A Constructional Analysis of Full-Verb Inversion
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Over the past few years, full-verb inversion — constructions in which the subject follows the entire verb phrase in a declarative clause, as in “On the near corner was Herb’s Gas Station” or “Upstairs was a bedroom and a bathroom” — has received a considerable amount of attention from a functional perspective (Birner 1996; Dorgeloh 1997; Chen 2003, Kreyer 2006; Prado-Alonso 2008). This paper is a further contribution to this line of research and offers a constructional analysis of full inversion in Present-day written English.

A central thesis of Construction Grammar is that information is not only conveyed through individual lexical items but also through constructions, namely form-meaning correspondences or symbolic units in cognitive terms (cf. Langacker 1987: Ch. 2), which in themselves carry meaning, independently of the words in the sentence. According to Goldberg (1995), a distinct construction is said to exist if one or more of its properties are not strictly predictable from knowledge of other constructions existing in the language. In my presentation, I will argue that the different full inversion types distinguished in the literature are clear instances of constructions in Goldberg’s sense. I will further argue that, despite their formal and functional dissimilarities, these inversions still relate to one another in systematic and predictable ways. It will be shown that in fact the inversions are grouped in relation to a unit in the schematic network which is naturally most salient – the prototype – and form with it a family of nodes – extensions from the prototype – in the system. In sum, the analysis will show that the inversions are constructions which form an interconnected, structured system or network and inhabit a conceptual space that is best understood in reference to different forms of inheritance (cf. Goldberg 1995: 72 ff).

References