# The semantics-pragmatics interplay in a partonomic construction: Construals, lexical relations, pragmatic points and 'the construction itself'

by
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The present article presents a corpus-illustrated description of the English expression *the X itself* which treats the expression as a grammatical construction, as defined in usage-based construction grammar (an entrenched semiotic routine in a speech community). Investigating the construction's semantic content, we find that it serves to set up a partonomy and construes one of the items therein as a core part, and that it, as an extension of its semantic meaning also has the discourse-pragmatic function of distributing discursive salience. The discussion in the present paper documents the initial steps in the building of a hypothesis regarding the nature of *the X itself* – one which can be tested and refined in future corpus-based empirical usage-based linguistic research.

## *1. Introduction*

In their discussion of the conceptual underpinnings of lexical relations, Croft and Cruse (2004:156) mention, very much in passing, an expression that they call *the X itself* which, they argue, serves to select a core within a whole, such that the nominal *X*-element expresses a core part among other parts that constitute the whole. The expression is brought up in an in-depth discussion of meronymy and simply serves to illustrate the semantic category of core part. Naturally, Croft and Cruse do not follow up on *the X itself*, since providing a detailed description of this expression is not within the scope of their discussion of lexical relations. Nonetheless, their sketchy description of the expression actually provides enough

detail for it to serve as a pre-theoretical, skeletal foundation upon which a hypothesis can be built. The present paper draws on their pre-theoretical description and elaborates on it, adding flesh to its skeletal nature, and sets up a hypothesis about the communicative behavior of *the X itself.* Hopefully, the hypothesis has enough substance for it to be able to be tested, falsified or verified, and refined in further research.

The present paper, and the hypothesis it presents, has three main theoretical premises, the understanding of which is important to the overall appreciation of our hypothesis.

Embracing the theoretical framework of construction grammar (Fillmore et al. 1988, Goldberg 1995, Croft 2001), *the X itself* will be treated as a grammatical construction. That is, the first main premise of the hypothesis is that *the X itself* is a pairing of form and conventional meaning. In other words, it is an integrated holistic sign which is entrenched in the communicative system of the English-based speech community. Croft and Cruse's (2004:156) description of the symbolic structure of *the X itself* will serve as the starting point of our discussion of the construction.

In addition to taking construction grammar as its main theoretical framework, our hypothesis is anchored in the usage-based model of language (Kemmer & Barlow 2000, Croft & Cruse 2004: 291-327, Tummers et al. 2005) in which the language system not only includes contextual features, but is also inductively based on language use. This is the second major premise of the present discussion. Usage-based linguists argue that the language system is best described via empirical methods that capture the behavior of the phenomenon in question and allows for statistical accounts of patterns of use. Consequently, our hypothesis must also be empirically based on observations of naturally occurring language – otherwise, it may leave out some potentially very important features of the phenomenon.

The third major premise of the present discussion stems from the





framework of cognitive linguistics and what Lakoff (1990:40) calls the cognitive commitment, described as 'a commitment to make one's account of human language accord with what is generally known about the mind and the brain, from other disciplines as well as our own'. That is, in addition to being informed by 'our own' discipline (which is linguistics), we must, if we embrace cognitive linguistics, seek to take into account the relation between language and cognition in our construction of hypotheses, our building of language models, and our descriptions of linguistic phenomena. Thus, a description of a linguistic phenomenon within the cognitive linguistics framework will include considerations of cognitive processes and structures on a par with, or even in lieu of, purely linguistics-based generalizations.

Based on these three premises, the present discussion sets up a descriptive hypothesis about *the X itself* which takes into account its symbolic structure, the cognitive processes and principles involved in its semantics, as well as its discourse-pragmatic features.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an introduction to the basic principles of construction grammar, first offering a definition of the grammatical construction, then addressing the symbolic structure of constructions in terms of entrenchment, construal operations and discourse pragmatics. In section 3, *the X itself* is explored and a descriptive hypothesis is built, dealing with its symbolic structure, its conceptual-semantic structures and construal processes, and with its discourse-pragmatic function. Section 4 provides a discussion of the possibility of empirically testing the hypothesis built in section 3, while also addressing some points of criticism that non-empirically oriented linguists might have.

## *2. Usage-based construction grammar*

This section introduces the basic principles of usage-based construction grammar as embraced in the present investigation. It draws largely on the principles of construction grammar put forth by Croft (2001, 2003, 2005) and Tomasello (2003) as well as on usage-based linguistics taken more broadly (Kemmer & Barlow 2000, Croft & Cruse 2004: 291-327, Tummers et al. 2005).

### 2.1. Entrenched routines

The grammatical construction figures as the central theoretical concept in all versions of construction grammar. The framework of the present discussion is usage-based construction grammar, which is built on a recognition of the intimate two-way influential direction between the language system and discourse as posed in usage-based linguistics (Kemmer & Barlow 2000, Croft & Cruse 2004: 291-327, Tummers et al. 2005). In this framework, a construction is defined as 'an entrenched routine …, that is generally used in the speech community … and involves a pairing of form and meaning' (Croft 2005: 274). Importantly, regularities in various types of context are entrenched along with the form-meaning pairing as part of the language system.

In construction grammarians' vision, grammar consists of networks of constructional templates that pair form and meaning and license instances of constructions in discourse. These networks are organized like the prototype categories known from cognitive linguistics and other cognitive sciences (e.g. Rosch 1973, Lakoff 1987, Geeraerts 1997), displaying prototype effects and varying in terms of specificity, such that both very schematic and very specific constructions and subconstructions may appear in a constructional network. In usage-based construction grammars, these networks are





inductively structured and may feature redundancy across network levels (Croft & Cruse 2004: 270-271) in the form of, for example, item-specific and item-class-specific constructions (Croft 2003: 57-58; Tomasello 2003: 139).

### 2.2. Construal

It is held in cognitive linguistics that meaning is conceptualized or construed via a set of cognitive processes, or construal operations. Croft and Wood (2000) propose a model, revised in Croft & Cruse (2004: 40-73), of construal operations at play in meaning construction and general human cognition, the latter divided into four major categories. Each category is based on an experiential area and its accompanying sets of cognitive abilities: attention/salience (the ability to distribute one's focus of attention on various details of a scene), judgment/comparison (the ability to compare experiences on the basis of similarities and differences), perspective/situatedness (the ability to relate to the scene, or context, in which the experiences are situated), and constitution/gestalt (the ability to interpret the constitutions of entities in terms of their physical shapes, their spatio-temporal, and their force-dynamic structures). Figure-ground alignment is included under judgment/comparison, following Croft & Wood (2000: 62), who argue that '[f]igure/ground is most appropriately subsumed under the philosophical notion of judgement, that is, an act of comparison that leads to an evaluation'.

Both constructional and lexical meaning involve conceptual content, and construal operations may be applied to constructional meaning as well as to lexical meaning (Jensen 2011: 124-125). A central part of our hypothesis about *the X itself* is that its conventional meaning is construed and thus involves construal operations. In addition, its conventional conceptual content also serves as the basis of its discourse-pragmatic functional potential, in virtue of

which the conventional semantic content of the construction may serve as a resource that interlocutors can use in the name of more pragmatics- and discourse-oriented communicative functions.

## 2.3. Discourse pragmatics in construction grammar

Discourse pragmatics is an essential component in the hypothesis about *the X itself* proposed in this paper. Pragmatics as such does have a place in construction grammar, but it has generally received less attention than semantics has. The syntax-semantics interface has been dealt with quite extensively in construction grammar, and this has resulted in numerous interesting descriptions and accounts of various syntactic phenomena. It might perhaps, in light of this, be tempting to criticize construction grammar for ignoring the pragmatic aspects of grammar. But such a critique would simply be ill-directed, as discourse pragmatics is taken seriously, and is, in fact, an essential principle in construction grammar: semantics and pragmatics are closely integrated and equally important parts of the content of a grammatical construction, as Lambrecht (1994:15) points out in his study of information structure. Compare that Lakoff (1987: 470-471) states that constructions as symbolic entities allow for the representation of the pairing of syntactic conditions with pragmatic conditions, while Fillmore et al. (1988: 501) similarly argue that 'constructions may specify, not only syntactic, but also lexical, semantic, and pragmatic information'. Perhaps more to the point, Goldberg writes,

> [a]nother notion rejected by Construction Grammar is that of a strict division between semantics and pragmatics. Information about focused constituents, topicality, and register is presented in constructions alongside semantic information. (Goldberg 1995: 7).





In a similar vein, Croft points out that, in construction grammar, the notions of 'meaning' and 'content' cover

> all of the CONVENTIONALIZED aspects of a construction's function, which may include not only properties of the situation described by the utterance but also properties of the discourse in which the utterance is found … and of the pragmatic situation of the interlocutors. (Croft 2001: 19; small caps in original)

Fillmore et al. (1988: 506) propose that idioms and other constructional entities (Croft & Cruse 2004: 236-247) may have what they call 'pragmatic points'. A pragmatic point is a special pragmatic purpose associated with a particular construction (Fillmore et al. 1988: 506). An example of a construction with a pragmatic point could be the idiomatic use of *to begin with*, serving the meta-discursive function of introducing a list of items into a particular discourse (Lipka & Schmid 1994).

Another important pair of notions in relation to the construction-context interplay was proposed by Fillmore:

> On the level of syntax, we distinguish for any construction in a language its **internal** and its **external** properties. In speaking of the **external syntax** of a construction, we refer to the properties of the construction as a whole, that is to say, anything that speakers know about the construction that is relevant to the larger contexts in which it is welcome. By the **internal syntax** of a construction we have in mind a description of the construction's make-up. (Fillmore 1988: 36; emphasis in original)

While primarily thought of in terms of syntactic contexts, external syntax is nonetheless described as '*anything* that speakers know about the construction that is relevant to the larger contexts in which it is

welcome' (Fillmore 1988:36; italics in original), which would also include other types of context. The notion of external properties can be expanded into other types of contextual properties, as Lindström and Linell do in their treatment of the Swedish *X och X*-construction, in which they apply the notions of external properties to interactional properties, given that the main function of the *X och X*-construction is to indicate conversational repair (Lindström 2000, Lindström & Linell 2007, Linell 2009).

The linkage between pragmatic points and external properties is quite obvious – perhaps too obvious, which may be why it has not been addressed as such in the literature on construction grammar. Pragmatic points are functional features of constructions that serve various contextual functions. Consequently, the contexts in which constructions are pragmatically relevant serve, I would say, as external properties of the constructions in question. Moreover, pragmatic points and external features are obviously very relevant in a usage-based framework.

## *3. Exploring* the X itself *and building the hypothesis*

Our description of the X itself is empirically based, drawing on observations of naturally occurring instances of the constructions in question in three language corpora – namely, the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (*COCA*), and the *Time Magazine Corpus of American English* (*TIME*), which are available at Davies (2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

The present discussion falls under what Tummers et al. (2005: 234-235) call 'corpus-illustrated linguistics':

> The type of research that we would like to place under the heading *corpus-illustrated* basically considers usage events as a data set for the selection of examples, in the sense that the usage materials complement or supplement introspective data for theoretical hypotheses. The presence of an expected pattern in the corpus data is then so to speak interpreted as a grammaticality judgment, albeit to some extent a more reliable one than the usual, introspectively derived ones. Thus, examples are extracted from the empirical materials as evidence for the mere existence of specific descriptive features (like a certain distribution) of a language unit… (Tummers et al. 2005: 234; italics in original)





The present discussion, however, deviates from this description in that the examples retrieved from the three corpora do not serve to supplement the analyst's introspective data, but rather to elaborate on the initial description of the phenomenon by Croft and Cruse (2004: 156). As an empirical study, the discussion would fail to meet one of the fundamental requirements that Tummers et al. (2005: 234-235) set up for proper usage-based corpus linguistics – namely, that a usage-based description needs quantification and statistical analysis; as such, the present discussion does not have any predictive power. However, corpus-illustrated linguistics arguably does play an important role within the overall process of usage-based linguistic research – namely, in the preliminary steps of building empirically founded interpretative hypotheses:

> From a methodological point of view, however, the preliminary step (even though it is less often discussed) is the really essential one: linking interpretative hypotheses to observable corpus phenomena – and repeating the procedure in a process of gradual refinement of the hypotheses. (Tummers et al. 2005: 235)

The present discussion of *the X itself* does not intend to provide a fully fledged, exhaustive usage-based description of the phenomenon; it

merely serves to suggest a hypothesis, anchored in Croft & Cruse's (2004: 156) initial description and drawing on corpus observations, about *the X itself* – a hypothesis which can later be tested and refined through proper systematic corpus-based linguistic research (Tummers et al. 2005: 235-238), involving quantification of the observed usage-patterns. In that sense, the present discussion is not invalidated in the framework of usage-based linguistics.

### 3.1. Parts and wholes

In their discussion of meronymic relations, Croft and Cruse (2004: 156), drawing on the following examples, state that *the X itself* serves to 'select some sort of core' (Croft & Cruse 2004:156) which is to be understood as the smallest constitutive part or portion that can be conceptualized as forming a whole:

(1) There were scratches on the hand, but not on *the arm itself*.
(2) The monitor is faulty, but *the computer itself* is OK.

In the first example, *the X itself* construes the hand, while part of the arm, as merely peripheral. That is, the hand could be severed from the arm, and the arm would still be an arm. Likewise, in the second example, the monitor is set up as a merely peripheral component of a computer, which could be removed, the remaining portion still being a computer.

In their discussion of *the X itself*, Croft and Cruse (2004:156) seem to indicate (although not classifying it as such) that we actually are dealing with a construction, as defined in construction grammar, which combines form and meaning such that the *the X itself*-constellation serves a specific communicative function – namely, selecting a part of a whole and construing it as a core part. In recognition of this likely constructionhood of *the X itself* and for





the purpose of the present discussion, we will treat it as a grammatical construction with this particular semantic function – a pivotal point in our hypothesis. However, as we shall see, it could also be argued that the construction has an additional pragmatic point – namely, to serve as a type of textual information-structuring device in discourse. An interesting feature of this construction is the close interplay between its conceptual semantics and this latter discourse-pragmatic function.

Formally, the construction is a noun preceded by a definite article and postmodified by the reflexive pronoun *itself* (with nominals expressing unique reference, such as proper nouns, where the definite article is left out and the noun may appear in the singular or the plural, in the latter case, *themselves* replacing *itself*); so it is essentially a noun phrase construction.

Turning to the content of *the X itself*, Croft and Cruse provide the following description of its function, which also features a definition of the notion of a core part:

> The expression *the X itself* selects some sort of core. In the case of the part-whole relation, what seems to be selected is the smallest portion that can be construed as 'a whole X' – any smaller unit Y can only be construed as a part of X (although it can of course be construed as a whole Y): certain (genuine) parts may be stripped off without completely destroying wholeness. We shall call the smallest possible portion of an X that can be construed as a whole X the core part. (Croft & Cruse 2004: 156)

This definition has a number of implications which can be accounted for using the terminology of cognitive linguistics. Croft and Cruse (2004: 156) state that '"core" is deliberately used to suggest a parallel between core parts and the core of a category', but the use of 'core' suggests that yet another cognitive phenomenon is

implied – namely, the center-periphery image schema (Lakoff 1987: 274-275), whose main structural elements are an entity, its center and a periphery, where the center is at the core of the entity and the periphery is dependent on the center, but not *vice versa*. While neither mentioned in Croft & Cruse's (2004: 156) discussion of *the X itself* or Cruse's (1986: 157-180) discussion of meronymic relations, the selection of a core part also implies the selection of one or more peripheral parts. A peripheral part may be defined as a non-constitutive part of a whole, which can be removed without disintegrating the whole. The core part is not dependent on the peripheral parts, and neither is the whole.

The function of *the X itself* is thus to select a concept as the core part of a whole, separating this core part from any other parts, and construing the latter as peripheral parts which are non-essential to the integrity and completeness of the whole. This way, *the X itself* essentially sets up a partonomy with a whole, a core part and one or more peripheral parts. *The X itself* can be described as a partonomic construction – that is, a grammatical construction that construes a partonomy and sets up relations of meronymy. While many partonomies are socio-culturally and cognitively conventional, as is the case of both Croft & Cruse's (2004:156) arm- and computer-examples, an underlying principle is that partonomies and meronymic relations may indeed be construed linguistically, even if they are neither socio-culturally and cognitively conventional nor more or less accurate representations of part-whole relations in the real world. A partonomy can be construed by placing elements in the same whole, or by setting up a boundary between the whole and its context, even if there are no objectively true or conventional boundaries between the whole and its context.

Partonomy construals are construals of constitution/gestalt inasmuch as a partonomy is a layout of the internal constitution of a whole, which sets up relations between the whole and the parts, and between the parts as well, these relations ultimately being the basis





of meronymic lexical relations. Perhaps less obviously, partonomies also involve construal operations of attention/salience in that the structure of the partonomy depends on the selection of components of the whole in question as salient enough to be perceived as parts in the whole.

### 3.2 Partonomy, meronymy, and polysemy in *the X itself*

Interestingly, the two examples provided by Croft and Cruse (2004: 156) actually establish two types of lexical relation. Firstly, they construe partonomies and set up meronymic relations between *hand* and *arm*, and *monitor* and *computer* respectively. Secondly, they also set up relations of polysemy in that the *X*-elements – arm and computer – are used with reference to both the core part and the whole. This is also observed in the corpora that our description draws on:

(3) The Beer Hunter Michael Jackson 'THE Belgian Beer Year Book' I mentioned last month is available from CAMRA member Richard Larkin complete with an English-language glossary (*the book itself* is in Flemish). (BNC A14 378)

(4) Its well made slip-cover is faced with a reproduction, in an attractive matt finish, of marquetry in close-up – such a relief from the glossy covers and jackets that are becoming increasingly tedious and are all too often vulgar. Take out *the book itself* and you find a stylish, plain sky-blue rough paper jacket, tastefully printed with title, etc. This enwraps a plain blue paper binding. (BNC CKX 1094)

(5) But it's the stunt of *the book itself* that allows the funny, touching memoir to be so stuffed with nutritious bits of trivia that you feel smart for reading it. (TIME 2004/10/04)

In (3), *book* in *the book itself* refers to the main portion of text as the core part of *THE Belgian Beer Year Book* while distinguishing it from the book's English-language glossary; the latter is construed as a peripheral part of the book. In addition to this partonomy, *book* is used polysemically with reference to the entire book and to the Flemish-language main text. In (4), *book* refers to the entire physical tome and construes that as the core part, while the sleeve is construed as a peripheral part. As in (3), *book* is polysemic as well, as it refers to the book in its entirety in addition to setting up the partonomy. Similarly, *book* is polysemic in (6), referring to the entire book and to the core part, which in this case is the treatment of the subject matter of the book. In cases like this, the *X*-element symbolically links up with both the concept that is the whole in the partonomy and the concept that is construed as the core part. The entire *the X itself*-complex thus sets up the partonomy, and the item that appears in the *X*-position, by virtue of appearing in the construction, expresses both the whole and the core part. As the examples in (3)-(7) indicate, what in each case exactly constitutes the core part (and the peripheral parts) of a whole depends on the conventional construal associated with constructions like *the X itself* rather than on naturally objective features of real world objects.

The polysemy-generating function that one observes here does not apply in each and every instance of the construction, as there are several cases in which the *X*-slot is filled by a noun that does not necessarily also label the whole:

(6) The future of online reading, Dr. Liu says, ''is going to resemble a social-networking environment'' where readers can instantly interact with the publisher, the author, and *the text itself*. (COCA NEWS CSM)

(7) ''Here's where the road to Taverna passes behind the villa – there's a bridle path leading from there to the stables, this double dotted





line here. This is the main driveway up here, opening on what used to be a road down to Florence.''

''Can you still get all the way down to Florence on it?''

''If the weather's dry and if you don't mind how you treat your car – or maybe you could only do it in a jeep, I've never tried it. Most people only use that road to get to *the villa itself* and the two farms beyond it. It's in reasonable repair up to that point, but then it forks, one fork joining the Taverna road again, a short stretch that's in good shape, and the other going down to the city. That hasn't been touched for over fifteen years.'' (BNC CJX 2701)

(8) It is a three-day journey to the land of Moriah, yet he cuts the wood for Isaac's funeral pyre before he sets off, and takes it all the way with him. Isaac will himself carry it up the mountain where the sacrifice is to be made. Is there really no wood to be found on the way, or even on *the mountain itself*? We cannot answer that question. (BNC ACG 255)

(9) Today, a growing number of churches and Christian development organizations with long tenures in Africa are gaining attention with approaches to hunger that are more holistic, ones that look for answers from African farmers and from *the land itself*. (COCA NEWS CSM)

Unlike the previous examples, example (6) does not feature a polysemized noun in the *X*-slot which also refers to the whole. In this case, *text* refers only to the text, and not to the situation of reading an online text – the entire whole of which the text, the publisher and the author as well as the reader are construed as parts. The text is still selected as the core part (the publisher, the reader, and the author being peripheral), but the whole is designated using the deverbal nominal *online reading*. Consequently, there is no polysemy

at play here in relation to the core part and the whole. Similarly, *villa* in *the villa itself* in (7) cannot be said to be polysemic, as it is not used with reference to the whole scene, but only with reference to one of its parts (which also features a network of roads, stables, farm buildings and other landmarks); even so, the villa is construed as a core part of the scene, in contrast to the road and the two farms mentioned. *The mountain itself* in (8) is similar to *the villa itself* in (7), as it selects a feature of the scenery as its core part and separates it from the path that leads up to the mountain; *mountain* cannot be said to be used with reference to the entire landscape of which the mountain and the path are part. In (9), *the land itself* refers to a particular geographical-agricultural aspect of Africa, setting it up as the core part, while *the African farmers* construes the population as peripheral in relation to the land. It is *Africa*, rather than *land*, which denotes the whole; thus, the polysemy relation is absent here, too. In such polysemy-free instances of *the X itself*, the *X*-element still expresses the core part, but the whole is expressed by another form in the discourse.

Note further that, while identifiable as partonomies based on meronymic relations, the wholes construed in (6)-(9) can be argued to be less integrated (or less conventional): with the exception of the scenario in (6) they are wholly construed online rather than drawing on conventionalized cognitive models. Consider the following examples, which further illustrate this difference:

(10) Since 1993, when Camry's test results were publicized, Toyota has improved the bumpers, though *the car itself* has changed little. (COCA MAG ConsumResrch)

(11) His son eventually found the car of his dreams: a 2003 red Mustang convertible. ''He made sure it was in great shape, and together we made sure we got a good value,'' Frankel says, adding, ''When I was that age, I only could wish for a 'chick magnet' car like that.'' Beyond decisions about *the car itself*, families must resolve other issues, such as who will pay for gas and insurance. (COCA NEWS CSMonitor)





In both these cases, the *X*-slot of *the X itself* is filled by *car*, but it is only in (10) that *car* is polysemic, referring both to the whole of the car and to the portion that does not include the bumpers. In (11), *car* refers to the vehicle in its entirety, but construes it as the core part of the situation of acquiring and owning a car, distinguishing between it and other implications of owning a car, such as paying for insurance and gas; the latter are presented as peripheral in relation to the car, whereas *car* definitely cannot be said to refer to that scenario – only to the car. While one might argue that paying for gas and buying insurance are parts of a conventionalized owning-a-car cognitive model, this scenario is not, physically speaking, similar to the partonomy set up in (10), with bumpers typically being considered part of a car – but in this case, of course, construed as a non-constitutive part.

To further illustrate the dynamics of partonomic construals for *the X itself*, consider the following occurrences of *the castle itself*. Here, two quite different partonomies are established in which a castle is construed as the core part:

(12) But there remained the problem which had been gnawing at his mind for months as he waited for his enemy to come home: how was he to get into *the castle itself*? There was only one way in, by the drawbridge and the gate-towers; he had racked his brains for an alternative, but there was none, short of procuring an ally within the walls, and that idea he did not entertain for a moment. (BNC K8S 105)

(13) The climb had been no trouble to Harry, bred as he had been among the crags of Snowdon. This wedge-shaped promontory

that led up to the isolated rock on which *the castle itself* stood was nowhere quite sheer, and stunted trees rooting precariously in its crevices afforded cover for one solitary boy, though they would not have hidden an approach in numbers. (BNC K8S 104)

While (13) arguably draws on a common image of castles being placed on rocks or cliffs, the *castle* in *the castle itself* does not refer to this entire scenery. It merely selects the castle as a core part of the scenery and construes the rock, the promontory, the trees, and the crevices as peripheral parts. In contrast, *castle* in (12) can be argued to refer to both the whole of the castle and to the portion excluding the drawbridge and the gate towers. The partonomy construed here subsumes elements that are proper parts of a castle – the gate towers and the drawbridge typically being integrated parts of any castle complex (in this case, of course construed as non-constitutive).

Below are two examples of *the face itself* in which *face*, in a similar fashion to *castle* in (12)-(13), is selected as the core part in two different partonomies:

(14) Within *the face itself*, I find that the shape and placement of the mouth are often more important than those of the eyes. (COCA MAG AmerArtist)

(15) It happens very fast. We see blonde hair around the face. But we don't see *the face itself* – the head is down, the hood up. There is an icepick in the figure's hand. (COCA FIC Mov:Basic Instinct)

*Face* in (14) refers to both a central part of the face and the entire face, distinguishing between what is conceived of as constituting the face the mouth and eyes, which are here construed as peripheral in relation to the delimited area of the human head which constitutes





the face. In contrast, (15) uses *face* only with reference to a specific part, not to the entire whole, in that it makes a distinction between the facial area and the hair around it. Unlike the more abstract wholes in (11) and (13), the partonomy set up in (15) is a tangible one, representing the part-whole relations of the human head, as both the face and the hair are parts thereof.

The use of *the X itself* if not functionally uniform in all instances, as at least two patterns appear to be at play: one including polysemy, the other excluding it. The examples we have looked at so far seem to indicate that the polysemy-including pattern is also associated with the construal of fairly well integrated and cognitively conventional partonomies, while the polysemy-excluding pattern is associated with less conventional and perhaps less tangible partonomies – although an instance like (15) seems to further suggest that the two patterns of use are not discrete: perhaps they form two poles of a continuum, with fully integrated wholes as the one pole and loosely integrated wholes as the other – in which case our hypothesis must consider the polysemy-including and polysemy-excluding patterns as two different subconstructional functions of *the X itself*.

A further differentiating factor between the two patterns seems to be that in the polysemy-excluding function, the core part status of the referent of the *X*-element is not always the same. Whereas in the polysemy-including function, the core part is a core part proper, by contrast, in the polysemy-excluding function, the *X*-element construes a core part proper in all cases. In some examples, such as (8)-(9), the *X*-element definitely seems to be a core part proper. In other cases, the *X*-element seems to be a core part primarily in the sense that it is construed as the center of the center-periphery schema that I argue is involved in the semantics of *the X itself*, rather than in the sense that it is the smallest constitutive part possible. We see this in (13) and (7): the primary function of *the X itself* in these two cases seems to be the selection of the respective parts of the sceneries as the central points in a construal of distribution of

attention. In cases like these, the term salient part is perhaps better than that of core part; in other cases, such as in (15), the referent of the *X*-element refers to a type of part which is not a core part as such, since it is not the smallest constitutive portion, however, without it, the whole would cease to be intact. Using a different term, one could call this the central part rather than the core part.

Despite these differences in terms of formal relations, all of the above examples share the feature of highlighting, by placing it at the center, a part of a whole or a feature of a scene, as a focal point of attention. Also these aspects must be included in our hypothesis if we want it to capture what seems to be actual patterns of use of the construction.

### 3.3. *The X itself* as a discursive contrast-marker

As we have seen, the central function of *the X itself* is to select a core part in a whole and, consequently, to set up a partonomy in which other parts are construed as peripheral parts. But there is more to *the X itself* than this conceptual-semantic function. The construction may also be argued to have a pragmatic point that allows it to serve as a discursive information-structuring device, serving to establish relations between information units in a particular discourse.

This function is less obvious at first sight, and perhaps the easiest way to account for it is by identifying the external properties of *the X itself*. The examples we have seen so far reveal that *the X itself*, in addition to pointing out the core part via the *X*-slot, also appears in the context of lexical items referring to other parts of the whole in which the *X*-element is the core part. For instance, in (3), *the book itself* co-occurs in the context of *English-glossary*, while in (4), it co-occurs with *covers* and *jackets*. Likewise in (6), the lexemes *publisher* and *author* appear in the context of *the text itself*; in (10), *the car itself* appears in a co-text that also features *bumpers*, while the





context of *the car itself* in (11) comprises the propositions of paying for gas and paying for insurance. This suggests that *the X itself* may serve the discourse-pragmatic function of setting up a discursive information structural relation of contrast between the *X*-element and the lexemes and propositions that appear in the textual context, thus essentially contributing to the overall informational structure of the discourse in which it appears.

Consider the following examples:

(16) Funny, here we are in the largest park in the continental United States, in the slow season, before dawn, and yet we've found ourselves in a crowd of people trying to freeze a certain moment. But then the sky lightens, and the canyon glows from the still-hidden sun. It doesn't really matter who else is around us, the show is so captivating. Eventually *the sun itself* emerges from behind the ridge, and the canyon settles into tones of gold and cream and dusky brown. The photographers begin to pack up their equipment and head back down the trail. One hour has transformed the place; I guess that's the idea. Time does that here, in a daily, fleeting way and on a grand, irrevocable scale. No wonder so many dreamers have been drawn to this valley; no wonder photographers try so hard to capture its moments of transition. (COCA MAG Sunset)

The expression *the sun itself* creates a contrast between the sun and the other elements of the nature-scape such as the sky, the canyon, the ridge and the trail, selecting the sun as the salient feature of the scenery. Interestingly the first mention of the sun (in *the still-hidden sun*) places it on equal terms with *the sky* and *the canyon*, but with the use of *the sun itself*, a relation of meronymic and informational inequality is generated between the sun and the other elements of the scenery. Had the author simply written *Eventually, the sun emerges from the ridge*, this contrast in salience would not have been

generated. *The sun itself* foregrounds the sun in relation to the other parts of the scene in the sense that the sun becomes the center point, or focal point, of the scene with the ridge and the canyon being less prominent (not only informationally). Alternatively, the author could have construed the same scene differently by writing:

(17) Eventually the sun emerges from behind *the ridge itself*, and the canyon settles into tones of gold and cream and dusky brown.

The sentence in (17) essentially expresses the same scene as does (16), but, by reconstruing the internal partonomic relations of the scene and its parts, the author makes the ridge the salient part; as a result, the informational focus assigned to the information units in the excerpt is also changed, the ridge becoming the new informational focal point in relation to the sun and the valley.

The following example is very similar to the one above in terms of the influence that *the X itself* seems to have on the distribution of informational salience in the discourse:

(18) They are chewing a drug plant and drinking their quite disgusting beer or spirit – I had only one sip and did not stay to analyse the taste but rejected it instantly – the dancers – wearing headdresses feathered like exotic birds and daubed all over with signs and scribbles – messages to their gods, I assumed – then begin to pound the earth in a movement which matches the drumming perfectly and, like the drumming, is powerfully affecting. He found a matching rhythm. Faster go the drums, faster spin the dancers, rush torches show off the paint and the sweat on them – they begin to smash small bottles of some holy liquid and first stab themselves with the broken glass – with no apparent injury, they do not even bleed – and then they eat *the glass itself*. I swear it. The glass is put into their





mouths as they whirl around in the shadows and lights of the torches and they chew and swallow it down – showing it in their mouths – putting out their tongues afterwards to prove either that the tongue is not cut or that the mouth is empty. I asked, afterwards, how many of the young men – they are mostly young men – died as a consequence and was told none. The broken glass kills the devils inside them and makes them stronger. (BNC FP1 1559)

As in (17), *the X itself* in (18) creates a contrast in salience between the glass and other elements of the same whole, which in this case is a bottle of holy liquid, the liquid being the peripheral part. Through use of *the X itself*, the writer not only selects the glass as the core part of the bottle, but also assigns the glass discursive salience. Thus, the information unit expressed by *the glass itself* is foregrounded in relation to the holy liquid. Interestingly, the first mention of the glass in *first stab themselves with the broken glass*, does not (although this type of self-mutilation is pretty severe) emphasize the glass (as against the holy liquid in the bottle); but when the subsequent act of eating the glass is described, the focus is on *the glass itself*. The discursive salience of the glass resonates throughout this entire text excerpt and enhances the writer's expression of shock at the glass eating ritual (further emphasized by *I swear it*). Had the author chosen to write *and then they eat the glass*, the 'shock effect', so to speak, would probably have been less profound.

A further example of the effects that *the X itself* appears to have on the distribution of informational salience is found in (19), *the chip itself* creates a prominent contrast between the referent of *chip* and the other components of the whole in which it appears:

(19) Otellini has been with Intel since 1974 and once served as technical assistant to the legendary Andy Grove, Barrett's predecessor. Last year, as Intel faced cutthroat competition

> from rival Advanced Micro Devices in a declining PC market, Otellini sat down with his engineering team, which wanted to make a new microprocessor for laptops. His big idea: since laptop owners add wi-fi cards to their machines so that they can surf the Internet wirelessly at any hot spot, why not build wireless connectivity into *the chip itself*? The result was the Centrino, which was launched this past March and has already netted Intel $2 billion in revenue – about a third of its quarterly total. Otellini offers an unusual perspective for his industry: that good marketing makes all the difference. Pushing a distinctive product like Centrino or Pentium, Intel's previous success story, is almost as important to him as the chips themselves. ''Our whole job,'' he says, ''is to create demand.'' (TIME 2003/12/01)

Here, *the chip itself* selects the chip as the focal point, separating it off from other parts of the wi-fi card which it is construed as being a part of. This assigning of discursive salience to the referent of *chip* gives it salience over *wi-fi cards;* in this way, the excerpt expresses a scene in which *the chip itself* (and consequently, the wi-fi card) become the centerpoint of wireless connectivity rather than just a peripheral part.

These three examples suggest that, at least in its polysemy-excluding function, *the X itself*, by virtue of the partonomic relations outlined here (which are likely to draw on construal operations of constitution/gestalt and attention/salience, with one part selected as the core, the salient or central part), imposes an unequal distribution of informational salience upon the co-text in which it appears. The referent of the *X*-element is foregrounded, whereas the referents of other units in the co-text that refer to parts of the same whole are backgrounded by virtue of being construed as peripheral parts of the whole.

In building our hypothesis, we have linked the likely discourse-





pragmatic function of *the X itself* to construal operations of constitution/gestalt and attention/salience (and comparison/judgment), as the construction sets up a partonomy and assigns specific salience to one part. This, I have argued, is reflected in the distribution of informational salience in the co-text of *the X itself,* such that other units in this textual context that refer to parts of the same whole or scene as the *X*-element are informationally less prominent than is the *X*-element. This calls for another construal operation to be brought into our description – namely, figure-ground alignment, in that, by selecting an informational unit as the focal point of the larger informational complex of a chunk of discourse, one also foregrounds that unit in relation to the rest of the informational complex, which essentially is made to serve as the background of this unit of information. That is, the informationally foregrounded unit serves as figure, while the backgrounded chunk of information serves as ground, much like the descriptions of figure-ground alignment in visual perception in Rubin's (1915) seminal work on the psychology of perception (notice that in Croft and Wood's (2000) model, figure-ground alignment is categorized as a construal of comparison).

## *4. The hypothesis*

Drawing on Croft and Cruse's (2004: 156) initial description, the main component of our hypothesis is that *the X itself* serves to select a core in a whole. Our corpus observations seem to confirm this, but also allow us to consolidate the hypothesis by formulating the following statements:

1. *the X itself* sets up a partonomy and selects an element therein as a core part.
   a. this process involves construal operations of constitution/gestalt (in setting up the partonomy) and attention/salience

(in selecting the core part); thus it projects the basic center-periphery image schema upon the partonomy.

2. *the X itself* covers two usage-patterns – namely, the polysemy-including one in which the *X*-element refers to both the core part and the whole, and the polysemy-excluding one in which the *X*-element refers only to the core part.
   a. the polysemy-including function construes a well-integrated, or conventional, partonomic whole, while the polysemy-excluding one may construe partonomic structures that are not necessarily integrated, or conventional, wholes.
   b. in addition to selecting a core part, the polysemy-excluding function may also construe a central part or a salient part.
3. *the X itself* has the discourse-pragmatic function of generating relations of center-periphery contrast between the *X*-element and other informational units in the discourse, such that the *X*-element is informationally foregrounded. This pragmatic point draws on of the categories of comparison/judgment, in accordance with Croft and Wood's (2000) model of construal operations.

The statements above will have to be quantified, if possible, so that the hypothesis may be empirically tested against naturally occurring language data.

### 4.1 How to test the hypothesis

At first sight, a corpus study seems to be the appropriate way to test our hypothesis. However, there are some potential issues involved here. One might argue that semantic phenomena cannot actually be observed (this holds both for linguistic semantics and other types of meaning). Even so, the *effects* of meaning are definitely observable in the discourse context. One example would be a felicitous directive





speech act, whose effect is that the recipient performs the action expressed by the act. Likewise, the discursive and distributional behavior of a linguistic expression is very much reflective of its meaning; for instance, monotransitive verbs typically appear with subjects and direct objects, inasmuch as they iconically express two-participant scenarios in which one participant acts upon the other.

The observations offered above constitute one of the primary premises of corpus-based semantic studies. As Gries (2012: 57) informs us, '[t]he main assumption underlying nearly all corpus-based work in lexical (and constructional) semantics is that the distributional characteristics of a linguistic expression reveal many if not most of its semantic and functional properties'. The distributional (and general contextual) effects of meaning are not likely to be always captured relying exclusively on speaker intuition, as identifying every such effect would require the bird's eye view which only corpus linguistics allows us to take. For this reason, corpus linguistics and its methodology are strong candidates for a place among the best ways to empirically test our hypothesis.

To begin with statement #3 above, the discourse-pragmatic function proposed here may be tested by observing the lexemes that appear in the immediate linguistic context of *the X itself* and by identifying the lexical relations between the latter and the lexeme in the *X*-position. If center-periphery related contrasts, conventional or construed online, can be identified and, via quantitative analysis, can be shown to be statistically significant, then the data in question would arguably verify/confirm this part of the hypothesis – especially, if these lexical relations of contrast reflect textual relations among chunks of information. Of course, it cannot be ruled out (nor should it be) that further categories of discourse-pragmatic uses of the construction could surface in a systematic corpus study of *the X itself*.

Moving on to statement #2, point 2a may be tested by quantifying the polysemy-generating and polysemy-free usage-patterns of

*the X itself*, and statistically testing their distribution. This should also provide some insight into whether the one is more frequent than the other; in addition, depending on the fine-grainedness of our methodology, it may even be possible to check whether the distribution of the two categories follows the distributional patterns of lexemes in the *X*-position. Moreover, if 2a is to be verified, there should be some significant conventional semantic coherence between the *X*-elements and lexical elements in the immediate linguistic context, and this semantic coherence should follow underlying conceptual relations in conventional partonomies. For 2b to be verified, the possibility of central and salient part construals occurring along with core part construals should be statistically significant; a positive outcome of this test would also provide knowledge about the frequency of distribution among the three semantic categories mentioned. Again, it must not be ruled out that further categories may surface in a comprehensive corpus study.

While the points made in statements #2 and #3, above are probably not going to be difficult to address in a corpus study, there are elements in statement #1 that may seem more difficult to operationalize at first. How, for instance, can we quantify the selection of a core part? In cases where the partonomy of the whole is represented by other lexemes in the immediate co-text, the methodology described above in relation to statement #3 (identifying lexical relations) would also help us account for this case. However, whenever *the X itself* appears on its own. without accompanying meronymic and co-meronymic lexemes in the immediate linguistic context, this would not do. Alternatively, measuring the frequency of occurrence of lexical items in the *X*-position may be another way to address the hypothesized core selection function: if lexical items which conventionally express core parts in wholes, or conventionally serve as labels of partonomies with perceived center-periphery structures, occur in the *X*-position, then this may indicate the presence of the core selection function.





As the construal operations proposed in statement #1, point 1a, are obviously quite abstract, it may seem inconceivable that a corpus study could address this issue. However, since we assume that meaning is reflected in the distributional effects, we could have another look at the lexical-relations approach, under the assumption that the construal operations are likely to be reflected in how the lexical elements are structured in the immediate linguistic context.

Note also that testing these hypotheses will require a lot of manual work on the part of the analyst, as neither the discourse-pragmatic features nor the semantic relations are easily annotated automatically. Consequently, the qualitative portion of the testing will involve interpretation by the analyst and will, as is only to be expected, not be totally free of a subjective evaluation.

## 4.2 Two potential issues

Testing the hypothesis empirically via corpus-based investigations may raise at least two critical questions, which also figure in a broader set of criticisms of corpus linguistic methods (McEnery & Wilson 1996: 7-13) – one, the argument that corpora are basically useless because the only true locus of semantics is speaker-intuition, and two, the argument that evidence based on statistics is indirect and unreliable.

With regard to the first argument, speaker-intuition as the only data source is seriously problematic because an individual speaker's intuitions are not necessarily representative of the language as a whole. As an example, consider the following rendering of a(n) (in)famous incident that took place in the heyday of generative linguistics:

> Chomsky: The verb perform cannot be used with mass word objects: one can *perform a task* but one cannot *perform labour*.
> Hatcher: How do you know, if you don't use a corpus and

> have not studied the verb *perform*?
> Chomsky: How do I know? Because I am a native speaker of the English language.
> (Source: Hill 1962:29; quoted in McEnery & Wilson 2001: 11)

McEnery and Wilson (2001: 11) point out that Chomsky's confidence in his own native speaker intuition was actually misplaced:

> Such arguments may have a certain force – indeed one is initially impressed by the incisiveness of Chomsky's observation and subsequent defence of it. Yet the quote also underlines why corpus data may be useful. Chomsky was, in fact, wrong. One can *perform magic*, for example, as a check of a corpus such as the bnc reveals. Native speaker intuition merely allowed Chomsky to be wrong with an air of absolute certainty.

In reality, even native speakers like Chomsky do not have access to the entirety of their language. Chomsky was wrong because his native speaker intuition only represented his own, limited perspective on English. There may be dialects or registers not all native speakers are familiar with, non-prototypical or specialized constructions that they are unaware of; alternatively, there may be words and constructions they simply do not know or have forgotten, because they do not use them frequently. This is where empirical observations as substantiated by corpora come in useful. Today's hypercorpora simply capture the language in a much broader perspective than that which is available to the individual native speaker, as they document language use in a range of contexts that go beyond the boundaries of the individual native speaker's experience.

In other words, whereas empirical observations of phenomena as documented in language corpora are indeed valid descriptive tools, what the Chomsky incident shows is that the description of a verb's distributional features does not necessarily involve semantics; on





the other hand, semantics being an integrated part of the language system, the same reservations apply to speaker intuition when taken as a reliable source of semantic data. In neither case, the native speaker's intuitions can be taken as satisfactorily representing the language as a whole.

As for the second line of argumentation, within the framework of usage-based linguistics, frequency of use is fundamental. Langacker (1987: 59) argues that linguistic structures fall 'along a continuous scale of entrenchment', and that '[e]very use of a structure has a positive impact on its degree of entrenchment whereas periods of disuse have a negative impact'. Thus, there is an intimate relation between linguistic structures and usage-events, described by Kemmer and Barlow (2000: ix) as 'instances of a speaker's producing and understanding language': hence, a language user's linguistic knowledge is ultimately experientially based on the frequency of usage-events (Kemmer & Barlow 2000: ix). Consequently, when describing the language system in terms of usage-based linguistics, we will have to take frequency into account. If we want these numbers to be systematic and rigorous, there is no way around using quantitative analytical methods and data, because, within the framework of usage-based linguistics, frequency analyses serve as direct indicators of patterns of use (of course, the analyses will have to be replicated and applied to several data sets in the process of gradual hypothesis refinement). As to whether statistical methods in linguistics are accurate, there will always be a margin of error: even today's hypercorpora, while comprehensive and representative, are after all finite, and there is always a risk that certain expressions are not attested in a particular corpus. Still, frequency analyses undeniably offer more comprehensive insights into patterns of language use than do introspective data based on speaker intuitions. Moreover, we have several statistical reliability methods at our disposal to help us test the accuracy of our data, and – importantly – statistical methods allow us to address alternative

hypotheses and null hypotheses. The latter step is very important in evaluating and refining hypotheses within the humanities in general, as its inclusion of the null hypothesis provides a more objective approach to hypothesizing.

Does this mean that speaker intuition has no place at all in usage-based construction grammar (and usage-based linguistics in general)? The answer to this question is that, if it is possible to test speaker intuitions in systematic and representative ways, then they can be highly valuable. Whereas merely checking one's data with some randomly chosen native speakers is not a useful way of testing hypotheses about semantics, a more systematic study involving a representative, quantifiable population of native speakers could be very valuable – provided, of course, there exists a careful design on the part of the analyst doing elicitation tests or even (quantifiable) interviews. Conceivably, a well-designed systematic investigation into speaker intuitions regarding *the X itself* could generate interesting results.

Turning the question around, one could ask whether qualitative analyses are not welcome in usage-based construction grammar. The answer is that indeed they are. In fact, as we have seen in the present study, qualitative analysis plays a big role in the building of a hypothesis (see also Tummers et al. 2005: 235). Moreover, any corpus study will involve a qualitative analysis, in that the analyst, by observing naturally occurring language, identifies the categories and patterns which subsequently will have to be quantified; this holds for the case of the present study as well where any testing would have to include an initial qualitative analysis.

## *5. Concluding remarks*

Our corpus-illustrated treatment of *the X itself* construction was guided by three main premises – namely, 1) a constructional view of





linguistic units, complex or simple, as symbolic units that pair form and function; 2) the principle (adopted from usage-based linguistics) that language use informs the language system, and that therefore contextual information should be included in the description of linguistic phenomena; and 3) a cognitive commitment, calling for cognitively realistic models of language that include processes and structures known from the study of human cognition in the description of language. Being the fundamental notions of usage-based construction grammar, these three premises have guided our corpus-illustrated discussion of *the X itself* construction, allowing us to set up a usage-based hypothesis regarding its nature.

While the description offered in the above has no predictive power as such, in the perspective of usage-based research, and the sciences of the humanities in general, it provides an entry point into the 'hermeneutic spiral' indirectly initiated by Croft and Cruse (2004:156). Building on their pre-theoretical description of *the X itself*, our corpus-illustrated discussion of the phenomenon and the ensuing hypotheses will hopefully have revealed certain of the construction's salient features, the majority of which may be empirically tested against data of naturally occurring language use, and refined in future usage-based empirical research.

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The semantics-pragmatics interplay in a partonomic construction: Construals, lexical relations, pragmatic points and â€˜the construction itselfâ€™. The article presents a corpus-illustrated description of the English expression 'the X itself' which treats the expression as a grammatical construction, as defined in usage-based construction grammar (an entrenched semiotic routine in a more.Â  The present paper focuses on each of these symbolic links and their interplay, and investigates the meaning construction processes involved in the symbolic structure of the progressive construction. Lexical semantics (also known as lexicosemantics), is a subfield of linguistic semantics. The units of analysis in lexical semantics are lexical units which include not only words but also sub-words or sub-units such as affixes and even compound words and phrases. Lexical units include the catalogue of words in a language, the lexicon. Lexical semantics looks at how the meaning of the lexical units correlates with the structure of the language or syntax. This is referred to as syntax-semantic interface. Indeed, many pragmatic phenomena seem to have little to do with the formal marking of language structure. However, recurrent abstract pragmatic indications such as focus have a substantial impact on the structure of languages (inter alia Skopeteas & Fanselow 2011 and references therein).Â  Emphasis attaches to negative markers and constructions in a variety of Indo-European languages and beyond. Markers corresponding to emphatic not are identified in some Athabaskan languages (Gelderen 2008), as well as Swahili ku et ja (Contini-Morava 1989), Tibetan re (Zeisler 2004: 317-319), and the absence of the expected post-verbal marker in Jordanian and other varieties of Arabic (Al-Momani 2011). 9 Pragmatic and semantic meaning Semantics Semantic meaning Speakerâ€™s meaning Pragmatics lexicon grammar Context of use. 10 Semantics vs. pragmatics Semantics focuses on the link between the lexicon, grammar and semantic meaning Pragmatics focuses on the connection between context of use and semantic meaning.Â  54 Time Time, or temporal, deixis concerns itself with the various times involved in and referred to in an utterance. This includes time adverbs, e.g. "now", "then", "soon", etc. and also different tenses Example: tomorrow denotes the consecutive next day after every day. The "tomorrow" of a day last year was a different day from the "tomorrow" of a day next week.