Exploring inter-constructional relations in the *constructicon*:
A view from Contrastive (Cognitive) Construction Grammar

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This paper explores inter-constructional relations in the constructicon from a contrastive (English-Spanish) standpoint (see further Boas 2010 for a full blown defence of Contrastive Construction Grammar). The investigation presented here concentrates on two *prima facie* distinct constructions. The first one, the so-called WXDY construction, encodes in English the expression of a judgment of incongruity by a judge in relation to some state of affairs (Kay and Fillmore 1999: 21), a characterization which can be duplicated for its Spanish counterpart, the *¿Pero qué V-hacer-finite X Y?* construction, as illustrated in (1)-(2). The second construction under scrutiny here, the *self-descriptive subjective-transitive* construction, has the skeletal meaning X_j UNEXPECTEDLY REALIZES S_j IS UNINTENTIONALLY Y (author 2001, 2008) and is exemplified in (3)-(4) for English and Spanish, respectively:

(1) *What is he doing knowing the answer?* (Kay and Fillmore 1999: 6)
(2) *Pero   ¿qué   hac-es   últimamente   tan   ocios-o?* (CREA)
    But   what   do-PRS.2SG   lately   so   idle-M.SG
    What are you doing so idle lately?
(3) *I found myself the object of a takeover* (BNC)
(4) *Me   encontr-é   sol-o   ante   el   peligro (CREA)*
    1SG.REFL   find-INDEFPRET.1SG   alone-M.SG   in.front.of   DEF.M.SG   danger
    'I found myself alone facing danger'

Drawing on (Cognitive) Construction Grammar (Goldberg 2006), a number of significant analogies and differences are pinpointed between these two constructions in English and Spanish. As far as the analogies are concerned, these constructions (i) convey an unexpected state of affairs/action/process, (ii) impose a stage-level (i.e. temporary, accidental) construal of the Y element, (iii) usually convey a contingent or negative state of affairs and (iv) are more felicitous if the Y element is informationally prominent. An important asymmetry between these two constructions concerns the morphosyntactic realizations of the Y element in English and Spanish. Thus, the WXYD and the *self-descriptive subjective-transitive* construction in English are more tolerant of, say, NPs in the Y slot than their Spanish counterparts, as evidenced in the grammaticality contrasts in (5)-(6):

(5) (a) *What is she doing **the winner**?* (Kay and Fillmore 1999: 34, emphasis added)
    (b) **Pero   ¿qué   hac-e   ella   **ganador-a**?*
        But   what   do-PRS.2SG   3SG   winner-F.SG
(6) (a) *He found himself **the target of a terrorist attack*** (BNC)
    (b) **Se   encontr-ó   **el   objetivo   de   un   ataque   terrorista***
        3SG.REFL   find-INDEFPRET.3SG   DEF.M.SG   target   of   INDF.M.SG   attack   terrorist

A number of robust generalizations can be seen to emerge from the cursory analysis of the constructions under investigation here: First, the WXYD and the *self-descriptive subjective-transitive* constructions have similar illocutionary forces in English and Spanish: the expression of an observed incongruity and an unexpected situation in which the subject/speaker is unintentionally involved, respectively. It can be plausibly claimed that there is a considerable degree of correlation between the illocutionary forces in question and the semantico-pragmatic make-up of these constructions, most notably, the requirement that the Y slot should feature a stage-level (rather than individual), informationally prominent and, preferably, negative or contingent state of affairs, thus pointing to illocutionary or pragmatic function as a likely unifying factor in the *constructicons* of languages such as English and Spanish.

   Second, important differences must nonetheless be noted, which impinge on the morpho-syntactic realization of the Y element in these two constructions. Thus, NPs are acceptable in the Y slot in English as long as these encode an episodic characterization, rather than an identification, of the X element. By contrast, NPs are systematically ruled out in Spanish in these constructions. Asymmetries of this kind thus lend further credence to Croft's (2001) contention that argument structure is construction-specific and language-specific, while also calling for a much more fine-grained mapping of the inherent semantico-pragmatic properties of a construction's elements onto their morpho-syntactic realizations than has so far been done in (Cognitive) Construction Grammar (see Gonzálvez-García 2009 for further discussion).