

CONVERSATIONAL STRUCTURE, SYNTAX AND THE CLAUSE IN RUSSIAN

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INTRODUCTION

The present presentation is part of a larger research project on the structure of Russian conversation. Much of the work in conversation analysis over the last ten years has examined the relationship between conversation and syntax; this is brought to the fore in the title of Ono and Thompson's 1995 paper, "What can conversation tell us about syntax?" Here I focus on one small piece of that, namely, how turns can be collaboratively constructed by more than one interlocutor. Conversation is a collaborative endeavor and, on a large level, its ultimate structure and content are shaped by multiple speakers. Sometimes single turns are co-constructed, i.e., constructed by more than one speaker. One relatively common experience with co-constructions is when one interlocutor is searching for a word, another supplies it, and then the first interlocutor continues speaking. That is a simple example of a co-constructed turn. The examples that follow are more complicated (and more interesting).

The very fact that co-constructions occur raises interesting questions about the planning, production and processing that goes on during conversation. Previous work has focused most deeply on English (Lerner 1991, 1996, 2004), although there has also been some extensive work on Turkic, German, Finnish and Japanese. In English the clause has a relatively predictably ordered structure, of a subject NP (most frequently a pronoun) followed by a VP and possibly other items, such as prepositional phrases, within that VP. Russian provides interesting data for this kind of research precisely because the linear ordering of elements is not so rigid, while at the same time inflectional morphology often restricts at the least the form of the elements which follow, so that if a verb precedes a subject NP, the morphology of the verb often restricts the morphological form of the subject. Of course there are lexico-semantic and pragmatic restrictions as well: it all has to make sense.

The data for this paper come from radio interviews on Радиостанция Эхо Москвы available at <http://www.echo.msk.ru/>. The radio station broadcasts the interviews and then posts transcripts. The transcripts are not completely accurate representations of the conversations as they are cleaned up for overall readability, but they are quite good and, with the sound track, very easily fixed to be an accurate representation of the interview. Because these are radio interviews, the conversational setting is relatively controlled: the interviews range from 2-4 speakers, and they have clearly defined roles: in each conversations there is one or two interviewers and one or two interviewees. The acoustic quality of the broadcasts is good enough to make judgments based on auditory perception but not really good enough for acoustic measurements. Native speakers of Russian will find usage in some of the examples that is not representative of standard, literary Russian; this stems from the nature of the spontaneous interviews as well as from the speakers' own varieties of spoken Russian.

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND CO-CONSTRUCTIONS

In this paper I follow a framework based upon conversation analysis, which takes as the basic unit in conversation the turn-constructive unit (or TCU), as defined by Sacks et al (1974).¹ For the purposes of the present discussion, it is relevant that the TCU was identified in part to analyze how turn taking occurs in conversation, or more specifically, how conversational participants know when to start or stop talking. This system is based on talk in interaction, talk which is collaboratively constructed by more than one speaker and, in fact, the collaborative nature of conversation is one of their key premises. The system is designed to account for how speakers change turns without any, or with minimal overlap. Specifically, their turn-taking systems maps out the rules by which talk is organized as a series of turns; each speaker is entitled to talk until he or she reaches a point of possible turn completion, called a transition relevance place (TRP). The current speaker may continue talking at a TRP, or there may be a change in speakers. (Talking may also stop, of course.) Cues for possible TRP's include prosodic factors such as falling intonation, pauses, and semantic and syntactic completion.

The turn construction unit is generally understood to reach a transitional relevance place at a moment of syntactic completion. Even though syntactic units are ultimately and infinitely expandable, they do reach a point or points of possible completion. In conversation, syntactic completion occurs when an utterance, in its discourse context, can be interpreted as a complete clause, i.e., with an overt or recoverable predicate. This definition allows answers to questions, elliptical clauses and backchannels to be considered syntactically "complete" (Ford and Thompson 1996:143). While the turn is a "unit" in conversation, it does not stand outside of a relationship to the rest of the discourse, both the surrounding linguistic text and extralinguistic factors. Morphosyntax carries across clause boundaries; in example (1) the use of the dative case in line 6 needs to be explained with reference to the final clause of the first TCU, line 5:

(1) *Банкротство ЮКОСа* (27.06.2006; В. Геращенко и А. Венедиктов)

- | | | |
|-------|---|--|
| В. Г. | 1 | И главное, ЮКОС пользовался не первым, |
| | 2 | первой пользовалась «Сибнефть», |
| | 3 | где 13 млрд. заплатили Абрамовичу. |
| | 4 | Но неважно. |
| | 5 | → <u>Я не завидую.</u> |
| А. В. | 6 | → <u>Кому? Вы не завидуете?</u> |
| В. Г. | 7 | → <u>Нашему многострадальному населению,</u> такая власть у них, что поделать. |

Although this is a relatively straightforward example, it illustrates several key points. First, morphosyntax carries across TCU's. Note that this means distinguishes TCU's from sentences (or IP's) where morphosyntax starts anew with the beginning of each IP. That is not to say that sentences exist independently of one another, as their organization

¹ The actual definition of a TCU has come under much scrutiny since the publication of Sacks et al. (1974); see Selting (2000) and Ford (2004) for a thorough discussion.

is certainly determined by discourse structure and topical relations, but that is quite different from the use of the dative in *кому* above, which is due to the fact that it is the complement of *завидую* in the preceding turn. Second, this example indicates the collaborative nature of conversation, where each participant contributes and determines not only the topic, but the structure of the overall conversation.

Auer (2005) argues that syntax and conversational structure share a central organizational feature, projection. Syntax is a formal means to organize projection; clear cues for syntactic projection include rules of government, constituency, adjacency and serialization. In conversation, there is an interactional projection based on knowledge about the sequencing of activities. For example, an utterance can be responded to in a variety of ways—it can be questioned, ratified, cancelled, and so on. Moreover, the turn-taking system (as described by Sacks et al. 1974) provides interlocutors with a resource for projecting the possible completion of a TCU: the turn-constructive units have an internal structure, a syntactic, semantic and prosodic structure that projects their termination.

Strong evidence of these claims is provided by what are called co-constructions or compound turn constructional units. These are turn constructional units which are produced collaboratively by two or more participants in a conversation (see Sacks 1992:647-655; Helasvuoto 2004; Lerner 1991, 1994, 1996; Ono and Thompson 1996). In these cases, speaker A begins a TCU and the speaker B continues, sometimes ending the TCU or sometimes only partially adding to it, with the first speaker ending it, or in some cases it is completed by yet another speaker. Co-constructions can be divided into two syntactic types, *extensions* and *completions* (Ono and Thompson 1996), depending on whether the first speaker stops speaking at a potential transitional relevance place. In both cases, the secondary part of the TCU is syntactically and semantically dependent on the first part of the TCU. That is, both extensions and completions do not constitute turn-constructive units in and of themselves, independent of a TCU uttered by another speaker. In extensions, the second speaker expands or “extends” what the previous speaker has said into a new syntactic unit. In these cases, syntactically dependent material occurs after a transition relevance place, that is, after the possible end of a turn-constructive unit, as defined by Schegloff (1996); see also Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen (2005:495). In Russian (and in English), one typical way of doing this is by adding a PP to a clause which is already syntactically complete, as illustrated in (2):

(2) *Ищем выход...* (02.11.2005; М. Урнов и Д. Орешкин)

М. У.	1	→	Я же не <u>про каждого отдельного</u> депутата говорю.
	2	→	Я говорю <u>про некую риторику</u> , от партии исходящую
Д. О.	3	→	и <u>про настроение избирателей</u> .

In this example, the second speaker (Орешкин) picks up on the syntax of lines 1 and 2, using it to augment what the first speaker has said. The first TCU is syntactically complete; this expansion simply lengthens it, as it were. This can be seen as part of a listing strategy (Jefferson 1990; Lerner 1991:447). This kind of examples underscores the existence of recursive rules for generating language; speaker B can add prepositional

phrases of this type through recursion ad infinitum. It is interesting to note that this is the only instance in my corpus of the use of a conjunction in a co-construction. At first that is rather surprising: it would be relatively easy to string together additional phrases or clauses by using conjunctions. This example, however, illustrates the very formulaic nature of these co-constructions; here there is an almost rhythmic pattern with the repeated use of these prepositional phrases, each beginning with the same preposition.

Work on co-constructions in English has found that expansions are often prepositional phrases. It is interesting to note that a single speaker may “expand” his or her own utterance in an analogous way, as seen in examples (3)-(4). These are what Chafe (1988) calls *afterthoughts*. They occur after a completed TCU (in the terms of conversation analysis), and in Chafe’s terms, after a completed intonation unit which ends with period intonation (falling intonation and perhaps a pause). After this completed TCU, the speaker tacks on an intonation unit which has some piece of additional information which is relevant to the preceding unit. Chafe interprets this as the speaker choosing at first to end the sentence at the period, but then thinking of something else that would also be useful for the hearer to know, within the same cluster of information. Most frequently this supplementary information is added in a prepositional phrase, as in (3a) and (3b), though it may have some other adverbial status, as in (3c)” (Chafe 1988:6):

“*Afterthoughts*” (Chafe 1988:6)

- (3a) 1 ...well .. it was just obvious I couldn’t...I couldn’t work.
2 ... uh .. with her in the office
- (3b) 1 ...but ... uh ... my father came .. into possession of some papers that his mother had.
2 ... uh .. in German.
- (3c) 1 ... it was quite .. striking when we were .. the year we were in Japan.
2 ... three years ago.

Similarly, Walker (2004) uses the term *increments* to describe when a speaker reaches a point of possible syntactic, pragmatic and prosodic completion, and at some point soon after that completion elects to continue talking, doing so in such a way that the continuation is grammatically parasitic on the prior talk.

“*Increments*” (Walker 2004:147-8)

- (4) 1 mmm .hhhh do you know what people have to pa:y
2 at Legends if they’re not a student
3 (0.4)
4 → to get in

Here in (4) the speaker produces what could be a complete TCU and, following a pause of nearly half a second, adds the grammatically fitted continuation *to get in*.

A somewhat different type of expansion is seen in example (5):

(5) *Особое мнение* (08.08.2006; Н. Болтянская и Е. Киселев)

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| Н. Б. | 1 | Условия хранения, транспортировки российских культурных |
| | 2 | ценностей допускают возможность неадекватного с ними |
| | 3 | обращения. Это сильный эвфемизм то, что я сказала. С моей |
| | 4 | → точки зрения <u>прозвучали прямые обвинения</u> |
| Е. К. | 5 | → <u>В адрес?</u> |
| Н. Б. | 6 | → <u>В адрес</u> господина Пиотровского и адрес господина Швыдкого.
Но так мне показалось. |

While in example (2) we saw a PP added to the end of the previous turn, this is quite different than the expansion in example (5), where the speaker takes advantage of a structure existing in the one turn and replicating it in the next. There are different discourse purposes at work as well: in (2) the expansion serves to add to the propositional content of the previous utterance while in (5) it serves to pose a question for more information. Under this analysis, one might argue that *кому* in example (1) is an expansion of the preceding turn, although it could also be argued that there is ellipsis in line (2). It is unclear that one analysis provides any more insights than the other.

A different kind of example is provided by (6):

(6) *Банкротство ЮКОСа* (27.06.2006; А. Венедиктов и В. Геращенко)

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| А. В. | 1 | Вы употребили в разных интервью такое крепкое слово как |
| | 2 | → <u>идиотизм.</u> |
| В. Г. | 3 | → <u>власти.</u> |
| А. В. | 4 | → <u>Власти, идиотизм власти,</u> я думал, скажете сами или мне |
| | 5 | придется подсказывать. |
| В. Г. | 6 | А я не боюсь. |

Here the extension is represented by an adnominal genitive, which occurs across a speaker change, in line 3. This extension is ratified by the first speaker (Венедиктов) and repeated, first in just the genitive and then as a full phrase (*Власти, идиотизм власти*) in line 4.

Completions differ from extensions. In extensions, the preliminary component constitutes a complete syntactic unit and a complete TCU; the secondary component “extends” or lengthens this component by adding onto, creating a new (and longer syntactic unit). In *completions*, the first part of the co-construction is not syntactically complete. The second speaker completes this syntactic unit. The first component typically projects the second component but is not a typical place for speaker transition. Completions provide strong evidence for projection in conversation and in syntax.

Completions are turn-constructural units which are constructed by two different speakers. The first part or first component does not end at a transition relevance place, i.e., it is not syntactically complete. It projects the form of the second component and so projects the form of the entire TCU itself. Typical compound TCU’s are *when-then* and *if-then* clauses.

(7) (Lerner 1996:241)

(7a) Dan 1 when the group reconvenes in two weeks=
Roger 2 → =they're gonna issue straight jackets

(7b) David 1 so if one person said he couldn't invest (.)
Kerry 2 → then I'd have to wait till

In both (7a) and (7b), the preliminary part of the turn projects the form of the second part; in each the second line, indicated with an arrow, is produced in the course of an ongoing TCU (and thereby in the course of an ongoing turn). In (7a) there is no pause between the first and second parts, while in (7b) there is a slight pause. The absolute clearest types of this kind of projection do come from conditional clauses, as seen in examples (8)-(10):

(8) *Спорт-курьер* (16.08.2006; В. Балахничев и А. Родионов)

В. Б. 1 Ну обычно тренеры планируют меньше для того, чтобы
потом=
А. Р. 2 → =отчитаться было.
В. Б. 3 Это старая традиция.

In examples like (8), the preliminary component not only projects the form of the second component but restricts it. (Note that this example is interesting because of the lack of *чем* in the line (2), although native speakers react differently to this. It should be: *чтобы потом отчитаться, чем было*) Co-construction of clauses across turn boundaries suggests a “shared syntax,” shared in the sense that the syntactic frame begun by one speaker is completed by another. This is illustrated in the next example where the interviewer completes the syntactic clause begun the caller (*лишь бы...*):

(9) *Взрослым о взрослых* (09.06.2005; радиослушатель и М. Лабковский)

Р. 1 Нет, не напрягает, лишь бы, я думаю
М. Л. 2 не было войны. Понятно, спасибо Эльвира.

In (9) the completion is used to end the turn, gain control of the floor and end the conversation. The use of *бы* in line 1 restricts what can come after it: there needs to be a conditional clause. The parenthetical *я думаю* interrupts this conditional clause, showing that despite this kind of interruption the grammar continues across a speaker change. Note that Лабковский here is calling on not just the syntax, but the set phraseology of *лишь бы не было войны*.

Example (10) illustrates a more extensive kind of completion, where the completion is clearly not a device to end the conversation but rather to supplement what the previous speaker has said, to complete that TCU:

(10) *Человек из телевизора* (02 сентября 2006; И. Петровская и К. Ларина)

И.П.	1		Ну, вот, дай Бог, <u>чтобы</u> программа
К.Л.	2	→	<u>вернулась</u>
И.П.	3		<u>не реконструировалась до такой степени</u>
К.Л.	4	→	<u>чтобы</u> мы её не узнали.
И.П.	5		<u>чтобы</u> мы её больше не увидели.

Not all cases of completion are of this kind; in my corpus, it is more frequent to have a co-construction where the preliminary component is less restrictive: it projects a second component, but does not dictate its form as strictly as in examples (8)-(10).

The remaining examples illustrate some basic completions. These differ from the compound TCU's, which consisted of two separate clauses (*when~then, if~then*). At times these occur when the speaker is searching for a word, so in (11) the second speaker (Бунтман) supplies a missing predicate, which is accepted by the first speaker and ratified in line (3):

(11) *Разворот* (31.08.2006; Сергей Бунтман, Тина Канделаки и Петр Лансков)

Т. К.	1		но получается он просто всё же:: uh::
С. Б.	2		продал (.)
Т. К.	3		продал.

The first speaker (Канделаки) begins by extending the vowel in *же* for about 0.2 seconds and then hesitates; the *uh* which follows *же* continues for 0.8 seconds, and which point the second speaker (Бунтман) supplies the word she appears to be searching for (продал) in line 2.

Even phrasal categories can be broken up across turns and co-constructed:

(12) *Лукавая цифра* (08.08.2006; А. Цыганок и А. Гроссман)

А. Ц.	1		У нас в 39-и году подтасованы, не подтасованы были цифры <u>по: uh::</u>
А. Г.	2	→	<u>переписи</u>
А. Ц.	3		<u>переписи населения</u> . Якобы, Сталин – было 68, но натянули до 190.

In (16) the constituent itself is broken up, with the preposition in line 1 and its nominal complement in line (2). The first speaker hesitates after uttering the preposition *по*, which is uttered with a lengthened vowel; the hesitation—*uh*—lasts for about 0.4 seconds, at which point the second speakers adds a noun in the dative case (*переписи*), thereby completing the prepositional phrase. It is interesting that the first speaker ratifies this completion by repeating it in line 3 and expanding it with the addition of *населения*, but notably not repeating the preposition *по*. Thus the prepositional phrase is broken up over two speaker changes.

In these examples (13) and (14), the first component is an incomplete clause:

(13) *Особое мнение* (08.08.2006; Н. Болтянская и Е. Киселев)

- | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|
| Е. К. | 1 | | Я тоже не уверен в том, что там масштабы жесткого применения силы соответствовали масштабам террористической деятельности чеченских сепаратистов. Но, <u>тем не менее</u> |
| Н. Б. | 4 | → | <u>достали.</u> |
| Е. К. | 5 | | <u>достали.</u> И что касается благоприятных сценариев, понятно, что сейчас там есть согласованная резолюция Совета Безопасности ООН. |

In (13), the completion by the second speaker, in line 4 (*достали*) is accepted by the first speaker, who repeats it and then continues speaking. This repetition serves as an acceptance of the proposed completion. Similarly in (14) the predicate (*шла*) is found in line 2 of the first speaker's utterance; the subject (*война*) is uttered by a second speaker in line 3.

(14) *Банкротство ЮКОСа* (27.06.2006; В. Геращенко и А. Венедиктов)

- | | | | |
|-------|---|---|--|
| В. Г. | 1 | | И Йосиф сказал - пожалуйста, вот план Маршалла Украине и |
| | 2 | | Белоруссии, они страны, т.е. республики, где, в основном, <u>шла</u> |
| А. В. | 3 | → | <u>война.</u> |
| В. Г. | 4 | | <u>война и агрессия.</u> Поскольку, опять же, в ООН кроме Англии вступила Канада и Австралия, хотя они были доминионы и туда-сюда. |

This subject is accepted and expanded upon by the first speaker, as seen in line 4 (with *война и агрессия*). What can be said about projection in this example? Clearly, the verb (*шла*) projects a feminine singular subject. It seems fairly safe to predict that *война* is not the subject which the first speaker (Геращенко) had planned, inasmuch as he amends it to a compound subject, *война и агрессия* and in Russian *шла* does not collocate with *агрессия*. Rather, some other verb is required, such as *происходила агрессия* or *имела место агрессия*. A more idiomatic example would use the singular verb, as in (14a):

(14a) В это время шла война и мировая революция.

So actually *где шла война* is a “better” TCU than *где шла война и агрессия*. One way to analyze this is to say that the distance between the predicate in line 2 and the “new” subject in line 4 makes this combination possible, with the rationale being something like the intervening change in speakers and proposed subject (*война*) makes it more acceptable. In general research shows that the farther apart the elements are, the more likely agreement is to break down. That said, the distance between the subject and verb is not great, and this explanation actually runs counter to the claims that I have made here about these constructions, namely, that co-constructions are evidence of the interactive collaboration in conversation. Another possible explanation is to take line 3 as a

completion of the TCU which is unfinished in line 2, so that the end of the line 3 represents in fact a TRP and a completed TCU. Then line 4 can be seen as an extension of that completed TCU. It is still not a particularly elegant extension, but this is probably the better analysis.

Example (15) shows an explicit acknowledgement of the contribution of the second speaker; the first speaker seemingly amends his TCU to include the proposed co-construction:

(15) *Лукавая цифра* (08.08.2006; А. Гроссман и Т. Самсонова)

А. Г.	1		И в этих условиях уже нельзя локально рассматривать тот или
	2		иной конфликт. <u>Он является частью</u>
Т. С.	3	→	<u>мирового</u>
А. Г.	4	→	<u>если хотите мирового конфликта</u>

The examples of completions to this point have demonstrated acceptance of the proposed co-construction by the speaker who began the TCU, although the completion at times has been modified by that first speaker, as in examples (12) and (14). This underscores the interactive nature of constructing conversation, however, it is not the case that the proposed co-constructions are always accepted, as seen in examples (16)-(18):

(16) *Особое мнение* (08.08.2006; Н. Болтянская и Е. Киселев)

Е. К.	1		Понимаете, на самом деле <u>бардак</u> у нас я так понимаю в
			стране
Н. Б.	2	→	<u>не временной</u>
Е. К.	3		<u>такой фактор</u> , который присутствует в разных организациях и
			боюсь, я не хочу никого обидеть, но боюсь, что и в музейном
			деле тоже.

Here, the completion is ignored and the first speaker continues as if the second interlocutor (Болтянская) had not spoken, i.e., there is a lack of acknowledgement of the co-constructed unit and no attempt to incorporate it into the TCU begun by the first speaker. In other cases, the acknowledgement and acceptance comes in the form of a reformulation of the proposed co-construction:

(17) *Лукавая цифра* (08.08.2006; М. Майерс и Т. Самсонова)

М. М.	1		Ну, нет, я объясню, почему для меня вопрос в количестве
			войн.
	2		Это как количество вопросов, которые наше современное
	3		общество не в состоянии <u>решить</u>
Т. С.	4	→	<u>мирным путем.</u>
М. М.	5		<u>дипломатическими средствами доступными.</u>
	6		И это кроме всего прочего, т.е. понятно [...]

Here line 5 (*дипломатическими средствами доступными*) is essentially a paraphrase of line 4 (*мирным путем*), the proposed co-construction, although it is more specific as to what kinds of peaceful measures are not possible (i.e. diplomatic ones).

Occasionally, co-constructions occur over multiple speaker changes, as illustrated in example (18):

(18) *Лукавая цифра* (08.08.2006; М. Майерс и Т. Самсонова)

Т. С.	1		И система, в которой есть одна или <u>две военные мощные</u>
			<u>державы которые</u>
М. М.	2	→	<u>противостояние которых является гарантом</u>
Т. С.	3		<u>гарантом стабильности</u> . Вот как в холодной войне.

The second-part component of the completions are evidence of what Lerner (2004:226) has called *affiliating utterances*. The second component, by virtue not only of being contiguous to the primary component, but more critically, syntactically dependent upon it, maintains the overall flow of the conversation. The syntactic format of the TCU is unchanged, despite the change in speakers, and the speaker change itself is unmarked.

CONCLUSION

The data presented here have shown a number of different types of co-constructions. One basic division is into extensions and completions. The extensions in this corpus—and there are very few—most typically add a PP to the prior TCU. This is seen example (2) with *и про настроение избирателей*, which is a relatively straightforward extension, picking up on the template in the preceding utterance. There is also an extension with a PP in (5) with *В адрес?* which is sort of tacked onto *прозвучали прямые обвинения*. This is a good example of how just looking at the constituent structure of co-constructions can mask whatever is going on behind them—these are very different uses of prepositional phrases.

Next we considered completions and saw two kinds of completions. First there were what might be called compound completions, which consist of two parts. The first part includes a conditional (*бы* or *чтобы*); this preliminary part quite clearly projects the syntactic form of the second part. This is illustrated in examples (8)-(10); in each of these that the preliminary part builds up a conditional frame which projecting or even requiring the appropriate verb form (an infinitive or L participle); in other words, the preliminary part sets up clear morphosyntactic constraints. In these cases, the first part projects a second part.

In contrast, the remaining examples show completions which involve the co-construction of a single clause rather than a clausal compound. We have seen that the completions occur at different syntactic levels, both at constituent boundaries and within constituents. Moreover, the preliminary component does not so clearly, or so rigidly, project the final component as in the conditional clauses. (This is especially clear in example (13) with *тем не менее*, which could project quite a range of things.)

It can be further argued that co-constructions provide evidence for the relationship between planning, production and processing. First and foremost, they show that there is a template, a frame or some sort of construction which is involved in production of conversation. It is a shared frame, in the sense that once it is introduced by one interlocutor, it can be expanded or completed by a different interlocutor. This is very clear on a lexical level, with what could be called lexical frames or constructions. Thus, for example, the “war” frame occurs in several examples:

- (9) лишь бы не было войны
- (14) шла война
- (15) он является частью мирового конфликта
- (17) решить мирным путем/дипломатическими средствами

Different approaches to syntax treat these “frames” in different ways: generative grammar uses phrase structure rules; some versions of functional grammar uses predicate frames; construction grammar uses constructions, and so on. On the extreme end are the claims (e.g. Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen 2005) that co-constructions of the type seen here provide strong evidence for the *emergent* nature of grammar: “Grammar must be thought of as distributed and emergent, and that its units of analysis are *formats*—patterns or templates—which can be thought of as crystallizations of common solutions to communicative problems and interactional tasks” (Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen 2005:497). They argue that grammatical formats are interactional practices.

The term “emergent grammar” is taken from Hopper (1987), who argues that grammar is not “an overarching set of abstract principles” and “[i]ts forms are not fixed templates but are negotiable in face-to-face interaction in ways that reflect the individual speakers’ past experience of these forms, and their assessment of the present context, including especially their interlocutors, whose experiences and assessments may be quite different.” I would argue that the use of co-constructions indicates the opposite, that it the production of conversation and syntax is rather strictly rule-governed and to a large extent predictable. What seems to be less predictable is the semantic or propositional content; speakers appear to use the predictability of grammatical patterns to change and/or influence propositional content and topic of a conversation.

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