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CONSTRUCTION MORPHOLOGY:
AN INTERVIEW WITH GEERT BOOIJ

Geert Booij [1]

Natival Almeida Simões Neto [2]

Juliana Soledade [3]

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RESUMO

Geert Booij (1947) é professor emérito de linguística na Universidade de Leiden, onde trabalhou de 2005 a 2012. De 1981 a 2005, foi professor de Linguística Geral da Universidade Livre de Amsterdam, e, de 1971 a 1981, professor assistente/associado da Universidade de Amsterdam, onde também obteve seu Ph.D. em linguística em 1977. Estudou holandês e linguística geral na Universidade de Groningen (1965-1971), onde obteve seu título de mestre (*cum laude*). Foi reitor da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Livre (1988-1991, 1998-2002), vice-diretor da Universidade Livre (1999-2002), reitor da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Leiden (Setembro 2005- Outubro 2007) e membro (1997-2002) e presidente (2002-2004) do Conselho Holandês de Pesquisa para Humanidades da NWO (Organização holandesa para pesquisa científica). Atuou em uma série de comitês nacionais e internacionais para a avaliação das realizações de pesquisas linguísticas e em comitês de auditoria para a qualidade dos programas de línguas em várias universidades na Holanda. Geert Booij também lecionou na Universidade de Canterbury em Christchurch, Nova Zelândia (Erskine Fellow) em 2002, na Sociedade Linguística do America Institute da Universidade de Berkeley em 2009, na Universidade de Harvard (Erasmus professor de língua e cultura holandesas) em 2010, e na Universidade Livre de Berlin (Departamento de Germânicas, seção Holandês) em 2011. Em 2011, recebeu o Prêmio Alexander von Humboldt de Pesquisa por suas realizações gerais em pesquisa linguística. É membro honorário da *Linguistic Society of America*. Geert Booij é um dos dois fundadores e editores da série de livros *Yearbook of Morphology* (1988-2005), que, desde 2006, teve continuação como a revista *Morphology*, da qual foi um dos três editores até 2014. Ele é o autor de uma série de livros holandeses sobre gramática, morfologia e fonologia e de quatro monografias em inglês: *The Phonology of Dutch* (1995), *The Morphology of Dutch* (2002, 20192), *The Grammar of Words* (2005, 20123) e *Construção Morphology* (2010), todos publicados pela Oxford University Press. Ele publicou artigos linguísticos em uma ampla variedade de periódicos e volumes holandeses e internacionais (consulte https://geert.booij.com para obter uma lista de publicações, em sua maioria para download).

Palavras-chave: Morfologia; Entrevista; Geert Booij; Morfologia Construcional.

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ABSTRACT

Geert Booij (1947) is professor emeritus of linguistics at the University of Leiden where he worked from 2005-2012. From 1981-2005 he was professor of General Linguistics at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and from 1971-1981 assistant / associate professor at the University of Amsterdam, where he also obtained his Ph.D. degree in linguistics in 1977. He studied Dutch and general linguistics at the University of Groningen (1965-1971) where he obtained his MA degree (*cum laude*). He was dean of the Faculty of Letters at the Vrije Universiteit (1988-1991, 1998-2002), conrector of the Vrije Universiteit (1999-2002), dean of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Leiden (September 2005-October 2007), and member (1997-2002) and chair (2002-2004) of the Dutch Research Council for the Humanities of NWO (the Dutch organization for scientific research). He served on a number of national and international committees for the assessment of linguistic research achievements, and on audit committees for the quality of language programs at various universities in the Netherlands. Geert Booij also taught at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand (Erskine Fellow) in 2002, the Linguistic Society of America Institute at the University of Berkeley in 2009, at Harvard University (Erasmus professor of Dutch language and culture) in 2010, and at the Freie Universität Berlin (Germanic Department, section Dutch) in 2011. In 2011 he received the Alexander von Humboldt Research Award for his overall achievements in linguistic research. He is an honorary member of the *Linguistic Society of America*. Geert Booij is one of the two founders and editors of the book series *Yearbook of Morphology* (1988-2005), which is, as of 2006, continued as the journal *Morphology*, of which he was one of the three editors until 2014. He is the author of a number of Dutch textbooks on grammar, morphology, and phonology, and of four English monographs: *The Phonology of Dutch* (1995), *The Morphology of Dutch* (2002, 20192), *The Grammar of Words* (2005, 20123), and *Construction Morphology* (2010), all published by Oxford University Press. He has published linguistic articles in a wide range of Dutch and international journals and volumes (see https://geert.booij.com for a list of, mostly downloadable, publications).

Keywords: Morphology; Interview; Geert Booij; Construction Morphology.

Greetings

Professor Booij, before we start with the questions, we want to thank you very much for accepting the invitation to do this interview. It is truly an honor for us to have the opportunity to ask these questions. We hope they are interesting and thought provoking.

Questions

Question 1

[Carlos Alexandre Gonçalves] In 1977, you defended your thesis "Dutch Morphology: a study of word-formation in generative grammar". Later, you developed and advised many works in the theoretical framework of Generative Grammar. How was the process of changing from this paradigm to the Construction Grammar (CxG) paradigm? What motivated the creation of Construction Morphology (CxM)? What advantages does CxM offer over other models?

Geert Booij: It is a pleasure for me to answer your questions, and I was pleasantly surprised that there is such an active Construction Morphology community in Brazil.

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I started as a linguist at the end of the sixties. At that time, in the Netherlands, as well as at MIT, syntax and phonology were the main topics of grammatical research, and there was hardly any attention for morphology. This situation has been aptly described as morphology being "the Poland of linguistics" (SPENCER; ZWICKY 1988, p. 3), divided between syntax and phonology. It was Aronoff's MIT dissertation (1974), published in 1976 as *Word formation in Generative Grammar* that stimulated me to pursue morphological research as a separate subdiscipline within the generative framework. In 1974, Aronoff also gave lectures at the University of Groningen that inspired me. My dissertation, defended in 1977, is a specimen of this influence. It has also been written because, when I was working on the phonology of Dutch, I discovered that in the derivational approach to phonology of Chomsky and Halle (1968), the morphological structure of words was mainly a vehicle for getting phonological derivations right, and not based on independently motivated morphological insights, thus leading to doubtful morphological analyses of words. As may be expected from a generative framework, the theoretical focus was on morphological creativity, on the kind of knowledge that enables language users to form new words and word-forms. Therefore, the concept of 'rule' had a prominent place in morphological research.

The Dutch tradition of morphology before the rise of generative grammar in the 1960s had a different focus, even though it also wanted to account for the word-forming creativity of the language user. As Henk Schultink pointed out in his dissertation (SCHULTINK 1962), the discovery of morphological patterns is based on systematic form-meaning correspondences between sets of existing words. This means that paradigmatic relationships between words in the lexicon form the bases for discovering a creative morphological engine. Some of these form-meaning correspondences can be extended to new cases, which means that the relevant patterns are productive. However, there are also many unproductive and marginally productive patterns that need to be accounted for as well.

Since the 1980s, quite a number of Dutch morphologists stressed the importance of paradigmatic relations and of the notion 'productivity', as can be seen in the work of Harald Baayen (my first Ph.D. student at the Vrije Universiteit), Matthias Hüning, Jaap van Marle and Ariane van Santen, among others. Our common approach to morphology can be characterized as word-based, since words form the starting point of morphological analysis. This implies that morphology is not the syntax of morphemes, as was the dominant view in the early days of generative morphology, and that morphemes play only a secondary role only in accounting for morphological regularities.

Aronoff, who also defended word-based morphology, formulated morphological rules as rewrite rules, because (in his own words):

It bore close resemblance in form to the rewrite rules that were standard in generative grammar. A W[ord] F[ormation] R[ule] took a word from one of the three major lexical categories (Noun, Verb, or Adjective) and mapped it onto a lexical category (the same or another), usually adding an affix, and making another word. The rule of *un*-prefixation, for example, could be written as [X]A → [un-[X]A]A or it could be written simply as the output [un-[X]A]A." (ARONOFF, 2018, p. 11)

As stated in the last sentence of this quote, word formation processes can be characterized in terms of output schemas, which means that the rule format is not relevant. Output schemas became essential for me in developing an adequate model of morphology, instead of rewrite rules

Morphological schemas have two functions: they function as redundancy statements with respect to existing complex words, and they specify how new words can be formed. The first function (redundancy) had already been argued for in one of the first articles on morphology in a generative framework, Jackendoff (1975). The redundancy function means that morphological schemas have a motivating function: they reduce the degree of arbitrariness in the properties of existing complex words. This is also the perspective taken in Construction Morphology (CxM) (BOOIJ, 2010), and its sister-theory Relation Morphology (JACKENDOFF; AUDRING, 2020). This links morphology directly to the study of the lexicon, and its internal structure. The second function of morphological schemas is the creative, generative one: they account for the capacity of language users to coin and understand new complex words.

Another factor in the development of CxM was my detailed study of particle verbs in Dutch (BOOIJ, 2010, Chapter 5, Los et al. 2012). They are not really complex words, because the particle and the verb can be split in main clauses. Yet, their behavior is similar to that of complex verbs. Therefore, I needed a model in which there is no strict separation of morphology and syntax. Particle verbs appeared to be phrasal constructions, which must often be stored in the lexicon.

Thus, my work on Construction Morphology was not a sudden paradigm shift, but a gradual development, based on a number of ideas about what morphology is about. The articulation of this model received support from Construction Grammar, in particular the work of Adele Goldberg. It was not the case that I thought: let's apply Construction Grammar to morphology. It was rather a gradual articulation of ideas in which the notions 'construction' and 'schema' became important, notions that were also used in Construction Grammar.

Question 2

[Natival Simões Neto] In the article "Form and meaning in morphology: the case of Dutch 'agent nouns'", published in 1986 and developed in a theoretical framework prior to CxM, there is a discussion about the role of the semantic component in derivational morphology. Even today, more than 30 years after that publication, the interface between semantics and morphology is not always well received by morphologists. So, what are the main contribution(s) of CxM for the description of the semantic aspects related to word-formation?

Geert Booij: The essential insight embodied in CxM is that morphology is about the systematic relation between form and meaning. Therefore, morphological models that only deal with the formal side of morphology are inadequate. Since constructions are pairings of form and meaning, CxM assigns semantics its proper place, and declares it essential for an adequate theory of morphology.

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What are specific contributions of CxM to the semantics of complex words? One example is the phenomenon of semantic fragmentation. In word formation we often find that one word formation patterns may carry a range of, often related, meanings (for instance, agent and instrument meanings of deverbal nouns). This can be nicely expressed in CxM by assuming subschemas for the different subsenses. Moreover, it can be specified that some of these subschemas are more productive than others.

The CxM model also allows for asymmetries between formal structure and semantic structure (bracketing paradoxes). For example, in the Dutch adjectival compound *witgejast* 'white-coated', with the morphological structure [[*wit*]A[*ge* [*jas*]N *t*]A]A the adjective *wit* does not modify the head of the compound *gejast* as a whole, but only its constituent *jas* 'coat'. CxM, with its Tripartite Parallel Architecture for the description of the properties of complex words, can properly account for such bracketing paradoxes, as discussed in Booij e Masini (2015).

Another semantic phenomenon that finds a natural account in CxM is that of semantic coercion: a (morphological or syntactic) construction may impose a certain interpretation on words (AUDRING; BOOIJ, 2016). Consider the following Dutch sentence;

Mijn dochter is nu uit-ge-kleuter-d

My daughter is now out-[Prefix-toddler-Suffix]Participle

'My daughter is done with raising toddlers now'

Here, the noun *kleuter* 'toddler' is used as the root of a separable complex verb, resulting in the participle *uitgekleuterd* 'toddlered out, done with raising toddlers'. This coinage is particularly interesting, as Dutch does not have the particle verb *uitkleuteren* (nor, for that matter, the base verb *kleuteren*, at least not with the relevant meaning), so the noun has been inserted directly into the participle schema. Thus, the 'done with' meaning is imposed on the noun *kleuter* through the *uit* + Participle construction. It is the construction as a whole that has category-changing power (from noun to participial adjective), and that imposes this specific meaning.

In short, CxM provides some specific tools for an adequate semantic analysis of complex words.

Question 3

[Juliana Soledade] The understanding that metaphor and metonymy are not ornaments characteristic of the literary use of language, but rather comprehension mechanisms, is one of the founding principles of Cognitive Linguistics (CL). In Brazil, CxM has been extensively explored by morphologists who defend the cognitive approach to language. To what extent and in what ways are the concepts of metaphor and metonymy important to CxM?

Geert Booij: The concepts of metaphor and metonymy are essential for CxM for explaining not only the polysemy of words, but also that of abstract (schematic) constructions. Consider, for instance the instrumental interpretation of deverbal nouns in *-er* in Germanic languages alongside the agent interpretation. The rise of this instrumental subschema can be interpreted as a case of metaphorical or metonymic sense extension. We can see instruments as metaphorical agent.

Alternatively, we can see them as a case of metonymy because actions presuppose the presence of instruments. We need this metonymic explanation also because the object interpretation and the location interpretation of such deverbal nouns cannot be related metaphorically to the Agent. The basic generalization is that these nouns can also denote another entity that is a participant in the action denoted by the verb. These sense extensions can therefore be seen as resulting from metonymy (conceptual contiguity).

Question 4

[Natival Simões Neto] One of the central aspects of CxG is the non-division between lexicon and grammar, unlike the classic versions of Generative Grammar and Functional Grammar, for example. The position assumed in GC is in line with the theoretical foundations of CL. Hoffman and Trousdale (2012) are among the authors who defend the existence of a constructicon, a mental collection that brings together all the constructions of the language, in its most varied levels of complexity. What is your opinion regarding the lexicon/grammar dichotomy? What do you think about the idea of a constructicon? How do you assess the relationship between CxM and other models developed within the scope of CxG?

Geert Booij: I fully agree that there is no separation between lexicon and grammar: words and construction only differ in their degree of abstractness (BOOIJ, 2010; JACKENDOFF; AUDRING, 2020). For instance, particle verbs are formally phrasal, but lexical items at the same time. Moreover, phrasal and lexical constructions can compete, and phrases can be parts of complex words (BOOIJ, 2018). This view indeed implies the idea of a constructicon, with both lexical and syntactic patterns represented as constructions that motivate existing, stored complex words and phrases. CxM shares this view with Relational Morphology, and with other varieties of CxG.

Question 5

[Natival Almeida Simões Neto] In the first chapter of the book "Construction Morphology", from 2010, there is a section called "Word-based morphology", in which a difference between a morphological approach of this type and an approach of the "Morpheme-based morphology" type is presented. Amid this discussion, CxM is classified as "Word-based morphology". When aligned with the theoretical model of CxG, there is a discussion regarding whether morphemes are constructions. In your view, it is the word, and the morpheme must not appear on the list of constructions of the language. Among researchers who are guided by the models developed within the scope of CxG, there is no consensus. Could you explain the reasons that led you to take such a position in the 2010 book? After 10 years of this publication, is your position on this still the same?

Geert Booij: The reason why it is the word that is the minimal construction is because constructions are defined as pairings of form and meaning, and a morpheme, in particular a bound morpheme, does not have a meaning by itself. A non-bound morpheme only has a meaning when used as a word, and a bound morpheme only in a morphological construction. For

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instance, it does not make sense to talk about the meaning of the bound morpheme -*s* in English. Its meaning contribution depends on the word construction of which it forms a part, for instance a verb (present tense 3sg), or a noun (plural), or a genitive construction (possessive). The same holds for the English bound morpheme -*er*, used in comparative adjectives, with verbs, and with nouns (*bigger, baker, Londoner*). Moreover, there are also morphemes embedded in complex words without a meaning contribution, such as the linking elements in Germanic compounds. Think also of root extensions such as -*ic* in *philosop-ic-al*. The Construction Grammarian Adele Goldberg, who initially considered the morpheme as the smallest construction, has adopted my position, a position that I still maintain.

Question 6

[Juliana Soledade] An important contribution of CxM to the morphological studies is the description by means of schemes. Before CxM was introduced, rule-based models predominated. In the book "Construction Morphology", more precisely in Chapter 3 (p. 80), which deals exactly with schemes and subschemas, a representation of the Dutch [Vi-er]N scheme is introduced, in which a general scheme whose counterpart semantics is introduced by the label "entity" appears. There are dominant "agent", "instrument" and "object" schemes. The "agent" scheme is ultimately specified using subschemas. An issue that gives rise to divergences, at least here in Brazil, concerns the formulation of the general scheme, which would be the level of maximum abstraction. It is a theoretical-descriptive mechanism that allows us to bring together many formal and semantic developments of schemes and subschemas. Is there research, in areas such as Psycholinguistics, Experimental Morphology, Neural Theory of Language, or Cognitive Sociolinguistics, which confirm whether this maximum abstraction, of considerably generic character, is done by the speakers?

Geert Booij: The issue raised here is discussed in the literature, for instance in Hilpert (2020), and has also been investigated by Dąbrowska. What we know for sure is that not all language users have maximal abstractions for all types of complex word, because abstract schemas are based on a sufficiently large vocabulary knowledge, and people differ enormously in the size and nature of their lexical knowledge. Moreover, abstract schemas and specific subpattern both exist. For instance, it is obvious that there is a general abstract [NN]N pattern for Dutch compounds because this is a pattern of unlimited productivity. At the same time we know that subpatterns with one position lexically filled exist alongside with the general pattern, because words may have meanings that are bound to their occurrence within a compound. These lxical constituents are referred to as affixoids (HÜNING; BOOIJ, 2014; HÜNING; BOOIJ, 2014). There has been some research on this topic with respect to derivation in Dutch, for instance the dissertation by Maria Mos (2010) who claims that (Dutch) children do make abstract generalizations concerning word formation patterns. For me it is an open question, how much abstraction is made and by whom. I do not know about other recent research on this topic.

Question 7

[Carlos Alexandre Gonçalves] The non-concatenative word-formation processes, such as reduplication, blending, clipping and splinter, for a long time, received little attention from morphological description models, which always favored concatenative processes, such as derivation and composition. Non-concatenative processes were sometimes called marginal word-formation processes, being considered sporadic and unsystematic. More recent studies have shown the regular nature of these processes. In your view, are such processes challenging for CxM?

Geert Booij: The focus in generative grammar on compounding and affixation as morphological processes originates from the view of morphology as the syntax of morphemes, or as syntax below zero. This approach can only be maintained by reducing all other types of morphology to concatenation processes, as has been attempted in Trommer (2012).

The use of schemas in CxM makes it possible to also account for other types of morphology, such as reduplication, and non-concatenative Morphology (BOOIJ, 2010). This is illustrated for Arabic non-concatenative Morphology in Davis e Tsujimura (2018). An essential ingredient for this descriptive power of CxM is the use of paradigmatically related schemas. For instance, in blending, the meaning of the two related words are combined, but only parts of their forms. The meaning of the blends can be computed by referring to the corresponding full words.

Thus, these various types of Morphology should not be seen as marginal, but instead show that the descriptive power of a morphological model must be bigger than what the morphological model of 'the syntax of morphemes' implies. They are strong evidence for CxM. Think also of templatic Morphology, as discussed by Good (2018). Schemas are the right formalism for describing templatic morphology because templates can be described as schemas.

Question 8

[Juliana Soledade] The historical and/or diachronic aspects related to the morphology of languages have not always received the deserved attention of morphologists, who often choose to describe phenomena under a strictly synchronic view that disregards the historical character of languages. How do you assess the presence of these aspects in the morphological description? Would they also be challenging for CxM?

Geert Booij: Diachronic aspects of Morphology have received renewed attention and analysis in CxM, in particular by using the concepts 'constructionalization'and 'constructional change' (Close TRAUGOTT; TROUSDALE, 2013). An example from Dutch is that this language lost its case marking system, but the genitive marker remained as marker of a number of specific constructions (BOOIJ, 2010). These are examples of constructionalization. This reduction of case morphology and the role of its relics can only be understood and analyzed by means of the notion 'construction'. The development of affixes out of compound constituents (affixoids) is another example, studied in Booij e Hüning (2014) and Hüning e Booij (2014). The study of debonding of prefixes in Norde e Van Goethem (2018) is another example of the relevance of CxM for language change. In other words, diachrony is an important source of supportive evidence for CxM.

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Question 9

[Carlos Alexandre Gonçalves] In recent times, Ray Jackendoff and Jenny Audring have proposed Relational Morphology, a model they identify as a "cousin" to CxM. How do you evaluate the proposal of a model whose formulation is close to the model you proposed? What would you highlight as different between them?

Geert Booij: Relation Morphology is conceptually very similar to CxM, which will not come as a surprise when you realize that these linguists also co-authored papers with me. The choice for a different name of their morphological theory is because they want to stress that morphology is primarily about the relations between the existing words of a language, including many non-productive patterns that still play a role in motivating the properties of words through their relations with other words. The notion 'construction' may have a slightly more generative flavor (construction = creation), but the word *construction* also has a non-creative, result meaning. Both meanings are relevant for CxM. Another difference is that the authors use a slightly different formalism, and the concepts 'same, except' and 'sister schema' have a more prominent place. *The Texture of the Lexicon* stresses that we also need schemas that specify correspondences between properties of words on different levels without meaning being involved, whereas constructions are by definition pairings of form and meaning. In other words, there are also schemas specifying relationships between words that are not constructions. I agree with this view, and have also given examples of such schemas in Booij (2010, Chapter 10).

Question 10

[Natival Almeida Simões Neto, Carlos Alexandre Gonçalves and Juliana Soledade] Professor, we appreciate your availability to answer the questions. To finish we ask you to make some final remarks. We would like, if possible, to ask you for the recommendation of at least five references (articles, chapters or complete books) that you consider relevant to the understanding of the main ideas and developments of CM.

Geert Booij: It was my pleasure to answer these very pertinent questions concerning Construction Morphology (CxM). There are many researchers now that use this model in their synchronic and diachronic investigations of morphology. Below I list a small number of key publications, with a brief characterization. There is also a website on Construction Morphology (http://www.lilec.it/cxm/).

Reading suggestions

BOOIJ, G. *Construction Morphology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

[The first three chapter of this book present the theory of CxM, and the following chapters apply this model to various phenomena, mainly on the border between morphology and syntax.]

BOOIJ, G.; MASINI, F. The role of second order schemas in word formation. In: BAUER, L.; KÖRTVÉLYESSY, L.; ŠTEKAUER, P. (eds.) *Semantics of complex words.* Cham etc.: Springer, 2015, p. 47-66.

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[This article argues for the role of paradigmatic relations between words and phrases in word formation.]

BOOIJ, G. Construction Morphology. In: Hippisley, A.; STUMP, G. (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Morphology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter 16, 2016, p. 424-448.

[A concise introduction to CxM.]

BOOIJ, G.; AUDRING, J. Construction Morphology and the Parallel Architecture of Grammar. *Cognitive Science* 41 (S2), p. 277-302, 2017.

[This article relates CxM to the theory of Parallel Architecture as developed by Ray Jackendoff, and highlights the interface between phonology and morphology.]

BOOIJ, G.; AUDRING, J. Partial motivation, multiple motivation, and the role of output schemas. In: BOOIJ, G. (ed.). *The construction of words. Advances in Construction Morphology*. Studies in Morphology 4. Cham: Springer, 2018, p. 59-80.

[This book chapter argues that existing complex words may be only partially motivated, and by different schemas. It is discussed how morphological schemas relate to existing words.]

TRAUGOTT, E. C.; TROUSDALE, G. *Constructionalization and constructional changes.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

[This monograph is a key publication on the application of CxM to diachronic morphology and syntax.]

COUSSÉ, E.; VAN GOETHEM, K.; NORDE, M.; VANDERBAUWHEDE, G. (eds,). *Category change from a constructional perspective*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2018.

[A volume with important detailed studies of how category change of words can be understood.]

HILPERT, M. (ed.). *Higher order schemas in morphology.* Special issue of *Word Structure* 12 (3), 2019.

[This journal issue features a number of articles on the question: do we really need abstract schemas in morphology?]

HÜNING, M.; BOOIJ, G. From compounding to derivation. The emergence of derivational affixes through 'constructionalization'. *Folia Linguistica* 48, p. 579-604, 2014.

[A case study of how CxM gives insight into the process of derivational affixes developing from compound constituents.]

JACKENDOFF, R.; AUDRING, J. *The texture of the lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

[This book explains and argues for the theory of Relational Morphology, in most respects a variant of CxM, but with slightly different formalization of constructions, and additional important points of attention.]

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