Construction Grammar as a framework

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In this paper, we discuss the prevalent diversity of constructionist approaches in relation to the idea of Construction Grammar as a coherent field of linguistic study. We do so, based on the views of about 190 constructionist researchers, as expressed in a questionnaire in 2021. While the responses show both variety and agreement, the main dividers appear to be whether all constructionist approaches are usage-based, on the one hand, and the stance towards formalization, on the other. We argue that the diversity of approaches is on the one hand a strength, in that a great variety of linguistic phenomena can be accounted for from a constructionist viewpoint. On the other hand, it is a weakness if these accounts are not mutually compatible. If Construction Grammar is to truly work as a model of language as a whole, the various approaches must not only get to co-exist — and flourish — but also be made to fit together. This is not a call for conformity, but rather for communication and cross-fertilization.

Keywords: Construction Grammar, Framework, Usage-based, Formalization, Theory

1. Introduction

One of the main selling points of Construction Grammar (CxG) is its versatility. Virtually any linguistic pattern can be described in terms of constructions, and any factor and perspective may be incorporated in a construction description, from phonological, semantic, lexical, and morphosyntactic features to various contextual associations. This versatility, in turn, has led to a great diversity of constructionist approaches, to a point where it is unclear to what extent they all fit together in a coherent linguistic theory or framework.[1]

1. This paper is a significantly revised version of a manuscript originally submitted for review to Constructions and Frames in 2023. We would like to thank the editors of the journal and, including the latest round of reviews, three anonymous reviewers, who made many valuable suggestions for revising the paper. The usual disclaimers apply.

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Obviously, there are both pros and cons to this situation (e.g., Ungerer & Hartmann 2023; Cappelle 2024; Boas et al. 2024; van Trijp 2025; see further below). Consequently, the desirability of a shared CxG framework turned out to be one of the most divisive topics in an online questionnaire on CxG conducted in 2021 and an ensuing roundtable discussion at ICCG-11 in Antwerp the same year (for details, see Boas et al. 2024). In this paper, we will therefore zoom in on the framework-related issues treated in the questionnaire and roundtable discussion, present the diverse opinions expressed on this topic and discuss them in relation to key aspects of CxG theory and practice. Can — and should — the variety of constructionist approaches fit within the same coherent Construction Grammar? (For an overall account of the results from the questionnaire and the roundtable discussion, see Boas et al. 2024.)

Framework issues were addressed in both Likert-scale questions and open questions in the questionnaire. Of the 13 Likert questions in the questionnaire, we identify five in particular that connect closely to the issue of CxG as a framework. An overview of the numerical responses to these five questions is given in Table 1:

Table 1. Responses to framework-related Likert questions in the 2021 questionnaire

	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	St.D
CxG should be a full model of language as a whole rather than primarily a model of just grammar.	45	25	21	8	1	1.93	1.01
It's my impression that Construction Grammar is a coherent field of inquiry.	25	42	11	21	2	2.33	1.1
It's my impression that results from one flavor of CxG can be "translated" into other flavors of CxG.	9	49	18	20	3	2.59	1.01
CxG should use an exact formalism to represent its findings.	11	24	26	25	14	3.07	1.22
It's my impression that all flavors of CxG are usage-based.	21	31	12	23	14	2.77	1.36

1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = strongly disagree; Av = average; St.D = standard deviation

As shown in Table 1, there is mostly agreement that CxG should be a full model of language as a whole and the respondents somewhat agree that CxG is a coherent field and that results may translate between different variants (or "flavors", cf. Goldberg 2006) of CxG. There is less agreement on whether results should be formalized and, as will be shown below, the disagreement on this matter is connected to views of different variants of CxG as usage-based or not. In this paper, we discuss CxG as a framework, in relation to the responses and comments

to the questions in Table 1, as well as other related opinions that were expressed in the questionnaire replies and the roundtable discussion.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, we present the questionnaire and the roundtable. Section 3 gives a historical overview of how CxG developed from the original (Berkeley) Construction Grammar in the 1980s to the current variety of constructionist approaches. Thereafter, we discuss, one issue at a time, the variety of flavors in Section 4: the absence (or lack?) of a shared formalism in Section 4.1, translatability of research results between flavors in Section 4.2, descriptive coverage in Section 4.3, and usage-basedness in Section 4.4. In the concluding discussion (Section 5), we bring the various issues together and address the overall question of CxG as a coherent field of study.

2. The 2021 questionnaire and roundtable discussion

To get a better picture of what practitioners of CxG think about a variety of different issues regarding the current state of CxG, including the framework issue, we administered an anonymous online questionnaire that was filled out by 189 constructionist researchers in the spring of 2021 (Boas et al. 2024).[2] The questionnaire consisted of three different sections. The first section elicited background information about the respondents (e.g., age, gender, current level of academic seniority, primary fields of research interest, level of interest in CxG). The second section consisted of 13 Likert-scale questions about different aspects of CxG, followed by the option to provide further input in a text box. The third section consisted of 6 text questions eliciting specific thoughts and opinions about various aspects of CxG. At the end of the questionnaire respondents were given the opportunity to provide their names and contact information, in case they wanted to be personally identified.[3]

In the email with the link to the anonymous online questionnaire, we told our colleagues that we would like to have their views on different sets of questions surrounding constructional research and that we were going to use their (anonymous) answers for research (and publication) purposes, as well as a presentation

2. We would like to thank the following colleagues for providing helpful feedback on the first two drafts of the online questionnaire: Bert Cappelle, Bill Croft, Francisco Gonzálvez García, Yoko Hasegawa, Martin Hilpert, Steffen Höder, Thomas Hoffmann, Laura Janda, Kiki Nikoforidou, Oda Røste Odden, Kyoko Ohara, Florent Perek, Peter Petré, and Tiago Torrent.

3. We are very grateful to Todd Krause of the Linguistics Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin for his help with administering the online Qualtrics questionnaire. He also gave us useful feedback on the design and content of the first two draft questionnaires.

and discussion at the ICCG-11 conference in Antwerp in August 2021. After participation in the online questionnaire closed in early June 2021, we started analyzing the answers provided by the respondents in preparation for our introductory presentation at the Roundtable at ICCG-11 in Antwerp in August 2021.

Based on the results of our online questionnaire, we organized an hour and a half long roundtable discussion titled *The current state of Construction Grammar*, which took place at ICCG-11 in Antwerp in August of 2021.[4] The roundtable was conducted in a hybrid format and included about 100 people in the room and perhaps 150 online participants. The goal was to engage our colleagues in a conversation based on the topics and answers of the online questionnaire.

As a point of departure for the discussion, we first summarized some of the results from the questionnaire, then we allotted roughly 15 minutes of discussion time to four broad topics: the framework problem, the meaning problem, usage and cognition issues, and "where do we go from here?" Due to the format, there were parallel discussions going on simultaneously in the oral forum (both in-person and over video-conference) and the online chat. In both modalities, many different opinions were expressed. Hence, giving a proper account of what was said would require an article of its own. In the present context, we will settle for a very rough outline and summary of the discussion of the framework problem, our first topic under discussion, which generated a broad variety of different opinions.

Some colleagues expressed their reservations regarding the status of formalism(s) in CxG. For example, one participant noted that constructionists should be "transparent by how we communicate with each other, doesn't require a formalism". While some participants argued strongly in favor of a precise formalism ("we need to be precise, and then we need a formalism"), there was also the realization that "different formalisms have different conceptions of what counts as a construction" and that sometimes formalisms may create obstacles when it comes to capturing complex linguistic situations. To this end, several participants suggested that one should be open towards an evolving framework that may change over time ("if the framework is too restrictive we need to change the framework").

This observation led to the realization that constructionists sometimes don't appear to agree on the exact formulation of a number of key concepts in CxG. For example, one participant pointed out that we "need to talk explicitly about key notions: what do we mean by construction, meaning, etc.?", while another participant noted that linguists "can't even agree what a word is, what counts as evidence and what counts as data". This observation led another participant to express his

4. We are grateful to the organizers of ICCG-11, and to Peter Petré in particular, for giving us the opportunity to carry out this roundtable discussion and for helping us with various associated practical matters.

interest, shared by other participants, that insights from different flavors of CxG should be compatible with each other ("different approaches should be translatable").

With this overview of the diverse range of opinions held by current-day practitioners of CxG, we now turn to a discussion of the intellectual background and development of CxG since its inception at UC Berkeley from the 1980s onwards. More specifically, we trace how the question of formalizing linguistic insights has been handled over the years and how this helps us with understanding the various different opinions held by practitioners of CxG about the framework problem today.

3. From (Berkeley) Construction Grammar to a variety of constructionist approaches

Beginning in the late 1980s, a series of publications by Charles Fillmore and his associates analyzed semi-idiomatic grammatical constructions that were not of particular interest to the then mainstream Chomskyan paradigm (Chomsky 1981, 1989). One central goal of this early (as well as subsequent) constructional research was to provide an account of not only idiomatic and semi-idiomatic syntactic structures, which were considered by the then mainstream syntacticians to belong to what they labeled "periphery", but also of the fully regular syntactic structures in language, or the so-called "core" of grammar.[5]

One of the key features of the emerging constructionist research paradigm was its explicit claim about the very close relationship between form and meaning, articulated in a series of case studies of specific grammatical constructions (see Lakoff 1987; Fillmore 1988; Fillmore et al. 1988; Fillmore & Kay 1993; Zwicky 1994, 1995), treating constructions — conventional pairings of form and meaning — as the basic units for linguistic analysis. This notion has also been relevant for other central ideas in CxG, such as the lexicon-syntax continuum, the organization of constructions in terms of a network, the commitment to analyzing all aspects of a language instead of focusing only on selected aspects while ignoring other aspects, and a focus on usage-based data (for details, see Boas 2021).

5. Some of the constructional ideas emerging during the 1980s had their intellectual roots in Fillmore's (1968) Case Grammar, in which he presented a set of so-called case frames that specify a verb's semantic valency, and in which he made proposals about how such case frames are mapped to syntax. For more information, see Chapin (1972), Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005), Boas & Dux (2017), and Boas (2025b).

One major development following the early constructionist publications is the emergence of several different types of so-called "flavors" of CxG (cf. Goldberg 2006). For example, many of the foundational publications on CxG of the late 1980s and 1990s such as Fillmore et al. (1988), Fillmore & Kay (1993), Michaelis & Lambrecht (1996), Fillmore (1999), and Kay & Fillmore (1999) laid the ground for a particular version of CxG that later became known as Berkeley Construction Grammar (BCxG) (see Fillmore 2013). While the very early BCxG publications focused on semi-idiomatic constructions, later research, such as Fillmore & Kay (1993), also covered a much broader variety of constructions while at the same time also offering a general formalism for accounting for different kinds of constructional properties.

In light of the present-day versatility of CxG, it is worthwhile to note that a similar theoretical variability was there already in the earliest stages. Fillmore (1988: 35) acknowledges this in one of the very first overall presentations of Construction Grammar: "unfortunately, the framework I'll be speaking about is a moving target; in fact, it is one of a set of several moving targets with the same name". In fact, not all of these "moving targets" even had the same name: for instance, Langacker (1991: 8) distinguishes between Construction Grammar and Cognitive Grammar (which e.g., Goldberg later [2006: 123–124] includes in her list of "constructionist approaches"), while at the same time pointing out their fundamental similarity: "it appears, in fact, that anything statable in Construction Grammar has a direct analog in Cognitive Grammar." Thus, as Remi van Trijp put it as he kindly pointed out this state of affairs to us, "constructional multilingualism" is not just a recent phenomenon, but something that was baked into CxG's DNA.

Goldberg's (1995, 2006, 2019) constructional approach, which was in large part inspired by Lakoff's research, is known today under the label of Cognitive Construction Grammar (CCxG), and it has mainly focused on argument structure constructions (see Boas 2013). While similar to BCxG in many respects, CCxG stands out in its aim to also offer a psychologically plausible account of language. On this cognitive view, influenced by Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987), constructions are thought to be motivated by more general properties of human interaction and cognition. BCxG, on the other hand, remains largely silent on the influence of general cognitive principles, being more focused on formalizing constructional insights in a coherent overall system using a precise notation system. Its successor, Sign-based Construction Grammar (SBCG) (Sag 2012; Boas & Sag 2012; Michaelis 2013), follows BCxG in this regard, further refining the formal apparatus.

Other flavors of CxG emerging since the 2000s include Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001, 2013), with a heavy focus on typological aspects of lan-

guage, Embodied Construction Grammar (Bergen & Chang 2005), which is used for simulation-based language understanding, Fluid Construction Grammar (Steels 2011; 2013), which offers a computational construction grammar formalism that allows for the explicit modeling of language learning and language evolution (van Trijp 2017; van Trijp et al. 2022), and Diasystematic Construction Grammar (Höder 2018), which is a constructionist model of multilingualism and language contact. A recent, pedagogically oriented version of CxG is the CASA model of Herbst & Hoffmann (2024). While each of the different flavors of CxG emerging since the 1990s have their own objectives and specific interests (often using different methodological approaches), they all share a common core set of constructional ideas, including:

1. Constructions, pairings of form with meaning/function, are the basic building blocks of language (Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001);
2. Constructions are organized in structured networks (Diessel 2019, 2023; Hilpert et al. 2025);
3. There is no strict division between the lexicon and syntax;
4. There are no different levels of representation as in other formal theories.[6]

CxG has changed in other ways, too, since the 1990s. First, from the 1980s until the mid-1990s, Fillmore and Kay's constructional research program, which later became known as BCxG (see Fillmore 2013), was widely recognized as what researchers at the time considered to be "Construction Grammar" (see Boas 2025a). This changed following Goldberg's seminal (1995) book on argument structure constructions (ASCs), which captured most of the attention of people interested in CxG. In fact, the popularity of Goldberg's (1995) book led many linguists not very familiar with CxG to think for a long time that CxG was mainly about ASCs. It was only later in the 2000s that more researchers started exploring constructions other than ASCs made popular by Goldberg (1995; 2006).

Second, while the Chomskyan framework, as well as other modular approaches, made explicit claims about Universal Grammar and cross-linguistic similarities between different languages, constructional research began in the 1980s with a focus on analyzing only English. It was only during the late 1990s and early 2000s that constructional researchers also started exploring languages other than English to determine to what degree one could employ CxG for the analysis of other languages. These languages included German (Hens 1996; Boas 2000;

6. For an in-depth comparison of the various flavors of CxG with other functional-cognitive approaches, see Butler & Gonzálvez García (2014). For a more elaborate discussion of the different flavors of CxG, see Boas (2013), Hoffmann (2022), Ungerer & Hartmann (2023), and van Trijp (2025).

Michaelis & Ruppenhofer 2001), Icelandic (Barðdal 2004), Czech (Fried 2004), French (Lambrecht 2004; Lambrecht & Lemoine 2005; Bouveret & Legallois 2012), Finnish (Pälsi 2000; Leino 2005), and Japanese (Fujii 2004; Ohara 2005; Tsujimura 2005).

The ever-increasing interest among construction grammarians to analyze languages other than English also led to cross-linguistic application of CxG. While there is a fairly general consensus about constructions being conventions, and thus particular to language-communities (e.g., Croft 2001), this does not preclude comparison between constructions in different languages. Thus, CxG is now being applied to both contrastive linguistics and language typology.

Boas (2010a) employs principles from contrastive linguistics (Weigand 1998; Altenberg & Granger 2002) and Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1982, 1985) to propose a contrastive approach to cross-linguistic comparisons of constructions (see also Boas 2003), and the papers in Boas (2010b) present comparisons between English constructions with their counterparts in other languages, including Finnish, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Thai.

This contrastive approach to comparing constructions across languages is refined by Boas & Ziem (2018), who compare English and German constructions in order to identify which sets of constructions have counterparts in the other language and which ones do not. Boas & Ziem (2018) arrive at three broad classes of constructions that can be thought of as points on a continuum:

1. Constructions that have direct counterparts in the other language, expressing the same semantics in similar syntactic ways (such as the English *just_because_doesn't_mean* and the German *nur_weil_heisst_das_[noch_lange]_nicht* constructions).
2. Constructions that share many commonalities, but also differ systematically in a number of ways, such as exclamative constructions in English and German.
3. Constructions that have no clear constructional correspondences in the other language, such as the English *way* construction, whose semantics and function are only minimally covered by German reflexive constructions.

As for construction-based approaches to language typology, such a model is presented by Croft (2022). Croft treats linguistic structures in different languages by a comprehensive set of language-neutrally defined comparative concepts (CCs, cf. Haspelmath 2010), organized and defined from a constructional perspective. In addition to functional CCs, defining semantic content and information packaging (i.e., the meaning side of constructions), Croft also proposes hybrid CCs, i.e., combinations of form and function — ergo, constructions. Building on Croft's work, Lorenzi et al. (2024) have developed the database *MoCCA* (Model of Com-

parative Concepts for Constructicon Alignment) as a resource for comparing and aligning constructions in different languages.

Beyond linguistic theory, CxG has spread into the realm of applied linguistics in areas such as language pedagogy, constructicography, and computational linguistics. Since the first conference *Constructional Approaches to Language Pedagogy* (CALP) was held in Brussels in 2014 (De Knop & Gilquin 2016), the interest in applying constructional research to improving language teaching and learning has grown quite significantly. CALP has developed into a conference series, and the number of publications is growing steadily (see, for example, Ellis et al. 2016; Herbst & Hoffmann 2024; De Knop 2025; and the papers in Boas 2022). Constructicography, in turn, is the practice of compiling collections of construction descriptions into databases called constructicons (e.g., Fillmore et al. 2012; Boas 2017; Lyngfelt et al. 2018), in principle applied counterparts of the theoretical notion of a mental constructicon (Lee-Goldman & Petruck 2018; Lyngfelt 2018; Herbst 2019). To date, there are constructicon projects under way for about a dozen languages (cf. Borin & Lyngfelt 2025). As for computational linguistics, it is not only a growing field of application of CxG but also a source of tools for constructionist research (e.g., van Trijp et al. 2022; Torrent et al. 2023; Beuls & van Eecke 2025; Tayyar Madabushi et al. 2025).

Over the past 20 years, an increasing number of constructionist researchers have adopted a more explicitly usage-based approach (Backus 2020). This, however, seems to mean different things to different people, minimally entailing a commitment to work with authentic usage data, while usage-based *theory* (e.g., Langacker 1987; Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Diessel 2019; Schmid 2020) goes further than that. The key characteristic of such approaches is an intimate association between linguistic structures and instances of use of language, effectively collapsing the traditional distinction between grammar and usage (cf. *langue*/*parole* or *competence*/*performance*). Thus, factors such as frequency, typicality, gradience, emergent meaning, and contextual adaptation, traditionally treated as external to the grammar, are incorporated in the linguistic analysis. Most striking in constructionist research of the last decade is a strong emphasis on frequency, shown both by a wealth of quantitative corpus studies (cf. "the quantitative turn", Janda 2013) and by frequency playing a central role in linguistic theorizing (see, e.g., Bybee 2010; Diessel 2019; Schmid 2020; Gries 2022; Hilpert 2025).

However, while all flavors of CxG are arguably more or less usage-based in some sense, actual practice varies greatly in this regard. The positions range from Kay (2013), who maintains a traditional distinction between grammar and usage, to fundamentally usage-based models such as Diessel (2019) and Schmid (2020). It also varies to what extent adopting a usage-based viewpoint reflects on actual

analyses, beyond being grounded in authentic corpus data. In an attempt to avoid the somewhat confusing variety of notions of *usage-based*, one may instead refer to approaches devoted to integrating grammar and usage as *usage-oriented* (in contrast to work that is system-oriented but may nonetheless be usage-based to varying degrees). We return to this issue in Section 4.4.

Our brief discussion of how CxG has developed over the past 35+ years has shown the many ways in which constructional research has expanded from a few case studies on semi-idiomatic constructions in English to a much broader research program. Even though a core set of constructional ideas is shared by all proponents of different flavors of CxG, there are a number of theoretical and practical issues on which there seems to be far less consensus. In the following sections, we discuss in more detail some issues surrounding the framework problem, and we argue that these issues need to be resolved in order for CxG to make significant progress in the future.

4. A variety of flavors

As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, a prominent feature of CxG is its versatility. For better or worse, CxG comes in a wide variety of different shapes and appearances, as was pointed out in Section 2. There is a plentitude of different flavors with different names, and different terms, concepts, and notations are used to represent different types, or subsets, of constructions. This versatility is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it may be attractive to newcomers, there is "something for everyone", so to speak, and one can often find a variety of CxG to fit one's view of language among the different flavors. On the other hand, the mere possibility of such "theory-shopping" is a burden to the academic credibility of CxG: who is going to trust a theory that does not seem to agree with itself? More substantially, it provides a broader view — or a plentitude of points of view — to language, but at the same time it makes it more difficult to keep that view coherent, or to combine those points of view.

One may even ask whether or not, or to what extent, CxG is one theory or framework, rather than several different ones. Due to the variability of constructional approaches, trying to build a coherent picture of the language system, or the/a grammar, within CxG is an overly complicated task. Research results do not always seem to be fully transferable between different varieties of CxG, and learning and using "Construction Grammar" is an unlimited task since there are no obvious boundaries as to what constitutes "Construction Grammar". And, perhaps most importantly, the current diaspora could be regarded as an impediment to progress. CxG as a joint enterprise may not go forward the way it could when

there is no consensus about the direction it should take, and when progress takes place in only rather loosely related subprojects. While this may be a somewhat natural consequence of the greatly increased number of scholars working, and amount of work carried out, within CxG, not everyone in the CxG community finds it inevitable.

In the following sections, we discuss four aspects of the existing variation: the variability in systems of notation, the translatability of research results between different flavors of CxG, the effect which the different flavors have on the research questions asked and the phenomena covered by each of them, and the opinions of construction grammarians regarding whether or not constructions, and grammar, are to be regarded as usage-based. We do not intend to impose our own judgements on these topics but, rather, describe the current situation based on the opinions expressed in and reflected by the questionnaire results, as well as other observations.

4.1 No common system of representation

Perhaps the most visible point where CxG lacks consensus is the concrete framework, or descriptive apparatus, used in actual analyses. This is particularly visible with regard to concrete formalizations (or, as is often the case, lack thereof) of analyses made in "the CxG framework". As pointed out above, quite a few different "flavors" of CxG have emerged, many with their own machinery of notation and formalization. Ultimately, of course, the issue is much deeper than merely notational. Notation and formalization in different varieties of CxG reflect partly different underlying concepts, focusing on very different sets of linguistic phenomena (e.g., inflectional morphology vs. argument structure constructions), quite obviously different applications of the theory and analyses (for instance, artificial intelligence vs. language pedagogy), using very different methodologies, etc.[7]

That said, the descriptive apparatus is probably the most obvious point of variability between "different Construction Grammars". This is particularly visible with regard to concrete formalizations of analyses made in "the CxG framework". Quite a few different "flavors" of CxG have emerged, many with their own way of formalizing constructionist insights. Furthermore, not everyone wants to use an exact notation in the first place. Our online questionnaire contained a variety of questions asking the respondents to share their opinions. Question 8 of the questionnaire, regarding the role of exact formalization in CxG, seems to be a matter of true disagreement among practitioners of CxG, as Table 2 shows.

7. For a discussion of how different flavors of CxG employ various types of notation, see Butler & Gonzálvez García (2014), Boas (2025a), and van Trijp (2025).

Table 2. Likert responses on formalism

	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	St.D
CxG should use an exact formalism to represent its findings.	11	24	26	25	14	3.07	1.22

1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = strongly disagree; Av = average; St.D = standard deviation

As discussed in Boas et al. (2024), there is no one commonly accepted formalism for CxG at present (see also van Trijp 2025). Whether or not there should be one, and whether or not the findings of CxG should be formalized to begin with, is subject to debate and disagreement. Some like CxG precisely because it allows for non-formalized syntactic analysis, while others feel that formalization assures explicitness and exactitude, which some researchers feel are necessary for credible analysis. The answers below (1) present a range of different opinions on the matter, and they also reflect different attitudes regarding the unity vs. diversity of existing notations.

(1) a. I agree with this statement, but I think each strand of CxG should develop its own consistent method of formalism, especially CCxG.
b. I think it depends on the focus of the particular research. Sometimes formalisms are helpful, other times they do more harm than good.
c. It's not essential, but some more effort towards a shared formalism would be beneficial to the field.
d. There is not enough interest for formalisms in the field.
e. I honestly don't know what we gain from this, unless it's for a specific application in computational linguistics. I follow Dryer in thinking that functionalists have little to gain from playing formalist games.
f. No, I think the fluidity of CxG is what makes it so suitable to make sense of actual data.
g. I believe that formal and non-formal approaches can coexist for their mutual benefit.
h. I disagree if "formalism" means to exclude the function
i. Formalisations are of crucial importance for validating the preciseness and internal consistency of theories, for scaling them, for corroborating them with corpus data and for exchanging ideas among researchers.
j. If possible, fomalisation is preferable, but I don't think it is possible to represent all linguistic findings in a formalisation.
k. Again, I oppose to uniformation. Formalism is useful in computational linguistics and to clarify complex analyses. I'm not a great fan of the formalisms of SBCG and HPSG; they are hard to read and seem more adapted to computerized parsing than to a goal of representing constructions in a format that would approach something that language users

know and use. In form (though not necessarily in content), the f-structures of LFG are much closer to what I'd prefer.

l. god forbid we evolve into another generativistic hole

The results from our online questionnaire suggest that many members of the CxG community are in favor of formalisms as long as they are not required to use them themselves and as long as there is room for the existing (and presumably new) variation within the community.

Looking at the variation among existing frameworks, the longest tradition, Berkeley Construction Grammar (e.g., Fillmore & Kay 1993), uses a unification-based feature matrix notation. This tradition has been followed, and developed further, in several subsequent works (e.g., Fried & Östman 2004), most recently in the Sign-Based Construction Grammar framework (Boas & Sag 2012). A different but also widely used notation is that formulated in Goldberg (1995) for the analysis of argument structure constructions. Goldberg's notation is much less complex, but therefore also much more limited than the BCxG feature matrix notation.

Other, less widely used notational conventions also exist, mainly for fairly specific purposes (e.g., Östman 2005 and Östman 2025 on discourse structure). However, arguably the most common notation is not using notation at all but merely verbally describing the constructions under analysis. This is naturally true of many, if not most, other linguistic frameworks as well. In CxG, however, it may reflect the fact that there is no one shared notation, and therefore it is often easier to not formalize findings than to take a stance with regard to the choice of a particular notation.

Even when constructions are represented with formalizations, the notation used for the formalization is rarely shared throughout the CxG community. Let us consider a small selection of examples. Figure 1 represents the English ditransitive construction in a Goldbergian form. Figure 2 shows the English Verb Phrase construction in a Berkeley Construction Grammar fashion. Figure 3 shows the English Expletive-Phrase WH-interrogative construction in a more or less simple and general bracketed notation. And Figure 4 shows the "*how-many-are-there-*?" construction in the Fluid CxG notation.

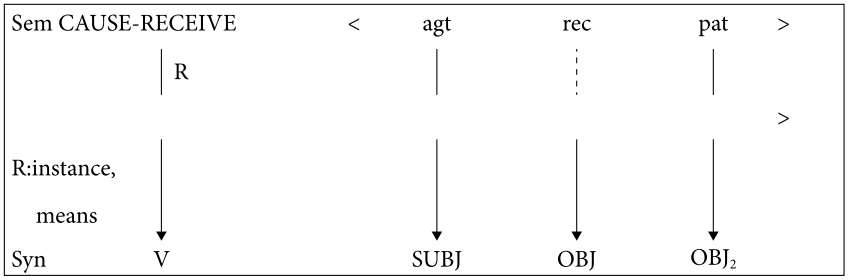

Figure 1. The English ditransitive construction (Goldberg 1995: 142)

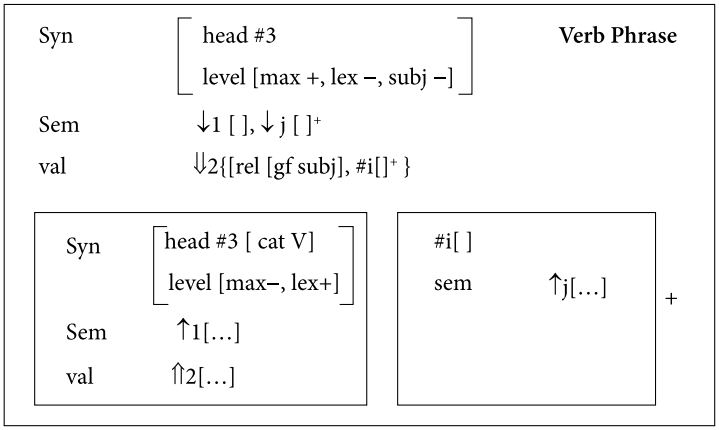

Figure 2. The English Verb Phrase construction (Fried & Östman 2004: 59)

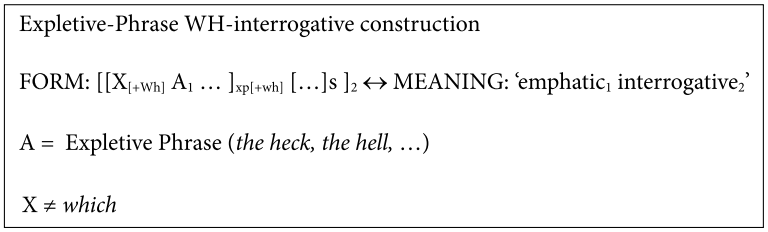

Figure 3. The English Expletive-Phrase WH-interrogative construction (Hoffmann 2017)

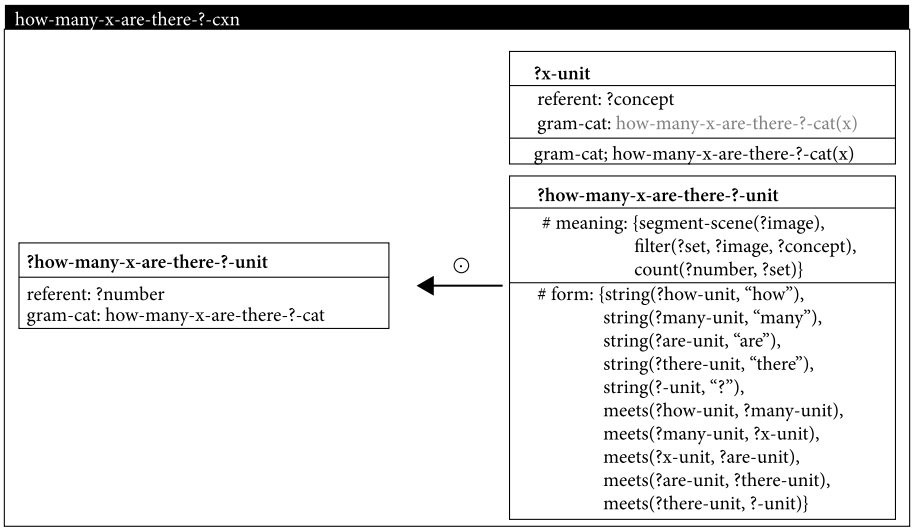

Figure 4. The "*how-many-are-there*-?" construction (Beuls & van Eecke 2023: 46)

As these somewhat randomly selected examples show, the variety of notations used under the name "Construction Grammar" varies to the extent that the uninitiated reader has a challenging time when trying to recognize them as instances of the "same" theory or framework. And, of course, this is just a selection and by no means a comprehensive list of the notations used within CxG (for further discussion, see Boas 2025a; van Trijp 2025).

We do not mean to suggest that we should do away with all this notational variety. Different formalisms serve different purposes, and they have proven useful for the purposes that they were designed for. Yet, this variety makes it difficult, in practice, to bring together analyses made in different flavors of CxG, and the questionnaire results suggest that many feel that there should be some shared system of notation, a notational *lingua franca*, that these different analyses could somewhat easily be translated into when necessary. This would be highly useful for the purposes of constructicography and cumulative repositories of description, i.e., constructicons. Such a formalism should be maximally flexible in order to allow for everything that may be conventionalized in language, in the spirit of the Fillmore & Kay (1993) quote above. The BCxG/SBCG feature matrix formalism seems like a viable candidate in that respect, although some consider it overly technical and difficult to acquire. A somewhat simpler candidate is the CASA format (Herbst & Hoffmann 2024).

4.2 Translatability of research results

Another issue pertaining to the variability of constructional approaches is the question of whether insights stated in one flavor of CxG can be translated into other flavors of CxG. As Table 3 shows, the majority (9% strongly agree; 49% somewhat agree) think that this is the case, while 18% neither agree nor disagree. However, less than one in ten respondents strongly agrees, which can be taken as an indication that translatability is not unproblematic; constructionists, by and large, seem to either "insecurely agree" or feel that research results "can be translated to some extent but often not fully".

Table 3. Likert responses on translatability between flavors

	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	St.D
It's my impression that results from one flavor of CxG can be "translated" into other flavors of CxG.	9	49	18	20	3	2.59	1.01

1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = strongly disagree; Av = average; St.D = standard deviation

In addition to the information in Table 3, respondents also offered further specific opinions about whether results from one flavor of CxG can be "translated" into other flavors of CxG. Some respondents voiced their general concerns that a "translation" of results between different flavors is not possible (e.g., "I don't see the point" and "I think that the models vary according to the aim of the description / analysis / explanation. In this sense, the results of one model cannot be translated into another").

Roughly speaking, the dominant view in the field is that different flavors of CxG are mutually intelligible but only to a degree, or at least not always without problems. Relatively many view the task of transferring results from one flavor of CxG to another as a problematic one, but only very few have a strongly negative opinion — or a strongly positive one, for that matter, although that is more common. The verbal data presented in (2) below supports this overall view.

(2) a. According to my experience, it has not been any easy job.[8]
b. An informed reader can easily recognise similarities between the different approaches, but sometimes it is difficult to remain in a specific terminology, because one wants to combine the assets of different approaches.
c. I don't see why not.
d. Not necessarily; especially difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches and between usage-based and non-usage-based approaches.
e. An approach like Cognitive CxG mostly eshews formalism for a good reason and cannot be properly translated into a formal approach.

f. I somewhat agree but, to give a more precise answer, it would depend on what does "translate" stands for (in terms of formalization, notation, or in terms of theoretical interpretation).

Interestingly, some of the respondents expressing their concerns also provided specific reasons for them, such as issues with formalization (e.g., "This requires a certain degree of formalization which is not feasible for all flavors of cxg" and "Sometimes the specific formalization system and the type of semantics employed may pose problems to do this") as well as issues with representing constructions at different degrees of abstractions (e.g., "This is because Goldberg's version of CxG would not be able to capture the information described in lower-level constructions"). In contrast, other respondents do not have a specific opinion (e.g., "not sure, I haven't seen such attempts"), while others have a fairly optimistic view regarding translating results from one flavor of CxG into other flavors of CxG (e.g., "I don't see why not" and "With a CxG view, the basic unit of language is form-meaning pairing, namely, construction. In this respect, all flavors are interchangeable").

A commonly held belief among construction grammarians is that these different flavors of CxG are all variants of the same basic line of thought. As pointed out in Section 2, different flavors of CxG share several fundamental ingredients, or background assumptions. Superficially, they all subscribe to the notion of *construction,* a conventional pairing of form and meaning/function, and they all agree that using language involves fitting such constructions together rather than, for instance, deriving structures from other structures with a mechanism involving rules, principles, different levels of representation, or the like. They also assume that constructions are organized in structured networks, and see a continuum, rather than a strict division, between the lexicon and syntax. However, despite all similarities, be they real or only apparent, different flavors of CxG are very different when it comes to their notations.

4.3 Uneven coverage of different types of constructions

A somewhat different, although naturally related, type of variability is the coverage of different aspects (or in some other views, modules) of language: syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics, pragmatics, discourse, etc. In its most traditional forms, CxG promised to be an integrated model of syntax and semantics (e.g., Fillmore 1988: 36). As CxG-driven works have accumulated, it has profiled

8. Some of the responses contain typos, these were left unchanged from the original replies in the online questionnaire.

itself more and more as a holistic framework of all aspects of the language system. For a long time, the focus was on syntax and semantics, but the scope has steadily broadened towards discourse (e.g., Östman 2005; Fried 2021; Östman 2025), morphology (Booij 2010, 2018; Audring & Jackendoff 2025), phonology (Boas 2004; Höder 2014, 2019; Ward 2025), etc. Whether or not this should be the case seems an easy question to answer, and, as shown in Table 4, there is little disagreement among the respondents.

Table 4. Responses on the scope of CxG

	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	St.D
CxG should be a full model of language as a whole rather than primarily a model of just grammar.	45	25	21	8	1	1.93	1.01

1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = strongly disagree; Av = average; St.D = standard deviation

A total of 70% of the replies are positive to the idea that CxG should cover language as a whole. Only 9% disagree, and most of them only somewhat. There seems to be more reflection as to whether or not this is a realistic aim, what the notions "just grammar" and "full model of language" mean, and where CxG stands with regard to this aim at present, see the responses in (3) below.

(3) a. It's about form-meaning pairings, how could it be about 'grammar' only?
b. Makes sense, but that's a tall order. Where do we start? How do we avoid scattering in ever diverging research?
c. "Full model" is just too much of a claim.
d. Although I agree with this I think in practice this is not yet the case.
e. The primary object of study in CxG is the linguistic sign, units without meaning such as phones and syllables do not fall under this definition.

The question concerning full coverage relates to the question concerning translatability, addressed in Section 4.2. While the range of phenomena addressed by different variants of CxG has broadened considerably, a true integration of different aspects, or levels, of linguistic structure into the CxG framework perhaps still seems to be in the making. The different flavors of CxG taken together, the framework is capable of capturing, if not the entirety of language, at least an impressive set of phenomena. Relating all those phenomena to one another and presenting them in a uniform manner still requires a lot of work.

That said, it also seems that CxG in its present state even sets limits to what syntactic phenomena can be approached within the framework. For instance, there is no shared view of how to express word order in constructions, or descriptions thereof. Consequently, very little has been written about word order within

the CxG framework, especially given how important word order is as a device of expressing grammatical relations and information structure phenomena, both of which have been central to the CxG enterprise in general.

It seems fairly obvious to us that in its present state, the lack of notational coherence, and certain shortages in essentially all of the different notational variants of CxG (some of which will be pointed out in subsequent sections), effectively direct research towards certain types of linguistic phenomena and certain types of analyses and away from others. This may seem unbecoming of a framework which "aims at full coverage of the facts of any language under study without loss of linguistic generalizations, within and across languages", as Kay (1995) puts it.

We would like to stress, however, that there is nothing inherent in the CxG framework in general that restricts analyses and makes it difficult or even impossible to discuss such topics as word order, phonology, or discourse phenomena. What is lacking is the machinery for formalizing such topics, i.e., presenting them in a systematic form in a precise and conventional notation shared by the CxG community. While several formalizations of CxG have been proposed (e.g., Fillmore & Kay 1993; Sag 2012), none of them covers the full range of phenomena listed here, nor is any of them shared by the whole community.

To address the issues pointed out in this section, two types of solutions may be proposed. First, it is always possible to formulate yet another flavor of CxG and a new notation, or a variant of an existing one, which may be used for the purposes at hand. However, given the already existing variability within CxG pointed out above, this does not seem like the optimal solution. Second, it should be possible to bring existing variants of CxG closer together and strengthen them, supplement their notation with novel tools necessary for new research topics, and thereby gradually develop CxG towards a unified and genuinely holistic descriptive apparatus. This second approach would essentially mean aiming for, or indeed returning to, the original goals of CxG. A first step in this direction, and one which might prove of great benefit to the community, would be putting existing tools into more use than they are at the moment. This goes for the BCxG-type formalism, as pointed out above, and other existing tools as well. Another crucial case in point is the Frame Semantics toolbox which is often referred to but seldom used in any detail (for details, see Petruck 1996; Fillmore & Baker 2010; Boas, Ruppenhofer & Baker 2024; Boas 2025b; Boas, Ruppenhofer & Baker 2025; Matsumoto 2025).

4.4 Usage-based to different degrees

As mentioned in the introduction, it seems that a key to the disagreement about CxG as a framework is the conception of 'usage-basedness' or, rather, the variety of conceptions. To begin with, the questionnaire responses to whether all flavors of CxG are usage-based range across the whole scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, as shown in Table 5 (repeated from Table 1). This is in itself indicative of differences in either the interpretation of 'usage-based' or the understanding of what characterizes the different flavors of CxG — or both.

Table 5. Likert responses to whether all flavors of CxG are usage-based

	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	St.D
It's my impression that all flavors of CxG are usage-based.	21	31	12	23	14	2.77	1.36

1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = strongly disagree; Av = average; St.D = standard deviation

Looking at the open comments to these responses, two clusters may be distinguished. One consists of positive opinions about usage-based linguistics (e.g., "This is one of the features I like about CxG" and "Hooray for usage-based"; cf. Boas et al. 2024); and the other concerns what flavors are allegedly not usage-based. The second cluster is exemplified in (4):

(4) a. Some seem to be more usage based/driven than others.
b. To my knowledge, there are variants of CxG which are not necessarily usage-based, e.g., SBCG or Linebacker's Cognitive Grammar
c. My feeling is that some subfields such as Fluid CxG are not usage-based
d. As far as I know, most flavors are usage-based; but some (e.g., SBCG) explicitly aren't.
e. Original Berkeley CxG, SBCG are not usage-based; is fluid cxg usage-based?

One thing that may be noticed is that, quite understandably, not all construction grammarians are familiar with the full range of constructionist approaches. For example, the author of (4b) is clearly not aware that Langacker (1987) was the one who launched the notion of 'usage-based' and has been instrumental in its development since then.[9] Also, the author of (4e) is explicitly unsure of whether Fluid CxG is usage-based, and several of the other responses are hedged (*seem, to my knowledge, my feeling is*).

9. We deem it safe to presume that *Linebacker* in (1b) refers to Langacker, possibly distorted by autocorrection.

Interestingly, the CxG flavors alleged to be non-usage-based tend to correlate with those proposing CxG frameworks designed to handle a wider range of constructions, including more abstract schemas. Is usage-based linguistics thus incompatible with a comprehensive model of language? We think not. On the contrary, this goal is included in Langacker's (1987) original definition of a usage-based approach:

> **usage-based approach** Substantial importance is given to the actual use of the linguistic system and a speaker's knowledge of this use; the grammar is held responsible for a speaker's knowledge of the full range of linguistic conventions, regardless of whether these conventions can be subsumed under more general statements. A nonreductive approach to linguistic structure that employs fully articulated schematic networks and emphasizes the importance of low-level schemas. (Langacker 1987: 494)

Not only does this definition of 'usage-based' align well with CxG in general, it is also strikingly similar to early characterizations of (Berkeley) CxG, a model sometimes regarded as non-usage-based:

> To adopt a constructional approach is to undertake a commitment in principle to account for the entirety of each language. (Kay & Fillmore 1999: 1)

> By grammatical construction we mean any syntactic pattern which is assigned one or more conventional functions in a language, together with whatever is linguistically conventionalized about its contribution to the meaning or use of the structures containing it. (Fillmore 1988: 36)

On the other hand, the conception and application of 'usage-based' has developed considerably during later decades, placing more emphasis on factors such as dynamicity, sociocognitive processes, emergence, frequency, context, etc. (e.g., Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Langacker 2000, 2008; Diessel 2019; Schmid 2020; Gries 2022; Hilpert 2025). Thus, *usage-based* has become a multi-faceted term, used differently by different scholars. This is also recognized in several of the questionnaire responses (5):

(5) a. Depends what you mean by usage-based — is that agreed upon?
b. Theoretically or empirically? In theory, I would say yes, in practice I would say no
c. I think that usage-based explanation may be more or less central to particular analyses but that even the more formal CxGs need to be usage-based (in theory) to be considered CxG.

d. It depends what one means by "usage-based". I've recently been told that "usage-based" basically means "exemplar-based" and therefore that one should stick to exemplars and avoid making generalizations. That is not how I use the term "usage-based", however. I use it to mean "experience-based". And in this case, one need not only focus on exemplars but is also entitled to make some generalization.
e. Usage-based can receive a more or less empirical interpretation: either considering the communicative dimension of language, either building theory out of real data. I think that different CxG emphasise either one of these interpretations or both.

Thus, the responses exemplified in (5) distinguish between usage-based theory and usage-based practice, and between different degrees and aspects of usage-based practice. Since acceptance of the theory seems to be more widespread than the application of it in linguistic practice, one may envision a scale of usage-basedness along the following lines (for a more detailed list of UBL characteristics, see Barlow & Kemmer 2000):

1. Theory: CxG should account for all of language (Langacker 1987; Kay & Fillmore 1999);
2. Theory: language is a dynamic system continuously shaped and reshaped by usage (e.g., Langacker 2000; Perek 2015; Diessel 2019);
3. Practice: generalizations must be based on empirical data and reflect actual usage;
4. Practice: analyses are based on corpus studies or experimental data and performed on authentic examples;
5. Practice: quantitative accounts of frequency and variation;
6. Practice: taking contextual factors in situated usage events into account.

Arguably, CxG in general goes hand in hand with UBL (usage-based linguistics) at least as far as step 3. There appears to be no actual disagreement regarding overall theory: step 1 is a constituting principle of both CxG and UBL, and the main difference with respect to step 2 is whether it is acknowledged explicitly or not. Turning to practice, all of CxG and UBL are empirically oriented, and thus generally in accordance with step 3, although you may find the occasional constructed example here and there.[10]

Further down the scale there is gradually increasing divergence between more or less usage-based approaches. Most but not all work in CxG aligns with step

10. Step 3 should not be confused with 'descriptive adequacy' in the Chomskyan (1957) sense, since Chomsky's generative grammar is designed to represent language intuitions rather than patterns of language use.

4, while somewhat fewer but still a large portion of CxG studies account for frequencies and variation (step 5). There are, however, few CxG studies that adhere to step 6 and thus embrace UBL in full, with the exceptions typically focusing on language change or acquisition. In the words of van Trijp (2024: 316): "the inconvenient truth is that most so-called usage-based analyses do not actually model language usage".

Is this a problem? We do not think so, unless treated that way. Research methods are, and should be, adapted to the purpose and focus of the study at hand, differences in foci are not necessarily due to theoretical disagreement, and it is a strength rather than a weakness that CxG encompasses a wide range of methodological approaches. van Trijp (2024) makes a related observation regarding what he calls *aggregate* and *population* perspectives on language, the former dealing with language as an idealized state and the latter with the dynamics of situated interaction:

> Both perspectives are important. The aggregate perspective is well-suited for tasks for which its idealizations are useful, such as the development of reference grammars, cross language comparisons, or language teaching. The population perspective is better suited for answering questions that involve processes such as language learning, language change, and language usage. (van Trijp 2024: 339)

Although contrasting, these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. A linguistic approach may well combine elements from both perspectives, for example, in a corpus linguistic variation study, addressing usage at the level of a speech community, abstracting away from individual usage events but not as far as the idealization of a standard language. Hence, rather than a distinction between "usage-based" and "non-usage-based", we propose a continuum in terms of orientation. Arguably, all CxG approaches are usage-*based* in different ways, but they may be more or less usage-*oriented* or system-oriented, as illustrated in Figure 5.

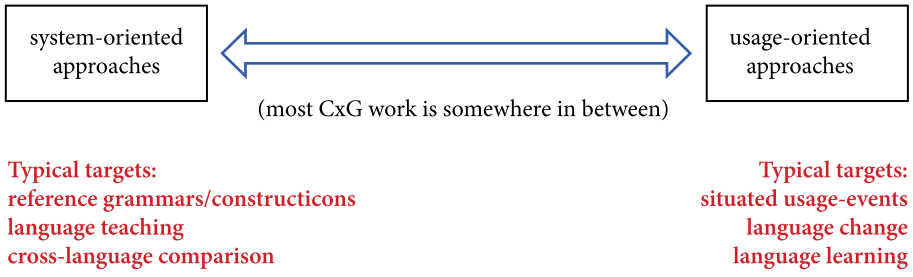

Figure 5. A continuum rather than a dichotomy[11]

11. Even a continuum is a simplification, at least if interpreted as one-dimensional, since there are a variety of factors and perspectives involved.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we discuss CxG as a framework, particularly with respect to the various views on this topic that came out of the 2021 questionnaire and ensuing roundtable. That initiative, in turn, grew out of our ponderings over what the existing diversity of constructionist approaches might mean to the field and its development. While some degree of diversity is not only beneficial but probably necessary for a field to progress, there is eventually a limit beyond which we no longer have a coherent field of study. Whether passing such a limit is a good or a bad thing is essentially a matter of perspective.

There appear to be two main dividers among the views of CxG as a framework: one is formalization, which some deem highly important and others view with skepticism; and the other concerns usage-based linguistics, which apparently all are in favor of but there is uncertainty and disagreement about what it includes — and excludes. Many of the questionnaire responses also indicate limited familiarity with other versions of CxG than one's own practiced variants, which perhaps also hints at a correlation between decreasing familiarity and increasing skepticism.

Are these differences indicative of a divided field or merely the kind of variation you would expect from a vibrant and growing community? Let us return to what the questionnaire responses have to say on the matter:

Table 6. Likert responses to whether CxG is a coherent field of inquiry

	1	2	3	4	5	Av.	St.D
It's my impression that Construction Grammar is a coherent field of inquiry.	25	41	11	21	2	2.33	1.13

1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = strongly disagree; Av = average; St.D = standard deviation

As shown in Table 6, the responses to whether CxG is a coherent field of study cluster around 'somewhat agree'. There is a fair amount of variation, but very few who strongly disagree. How is this to be interpreted? Some clues may be found in the open comments to the Likert responses (6):

(6) a. I perceive CxG as a cover for many different approaches that brings together different researchers for fruitful discussion.
b. I work in usage-based/cognitive CxG, but I'm aware that there are other varieties which I have little contact with.
c. The basic tenets are clear, but not many people seem to be working in the core of construction grammar today.

d. Not all constructional approaches share the same basic principles, such as, for example, that the use of language shapes grammar.
e. Despite I have been interested in CxG and wrote couple of papers about it, it is due to the field incoherency that I decided to pick up different notation and go on with dependency structures.

As exemplified in (6), the comments point in different directions, and the stances toward the current diversity range from positive (6a) to rejective (6e). Thus, while there appears to be relative agreement regarding the state of affairs, that the field is (perceived as) *somewhat coherent*, it is difficult to discern any central point of opinion about this situation. Consequently, it appears equally difficult to point out a (generally) preferred way forward. One may distinguish three main alternatives:

A. Keep the diversity of constructional "flavors" and formalisms
B. Think of ways of coming together towards a more coherent framework
C. (try to) Have your cake and eat it, too.

Among the questionnaire responses there are both those who prefer A and those who argue in favor of B. While such difference in opinion by itself points in the direction of A, it does not have to be an either/or matter. There might also be ways to fit the two ideals together. We outline such a possibility in the next section, after which we return to the apparently dividing issues of usage-basedness and formalization in Section 5.2. In Section 5.3, we briefly address the question of how constructions are combined, before moving to our conclusions in Section 6.

5.1 Can we have the cake and eat it, too?

The key to combining diversity and coherence is compatibility, which, in turn, depends on the diversity mainly being due to differences in foci rather than theoretical disagreement. The fact that you need somewhat different analytical tools to build constructicons, conduct language typology, investigate semantic change or perform experiments on language acquisition does not mean that these methodological adaptations require different linguistic theories. On the contrary, a theory of language that cannot be applied to these different activities is, in our view, in trouble. The fact that comparing standard languages may require a different kind of contrastive linguistics than characterizing contact varieties, for example, has more to do with different levels of abstraction than with conflicting views of the nature of language contact.

Drawing a parallel to the natural sciences, one may view constructions as a linguistic counterpart to atoms and molecules. Atoms were originally considered primitive units (cf. *atomos* 'indivisible') but were later found to be complex entities, comprised of internal components and relations: protons, neutrons, elec-

trons and, if you go deep enough, quarks. Some research objectives and applications in the natural sciences require a sub-atomic perspective, others do not; and the difference in perspective does not imply any theoretical conflict. Although different sub-disciplines may vary tremendously regarding methodology etc. (certainly larger differences than between different variants of CxG), they still have to be compatible, and they may still be considered parts of the same overall research agenda.

Similarly, some aspects of linguistics may require us to go below the level of 'constructions', perhaps treating them as clusters of associations rather than holistic units, to study the finer nuances of linguistic change, for example. With respect to cognitive structure, this may even be a more accurate view than assuming constructions as the basic units of language, as convincingly argued by Schmid (2020) and others. On the other hand, such a "sub-atomic" perspective would probably not be optimal for, say, constructicography or language typology. This does not in itself imply that the constructicographer or language typologist disagrees with Schmid, only that they assume different perspectives (cf. van Trijp 2024; Hilpert et al. 2025).

What, then, is the difference between C, have the cake and eat it, and A, keep the diversity? If we view option C as diversity but with an eye towards coherence, the difference boils down to looking beyond one's own core area of expertise, taking other perspectives into account when relevant, and aiming for compatibility. Arguably, it also depends on looking beyond 'us' and 'them'. Thus, the intended message of this paper is not a call for conformity. The benefits of the wide variety of constructionist approaches are something to cherish. What we are arguing for is rather to nurture this beautiful baby of variety but try to get rid of the dirty bathwater of division. We think that the various constructionist approaches are for the most part both compatible and mutually translatable, although currently perhaps not mutually comprehensible in all respects. By striving to explicate the compatibility and thus foster comprehensibility, the various approaches could reach more of their potential to benefit each other. For CxG to be a framework of language as a whole, there must not only be room for system-oriented approaches as well as usage-oriented ones; *they must also be made to fit together*.

5.2 Usage-based formalization?

Let us return to the two dividers, formalization and usage-based linguistics (UBL). Usage-basedness as such is not controversial at all; it seems all constructionists like it. The issue at stake is which constructionist approaches qualify. This, in turn, depends on which criteria you judge by. As noted in Section 4.4 above, linguistic approaches may be usage-based in different respects and to different

degrees. We therefore suggested that the range of constructionist approaches, which are arguably all more or less usage-based, is better characterized as a continuum of relatively more usage-oriented or system-oriented approaches. If we, instead of qualifying UBL criteria, look at what may motivate an assessment as *non* usage-based, three disfavored features seem to be abstraction, formalization, and unfamiliarity.

Abstraction

From the bottom-up perspective of UBL, abstraction is — and should be — approached with caution. The farther away from concrete instances you get, the more indirect the empirical support gets. Soon enough, the same data may be accounted for by different generalizations, which means the analysis can no longer be validated by strictly empirical support alone. Nevertheless, the ambition of UBL is to account for language in general. To substantiate the assumption that *all* generalizations are derived from particular usage-events, this has to be shown to apply all the way to the most general linguistic patterns. In order to do so, some degree of abstract modeling is required.

Formalization

In the questionnaire responses, formalization is disfavored with respect to UBL in two ways. Firstly, there are comments to the effect that formalization as such does not go well together with UBL. This view appears somewhat misinformed, since any feature can be formalized, including dynamic ones. While it is true that all formalisms have their limitations, and also, as several responders have pointed out, that formalization is not always useful to the task at hand, it is not the case that UBL is beyond the applicability of formalization. On the contrary, all CxG variants employ some kind of formalism, since any representation beyond ordinary prose involves some degree of formalization (e.g., van Trijp 2024: 327). Given the prevalence of terminological false friends in this area, it might be worth noting that *formalization*, as opposed to non formalization (or, rather, less formalization), must not be confused with *formalist*, as opposed to functionalist.

Secondly, frameworks alleged to be non-usage-based in the questionnaire responses are typically those with a more elaborate formalism, such as SBCG, BCxG, and to some extent FCG. This may, at least in part, be due to the type of formalism, in particular the top-down design, which is in principle contrary to UBL. This brings us back to the aforementioned feature of abstraction. These approaches are system-oriented rather than usage-oriented, but this is not in conflict with being usage-*based* (cf. Section 4.4 above); it is merely due to the aim of making the models comprehensive.

These formalisms, especially SBCG and FCG, are also abstract in the sense of being technical, in combination with being quite complex. The complexity and the technical meta-language are motivated by a desire for precision and, again, comprehensive coverage.[12] The benefits of such a model, however, come at the price of a high learning threshold. Given limited time and all else there is to learn about linguistics, not all are willing to pay this price. Which brings us to the third feature.

Unfamiliarity

There also seems to be a tendency to regard unfamiliar versions of CxG as non-usage-based. This is evidenced by comments labeling Langacker's cognitive grammar as non-usage-based, as illustrated in (4b) above, despite Langacker's role in developing UBL. It also shows in comments questioning the usage-basedness of FCG, when FCG practitioners, more elaborately than most, actually model language as a dynamic, complex-adaptive system. In the latter case, the abstractness and formalization may also play a role, which highlights the interrelatedness of these three features.

Regarding SBCG and BCxG as non-usage-based is not unfounded. Although both models may be — and are — used to represent usage-based insights, they are clearly predominantly system-oriented, taking a top-down approach to the task of accounting for the full range of more or less idiosyncratic constructions in a language. However, judging from some of the questionnaire responses, one should probably not disregard the possibility that there is also a bit of prejudice involved. In any case, formalization should not be the problem. Both formalization and abstract modeling are perfectly compatible with UBL, unless the particular design is in conflict with it. In all likelihood, both are required for UBL to live up to the promise of a model for language as a whole.

5.3 Construction *Grammar*

The question of CxG as a framework is very much a question of coverage, since different practices and formalisms are suited for different research objectives. Taken together, the existing variety of constructionist approaches enable a very wide coverage, in terms of analytical perspectives as well as empirical coverage, although they may have more limited scope each by themselves. One of the main

12. By comparison, the more popular formalism of Goldberg (1995) is more accessible but also more limited. It is primarily designed for argument structure constructions, in particular the argument structure of verbs. While very well suited to handle ASCs, it is less easily applicable to other kinds of constructions such as word order constructions or prosodic constructions.

points we have tried to make in this paper is that the wide combined coverage depends on coherence and compatibility; otherwise it breaks down into separate, although related research areas. Lacking compatibility, the strength of the combined coverage is reduced and there is also an increased risk of overlooking, or failing to account for, phenomena that fall between the respective focus areas. However, coherence and compatibility should not be confused with conformity, as strict conformity would reduce the combined coverage.

We also want to stress that coverage is not only a matter of the range of constructions covered, or the range of perspectives on those constructions. Even an account of the full range of constructions in a language, to the extent this is possible, would still be limited if it is only concerned with the inventory of constructions. Adding a network perspective extends the coverage to include relations between constructions. A truly comprehensive linguistic framework, however, a construction *grammar*, also has to address the interplay between constructions. While this is an old insight, as shown by the following quote by Fillmore (1988), and crucial for any linguistic theory with ambitions for comprehensive coverage, it has not been a high priority in constructionist research.

> The grammar of a language can be seen as a repertory of constructions, plus a set of principles which govern the nesting and superimposition of constructions into or upon one another. (Fillmore 1988: 37)

The "repertory" Fillmore mentions is what has come to be known as a *constructicon* (the term coined by Jurafsky 1991), and the "principles which govern the nesting and superimposition of constructions" may perhaps be called *constructional syntax* (Boas 2025a; Andréasson & Lyngfelt In press). The nesting part has been treated in terms of *unification* and *instantiation* (Fillmore & Kay 1993) and the superimposition part in terms of *coercion* (e.g., Michaelis 2004). While unification has sometimes been put in contrast to usage-based CxG (e.g., Goldberg 2006, Chapter 10) there seem to have been few alternative approaches proposed, at least until recently. One alternative, employed in the CASA model (Herbst & Hoffmann 2024), is to treat the combination of constructions as a form of conceptual blending (cf. Fauconnier & Turner 2002); another is the complex-adaptive system proposed from the viewpoint of Fluid Construction Grammar (e.g., van Trijp et al. 2022, cf. van Trijp 2024).

In any case, judging by experiences from Swedish (Andréasson & Lyngfelt in press; Blensenius & Lyngfelt 2025), accounting for constructional syntax is not merely an additional feature outside the task of accounting for the inventory; it appears to be necessary for attaining a comprehensive account of the inventory. Without a way to handle the interplay between different kinds of constructions it is difficult to organize them into a coherent system.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have shown the following, drawing on the questionnaire data and the roundtable discussion, and supported by our own observations: there is considerable variation within what is conceived as, and often called, Construction Grammar. On the one hand, this variation is a significant strength of CxG, in that it allows for a wide range of mutually complementary approaches, each tuned for a different subset of linguistic phenomena, thereby greatly increasing the overall coverage of CxG. On the other hand, however, it raises questions concerning the very complementarity, and compatibility, of those approaches, or the different flavors or varieties of CxG — to the extent that one may rightfully ask whether they should all be regarded as instances of fundamentally the same framework or not.

We do not intend to be whistleblowers who claim that Construction Grammar is going in the wrong direction, falling apart, or anything of the sort. The history of CxG since the 1980s shows not only divergence into separate varieties but also works which have combined two or more existing varieties and thus built bridges between them, and notable works which have provided insight that has been shared within the CxG community and adopted as common ground.

Metaphorically speaking, we have already made reference to the natural sciences, on the one hand, and babies and bathwater, on the other. Let us conclude with yet another metaphor. Construction Grammar, being a metalanguage for describing language, may be understood in linguistic terms, and the variety of its different flavors may be thought of in terms of linguistic variation.

We are not proposing that the existing varieties of CxG, whether they resemble more dialects or languages, be replaced with a single Volapük or Esperanto meant to fit everyone's needs. Rather, our take-home message is to encourage members of the community to continue working with mutual understanding in mind, and to study each other's "languages", build bridges between different Construction Grammars, and to root new growth, new insights, tools, and flavors, into the common ground of CxG.

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