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A constructionist approach towards poetic formula in Baltic folk songs

Construction Grammar is a model of linguistic analysis developed in the late 1980s (Fillmore et al. 1988) that views language as a system of learned building blocks (constructions). Since then a number of related models have emerged, however all these models share a basic idea, that a construction is a pairing of form and meaning/function (Goldberg 2006). By combining this model with the Parry-Lord theory of oral formulaic poetry (Parry 1971; Lord 1971), according to which the performer uses a set of ready-made formula to compose a text, and the theory of Immanent Art (Foley 1991), which analyses how the meaning of these formula is apprehended, one is able to establish a framework for a thorough linguistic and literary analysis of oral poetry. Such a framework is already being applied to Homer and South Slavic epics (Pagán Cánovas & Antović (Forthcoming)), however the possibilities of this model allow it to be applied to non-narrative oral poetry as well.

In this presentation the model of Construction Poetics is used to analyse Lithuanian and Latvian folk songs. The presentation will be divided into three parts corresponding to the three types of constructions that are used in Baltic folk songs: compound-constructions (phrases and clauses with partly or completely fixed variables), micro-constructions (morphological templates) and macro-constructions (large units of text with partly or completely fixed variables and the so called “floating verses” (Constantine & Porter 2003)). These types vary in the levels of abstraction and distribution among genres. The aim of this presentation is to shed new light on formal linguistic and poetic aspects of Baltic oral poetry.

References

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