

Lists: description, delimitation, definition. A foreword

Francesca Masini¹, Caterina Mauri¹, Paola Pietrandrea²

¹University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy <francesca.masini@unibo.it>, <caterina.mauri@unibo.it>

²University of Lille, Lille, France <paola.pietrandrea@univ-lille.fr>

*E metto in lista tutto quello che mi manca
e mi sembra quasi una preghiera oppure folle amore
(Baustelle, Piangi Roma, 2008)*

1. Why lists and why this Special Issue?

In 2009, when asked by the *Spiegel* about the reasons that had led him to propose to the Louvre an exhibition on the “Vertigo of lists”, Umberto Eco answered:

The list is the origin of culture [...] What does culture want? To make infinity comprehensible. It also wants to create order – not always, but often. And how, as a human being, does one face infinity? How does one attempt to grasp the incomprehensible? Through lists, through catalogs, through collections in museums and through encyclopedias and dictionaries [...] How does a person feel when looking at the sky? He thinks that he doesn't have enough tongues to describe what he sees. Nevertheless, people have never stopped describing the sky, simply listing what they see. Lovers are in the same position. They experience a deficiency of language, a lack of words to express their feelings. But do lovers ever stop trying to do so? They create lists: Your eyes are so beautiful, and so is your mouth, and your collarbone... One could go into great detail. [...] Wherever you look in cultural history, you will find lists. In fact, there is a dizzying array: lists of saints, armies and medicinal plants, or of treasures and book titles. Think of the nature collections of the 16th century. My novels, by the way, are full of lists.

According to Eco, thus, lists respond to two primitive needs of human beings: liberating themselves from the limits of finitude so as to both embrace infinity conceptually, and express it semiotically.

One might infer that, given their fundamental cognitive and semiotic function, lists play a major role in language, which is indeed the case. Unfortunately, such a primordial role of lists in language is not sufficiently mirrored by an adequate description and theorization

of lists in linguistics.

As shown by Masini *et al.* (*this issue*), two parallel linguistic traditions shed some light on lists in the late Seventies and Eighties: Conversational Analysis and spoken language syntax. Conversational Analysis described the interactional discursive role of lists, while the tradition of spoken language syntax initiated in France by Claire Blanche-Benveniste *et al.* (1979) highlighted the peculiar role that lists play at the interface between two orders of relations in language: the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic one. Let us focus on this second important approach.

According to Blanche-Benveniste, lists are a specific syntactic device that allows for a syntagmatic exploration of the associative (paradigmatic) relations that, to use Saussure's (1916) terms, "float around" (original *flottant autour*) the selection of any linguistic unit. As we know, Saussure (1916) and Jakobson (1956) identified two distinct orders of relations between linguistic units: according to them, any linguistic unit entertains a syntagmatic relation with the units that surround it in discourse and an associative or paradigmatic relation with the units that are related to it in the speaker's linguistic knowledge. As theorized by Saussure, a syntagmatic relation is the relation that a linguistic unit entertains with the DEFINITE number of linguistic units that concretely surround it in discourse, whereas an associative relation is the connection that that unit entertains with an INDEFINITE number of units belonging to the speaker's knowledge of the linguistic system.

In Blanche-Benveniste's view, lists blur the distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations allowing for a syntagmatic realization of the exploration of paradigmatic knowledge. In other terms, lists allow for an exploration in discourse of the potentiality of the linguistic system and, more interestingly, for an exploration of the indefinite limits of the paradigmatic relations within the definite limits of the syntagmatic relations. In a sense, lists fulfill in language exactly the same function they fulfill in other human behaviors: that is, embracing the potential infinity of linguistic creation.

Indeed, we can affirm that lists have a privileged role of cognitive and linguistic creation. The papers gathered in this volume all show that lists allow to fill gaps: in categorization, in lexical fields, in lexical knowledge, in lexical acquisition, in lexical production. As such, lists can be regarded as a device operating at the intersection between system and discourse, which allows for embedding the infinity of cognitive and semiotic potential in the finitude of linguistic production. This crucial cognitive and semiotic role is mirrored by a

relatively stable – albeit flexible – formal structure that allows a list to be recognized as such, independently of its manifestation at the morphological, syntactic or discourse level.

The crucial role that lists play in language both as a formal and a functional category has been somehow overlooked in the linguistic tradition (a tradition that privileges polishing existing categories rather than identifying and defining new ones). This Special Issue is an attempt to provide a definition for the linguistic category of list and, as such, it should be regarded as a late tribute to one of the linguists who have dared to explore language and human cognition as they are, Claire Blanche-Benveniste.

2. The contributions of this Special Issue

2.1. Overview

This Special Issue aims at pushing our knowledge and understanding of lists a step forward, by putting together contributions stemming from different research traditions and by adopting complementary perspectives on lists, in the belief that converging evidence is the key to a comprehensive account. The articles included in this Special Issue mainly focus on two directions: a formal and functional DESCRIPTION of lists, and their DELIMITATION. Description and delimitation are indeed two crucial steps towards a clear DEFINITION of the phenomenon of listing.

Although lists are intuitively easy to grasp as a concept, we still have to understand exactly how we can characterize them from a descriptive point of view, in terms of both form and function. On the formal side, the contributions in this Special Issue devote much attention to discuss relevant properties of lists at the morphological, syntactic, discourse and prosodic level, with a view to unveiling their defining formal properties. On the functional side, it is crucial to describe the semantic and pragmatic levels, in order to detect the meanings associated with different kinds of lists and to inquire whether their functional variation might be traced back to one general function or not.

Together with the identification of the formal and functional properties of lists, it is necessary to provide a delimitation of the object(s) of analysis, that is, a delimitation of lists with respect to neighboring, similar phenomena, but also a clearer delimitation of different types of lists. For instance: how do we define lists with respect to syntactic phenomena like coordination or juxtaposition? Can we talk about lists at the morphological or lexical level? And to which extent can we relate lists to repetition and reduplication?

What emerges from the contributions in this Special Issue is that a broad, schematic definition of ‘list’ may encompass all these phenomena (despite their obvious specificities) and that it is indeed possible to pursue a unified approach to lists. The challenge then lies in finding a way to reconcile the variety of forms we find in the domain of listing with the similarity of functions that lists of different kinds seem to convey.

2.2. *The five contributions*

This Special Issue is a collection of selected, peer-reviewed papers stemming from the workshop *List constructions: formal and functional aspects* organized within the 50th International Congress of the *Società di Linguistica Italiana* (SLI) held in Milan in September 2016.

The first paper – *List constructions: Towards a unified account*, by Francesca Masini, Caterina Mauri and Paola Pietrandrea – is aimed at setting the stage and providing a theoretical framework for list constructions. The authors identify an abstract linguistic pattern named ‘list’ and discuss its theoretical status and manifestations. The object ‘list’ is defined as a syntagmatic concatenation of two or more units of the same type (i.e. potentially paradigmatically connected) that are on a par with each other, thus filling one and the same slot within the larger construction they are part of. This highly abstract pattern is claimed to be responsible for a number of linguistic phenomena that are normally ascribed to different levels of analysis, from morphology to syntax and discourse. The three authors put forward a macro-distinction between ‘denotation’ and ‘formulation’ lists, pertaining to the conceptual and the metalinguistic level, respectively. Crucially, they show that certain formal features of denotation lists are conventionally associated with certain types of (non-compositional) meanings. They analyze the denotation lists characterized by this form-function match as ‘constructions’ in the Construction Grammar sense and claim that these are instantiations of a maximally abstract List Construction. Towards the conclusions, the three authors discuss the status of formulation lists and the advantages of a constructional approach to do justice to both the diversity and the unity of lists.

The second paper – *Constructing lists to construct categories* by Alessandra Barotto and Caterina Mauri – is aimed at analyzing to what extent list constructions can be considered as linguistic tools to build categories in discourse. The authors discuss in detail the inferential processes leading from list constructions to categorization, and examine the semantic and morphosyntactic elements that activate abstractive reasoning within lists. Based on real occurrences of lists

in written and spoken Italian, they start by proposing a basic distinction between exhaustive and non-exhaustive lists, arguing that (non-) exhaustivity determines the layer at which the construction of a category occurs, namely the layer of presupposition or the ‘what-is-said’ part of the utterance. Then they focus on non-exhaustive lists, arguing that this type of list construction directly communicates a bottom-up, exemplar-driven abstraction, characterized by the presence of an inherently indexical reference. As a consequence, the authors propose to call it ‘indexical categorization’. The linguistic analysis of how indexical categorization is expressed in discourse shows a major distinction between: (i) elements characterized by an indexical semantics, which trigger the abstraction process, and (ii) elements providing semantic clues towards the correct construction of the indexical category. In the conclusions, they take a broader perspective and provide an explanation of the patterns observed for indexical categorization in the light of the wider process of online reference construction.

The goal of the third paper – *Listing between lexicon and syntax: Focus on frame-naming lists*, by Francesca Masini and Giorgio Francesco Arcodia – is twofold. First, the authors advocate the view that listing is a cross-level mechanism with cognitive grounding that manifests itself in various ways along the lexicon-syntax continuum. Indeed, they claim that some linguistic objects pertaining to the morphological and lexical level (as e.g. coordinating compounds, reduplications, (ir)reversible binomials) are structurally and functionally similar to freely created syntactic lists. Second, they analyze a so far under-described type of lists between lexicon and syntax, namely what they call ‘frame-naming’ lists. Lists are often seen as instances of “natural coordination” (Wälchli 2005) where the conjuncts are ‘lexico-semantically related’; however, there are lists where the conjuncts are better described as being ‘frame-related’, i.e., by virtue of occurring in a list, they either evoke or build a frame, which may be either established or context-dependent. They focus on two corpus-based case-studies from Italian concerning the V_1 +AND+ V_2 construction (e.g. *gratta e sosta* ‘scratch and park ticket’, lit. ‘scratch and park’) and the ALL+LIST construction (e.g. *tutto casa e chiesa* ‘pious, churchy’, lit. ‘all home and church’). They discuss and analyze the data with the tools of Construction Grammar and Construction Morphology.

A detailed study of list constructions in spoken Italian is the object of the fourth paper – *List Constructions: A specialised way of text progression*, by Miriam Voghera. This author presents a study of list constructions in the corpus of spoken Italian VoLIP, devoting special attention to lists ending with a general extender. This type

of list constructions widens the scope and the meaning of what has been previously said by adding locutions such as: *or something / and everything / and things / and stuff (like that), etcetera*. The aim of her research is to show that list constructions exhibit some basic features that are especially suitable to the online process of spoken communication and, at the same time, they constitute a specialized way of text progression, useful to organize objects and concepts in a specific order, somehow resembling the use of written catalogues. After surveying some fundamental properties of spoken texts, Voghera shows how relevant repetition is in list constructions and presents a structural and descriptive analysis of some specific kinds of list. Finally, she proposes a unified account in which both the structural analysis and the textual distribution of list constructions are considered.

The last paper – “*Sopratavola soprammobile come dite voi*”: *Lists in L1 and L2*, by Elisabetta Bonvino, Diego Cortés Velásquez and Elisa Fiorenza – considers the use of list constructions by both native and non-native speakers. Lists are examined as a cognitive resource for speakers, characterized by a wide range of semantic and pragmatic functions, among which approximation. One of the main goals of this paper is to further clarify the links between lists and language proficiency. To do so, the three authors focus on lists produced by native and non-native Italian speakers during a lexical search in the context of spontaneous spoken language. The study is based on a corpus of oral productions elicited through a task, and shows that some elements usually regarded in the literature as completely disparate can be considered together within the framework of lists. Furthermore, the authors describe the gradual emergence as constructions of a particular subset of lists of lexical search.

3. *An agenda for the future*

As a final note, we would like to point out that research on lists, as intended here, is still at its infancy. A number of issues deserve to be addressed, among which: (a) the presence and distribution of lists across typologically different languages; (b) the psycholinguistic investigation of lists and their role in cognitive categorization; (c) the diachrony of lists, and the role of spoken interaction in their emergence as constructions; (d) the computational treatment of lists, since they have consequences on the automatic detection of reference. We hope this Special Issue will smooth the way for the inclusion of lists in the agenda of interdisciplinary research in linguistics.

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