

Construction morphology, language variation, and language change

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It is clear from the impressive research on language variation and change by Frans Hinskens that theories of the architecture of the grammar of natural languages should play a role in analyzing and understanding language variation and change. I will endorse this idea by means of a brief discussion of some morphological and phonological phenomena that have to do with language variation and language change, and how they can be accounted for in the framework of Construction Morphology.

Language variation occurs at both the individual level (variation in the use of word formation patterns) and the community level (for instance geographical variation). Cases of language change that I will briefly discuss are: the emergence of construction-dependent morphology, the rise of affixes from compound constituents, storage and use of non-productive alternations, and the role of paradigmatic relations in allomorphy patterns.

Before discussing these phenomena, I will give a brief exposition of the relevant theoretical concepts of Construction Morphology, in particular the false dichotomy between storage and computation, the hierarchical structure of the lexicon (schemas and subschemas), and the role of paradigmatic relations between words and between morphological schemas.