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CONSTRUCTION = SCHEMA = ANALOGY

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'Generalization' amounts to the claim that a structural similarity has been either discovered or invented in a set of phenomena (apart from the cases where what is being generalized is a simple property like colour, i.e. a property without internal structure). The common structure is inherited from higher hierarchical level to lower ones. In Construction Grammar the basis of generalizations is construction (as indicated by the subtitle of Goldberg 2006) while in Cognitive Grammar it is schema: "Langacker equates the ability to generalize with the extraction of schemas" (Tuggy 2007: 83). On the other hand, 'structural similarity' is the traditional definition of analogy (cf. Itkonen 2005: 1–13), a fact which justifies the tripartite equation constituting the title of this talk.

The equation 'rule = schema = analogy' is accepted by Cognitive Grammar: "If the notion of analogy is made explicit, and if [grammatical] rules are conceived as schemas, there is no substantial difference between analogical and rule-based descriptions" (Langacker 1987: 447). And yet Langacker (1999: 145) accepts the "standard argument", according which analogy is "too powerful" because it is incapable of predicting all, and only, occurrences of actual behavior. But no theory is capable of doing so (cf. Itkonen 2005: 73–76, 108). Besides, despite insistent claims to the contrary, a 'predictive' account of analogy can be and has been formalized within synchronic syntax, the well-defined core area of generativism (op. cit., pp. 89–94, 203–220).

Analogy has a single well-established meaning, with an illustrious pedigree in the history of linguistics. Moreover, this notion has been considerably refined in recent artificial-intelligence work. By contrast, the meaning of such terms as construction and/or schema varies from context to context. Therefore the rational thing to do is to abandon them.

References

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