“‘formal’ here includes syntactic, morphological, and phonological form; ‘semantic’ includes pragmatics and conventions of usage”

(Fillmore 2013: 131)

- For Adele Goldberg, “[a] notion rejected by Construction Grammar is that of a strict division between semantics and pragmatics. Information about focused constituents, topicality, and register is presented in constructions *alongside* semantic information” (Goldberg 1995: 7, emphasis mine)

→ no strict sem/pragm distinction, but no complete merger either

In this presentation: semantics and pragmatics are distinguished

e.g. *If I could say a few words...*

- short-circuited semantic interpretation: *could* = 'HAVE-PERMISSION'
- + short-circuited pragmatic interpretation of the whole expression:  
hedge: 'whether or not I have your actual permission, I will now make an announcement and hereby ask you, the audience, for some silence'

But there are other kinds of pragmatic information

Sem

Syn

Prag

IFor

Information  
structure

Other

Discourse  
organization

Register/  
Politeness

...

- Not everything that is not strictly semantic is therefore unpredictably context-dependent.
- There is much pragmatics that is part of language users' learned knowledge about constructions.

*May I thank you all for your attention!*