



## Intervention studies on Pedagogical Construction Grammar in Foreign Language Teaching

Eleni Kanli

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### Program for the CoPreSpa-scientific network workshop at the University of Tübingen

Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, Romanisches Seminar  
Wilhelmstr. 50, 72074 Tübingen  
Room: 215

**Thursday, 12 December 2024**

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|-----------------|--|
| 08:30-<br>08:45 | Introduction   |
| 08:45-<br>09:30 | Dr. Andreu Sentí (University of Barcelona)<br><br><b>When teaching grammar meets sociolinguistics and construction grammar. An intervention on verbal constructions with clitic pronouns in Catalan</b>                                      |
| 09:30-<br>10:00 | Coffee Break   |
| 10:00-<br>10:45 | Eleni Kanli (University of Tübingen)<br><br><b>Exploring the Interaction of (Multilingual) Pedagogical Construction Grammar and Cognitive Aptitudes in Multilingual Spanish Learners: An Intervention Study on Motion Verb Constructions</b> |
| 10:45-<br>11:30 | Dr. Elsa Liste Lamas (Zurich University of Applied Sciences)<br><br><b>Path Encoding in Motion Constructions in German as a Foreign Language: Do we need to rethink teaching options beyond prepositional semantics and case marking?</b>    |
| 11:30-<br>12:00 | Coffee Break   |
| 12:00-<br>12:45 | PD. Dr. Simone Amorocho (PH Freiburg)<br><br><b>Construction Didactics (KxD): Initial Insights from the Pilot Study of an Intervention on Oral Narratives</b>  |

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|-------------|---|
| 12:45-14:15 | Lunch: Uni-Café-Ristorante Unckel, Wilhelmstraße 17, 72074 Tübingen   |
| 14:15-15:00 | Prof. Dr. Detmar Meurers (Leibniz Institut für Wissensmedien (IWM) & University of Tübingen)<br><br><b>Linking SLA research and foreign language learning with digitally-supported studies in real-life school contexts</b> |
| 15:00-15:45 | Dr. Simón E. Ruiz (Public University of Navarre (UPNA))<br><br><b>The effects of memory and instruction on vocabulary learning: Insights from intelligent CALL</b>  |
| 15:45-16:15 | Coffee break  |
| 16:15-17:00 | Birgit Füreder (University of Mannheim & University of Salzburg)<br><br><b>The more the merrier (?) – A multilingual approach to polyverbal constructions in Romance</b>  |
| 17:00-17:15 | End of the workshop, outlook  |

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**“CoPreSpa - The dynamics of prepositions and prepositional constructions in Spanish”**  
 (Prof. Dr. Inga Hennecke & Jun.-Prof. Dr. Evelyn Wiesinger)

Registration by email to [eleni.kanli@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:eleni.kanli@uni-tuebingen.de).

The registration deadline is December 2, 2024.

## Abstracts:

### When teaching grammar meets sociolinguistics and construction grammar. An intervention on verbal constructions with clitic pronouns in Catalan

Dr. Andreu Sentí (Universitat de Barcelona)

Traditionally, Catalan language learning in secondary school has applied an L1 language learning methodology in which grammar has not been connected to speaking or writing skills, and neither to metalinguistic reflection. However, contact language between Spanish and Catalan in Catalan-speaking areas has increased in the last decades, and most of the scholar environments would need L2 instruction for the Catalan language, focusing especially on those grammatical features that are not shared in both Romance languages. Following a cognitive constructional approach (Goldberg 2006, Ellis 2013, Herbst 2016) we have designed a sequence to learn the verbal construction with the partitive clitic *en* (Segura-Llopes et al. 2023), the neuter accusative clitic *ho* (Sentí & Martínez 2023), the locative clitic *hi* and the ditransitive clitic cluster *li-la* (Sentí & Segura 2024) namely, to promote the knowledge of these forms and favour its acquisition and use. These Catalan constructions (1a, 2a, 3a, 4a) have not an equal Spanish counterpart (1b, 2b, 3b, 4b):

- (1) a. **En** vull dos ('I want two [of them]')
- b. Quiero dos
- (2) a. Això, **ho** vols? ('Do you want this?')
- b. Eso, **lo** quieres?
- (3) a. **Hi** vull anar ('I want to go there')
- b. Quiero ir
- (4) a. Per favor, dona-**li-la** ('Please, give it to him')
- b. Por favor, dásela

In this talk, I will first present a constructional approach for these four verbal constructions with clitic pronouns and the teaching sequences following a focus on form strategy (Milian 2014; Nassaji 2017). Second, I will report an experimental instruction in which two different grammatical approaches are compared (traditional vs. constructional) to observe the efficacy of the constructional model as a pedagogic grammar. This intervention was carried out during the spring of 2024 in Catalan and Valencian schools and also in some L2 adult courses. The teachers joined a specific course in which we taught them the basic constructional notions and the specific verbal constructions with clitics that we are dealing with. Additionally, we provided them with all the materials for the experiment (pre- and post-tests, teaching sequences; Sentí & Segura 2024) and prepared them for the intervention. We are now analysing the results.

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## **Exploring the Interaction of (Multilingual) Pedagogical Construction Grammar and Cognitive Aptitudes in Multilingual Spanish Learners: An Intervention Study on Motion Verb Constructions**

**Eleni Kanli (University of Tübingen)**

The use of prepositions is one of the most difficult grammar topics for Spanish learners. The high frequency prepositions *a* ('to, at, on') and *de* ('from, of') are often confused or omitted, especially in motion verb constructions (Kanli, 2024). These polysemous prepositions can be located on a lexicon-grammar-continuum with different degrees of abstractness, which makes it challenging for learners of Spanish to associate the form of the preposition with its different meanings or functions (*low form-meaning contingency* (Wulff & Ellis, 2018, p. 39–41)). In addition, crosslinguistic influence plays a significant role, especially in third or additional language acquisition (Rothman, 2019).

This contribution explores the efficiency of teaching material that is supposed to help students in expressing themselves idiomatically when using the construction [motion verb + *a/de* + noun] to describe their daily activities. The target group consists of students who are either simultaneous bilinguals of German and another language or German monolinguals learning English and French, and Spanish as a third foreign language from Grade 8 in German grammar schools.

I hypothesize that drawing attention explicitly to various construction types, or “form-meaning pairs”, as recommended by Pedagogical Construction Grammar (Boas, 2022) and Construction Didactics (Amorocho & Pfeiffer, 2023), can be beneficial. Additionally, increasing awareness of the similarities and differences between equivalent constructions across languages, as advocated by multilingual didactics (Fäcke & Meißner, 2019), could further support learning. To test these hypotheses, two intervention packages were created: "Pedagogical Construction Grammar" and "Multilingual Pedagogical Construction Grammar." Both are integrated into the task-based unit "Planning a Weekend in a Spanish city".

In this talk, I will present preliminary results from a pilot study conducted in July 2024 in two Spanish classes in grade 8 at a grammar school in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. In this study, the first versions of these packages were tested using a pre- and post-test design (Albert & Marx, 2016) along with a stimulated recall methodology (Gass & Mackey, 2016). Based on the results of this pilot study, I assume that the intervention package "Multilingual Pedagogical Construction Grammar" is the most effective one for acquiring prepositions following motion verbs in third language acquisition. This needs to be confirmed in a larger study; however, student progress may vary depending on individual cognitive aptitudes. Therefore, in the second part of my talk, I will outline the design of my main study planned for 2025, which additionally takes into account Aptitude-Treatment Interaction (ATI) (Cronbach & Snow, 1977; DeKeyser, 2021). This study will investigate whether individual differences in language biography (simultaneous bilingual vs. monolingual), in the use of the Multilingual Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (M-SILL) (Dmitrenko, 2017), and in working memory (OSPAN) (Hicks et al., 2016; Ruiz et al., 2019) are associated with the outcomes of the two intervention packages.

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## **Path Encoding in Motion Constructions in German as a Foreign Language: Do we need to rethink teaching options beyond prepositional semantics and case marking?**

**Dr. Elsa Liste Lamas (ZHAW – Zurich University of Applied Sciences)**

Based on the analysis of a large corpus of written and oral descriptions of motion events by L1 Spanish and L1 Danish L2 users of German at different proficiency levels (see Liste Lamas, 2024), in this talk, I will argue for a rethinking of the traditional focus on prepositional semantics and case marking in the teaching of spatial relations in German as a foreign language (see also Madlener-Charpentier & Liste Lamas, 2022).

I will first focus on how L1 Spanish and L1 Danish users of L2 German encode path in motion constructions and discuss the results in terms of cross-linguistic influence, characteristics of learner varieties and possible developmental patterns, as well as features of the target language input (see e.g. Cadierno 2004 & 2010, Filipović & Vidaković 2010, Jessen 2014, Treffers-Daller & Tidball 2016 for previous research on the encoding of motion events in an L2). The data analysis provides clear evidence that the typological classification of the L1 alone does not fully explain the characteristics of path encoding in L2 German, and that L2 German proficiency turns out to be more influential. In this context, I will address the fact that the challenges faced by L2 German users also correspond to aspects that have traditionally been treated superficially in teaching materials.

Against the background of the findings summarised so far, I will then discuss teaching options that go beyond the traditional emphasis on the semantics of prepositions and case marking and focus specifically on directional adverbs, their use in different motion constructions, and their distinction from other path encoding devices (see also Althoff, 2019). In this regard, I will present some preliminary results from the use of teaching materials that follow a more adverb-centered approach and are specifically designed for L1 Spanish users of L2 German.

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## **Construction Didactics (KxD): Initial Insights from the Pilot Study of an Intervention on Oral Narratives**

**PD Dr. Simone Amorocho (PH Freiburg)**

Construction Didactics (Konstruktionsdidaktik, KxD) is a didactic concept based on Construction Grammar (CxG) (see Amorocho & Pfeiffer 2023). It assumes that language learning is to be understood as learning constructions in the sense of symbolic form-meaning pairs. Since constructions form the core of the learning content, the division between vocabulary and grammar learning is dissolved, and the emphasis on abstract rules is discarded. In contrast to other approaches based on CxG (see e.g. the contributions in Boas & Herbst 2022), KxD not only aims to model foreign learning, but also the first language learning in regular school German classes. In doing so, it purposely highlights and utilizes the potential connections to established didactic concepts in the fields of first, second, and foreign language learning, in order to facilitate practical implementation.

Christian Pfeiffer and I aim to validate the effectiveness of a construction-didactic approach through an intervention study. As a learning objective, we deliberately chose oral narratives at the primary school level. In doing so, we wanted to address content within the area of oral competence, as KxD seeks to offer concepts for the underrepresented area of spoken language, taking the joint construction of meaning in interaction seriously. The intervention was piloted in a second-grade class at a primary school in Freiburg (with pre- and post-tests). The data is currently being analyzed. In the main study, a second learning objective will be added to ensure a broader investigation. The second objective will belong to the area of written language, and the teaching unit will be directed at secondary school students. The pre- and post-test design will be enhanced by a follow-up test.

The presentation will introduce the data collection tools. Furthermore, it will provide insights into the conception and implementation of the teaching unit for both the intervention and control groups. Additionally, the coding procedure for the data will be discussed. A focus will be placed on the implications of the pilot study for the main study.

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## Linking SLA research and foreign language learning with digitally-supported studies in real-life school contexts

**Prof. Dr. Detmar Meurers (Leibniz Institut für Wissensmedien (IWM) & University of Tübingen)**

While Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has long matured into a distinct discipline (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) and established substantial insights into the language acquisition process, there is only little SLA research targeting school children. This is striking considering that in Europe 94% of over 21 million school children in upper secondary schools (ISCED level 3, aged 14–18) learn a foreign language (Eurostat, 2016), which makes this an important population to study – especially also when we think about the need to inform future teachers about effective ways to teach and learn foreign languages. Long (1980) discussed one of the challenges of conducting research in schools, which he referred to as the “black box problem”: While we can control (some of) the setting, it is difficult to obtain evidence on what exactly goes on in class and the individual learning.

With digital devices becoming available in school, we can increasingly shine a light into this black box and exert more fine-grained control over the learning material and process. In this talk, I want to discuss how core SLA concepts such as Input, Output, Interaction, and Feedback can be investigated in digitally-supported learning contexts – and how we can scale such an approach to conduct large-scale randomized controlled trials (RCT) in authentic school contexts (e.g., Meurers et al. 2019). This includes so-called *learning analytics* that can be used to enrich our understanding of what goes on during the intervention (Hui, Rudzewitz, Meurers 2023).

Interestingly, such studies with large student populations in authentic contexts also makes it possible to empirically explore individual differences as a hot topic in SLA research, where previous research on issues such as *aptitude-treatment interactions* were in essence abandoned given the difficulty of conducting studies with enough power to empirically investigate such interactions.

Finally, given the considerable controversy around the question whether grammar practice generalizes and transfers to free production (Ur, 2016) and so-called *transfer-appropriate processing*, we will explore the student performance on a more ecologically valid, free writing task collected at the end of an RCT.

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## **The effects of memory and instruction on vocabulary learning: Insights from intelligent CALL**

**Dr. Simón Ruiz (Public University of Navarre [UPNA])**

Individual differences in cognitive abilities and instruction can affect language learning. Understanding how individual differences and instruction interact still remains a relatively unexplored area in both child and adult learning, however (DeKeyser, 2012; 2021). In this talk, I will report on research that investigates these *aptitude-treatment interactions* (ATIs) (Cronbach & Snow, 1977). ATIs are premised on the notion that the differential effects of instructional treatments depend upon individual learner characteristics (“one size does *not* fit all”). On a theoretical level, this research advances our understanding of both language learning and cognitive abilities. In practical terms, this work will inform personalized design of language learning programs.

Against this backdrop, in the main part of the talk, I will present my doctoral research that investigated the interaction between individual differences in memory (working memory and declarative memory), instruction, and second language (L2) vocabulary learning in the context of web-based intelligent computer assisted language learning (ICALL) (Ruiz Hernández, 2019; Ruiz et al., 2021). ICALL encompasses the use of artificial intelligence techniques in computerized systems that aim to provide adaptive language instruction tailored to the needs of individual learners (Ruiz et al., 2024). One hundred twenty-seven adult learners of English, mostly advanced-level, German-speaking learners, read news texts on the web for about two weeks using an ICALL system under meaning-focused and form-focused conditions. Learners in the form-focused condition read and completed automatically-generated multiple-choice gaps where phrasal verbs appeared in the text, while learners in the meaning-focused condition simply read and did not complete any gaps. Results indicated that form-focused instruction promoted vocabulary learning, especially for learners with high working memory. Lastly, I will briefly provide an overview of my most recent research examining ATIs in L2 learning.

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## The more the merrier (?) – A multilingual approach to polyverbal constructions in Romance

**Birgit Füreder (University of Mannheim & University of Salzburg)**

Multilingualism is not only a social reality but has also been recognised as a valuable resource for linguistic competence. Despite wide agreement that the ‘monolingual habitus’ (cf. Gogolin, 2008) has become outdated in modern society, the implementation of multilingual concepts (at least in educational settings) still seems somewhat hesitant. One of the reasons for this ‘bias’ may be grounded in the lack of empirical studies investigating the actual impact of multilingual approaches. The present paper aims to tackle this gap by examining the effects of a multilingual intervention targeting a specific type of polyverbal constructions in Romance.

Consisting of two verbs (sometimes joined by a preposition or conjunction) forming a single predicative unit, periphrastic verbal constructions are commonly used in Romance languages to express temporal, aspectual, modal and diathetic values. Observations, however, show that some of these constructions (can) pose problems to (German-speaking) learners, especially where (formal and/or functional) equivalents are missing or are structured differently, i.e. expressed by different linguistic means (e.g. adverbials or derivational morphology): cf. e.g. the expression of habituality by a polyverbal construction in Spanish (*soler* + INF) – partly also in English (*used to* + INF) – vs. an adverbial construction in German (*üblicherweise* + Vconj [lit. ‘usually do’]).

Given that learners in a German-speaking context usually dispose of several languages in their linguistic repertoires (such as L1 German, L2 English, L3/Ln Romance + possibly further second, foreign, additional or family languages), a multilingual approach appears highly promising. Building on the background of multilingual didactics (e.g. Meißner/Reinfried, 1998; Reimann, 2016) and the (beneficial) effects already attested (e.g. Müller-Lancé, 1999; Jessner, 2008; Rückl, 2023), the present contribution strives to evaluate its impact in the field of polyverbal constructions in Romance by means of a multilingual intervention study (cf. also Füreder, 2022): While the instruction in the control group is focussed on the target language only (avoiding any cross-linguistic reference other than German), the intervention in the experimental group explicitly draws on the learners’ multilingual resources by providing activities encouraging metalinguistic awareness across languages (cf. Roehr-Brackin, 2018; Woll, 2018) and fostering insights into potential transfer options from previously acquired languages (cf. e.g. Eibensteiner, 2020). The results are measured in terms of a pre-test/post-test design and accompanying interviews in order to determine the effects of a multilingual approach as compared to a primarily monolingual one.

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