

Usage-based approaches to syntax and semantics

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In usage-based approaches to syntax and semantics, we seek explanation by examining past usage. For example, it is not assumed that a speaker must always assign a unique syntactic and semantic structure to an utterance; instead, they can associate an utterance with a probability distribution over a small set of alternative structures. To understand that distribution one can estimate the likely influences on the speaker from past utterances, by gathering frequency data from corpora, both token frequency (count of a specific form); and type frequency (number of distinct forms found in a given structural context). The ultimate goal is to model the emergence of grammatical structure in terms of shifting probability distributions, where apparently rule-governed usage under a certain condition is modeled by a conditional probability of that usage being close to one.

We invite papers on any topic in semantics or syntax that take an approach of this kind, or any related kind of approach.