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INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN ELIZABETH HUNSTON

Interviewers: Deise C. de Moraes Pinto, Roberto de Freitas Jr. e Dennis Castanheira.

Interviewee`s resume:

Susan Elizabeth Hunston is a British linguist, she has a BA degree in English Language and Literature (University of Birmingham, 1974), a Postgraduate Diploma in English as a Second Language (University of Leeds, 1977) and a Master and a PHD in English (University of Birmingham, 1983 and 1989). She is currently a Professor of English Language in the Department of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Birmingham. She serves on the editorial board of various renowned international journals and was appointed Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2017 for her prominent achievements and services to higher education and Applied Linguistics. Professor Hunston is especially interested in the interface between lexis and grammar, phraseology, and the contribution of *Corpus* Linguistics. Her vast list of publications include books, articles and chapters. She also worked as a senior grammarian for the COBUILD Project, where she and her colleagues developed the Pattern Grammar (PG) model. In PG, words are described according to the environment they occur in language *corpora*.

In this interview, we invited Professor Susan Hunston to talk about the relation between Pattern Grammar, Construction Grammar and *Corpus* Linguistics.

1) **What are the main tenets of Pattern Grammar (PG) and how do they interact with Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Construction Grammar (CG)?**

Pattern Grammar seeks to describe a language by formalising the grammatical behaviour of each word in the language. Close class words have limited behaviours – for example, a preposition is followed by a noun phrase – but open class words have a wider range of possibilities. In English, open class adjectives, nouns and verbs can all be described in terms of, mostly, their complementation patterns. A pattern in this sense is a sequence of

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phrase or clause types, such as 'noun phrase', 'that clause', and specific closed class words such as *it*, *of* or *as*. The aim of Pattern Grammar is to produce a comprehensive description of a language by specifying all the patterns necessary to account for all lexis, and as far as possible to identify all the lexis used with each pattern.

To qualify as a pattern, a complementing phrase or clause must be frequent enough to be noticeable in a set of concordance lines, and must involve a level of dependency between the core word and the pattern. The pattern elements contribute to the overall meaning and it must be apparent that the phrase or clause is present. For example, 'he recovered from measles' illustrates the pattern **V *from* n** because 'from measles' is dependent on 'recover', but 'he recovered at home' does not illustrate the pattern **V *at* n** because there is no similar dependence. Similarly, 'this reflects badly on the organisation' illustrates the pattern **V adv *on* n**, i.e. the adverb is an integral part of the pattern, but 'he decided quickly on the black shoes' illustrates the pattern **V *on* n**, i.e. the adverb is not an element in the pattern.

Pattern Grammar interacts with Corpus Linguistics in two ways. Firstly, obviously, a corpus is used to identify the patterns. The concordance lines produced by corpus investigation software allow the patterns to be seen. Secondly, Corpus Linguistics has to some extent changed our view of what is important in describing a language, placing more emphasis on lexis, collocation, phraseology and so on than on grammatical abstractions. The grammatical behaviour of individual words, and the generalisations that can be drawn from that, is part of that changed emphasis.

Many of the patterns identified in Pattern Grammar are the same as constructions identified in Construction Grammar. In a sense, two groups of researchers have arrived at similar insights from different starting points. I shall return to this point below.

2) How would you define "pattern" in the PG`s perspective and how is a pattern identified? How does its concept relate to and/or differ from the concept of "construction"?

A grammar pattern describes the grammatical behaviour of a (sense of a) word. It can be very specific; for example, the word *face* when it means 'aspect' is followed by a prepositional phrase beginning with *of* and is preceded by an adjective and the definite article

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the. An example might be 'the public face of the organisation'. Because all these grammatical elements are needed to make this meaning, the pattern specifies all of them: ***the*** **adj N** ***of*** **n**. I do not know of any other words that are used with this pattern, that is, where all elements of the pattern are necessary for the meaning. Most patterns, though, are more generalisable and are used with a lot of words. For example, 138 verbs have been identified as occurring with the pattern **V** ***from*** **n**. These generalisable patterns consist of a limited set of elements: phrases or word classes such as noun phrases, adjectives, possessives and adverbs; prepositional phrases with specific prepositions; specific verb types such as link verbs; and a few specific closed-class words such as *it* and *there*.

Most verbs in English are used in the pattern **V** (the intransitive pattern e.g. *he laughed*) and/or the pattern **V n** (the transitive pattern e.g. *He ate some cake*). Other patterns are also very familiar, such as the ditransitive **V n n** (*She gave him a book*) or the **V n -ing** pattern (*She heard him talking*). In cases such as these the patterns simply reinterpret known grammatical features in a non-technical language intended to be useful for learners. But the patterns can also be extended to specify preposition use e.g. *he apologised for the noise* or **V** ***for*** **n** or longer sequences e.g. *He saw it as useful to sell books* or **v** ***it as*** **ADJ to-inf**.

Patterns are identified by looking at concordance lines from a corpus. Looking at the concordance lines for a word will suggest a potential pattern; for example, the concordance lines for *useful* will suggest a possible pattern of **v** ***it as*** **ADJ to-inf**. Then the pattern itself can be searched for, using a search string such as 'VERB + *it* + *as* + JJ + *to* + VB', or whatever works with the software. That will find other adjectives with the same pattern, such as *advantageous, critical, immoral, legitimate, natural, necessary, odd, risky, shameful, worthwhile*. After some time of doing this exercise for a given language, the list of patterns becomes fairly fixed. The procedure changes from being 'corpus-driven' (finding new and un-looked-for information) to being 'corpus-based' (fitting what is found into pre-existing notions). It is necessary to do this work 'manually', i.e. with a person looking at concordance lines, rather than with a search procedure that finds frequently-occurring phrases, because considerable interpretation is necessary in recognising dependency and in generalising from disparate instances.

I shall discuss in more detail below the relationship between patterns and constructions. It will be apparent that in some cases what is described as a pattern and what is

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described as a construction will be the same thing: two words for the same observation. In other cases the pattern will encompass a number of constructions. But in general I regard the ideas of pattern and of construction both as responses to a set of observations about regularities in language use.

3) In your book with Gill Francis (2000), Pattern Grammar: A corpus-driven approach to the Lexical Grammar of English, you claim "firstly, that the different senses of words will tend to be distinguished by different patterns, and secondly, that particular patterns will tend to be associated with lexical items that have particular meanings" (p. 83). How is a pattern connected to a meaning and to what extent?

One of the observations of Pattern Grammar is that the different dictionary senses of a word are often distinguished by different patterns. It is possible to give examples: 'reflect' with the 'mirror' sense occurs in patterns such as ***be*** **V-ed** ***in*** **n** (*was reflected in the water*) whereas 'reflect' with the 'think' sense occurs in patterns such as **V that** (*I reflected that…*); 'struggle' with the 'fight' sense is used in patterns such as **N** ***against*** **n** (*the struggle against the enemy*) whereas 'struggle' with the 'difficult' sense occurs in patterns such as ***it*** **v-link N to-inf** (*it was a struggle to think clearly*). Another observation is that if you start with a pattern, then the words that are used with that pattern tend to share meaning. For example, the pattern ***it*** **v-link N to-inf** is used with words that evaluate an action, for example by saying how difficult it is (*battle, challenge, effort, job, nightmare, problem* or *struggle*, and *[tough] decision/task*). Some patterns are used with sets of words that are quite different from one another. The Pattern Grammar resources for English list all the words with a given pattern, split into groups depending on meaning.

All this raises the question of the mechanism by which pattern is connected to meaning, or how this connection might be conceptualised. Analogy seems to be one factor, and we can see this in a process of language change. When the verb 'leak' is used figuratively, to mean giving someone secret information (*he leaked the memo to the press*), it is used with the patterns associated with the related verb 'tell'. The verb 'highlight' is often now used with the pattern **V that** (*they highlighted that…*), by analogy with 'stress' or 'argue'. The adjective 'bored' is increasingly used with the pattern **ADJ** ***of*** **n** (*bored of the*

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topic) by analogy with 'tired'. And so on. One idea I find quite appealing is that patterns work as classifiers, imposing a grouping on words. In other words, 'bored' is used with 'of', not because it means 'tired' but because language use imposes a similarity between 'tired' and 'bored'. My favourite example of this is the verb 'mistake'. In some varieties of English, this is used with the pattern **V n *for* n** (*mistook his wife for a hat*), and in others it is used with the pattern **V n *as* n** (*mistook his neighbour as his wife*). This shows that 'mistake' can be assigned by the pattern to a group with verbs such as 'exchange' and 'swap', or it can be assigned to a group with verbs such as 'classify' (i.e. 'exchange/mistake a tennis ball for a squash ball' or 'classify/mistake a tennis ball as a squash ball'). The pattern identifies the meaning of 'mistake' as being 'more like exchanging' or 'more like classifying'.

As shown, it is very easy to find examples of links between meaning and pattern, but this is not something that is absolute or universal. First of all, although many words with multiple senses have different patterns with the different meanings, this is not always the case. For example, the verb 'fade' is shown in the Cobuild dictionary with 5 senses (become paler, become less strong, slowly disappear, become unimportant, (of feelings) become less intense). The pattern **V** – the intransitive verb – is recorded against three of the senses and the pattern **V *into* n** is recorded against three senses. Whereas each sense is recorded with a distinctive set of patterns, no pattern uniquely identifies a sense. Numerous similar examples can be found. For example, the verb 'interrupt' is shown with three senses: interrupt a speaker, interrupt a process or activity, interrupt a line or surface. Each sense is used with the straightforward transitive pattern **V n**. The senses are distinguished by their lexis, not by the pattern. Then there is the argument that when lists of words sharing a pattern are compiled, it is noted that the words tend to cluster according to meaning. Whereas this is true whatever pattern you look at, putting the words into groups is a subjective matter, so while the general principle works there could easily be disagreement about details. For an extreme case, consider the pattern **N *in* n**. The Pattern Grammar project identified 218 nouns in English used with this pattern, and these were divided into no fewer than 19 meaning groups. A couple are large: a group comprising nouns meaning something like 'increasing' or 'decreasing' contains 53, and one comprising nouns meaning 'membership' or 'involvement' contains 29. These include nouns as disparate as 'immersion', 'interference', 'participation' and 'voice'. The other groups are of various sizes, with 11 groups having fewer than 10 nouns

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listed. Some of the groups list words that are opposite in meaning, such as a group that includes nouns meaning 'difference' (*contrast, difference, discrepancy, disparity, imbalance, inconsistency* and *variation*) and one meaning the opposite (*similarity*). Even with so many groups there is a final 'other nouns' group with 16 nouns listed that could not be placed anywhere else.

In conclusion, then, there is a great deal to be said for the argument that patterns themselves have meaning, and that, as a consequence, patterns distinguish the senses of polysemous words, and also that the words used with a given pattern will tend to share aspects of meaning. Unsurprisingly, though, there is a certain messiness around these generalisations. With a few exceptions, patterns have several meanings rather than one. For example, the **V n n** pattern is illustrated by each of: 'he gave her a book', 'she told him a story', 'he made her a cake', 'they elected her president'. And as we know, synonymy is rare, if it exists at all, so the lists of words said to share aspects of meaning have a necessary disparity. The words might be said to be more or less prototypical of the meaning that unites them.

4) In the paper "Patterns, constructions, and applied linguistics" (2019), it is claimed that patterns can be used to propose ´candidate constructions` and it is suggested that "the term 'construction' be used to refer to a sub-set of instances of a grammar pattern". Could you talk a little about it and give some examples?

For a long time, I have wondered how to articulate the relationship between pattern and construction. There are clear differences between Pattern Grammar and Construction Grammar. Pattern Grammar is a response to and a formalisation of observations of words in a corpus. Construction Grammar is a hypothesis about how language is represented cognition, with evidence coming from a corpus and/or from experimentation. On the other hand, the results can be similar. What I might describe as the **V n *as* n** pattern ('view something as', 'interpret something as' etc) might also be described as the 'appositive *as*' construction. The **V n *into* -ing** pattern has also been described as the 'causative *into*' construction. In the past I have considered abandoning the notion of pattern altogether, and simply adopting the nomenclature of construction. Or I have rather feebly asserted that the two things are similar

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but different. Eventually it became apparent that the nearest equivalent to a construction is not the pattern, which as we have seen can express more than one meaning, but the pattern along with a sub-set of the lexis associated with it. To take a simple example, the pattern **ADJ *at* n/ing** is used in two distinct ways: with adjectives such as *good* and *bad* to express judgement (*good at needlework*); and with adjectives expressing feelings (*astonished at the turn of events*). It seems sensible to suggest that there may be two constructions here: the 'good at doing' construction and the 'feeling at situation' construction, however they are described more technically in Construction Grammar terminology. In the paper we called these 'candidate constructions' because we have no idea about them as mental representations. So they are candidates for being constructions, rather than definitively constructions, and we leave it to the Construction people to test them out.

The paper you mention gives some examples of the pattern-construction alignment, and I will repeat one here, derived from the pattern **V n *on* n**. Working from the lists of verbs used with that pattern, a substantial number (about 16) constructions can be proposed. Here are just six of them:

a) Bestow good things on
b) Bring misfortune on
c) Advise someone on
d) Question someone on
e) Commend someone on
f) Focus attention on

Each of these constructions can be divided into more specific meanings. In some cases these relate to specific collocations e.g. 'settle money on', which is a sub-construction belonging to the 'bestow good things on' construction. In some cases the distinctions are about more than collocation. For example, the 'bring misfortune on' construction might include sub-constructions such as 'blame event on someone', 'inflict pain on someone', and 'spring a surprise on someone'.

There is, then, the potential for a hierarchy of constructions of greater and lesser specificity. This can be illustrated with the pattern **V *at* n**, for which four top-level

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constructions can be proposed: 'point on a scale', 'direction or target', 'reaction', and 'incomplete action'. The 'direction or target' can be sub-divided into:

a) 'animal-like noises' such as *bark, growl, screech at someone*
b) 'human vocal expressions of emotion' such as *bawl, laugh, shout, swear at someone*
c) 'gestures and expressions' such as *frown, smile, wave, wink at someone*
d) 'direct gaze' such as *gape, glance, look, peer, stare at someone*
e) 'direct a weapon or attack' such as *aim, fire, hit, spit, strike at someone*

Within each of these, each verb represents a more specific construction. Thus we might propose a 'bark at someone' construction, which is an instance of the 'directed animal-like noises' construction, which is an instance of the 'directed *at*' construction.

This proposal has, I think, advantages for both Construction Grammar and Pattern Grammar. For Pattern Grammar it offers a terminology that is well understood. Talking about the 'good at something' construction is more understandable than saying 'the **ADJ *at* n** pattern with the *good* and *bad* meaning group'. For Construction Grammar it offers the outcome of a sizeable corpus research project that can be used to provide information about a very large number of what might be constructions. Because the patterns and the lists of words already exist, they can be worked on to propose constructions in the hierarchies as suggested here.

5) Also in "Patterns, constructions, and applied linguistics" (2019), you suggest that "the Pattern Grammar reference resources that are already available be reconfigured as a constructicon". In this view, how is the constructicon seen/defined and organized? Why and in what sense should it be reconfigured and which PG resources could be used?

If we continue the argument from the previous answer, and agree that the patterns and lists of words so far identified for English could be interpreted as constructions (or 'candidate constructions'), then it would be possible to work through the patterns and lists and produce a list of constructions, or a constructicon. The resources used would be the Pattern Grammar books published by Collins in the 1990s, which have been made publicly available more

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recently as a database of patterns (grammar.collinsdictionary.com/grammar-pattern). The groups of words listed in each pattern would then be reinterpreted as constructions, in the manner illustrated above.

Such a constructicon might have two purposes. It would be a resource for language teaching, being something like a phraseological dictionary. If it was accompanied by an index of meanings, a learner or teacher could consult the index and find the constructions that can be used to express that meaning. Something like this was attempted in the first Grammar Patterns book, which covered verbs in English. One of the indexes to the book is a 'Meaning Finder', which directs users to particular patterns and meaning groups (i.e. to particular constructions). For example, the meaning 'starting, stopping or continuing' sends the user to 'start' (**V**), 'end something' (**V n**), 'begin to do' (**V to-inf**), 'start doing' (**V -ing**), 'persist in doing' (**V *in* n**), 'enter into something' (**V *into* n**), 'knuckle down to something' (**V *to* n**), 'proceed with something' (**V *with* n**) and 'join someone in something' (**V n *in* n**), among others.

The second purpose of the constructicon would be to offer to the Construction Grammar community a potential resource for further experimentation, as it would offer a near-complete set of constructions in English at a mid level of generality. Starting to build such a set from scratch would be a massive undertaking – my point is that much of preliminary work has been done here and it only needs re-interpretation to turn the Pattern Grammar on-line resources into a constructicon.

6) Is PG oriented only to the description of languages or it tries to account for the cognitive processes and bases of human language? If so, how and to what extent?

Pattern Grammar is purely descriptive and does not account for cognitive processes. Sinclair speculated that units of meaning (which look very like constructions) are stored in the brain, and Hoey made more concrete proposals for the priming of words to occur in specific contexts and co-texts. Both these approaches are compatible with Pattern Grammar, but neither Gill Francis nor I have made claims or even hypotheses about cognitive processes. We are both, I think, more in sympathy with approaches to Linguistics that treat language as a

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social entity rather than as a cognitive one. But if our description can be of use to Cognitive Linguists, then all the better.

7) In the article "Patterns, constructions and local grammar: a case study of 'evaluation'", written with Hang Su (2019), you discuss, among other aspects, the relationship between CG and language teaching/learning. In your analysis, what are the main contributions/applications of this approach to teaching/learning?

Partly, the answer to this question is about the general approach taken to language, and teaching language in use. Language teachers need to be aware of the interdependency of lexis and grammar and the need to make learners aware of how individual words are used. Some patterns might be taught specifically, such as the ***it* v-link ADJ that** pattern (*it is obvious that…*) for expressing opinions using a variety of 'opinion' adjectives. As Dave Willis argued, though, there is such a large number of patterns that they cannot all be taught, and learners simply have to be encouraged to notice patterns, for example in their reading or when using a dictionary. Another way to look at this would be to suggest that teachers are teaching 'chunks' of language, and this will include phenomena such as collocation, grammar patterns and constructions. There are, then, general issues about 'what a language consists of' and 'what approach to teaching is most compatible with this' that relate to both Pattern Grammar and Construction Grammar, among other things.

As well as this rather general approach, there is I think a challenge for teachers who might look at the Pattern Grammar resources and ask, what use can be made of them? I have used those resources to put together a few teaching activity ideas, mainly involving re-writing and paraphrase, to teach something like 'how to express similar ideas in a variety of ways'. For example, using the pattern **N that**, I have suggested prompts that require the learner to combine two sentences. For example: 'He suggested I should resign + I rejected that -> I rejected his suggestion that I should resign'. The aim would be partly to encourage noticing and use of the **N that** pattern and partly to encourage flexibility and complexity in use of the noun phrase. I would hope that teaching materials using grammar patterns could expand the learners' repertoire rather than simply indicate when learners are using right or wrong prepositions, for example.

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8) Which methodology would you most recommend to those interested in following PG? Is there any specific guidance regarding the choice of corpus, selection of software or the like?

Initial work on Pattern Grammar is essentially lexicographical: it means working word by word through a language to derive a description of the patterns that are important to that language. These may be sequences of phrases such as those identified for English, or they may be different. If this is not done as part of a lexicography project (writing a dictionary), then the most frequent few hundred open-class words would be the obvious place to start. The corpus just needs to be as large and as varied and as current as possible, and Part of Speech tagged. The software is any concordancing software that permits searches for PoS strings as well as wordform and lemma searches. Then the work is, as Gill Francis has said, cyclical, moving from the word to obtain patterns and from the pattern to obtain lists of words.

The initial work on Pattern Grammar in English was carried out as part of the compilation of the Cobuild dictionary published in 1995. The lexicographers worked with the Bank of English corpus and with the bespoke Lookup software. They were given guidance on how to recognise and code patterns, and each word was checked for this coding by Gill Francis and myself. The coding was stored in the dictionary database, so once the dictionary was completed the database could be searched for, for example, all the words that had been coded **V -ing**. That gave us the preliminary information and where necessary we could double-check against the corpus. In the case of adjectives, for example, we found that many infrequent instances had not been coded, so we searched for the patterns in the corpus and listed the adjectives that we found.

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