

The Limits of Construction Grammar

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All of the many competing accounts of the working of language draw a distinction in one way or another between what it is that speakers know outright about their language and what it is that they have to be able to figure out. For example, speakers of English have to know what *red* means and that it is an adjective, and they have to know what *ball* means and that it is a noun. They have to know that adjectives can co-occur with nouns in a modification structure (as in a phrase like *red ball*), and they have to know the proper strategies for giving a semantic interpretation to such adjective-noun combinations. But they do not have to know separately, or to be told, what the phrase *red ball* means. That is something which what they already know enables them to figure out (Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor 1988: 502).

On the widely accepted view illustrated in the epigraph, a grammar should contain the strictly linguistic information required to produce and understand all possible utterances of a language *and no more*. In this paper, I will argue that there are many patterns that appear in language data that do not qualify as parts of a grammar (i.e., as grammatical constructions) because, unlike the construction that licenses *red ball*<sup>1</sup>, these patterns are neither necessary nor sufficient to produce or interpret any set of expressions of the language: each expression that exemplifies one of these patterns has to be learned and remembered on its own. With regard to synchrony, such patterns are non-productive generalizations over a lexically fixed set of phrases: diachronically they can motivate the entry of new expressions into the language but cannot be relied on to do so under any circumstance predictable in advance. On the view of grammar in which the grammar contains all and only the stuff a speaker has to know in order to speak and understand the language of the moment, these patterns have no place, even though they are implicit in the language data and sporadically productive diachronically.

The first time I heard the word *underwhelm*, I was impressed by what I took to be the speaker's cleverness in creating this instantly understandable neologism on the fly. As time went by and I heard more tokens of *underwhelm*, it occurred to me that possibly the person I had first heard this expression from was not really its creator. (The latter conjecture was probably correct. Merriam-Webster Online dates *underwhelm* sixteen years before I first noticed it.) Nevertheless, *someone* had to be the first person to say *underwhelm*. Suppose this person was a man named Percival and consider Percival's act in producing the first token of *underwhelm*. Two competing analyses of this act suggest themselves. One is that Percival simply used his knowledge of English grammar to produce a novel

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Kay and Sag (2009).

utterance, just as he would have done if, say, he had never heard the noun *invidiousness* but constructed it on the fly from his knowledge of the adjective *invidious* and of the *ness*-suffixing derivational construction. A second view is that Percival was not using his grammar, but was adding to it. On this analysis, Percival coined a new lexeme by analogy with things about English he already knew, involving the words *overwhelm*, *over* and *under*, the analogical proportion being: over: overwhelm :: under: *underwhelm*.

According to the first view, Percival was just putting to use his grammatical resources to create a novel utterance. According to the second view Percival had to add to his grammatical resources before using the resulting grammar, augmented with a brand new lexical item, to construct his utterance. I hope you will find valid the distinction I have drawn between the first and second analyses of Percival's hypothetical act and agree with me that the second analysis is preferable.<sup>2</sup>

Fillmore (1997) introduced the distinction between constructions proper and patterns of coining:

We can distinguish two kinds of "creativity" in language. In one case there is the ability of speakers, using existing resources [viz. constructions, P.K.], to produce and understand novel expressions. In the other case, the one for which we use the term coining, a speaker uses existing patterns in the language for creating new resources.

This paper argues that patterns of coining, although frequently and properly studied by linguists, need to be distinguished from the true constructions. The severe view of grammar adopted here excludes partially productive processes<sup>3</sup> and consigns them to the meta-grammar: a

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<sup>2</sup> Whether or not *underwhelm* has fully made it into English is apparently still unsettled. The spell checker of Word 2001 votes nay. The authors of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage* are more sanguine:

*Underwhelm* is certainly an innocuous word. It serves as a mildly humorous way of describing something unimpressive, and its common use has so far been largely uncontroversial. The only criticism that we know of is by the Harper usage panelists, who find it unacceptable by a large majority, essentially because they see it as a joke that is no longer funny. Several of the panelists regard its popularity as a fad, but over 40 years of increasing use strongly suggest that *underwhelm* is here to stay.

<sup>3</sup> "A grammatical process or pattern or rule (or 'construction') can be said to be productive if the conditions of its applicability do not require the listing of exceptions. Actually, productivity is a notion of degree. All grammatical constructions have some constraints on their applicability, but the extent to which those constraints can themselves be formulated in general ways is the extent to which we can say that the construction is productive. Some constructions only work with monosyllabic words; some only with certain grammatical categories. But they are general to the extent

compendium of useful statements *about* the grammar.<sup>4</sup> Among the many victims of this purge will be a large number of imperfectly productive derivational processes.

Failure to observe the distinction between grammatical constructions and patterns of coining can have undesirable consequences beyond grammatical theory *per se*. In an otherwise exemplary study of the color terms of Yéî Dnye, an unaffiliated language of Rossel Island (Papua New Guinea), Levinson (1997) notes that the three most prominent color terms are all recognizable as reduplications of roots whose denotata, in two cases at least, saliently display the color in question. *kpêdekpêde* 'black' is derived from *kpêde*, the name of a species of tree that is perhaps not saliently black, but the other two main color terms *kpaapîkpaapî* 'white' and *mtyemtye* (dialect alternate: *taataa*) represent reduplications of the names of a saliently white cockatoo and a saliently red parrot, respectively. Levinson reports that there is a "regular" (that is, widespread) derivational pattern in Yéî Dnye according to which an adjective denoting a property may be formed by reduplication of a nominal root that denotes something which saliently displays that property. For example, the adjective *mty:aa* 'sweet' is derived from the nominal root *mty:aa* 'honey'.

Levinson notes further that Berlin and Kay's first criterion for a basic color term was that "its meaning is not predictable from the meaning of its parts" (1969: 6), and he points out that someone familiar with the birds in question and their names might well be able to guess the meanings of white and red for *kpaapîkpaapî* and *mtyemtye*. From these observations Levinson concludes that the white and red terms of Yéî Dnye are arguably not 'basic color terms' as defined by Berlin and Kay. And from the further observation that many Australian and Oceanic languages display similar patterns of reduplication, he opines that perhaps several of these languages have no 'basic color terms' in the defined sense.

But it is clear from the facts that Levinson reports that the meanings of white for *kpaapîkpaapî* and red for *mtyemtye* are not predictable from the meanings of their parts, because the partially productive reduplication process of Yéî Dnye is not a predictive construction but a mere pattern of coining. The words for white and red might have been based on the words for sand and blood, respectively, or not based on any nominal root. Not all Yéî Dnye adjectives are formed by reduplication and for the ones that are there is no sure way to know which of the noun roots whose denotata prominently display the property in question names the actual eponym. For example, suppose we knew everything there was to know about the

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that such non-lexical constraints involve general (Boolean) conditions involving properties shared by classes of lexical items, rather than lists of specific words" (Fillmore 1997).

<sup>4</sup>A meta-grammar contains useful information about a language and is therefore of interest to the linguist. The degree to which speakers of a language share a common meta-grammar of that language is, however, particularly hard to evaluate, since meta-grammatical statements don't normally yield concrete predictions, as will be demonstrated below.

grammar of Yélf Dnye except that *kpaapîkpaapî* is the word for white, including the facts that *kpaapî* is the name of the white cockatoo and that a Yélf Dnye adjective may be formed by reduplicating a noun root whose denotata saliently display the property expressed by the adjective. With this knowledge we could not deduce that the Yélf Dnye word for white is *kpaapîkpaapî* because the word for white might be an opaque root, might be derived by some other process, or might be derived by reduplication from another noun root. Nor, if one simply overheard the word *kpaapîkpaapî* could one deduce that its meaning is ‘white’, since – as Levinson points out – the meaning of *kpaapîkpaapî* might be based on, say, the cockatoo’s distinctive screech.

I would like now to consider two patterns of English, one of which I will argue qualifies as a construction, the other only a pattern of coining. The construction, which I will call the *All-cleft* construction, is illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. All that we had to say to them was that we intended to tax them more severely. [British National Corpus (BNC<sup>5</sup>)]  
 b. All that one has to do is to start training earlier. [BNC]  
 c. All I want is to get it out of the flat, ... [BNC]  
 d. All we can reasonably conclude is that they happened at the same time. [BNC]  
 e. All as me mother’s got to do that day is the dinners. [BNC]  
 f. All’s I see is a crazy woman throwing away our supplies. [BNC]  
 g. ... so all’s we really need is cigarettes ... [BNC]

With regard to syntax, *all-clefts* can be described as identical to *wh-clefts* except that the extracted constituent of the subject clause contains, instead of a *wh* word, either *all that* (as in 1a, b), *all* (as in 1c, d), *all as* (as in 1e), or *all’s* (as in 1f, g).<sup>6</sup> The syntactic identity of *all-clefts* and *wh-clefts* can be appreciated by comparing the *wh-cleft* sentences in (2) to the corresponding examples in (1).

- (2) a. What we had to say to them was that we intended to tax them more severely.  
 b. What one has to do is to start training earlier. [BNC]  
 c. What I want is to get it out of the flat, ... [BNC]  
 d. What we can reasonably conclude is that they happened at the same time. [BNC]  
 e. What me mother’s got to do that day is the dinners. [BNC]  
 f. What I see is a crazy woman throwing away our supplies. [BNC]  
 g. ... so what we really need is cigarettes ... [BNC]

<sup>5</sup> British National corpus.

<sup>6</sup> The *all’s* form seems to be a contraction of the *all as* form. Examples (2)e, f, and g were the only examples of the *all as* and *all’s* varieties, respectively, that I could find in the BNC. I suspect this may be due in part to the colloquial status of the *all as* and *all’s* versions.

The syntactic identity of *all*-clefts and *wh*-clefts includes the properties of connectivity and reversibility. The connectivity property is illustrated in (3) and the reversibility property in (4).

- (3) a. All the president wanted was to succeed himself  
b. What the president wanted was to succeed himself.  
c. \*That the president would be re-elected pleased himself.  
d. \*The president's certain re-election delighted himself.
- (4) a. To succeed himself was all the president wanted.  
b. To succeed himself was what the president wanted.

Since *all*-clefts are identical to *wh*-clefts syntactically, we postulate that *all*-clefts represent a construction that inherits its syntax from an abstract construction, which is also inherited, by the *Wh*-cleft construction and so can dispense with further discussion of the syntax of *All*-clefts.

The semantically interesting property of *all*-cleft sentences is that they do not mean what they might be thought to mean containing, as they do, the universal quantifier *all*. A sentence like (5)a does not mean (5)b. Rather (5)a is glossed reasonably well by (5)c.

- (5) a. All I can eat is half a pizza.  
b. Everything I can eat is half a pizza.  
c. The most I can eat is half a pizza.

More generally, utterance of an *all*-cleft sentence may express a proposition (e.g., *I can eat half a pizza*) that is taken to represent a lower point in a presupposed scalar model (Fauconnier 1975, Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor 1988; Kay 1990) than some contextually given alternative (e.g., *I can eat a whole pizza*). For example, in (6), B<sub>1</sub> is an appropriate answer to A and B<sub>2</sub> is not an appropriate answer, despite the fact that B<sub>3</sub> is..

- (6) a. A: I jumped six feet.  
b. B<sub>1</sub>: That's good. All you needed to jump was five feet.  
c. B<sub>2</sub>: \*That's bad. All you needed to jump was seven feet.  
d. B<sub>3</sub>: That's bad. What you needed to jump was seven feet.

Let us call this particular scalar reading of *all*-cleft sentences the 'below expectation' reading. Not all sentences with *all*-cleft syntax have this reading. Some do express universal quantification of the subject clause, as exemplified in (7). Compare the examples in (7) with the parallel examples in (8)

- (7) a. All that I command is yours now. [BNC]  
 b. All that we can see, feel, touch, taste and hear is of one, all-pervading force -- the god force. [BNC]  
 c. All that we use in our modern world is a comment upon the delicate balance of human hand, eye and brain. [BNC]
- (8) a. Everything that I command is yours now.  
 b. Everything that we can see, feel, touch, taste and hear is of one, all-pervading force -- the god force.  
 c. Everything that we use in our modern world is a comment upon the delicate balance of human hand, eye and brain.

Although *all*-cleft sentences with universally quantified readings, such as those in (7), appear in corpora, they are notably less frequent than *all*-cleft sentences with below-expectation readings. None of the examples of universally quantified *all*-clefts that I have found are of the *all as* or *all's* varieties. Moreover, although corpora can never present direct evidence of ungrammaticality, I believe *all as* and *all's* versions of *all*-cleft form force the below-expectation reading.

- (9) a. \*All's/\*All as I command is yours now.  
 b. \*All's/\*All as we can see, feel, touch, taste and hear is of one, all-pervading force -- the god force.  
 c. \*All's/\*All as we use in our modern world is a comment upon the delicate balance of human hand, eye and brain.

It could conceivably be argued that in the case of below-expectation *all*-clefts of bare *all* or *all that* form, the literal meaning is one of universal quantification and the below-expectation reading is derived by conversational implicature. The analyst who takes this line would, however, be required to explain why this type of conversational implicature does not apply to otherwise identical sentences with *everything*, *everyone* or other expressions of universal quantification in the extracted position. We cannot, for example say (10) to express what is expressed by (1)b, repeated.

- (1) b. All that one has to do is to start training earlier. [BNC]

(10) #Everything one has to do is to start training earlier.

Moreover, if it is correct that only the below-expectation reading is available for the *all as* and *all's* versions, then a special construction stipulating *all*-cleft syntax (i.e., *wh*-cleft syntax) and below-expectation interpretation will be required anyway. We conclude that the grammar of English contains an *all*-cleft construction with *wh*-cleft syntax and below-expectation interpretation and that this construction is fully productive, being lexically constrained only with respect to the left-isolate constituent of the subject phrase.

Our example of a non-productive, non-constructural pattern of coining appears in (11).

- (11)
- a. dumb as an ox
  - b. green as grass
  - c. dead as a doornail
  - d. happy as a lark
  - e. strong as an ox
  - f. flat as a pancake
  - g. big as a house
  - h. stubborn as a mule
  - i. dark as night
  - j. plain as the nose on your face
  - k. quick as a wink
  - l. hard as a rock
  - m. free as a bird
  - n. dry as a bone
  - o. light as a feather
  - p. thin as a rail
  - q. hot as blazes
  - r. clear as a bell
  - s. black as coal
  - t. black as night
  - u. black as pitch
  - v. big as a house
  - w. stubborn as a mule
  - x. dark as night
  - y. cold as hell
  - z. hot as hell
  - aa. easy as duck soup
  - bb. easy as pie

The pattern exemplified in (11) is characterized by the formula in (12).

- (12)            A as NP [interpretation: 'very A']

Despite the existence of many more formulaic expressions fitting the A as NP formula than are shown in (12), that formula does not constitute a construction because it is not productive. First, knowledge of formula (12) plus knowledge of the constituent words is not sufficient to license any of the expressions in (11). If a young, foreign or sheltered speaker of English knew what *easy* meant, and knew what *pie* meant and knew all the expressions in (12) plus many more built on the same pattern, they would still not know that *easy as pie* and *easy as duck soup* are ways of saying *very easy*. Secondly, one can't freely use the pattern to coin new expressions. Compare (13)a with a fixed collocation and (13)b, which although understandable is not English.

- (13) a. What a healthy baby, strong as a horse!  
 b. \*What a healthy baby, heavy as a truck!

There are many members of the A as NP pattern, and it is likely that new ones come into existence every now and then as analogical creations, like *underwhelm*, but, unlike *underwhelm*, die aborning. An unsystematic search of the BNC turns up several novel, singleton cases of the A as NP pattern, whose contents and contexts suggest self-conscious, literary usage.

- (14) a. Because you 're always utterly alone then. There may be a lover, a friend, asleep beside you, but who is **wide-eyed as a marigold** in the trackless dark? Just you and you.  
 b. She selected Goyescas. The music was **sure as a swing in high summer**, to and fro, light as racing over a sunny lawn to the blessed shade under the trees. Up the garden path and a frisson of unease  
 c. They flirted with everybody especially each other. Only last summer, years after it was all over and Astrid had found her stone cottage with roses round the door, golden/grey in a late summer orchard, she met Jay, and her eyes were **green as the flames on ashwood**. Firelight, evening light.  
 d. She would change their lives. The hospital in Leninakan is **bare as a garage**. The red robe they gave her there was the first bright colour she had worn .

Many of the expressions in the A as NP pattern are motivated by the meaning of the NP, but quite a few are not. Fathers are thought of as light and lead as heavy, but there is nothing particularly easy about pie or duck soup. Further evidence that individual expressions of the A as NP variety must be learned individually is that even among those that appear to be highly motivated, there are several kinds of idiosyncrasy to be observed. The first has to do with the association of some A as NP collocations with literal meanings of the adjective, others with metaphorical meanings of the adjective while yet others occur with both literal and figurative meanings. Consider some fixed expressions with *hot* and *cold*. These adjectives can be used metaphorically in sports contexts to indicate skillful and unskillful play, respectively.

- (15) Our best shooter was hot/cold tonight.

The expressions *hot as a firecracker* and *hot as a two-dollar pistol* can be used in this metaphorical sense, but not in the literal sense of elevated temperature. A different metaphor opposes *warm* and *cold* personalities. We can say that a person is *cold as ice*, but not that the weather is cold as ice. However, I think we can say that *our best shooter was cold as ice tonight*. Although we can say both that the weather is *hot as Hell* and *cold as Hell*, we cannot say that our best shooter is *hot as Hell*, although it sounds almost natural to me to say *Our best shooter was cold as Hell tonight*. (Your mileage may differ.)

A second kind of idiosyncrasy of A as NP expressions is that some of them can occur with a *than*-phrase, while others cannot. This is true of the expressions in (11), some of which are given below in comparative form. Some expressions of this type occur only in comparative form, as illustrated in (16)e-h.

- (16) a. deader than a doornail  
b. hotter than Hell  
c. bigger than a house  
d. flatter than a pancake  
e. \*happier than a lark  
f. \*quicker than a wink  
g. \*easier than pie  
h. \*drier than a bone

We conclude that although there is a very large number of collocations build on the A as NP pattern, this pattern is not productive. Expressions of this form cannot be freely produced as novel expressions using the existing resources of English grammar. The A as NP pattern with the meaning 'very A' has seemingly provided a fecund source of analogy for coining new English collocations but it is not a construction of English grammar.

We have seen that there exist families of lexically restricted expressions, originally identified by Fillmore as patterns of coining, which although sporadically productive diachronically are not systematically productive synchronically. Fillmore writes

There is a view of grammar according to which the grammar proper will identify only the productive processes. Since the ability to create new words, using non-productive processes, is clearly a linguistic ability, it is my opinion that a grammar of a language needs to identify constructions that exist for "coining" purposes as well. Technically, the coining constructions will simply be thought of as bound constructions, constructions that are "bound" to - inherited by - particular complex words. They will serve to motivate and represent the substructure of morphologically complex words and some idiomatic phrases. But they are also available for the coining of new words. (1997)

The narrower view, expressed in the first sentence of the quoted passage, is more in keeping with the notion of grammar expressed in the epigraph and adopted here: that a grammar represents the minimal amount of what a speaker-interpreter needs to know about the language in order to be able to figure out the rest. Patterns of coining are not part of what a speaker must

know because, as we have seen in examining the A as NP pattern, the speaker of English has to know each of the members of the set of expressions exemplifying this pattern individually, anyway. Speakers of English who already know the words *red* and *ball* and the construction licensing modified nominals do not also have to know the form and meaning of the expression *red ball*. That is something they can figure out from what they already know. But speakers who know the words *light* and *feather* and the A as NP pattern of coining, cannot deduce from this knowledge that *light as a feather* is a way to say extremely light. That is something they must possess as a separate piece of knowledge, or not at all.

Having argued that the *All-cleft* pattern and the A as NP pattern provide clear illustrations of a productive construction and a pattern of coining, respectively, it may be of interest to consider a case that is likely to elicit more disagreement and thereby highlight a methodological issue. I have argued elsewhere (Kay 2005) that the caused motion pattern, illustrated in (17) is properly considered a pattern of coining and not a productive construction.

(17)	a.	Kim pushed the shoe under the sofa.
	b.	They laughed his Hamlet off the stage.
	c.	Tracy sneezed the tissue off the table.

First, following some ideas of Gawron (1986), which were considered but not to my mind successfully refuted by Godlberg (1995), I reviewed some reasons for not positing a caused motion construction as part of the grammar. The grammar of English will need a transitivity construction, which adds an agent argument to an intransitive verb, in order to explain examples like (18)a,b, along with many others involving non-motion verbs such as *boil*, *melt*, *grow*, *evaporate*, *freeze*, and so on.

(18)	a.	The top spun.
	b.	Kim spun the top.
	c.	The top spun off the table.
	d.	Kim spun the top off the table.

The grammar of English will also need a construction that adds a path argument to intransitive verbs, as illustrated by (18)a,c. If we now posit a caused motion construction, licensing the verbal valence exemplified in (18)d, that sentence will be accorded a spurious ambiguity by our grammar, its valence being licensed both by the caused motion construction alone and by the combination of transitivity and path adding constructions. We need agent-adding and path-adding constructions whether or not we posit a caused motion construction, and once we have agent-adding and path-adding constructions, there is nothing left for a caused motion construction to do. It doesn't work in the other direction. If we posit the caused motion construction, with agent,

theme and path arguments, we will still need agent-adding for (18)b and path-adding for (18)c.

We noted that the A as NP pattern of coining is not productive. One diagnostic of a pattern that is not productive is that treating it as a productive construction leads to overgeneration. Overgeneration with the caused motion pattern is illustrated in (19).

(19)	a.	*He bragged her out of the room.
	b.	*She screamed him under the bed.
	c.	*She smiled him to her.
	d.	*He screeched her hands over her ears.

Although these observations provide reasons not to posit a caused motion construction, there remain three types of examples of acceptable caused-motion sentences that do not yield to an analysis in terms of agent-adding and path-adding constructions. In the first, the theme argument cannot occur without the path argument, as in (17)b,c, (20) and (21).<sup>7</sup>

(20)	a.	They laughed him off the stage.
	b.	*They laughed him.

(21)	a.	We let the water out of the pool.
	b.	*We let the water

The second, and related, group of examples involves verbs that do not have motion meanings unless the path is added.

(22)	a.	She showed him to the door.
	b.	He squeezed the shim under the pedestal.

I would suggest that these examples are individually conventionalized in the sense that, for example, there is a conventionalized usage or sense of the verb *let* that is subcategorized for both theme and path arguments. The same valence configuration is not possible with the semantically similar verbs *allow*, or (colloquial) *leave*, or with the somewhat less closely related verbs, *permit* and *enable*. If there were a Caused Motion construction, we would expect all the examples in (22) to be acceptable.

(22)	a.	*We allowed the water out of the pool.
	b.	*We permitted the water out of the pool.
	c.	(Coll.) Leave *the water out of the pool/ the dog stay in the house
	d.	*We permitted the water out of the pool.
	e.	*We enabled the water out of the pool.

<sup>7</sup> Most of the examples in this section are Goldberg's examples or minor variations on Goldberg's examples.

Observing, for example, that *permit* is inherently volitional while *let* is not (*A leaky roof let/allowed water (get) into the barn*), one might be inclined to argue that there is some semantic distinction which allows *let*, but no similar verbs, to unify with the caused motion construction (although this particular distinction will not rule out *allow* in (22)a). Taking this line, however, will commit the defender of caused motion as a construction to specifying just what that distinction is. There are a large number of near synonyms only one of which permits the caused motion pattern, as illustrated in (23).<sup>8</sup>

(23)	a.	She showed him to the door.
	b.	*She displayed / demonstrated / illustrated / revealed / exhibited... him to the door.

What the defender of caused motion as a construction will have to produce is a semantic property which characterizes just the verbs that work, e.g., *let*, *laugh* and *show*, and rules out the many semantically similar verbs that do not. Otherwise, we must conclude that the acceptable examples in (17-23) are individually conventionalized according to a caused motion pattern of coining.

The third and final set of examples consists of admittedly unconventionalized expressions like (24). Possibly this set of examples is a singleton set involving the verb *sneeze*. Goldberg (pc) points out that (24) occurs in a children's book by Robert Munsch.

(24) He sneezed his tooth right across town.

Examples like (24) are best considered nonce formulations, formed on analogy with the many conventionalized examples of the caused motion pattern of coining, as the examples in (11) were doubtless coined on analogy with other conventionalized examples of the A as NP pattern. Accepting this analysis leads us conclude that the caused motion pattern is not a construction of English.

There are other possible views. First one may reject the above analysis of caused motion on empirical grounds, insisting that caused motion is a construction and that examples like the *sneeze* family prove that fact by establishing productivity. That is, one might decide that caused motion is indeed a construction of English by giving the available facts a different interpretation. This would leave open the question whether the distinction between constructions and patterns of coining is a valid one, but it would be consistent with an attitude that rejects that distinction. Alternatively, one might accept the analysis of caused motion given above but reject the theoretical distinction, perhaps adopting an attitude like that expressed in the last Fillmore quote above: both constructions and patterns of coining,

<sup>8</sup> Boas (2003) makes a similar point and draws similar conclusions with regard to the resultative pattern, which I suspect is also best thought of as a pattern of coining.

although analytically distinguishable, should be included in the grammar. To take the latter position is to abandon the familiar criterion of acceptability by the native speaker as the empirical *sine qua non* of what counts as evidence for a grammar. But as long as the distinction between pattern of coining and construction is maintained, one could still identify a subset of the synchronic grammar for which native speaker acceptability or its contrary remained the evidence. It would seem to carve the matter more nearly at the joints, however, to distinguish between the grammar proper and the meta-grammar (a compendium of statements about the grammar, including perhaps its potentialities for change) and locate patterns of coining in the meta-grammar, that is outside of the grammar proper, restricting empirical evidence for grammar to patterns possessing the predictive property.

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