

Usage-Based Approaches to Language Acquisition

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Usage-based approaches hold that we learn language through using language. Our linguistic ability emerges as a result of our cognitive learning mechanisms analysing this experience. Corpus Linguistics provides the relevant evidence of usage. Cognitive Linguistics and Construction Grammar analyse the representations of language and how people acquire, represent, and process this knowledge.

This paper analyses (1) usage patterns of English verb-argument constructions (VACs) in terms of their grammatical form, semantics, lexical constituency, and distribution patterns in large corpora, (2) patterns of VAC usage in learner-directed speech and in first and second language acquisition, (3) psycholinguistic investigations of VAC processing in first and second language speakers. It demonstrates:

1. Language usage is highly patterned in ways that support learning.
2. Language acquisition is guided by this patterning.
3. Language users have rich implicit statistical knowledge of these patterns.