

Lexical constraints in construction grammar: methodological implications of a theoretical account

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The lexical items that appear in grammatical constructions may affect the use of these constructions in at least two ways. The first is where particular words directly bias or even restrict the language user to employ a certain construction. This is the case, for instance, for the object *contact* in sentences like *Nijs zoekt nog (naar) contact met deze scholen* 'Nijs is still trying to contact these schools', where the use of the *contact* strongly biases the language user to employ the transitive construction without *naar* – although the intransitive prepositional construction with *naar* is not completely ruled out. The second way is when the determinants of the choice between constructions are dependent upon the words that are used. For instance, the factors that make a language user opt for the transitive construction or the '*naar*-construction' differ, depending on whether the verb *zoeken*, *verlangen*, *peilen*, etc. is used. Construction grammar offers a unified way of accounting both types of lexical constraints through the very design of its *constructicon*, i.e. the network of constructions in a language. This theoretical account also comes with useful methodological implications. In this talk, I will exemplify this through the case study of optional *naar* in Dutch.