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Construal and perspectivisation

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CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUAL AND PERSPECTIVIZATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

A fundamental principle in Cognitive Linguistics is that semantics is, indeed, primarily cognitive and not a matter of relationships between language and the world (or truth conditions with respect to a model). This principle becomes especially manifest in the research into facets of meaning and grammatical organization which crucially makes use of notions such as “perspective,” “subjectivity,” or “point of view.” What these notions have in common is that they capture aspects of conceptualization that cannot be sufficiently analyzed in terms of properties of the *object* of conceptualization, but, in one way or another, necessarily involve a *subject* of conceptualization. A strong incentive for this type of research stems from the awareness that the more linguistic problems can be solved by making use of these notions, the more (heuristically) successful the fundamental principle is; in addition, this research is motivated by the awareness that the best way to make these notions relevant for linguistic analysis is not given a priori and thus requires empirical investigation. It is therefore not surprising that there is in fact quite a large body of research into such nonobjective facets of linguistic meaning.

The cover term that has come to be used for different ways of viewing a particular situation is “construal.” At a very elementary level, construal is a feature of the meaning of all linguistic expressions, if only as a consequence of the fact that languages provide various ways for categorizing situations, their participants

and features, and the relations between them. Speaking thus always implies a choice:

A speaker who accurately observes the spatial distribution of certain stars can describe them in many distinct fashions: as a *constellation*, as a *cluster of stars*, as *specks of light in the sky*, etc. Such expressions are semantically distinct; they reflect the speaker's alternate construals of the scene, each compatible with its objectively given properties. (Langacker 1990a: 61)

The fact *that* a particular situation can be construed in alternate ways should, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, not come as a big surprise or require extensive justification. What is more important linguistically is that languages systematically provide means for different *kinds* of construal. For instance, the distinct descriptions of a single phenomenon given in the quotation from Langacker above differ in (among other things) the *frames* of knowledge with respect to which the conceived situation is characterized: a particular distribution of stars is only considered a constellation in a culturally shared traditional frame of knowledge about the structure of the sky, while this framework is not required for conceptualizing it as a cluster. So one type of construal involved in these examples crucially involves frames of knowledge (or "Idealized Cognitive Models"). Another type, also involved here, focuses on the *compositionality* of the conceptualization: both *a cluster of stars* and *specks of light in the sky* evoke their objects of conceptualization by combining several elements into a whole in some particular way, while the lexical item *constellation* does not. Then again, *specks of light in the sky* (with the plural noun *specks* as its head) focuses on the multiplicity of the phenomenon observed, whereas *constellation* and *a cluster of stars* impose the construal of a coherent unit (with *the cluster* constituting a "multiplex" one in the sense of Talmy 2000a: 59).

This simple example already shows that there are several dimensions along which construals may vary. Cognitive linguists, most notably Langacker and Talmy, have proposed a number of classification schemes for construal phenomena, in attempts to organize them into a relatively small number of basic types. However, these classificatory systems seem to exhibit a substantial amount of arbitrariness. This is partly due to the fact that research into construal phenomena, while ubiquitous in ordinary language and therefore highly important, has at the same time led to a large increase in the number of known distinct construal operations. Therefore, it is useful to consider a few more types of construal before considering the classification proposals. It should be evident, though, that this cannot be a comprehensive list of construal phenomena.

2. THE DIVERSITY OF CONSTRUAL PHENOMENA

One of the first construal operations to have been recognized as linguistically highly relevant is the “Figure/Ground” distinction, well known from studies in Gestalt psychology. It was introduced into Cognitive Linguistics (even before it was known under that name) through the work of Talmy (1978). In visual perception, one element may be the focus of attention—the “Figure”; it is perceived as a prominent coherent element and set off against the rest of what is in the field of vision—the “Ground.” This psychological distinction is reflected in many linguistic distinctions, lexical as well as grammatical. Consider, for instance, the expressions *X is above Y* and *Y is below X*; while these expressions denote the same spatial configuration, they are semantically distinct in that they reflect different selections of the participant that is to provide the Ground, with respect to which the other participant, as Figure can be located. A well-known example of a grammatical alternation in which the construal of a participant as either Figure or Ground constitutes part of the semantic difference is the active/passive contrast.

The meanings of lexical items quite generally include a subtype of this Figure/Ground construal. Consider the meaning of the word *uncle*, which presupposes a background network of kinship relations, and foregrounds one particular node in it. More generally, a lexical item usually designates, or “profiles” (in Langacker’s terminology), a substructure within a larger structure (the “base”), and knowing what larger structure is involved is part of knowing the meaning of that item. The words *finger* and *thumb*, while profiling different substructures, share the conception of a hand as their base; the same holds for *ceiling* and *floor* with respect to a room, and so on. A general linguistic reflex of this phenomenon is found in constraints on expressions denoting part-whole relationships; these may not “bypass” base-profile relations. While *The hand of this animal has three fingers* is felicitous, *?The arm of this animal has three fingers* is definitely awkward, and *This animal has three fingers* has an entirely different meaning.

Profile-base distinctions also exist in the domain of time. The flow of time constitutes (part of) the base of the meaning of verbs. Different lexical verbs may profile different “slices” of time, backgrounding and foregrounding different features (thus producing different “aspectual” profiles). For example, *think* and *read* present processes that are construed as ongoing, not involving a change in the period of time being focused on, while *arrive* and *promise* present processes that crucially involve a change at the time being focused on. Grammatical constructions may impose a particular kind of profile on the temporal interpretation of a situation. For example, the English progressive construction (*be* + *V-ing*) can be said to impose a particular profile on the interpretation of the clause, backgrounding any boundaries (beginning and end point) of the designated process, irrespective of the meaning of the verb (see also Michaelis 2004; Boogaart and Janssen, this volume, chapter 31).

Another important construal operation is based on the fact that objects and situations can be perceived at different levels of “resolution,” or “granularity.” One linguistic correlate of this cognitive feature is the fact that lexical categories may form taxonomic hierarchies consisting of various levels of specificity (e.g., *Palomino*, *horse*, *mammal*, *animal*, *living thing*, *thing*). Each of these levels corresponds to our perception of things at different degrees of granularity. This in itself already allows language users to describe events at different levels of specificity (or, conversely, schematicity). Some of the most common verbs in a language are highly schematic (e.g., English *be*, *have*, *do*, and *make*), allowing a speaker to characterize a situation without paying attention to all the details of the specific state or process involved. Thus, the same objective situation can be described as *The young physicist wrote an original book*, *The physicist wrote a book*, *The scientist produced a publication*, *The woman made something*, or *She made something*. Often, the role of verbs in a construction is to provide specifics to the schematic conceptualization evoked by the construction. For example, *They made their way through the forest*, although itself a specific case of a transitive template, still evokes a rather schematic image of overcoming resistance and movement, while *They cut their way through the forest* provides more details about the means of “way-making.” The function of modifiers is to allow for representations with a high degree of specificity on the basis of (clausal and nominal) templates that are in themselves only rather schematic for types of events—that is, modifiers also make specificity possible without the need for more templates.

An example of grammatical construal involving different levels of granularity is provided by those causative constructions which code the causal and the result components of an event separately (e.g., English *to make something happen*). Such a construction construes an event with a higher degree of resolution than a causal lexical verb would; compare, for instance, *to make someone believe something* with *to tell someone something*. This, in turn, allows variation in explicit, highly granular construals of causal relationships, with distinctions such as those between *to make someone believe something* and *to let someone believe something*.

The construal phenomena discussed so far variously impose *structure* on conceptualizations in ways that do not immediately follow from their content, which is why they are considered cases of construal in the first place. Another form of construal consists in understanding one conceptualization *in relation to* another one. For example, tense marking in a finite clause in English relates the situation mentioned in the clause to the conceptualization of the communicative situation (roughly, as overlapping or not), which is why the category of tense is considered “deictic”—along with such elements as personal pronouns (with *I* and *you* identifying participants in the conceived situation as communicative participants and third-person pronouns identifying situation participants as *not* participating in the communicative process) and adverbs like *here*, *now*, *there*, and *then*. Other ways of understanding one conceptualization in relation to another are by establishing similarity or any sufficiently salient contingent connection—these two constitute the basis (albeit not exhaustively) for metaphor and metonymy, respectively—or by establishing contrast (e.g., negation) or scalarity (e.g., comparison).

Not only can construals of events be different within languages, but also across languages; that is, there exist typological distinctions in terms of construal—an issue related to the issue of linguistic relativity. For example, languages may not only have different means available to organize spatial relations, they may also differ radically in the way space is conceptually structured. In such cases, individual speakers have little or no freedom of choice to pick one construal over another, as their language simply lacks some of the “options.” Nevertheless, what is involved is still different construals of similar experiences or phenomena.

One type that has traditionally received much attention is the different ways motion events are expressed linguistically in languages such as English, on the one hand, and languages such as Spanish, on the other (see Talmy 2000b: 21–67, for a recent comprehensive overview). In English, the verb in a sentence expressing a motion event usually also encodes (features of) a “co-event,” such as manner (*to slide, to roll, to bounce*, etc.) or cause or instrument (*to push, to blow, to chop, to pound*, etc.), while the direction of movement may be indicated by optional adjuncts (*into the water*, etc.). In Spanish, on the other hand, the verb is mostly required to mark some aspect of directionality, and factors such as manner or instrument may be expressed by means of adjuncts (. . . *entró a la casa bailando* ‘. . . entered the house dancing’). Spanish, encoding the path component of motion in the verb, is called a “verb-framed language,” while English is called a “satellite-framed language.” Since verbs are obligatory elements in clauses expressing events, the two types of languages conventionally impose different construals on the conceptualization of motion events. It is findings of this type that have given rise to a research program, especially executed by Talmy, into the questions of what the typological variation in construal among languages is and what kind of factors are involved in it.

Another highly intriguing question triggered by this kind of typological results concerns the influence of conventional construal patterns in a language on the thought processes of its speakers (see Bowerman 1996; Levinson 2001). With respect to the distinction between satellite-framed and verb-framed languages in the domain of motion events, Slobin has developed his concept of “thinking for speaking”; the idea is that the grammatical patterns of a native language force its learners to habitually pay attention to those features of events that are necessary for expression in linguistic communication (Slobin 1996)—this issue is developed further by Pederson in chapter 38 of the present *Handbook*.

In view of the multitude of possible construal operations and their diverse uses across languages—which has become apparent even from this brief overview—a number of interrelated questions can be raised. How are construal operations related to each other? Are there basic types of construal? Which construal relations share which properties? Can linguistic expressions be exhaustively characterized as belonging to certain types and not others? One additional consideration that gives rise to these questions is the fact that certain phenomena systematically seem to allow for more than one classification. For example, the fact that a phenomenon allows for construal at different levels of specificity is at least to some

extent related to the fact that it can be seen as similar to other phenomena: the higher the schematicity, the more general the category to which it is assigned, and thus the larger the set of phenomena that are considered similar. Or consider the English progressive above, which was characterized in terms of profiling (backgrounding of the boundaries of a process unfolding in time); an alternative way of characterizing the progressive might be in terms of viewpoint: the position from which the situation is viewed is contained in the ongoing process itself (so that any boundaries are not “in view”). Considerations like these also make the question which types of construal operations there are, and how they are connected, an urgent one. So let us now turn to the issue of classifying construal phenomena.

3. CLASSIFICATIONS OF CONSTRUAL OPERATIONS

Langacker (1987: 116–37) proposed the following threefold classification of construal operations (then called “focal adjustments”):

- a. Selection
- b. Perspective
- c. Abstraction

The first category concerns language users’ capacity to selectively attend to some facets of a conceptualization and ignoring others. The second comprises linguistic manifestations of the position from which a situation is viewed, and is divided into four subtypes: (i) Figure/Ground alignment, (ii) Viewpoint, (iii) Deixis, and (iv) Subjectivity/Objectivity. The third major category relates to our ability to establish commonalities between distinct phenomena and abstracting away from differences, and thus to organize concepts into categories. Langacker has since revised his classification, which now¹ looks as follows (see Langacker, this volume, chapter 17):

- a. Specificity
- b. Prominence
- c. Perspective
- d. Dynamicity

The first class (Specificity) roughly corresponds to the previous class Abstraction. The new category of Prominence comprises especially Figure/Ground phenomena and the phenomena formerly categorized under Selection. Perspective has remained the same, except that of the subtype Figure/Ground has now been placed in the Prominence category. Dynamicity is an additional category and concerns the development of a conceptualization through processing time (rather than through

conceived time). It is first of all connected to the inherent temporal nature of linguistic utterances: presenting elements of a conceptualization in a different order results in differences of meaning. But a dynamic, sequential conceptualization may also result from the application of a dynamic concept to an object of conceptualization that is not inherently dynamic itself (as in *The road winds through the valley*).

Talmy (1988) originally proposed the following “imaging systems” as the major classes of construal phenomena:

- a. Schematization
- b. Perspective
- c. Attention
- d. Force Dynamics

There is a considerable overlap between this proposal and the one by Langacker, which in itself is indicative of the relevance of these classes. Thus, Talmy’s Schematization largely corresponds to Langacker’s Specificity; both have a category Perspective comprising similar phenomena, and Talmy’s category Attention overlaps with Langacker’s Prominence. Force Dynamics, though, is absent from Langacker’s classification.

Talmy (2000a: 40–84) has now also revised his classification, yielding the following major categories:

- a. Configurational Structure
- b. Perspective
- c. Distribution of Attention
- d. Force Dynamics²

Perpendicular to these four “schematic systems,” as they are now called, there is a “schematic category” called Domain, which includes only a very limited number of major dimensions of construal, namely, “space” and “time.”³ As such, a single specific construal operation from the schematic system “configurational structure” (e.g., $\pm$ boundedness) may apply to several domains. For example, in the domain of space as well as that of time, concepts may be construed as discrete (i.e., as objects in space and acts in time) or as continuous (as masses in space and activities in time). This way of cross-combining construal operations is linguistically justified by the fact that in nominalization (which converts concepts from the domain of time to the domain of space) acts are construed as objects and activities as mass, witness such pairs as in (1) and (2):

- (1) John called me – John gave me a call.
- (2) John helped me – John gave me some help.

In Langacker’s approach, Talmy’s domains of “space” and “time” correspond to the conceptual distinction between nouns and verbs. In particular, Langacker (1987, 2005) views nouns as “things,” understood as a construal resulting from conceptual grouping and reification, and verbs as “processes,” understood as a construal resulting from sequential scanning of a temporally manifested relationship. However,

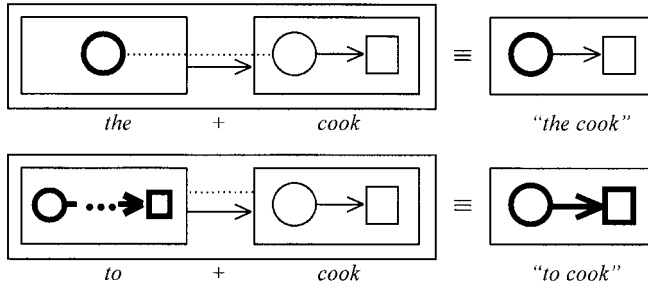


Figure 3.1. "Nominal" and "verbal" construal of the same content in different constructions

Langacker does not treat the noun-verb distinction as reflecting a fundamental schematic category in itself, but rather as a special instance of Figure/Ground organization (in particular, the profile-base organization) and of categorization. The English noun and verb *cook*, for example, have a shared conceptual content, but in one class of constructions (*the cook*, etc.), a different part of this content is "profiled" than in constructions (*to cook*, etc.) that encode a processual construal (schematically presented in figure 3.1).

Because of these (and other) patterns, the English word *cook* can be regarded as having a schematic sense that does not impose a particular profile and thus serves as a superordinate category for the specific nominal and verbal uses of the word (Langacker 2005). Figure 3.2 provides a schematic representation.

It is clear from the foregoing that, while the concepts employed in Langacker's and Talmy's analyses play a rather different role in their respective frameworks, their approaches basically capture the same insights. Furthermore, they both embrace the idea that several dimensions of construal can be involved in the meaning of a single linguistic expression. What these two points suggest is that any classification of construal phenomena in a particular language is likely to be at least to some extent arbitrary, if only because linguistic units often participate in more than a single kind of construal.

Croft and Cruse (2004: 43–46) also indicate that a classification of construal phenomena is to some extent arbitrary or cannot be entirely motivated. For one thing, they observe that the classifications proposed by Langacker and Talmy share a number of features, but also that it is not obvious how the differences can be reconciled. Furthermore, they point out that from both classifications, some dimensions of construal (e.g., image schemas) are still missing and their integration into the proposed classifications is not immediately evident. Building on an earlier comparison of construal classifications (Croft and Wood 2000), Croft and Cruse (2004: 45) then state that the main categories in such a classification should correspond to psychological processes and capacities that have been established independently, by psychologists and phenomenologists. But this requirement had, of course, already motivated Langacker's and Talmy's classifications. Thus, it is no surprise that the classification proposed by Croft and Cruse overlaps with those by Langacker and

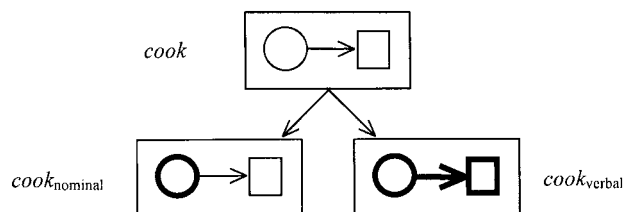


Figure 3.2. The word stem *cook* categorizing nominal and verbal construal

Talmy. Aside from some (smaller) reassignments of specific kinds of construal to other major categories, the main difference between Croft and Cruse's classification and those of Langacker and Talmy is that the former is more comprehensive than the latter ones. The main categories, according to Croft and Cruse, are:

- a. Attention/Salience
- b. Judgment/Comparison
- c. Perspective/Situatedness
- d. Constitution/Gestalt

Category (a), Attention/Salience, in general comprises the same types of construals as the ones subsumed under Talmy's Attention category (and Langacker's Prominence), but it also contains as subcategories certain construal phenomena that had the status of major categories in (some version of) Langacker's and Talmy's work; specifically, it includes Langacker's Abstraction and Talmy's Schematization ("scalar adjustments") and Langacker's Dynamicity. In addition, it contains the subcategory Scope (including referent accessibility; see Ariel 1990), a category which was not explicitly discussed by Langacker or Talmy.

The second category, Judgment/Comparison, contains the subcategories Categorization, Metaphor, and Figure/Ground. As such, we can observe that Figure/Ground has been reassigned from the category Attention/Prominence in Talmy's and Langacker's work. Furthermore, Categorization is not viewed as a Schematization phenomenon, as Talmy had it—despite the intimate connection between the two. Then again, the inclusion of Metaphor in the classification of construal phenomena makes this classification more comprehensive than previous ones.

The Perspective category is the one that is obviously most similar to that in the other proposals. The category Constitution/Gestalt, finally, overlaps with Talmy's (2000a) category Configurational Structure, but also includes Force Dynamics.

What conclusions can be drawn from this survey of classifications? First of all, although all classifications share the requirement that they should reflect general and well-established psychological abilities, they still turn out to be considerably different.

The proposal by Croft and Cruse, who formulate this requirement most emphatically, actually raises the same kind of questions as those that were raised by the other proposals; the assignment of particular construal operations under one rubric rather than another cannot always be clearly motivated (e.g., why, for instance,

Fictive Motion should be subsumed under Attention/Salience and not under Constitution/Gestalt?). The increase in coverage of construal operations in Croft and Cruse's classification in fact goes hand in hand with a further decrease of its transparency. It looks as if any new construal operation being discovered requires its own new category. Obviously, this does not mean that certain construal operations must therefore be excluded from the theory, but rather that construal operations may vary in so many different respects that attempts at an exhaustive classification necessarily have a considerable degree of arbitrariness. In fact, in his contribution to the present *Handbook*, Langacker states that his "classification of construal phenomena is . . . mostly for expository convenience" (chapter 17, note 22).

An additional reason for taking up this position is the fact that these taxonomies not only serve to classify the construal operations, but also the linguistic elements that express them. Now, what has not been taken into account in any of the classification schemes considered is the fact that the type of construal linguistic expressions reflect may gradually change. But precisely this observation casts considerable doubt on the feasibility of a psychologically realistic classification scheme. We can illustrate this with the phenomenon, well known from grammaticalization studies, that markers of perfectivity may change into markers of past tense. Such a change involves a transfer from the category of configurational construal operations (imposing boundedness on the conceived event) to the category of perspectival, deictic ones (marking the conceived event as preceding the communicative event). However, the meaning of a linguistic unit does not shift from one class of construal operations to another one overnight; semantic change is gradual. The diachronic development implies that for many speakers of a language for a long time (normally spanning several generations), these perfective expressions reflect both types of construal, in the sense that both types remain distinguishable for analysts. For the speakers themselves, however, it makes more sense to assume that they operate with a complex but unitary ("Gestalt-like") construal operation in which the effect on the structure of the event ('completed') is immediately associated with an effect on the relation of the event to the communicative situation ('past'). In other words, it is part of these speakers' knowledge of the conventions of their language that the unit involved conveys this complex construal. It is thus psychologically unrealistic to want to assign this particular construal operation to one category rather than another. For the speakers, it simply is a category in its own right, possibly sharing more or less prototypical characteristics of several other types of construal, some "configurational," some "perspectival." In fact, such conclusions soon appear inevitable on the basis of research into the details of the working of any particular kind of construal operation in actual usage (see Cornelis 1997 on construals effected by passive constructions).

Thus, it is precisely from a cognitive point of view that one should not expect that classifications of construal operations can be set up that are exhaustive and complete. From this perspective, it is therefore quite appropriate that the chapters to follow simply present the most important and well-studied types of construal operations successively.

The insight that a general classification scheme for construal operations is not feasible should not obscure the fact that the set of these operations definitely exhibits structure—it is not a list of totally unrelated notions. Some subsets of construal operations share more features with each other than with other ones, and as such the entire set of construal phenomena is amenable to a structure comprising some general rubrics under which they can be subsumed on the basis of their recurrent or shared features.

There is one such rubric that stands out as a more general dimension of construal than other ones, namely, perspective. In view of the differences between the different classification systems discussed above, it is striking that they show agreement about the relevance of a class of perspectival construal operations. Actually, this is hardly surprising since the concept of “construal” was introduced to capture aspects of conceptualization that cannot be adequately analyzed in terms of the object of conceptualization but require reference to a *subject’s* perception, choice, or point of view. Accordingly, I will assume that perspective is a central part of the entire range of possible construal relations, in fact a definitional aspect of prototypical instances of construal.

We may think of the general rubrics under which construal operations can be subsumed as establishing a kind of “conceptual space” for construal. A linguistic element conventionally conveying a specific kind of construal may in principle occupy any position in this space; elements sharing features can be thought of as close together, forming “clusters” in this space without necessarily belonging in preestablished, bounded regions. Starting from fundamental features of the notion “construal” itself, the remainder of this chapter will develop a general conceptual framework in terms of which construal operations may be characterized, as an alternative to different classification schemes discussed before. On the one hand, this framework will not provide a new exhaustive classification (nor is it intended as one); on the other hand, it will allow us to see that still more (especially grammatical) phenomena may crucially involve construal (especially perspectivization) than have already been considered so far.

4. A GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHARACTERIZING CONSTRUAL OPERATIONS

Langacker (1987: 487–88) defines the *construal relationship* as follows: “The relationship between a speaker (or hearer) and a situation that he conceptualizes and portrays, involving focal adjustments and imagery.” In this definition, the construal

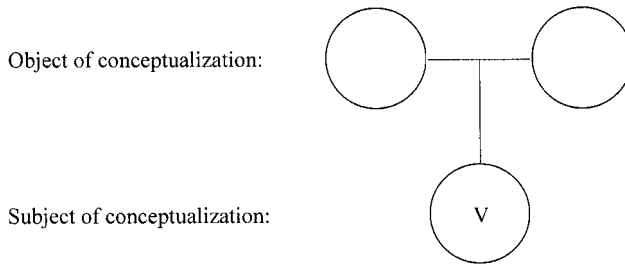


Figure 3.3. A viewing arrangement

relation basically involves an individual (speaker *or* hearer), on the one hand, and a conceived situation, on the other. Thus, it corresponds closely to Langacker's "viewing arrangement" (cf. Langacker 1987: 129; 1993: 454). Diagrammatically, this relationship can be represented as in figure 3.3.

This configuration, being two-dimensional, already embodies one very basic distinction between construal types. As was pointed out in section 2, some construals involve the imposition of *structure* on the object of conceptualization, while others consist in one conceptualization being understood *in relation to* another one, in particular the communicative situation. Different sorts of structure (attentional, force-dynamic, etc.) involve the higher, horizontal level of figure 3.3, while different sorts of relations to the communicative situation (deixis, viewpoint, etc.) concern the vertical relation.⁴

Langacker subsequently identifies the lower, horizontal level of figure 3.3 as the "ground" (Langacker 1987: 126; 1990b: 9), which he defines as the ensemble of the communicative event, its participants, and its immediate circumstances.⁵ Although in this definition, the ground includes participants—in plural—rather than a singular "viewer," no distinction is made between *different* speech act participants, and the graphic representations given still represent only a single "viewer" (or "subject" of conceptualization).⁶ Moreover, while the configuration, as depicted in figure 3.3, is amenable to providing a wide array of cognitive abilities with respect to various objects of conceptualization, it does not accommodate one highly human capacity, namely, to take into account *other minds* in relation to an object of conceptualization. Indeed, it is a characteristically human trait to be able to identify deeply with conspecifics. In characterizing biologically determined cognitive differences and similarities between young humans and other primates, Tomasello (1999: 14–15) writes:

There is just one major difference, and that is the fact that human beings 'identify' with conspecifics more deeply than do other primates. This identification is not something mysterious, but simply the process by which the human child understands that other persons are beings like herself . . . and so she sometimes tries to understand things from their point of view. . . . For purposes of exposition

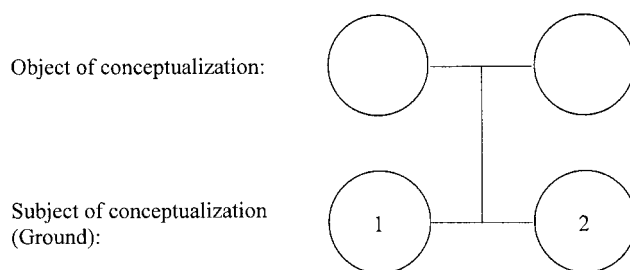


Figure 3.4. The construal configuration and its basic elements

I refer to this process generally as ‘understanding others as intentional (or mental) agents (like the self).’⁷

Language use, which is dependent on mutually shared knowledge of conventions, is crucially dependent on recognizing others like oneself. So, certainly with respect to linguistically coded conceptualizations, Langacker’s initial way of construing the construal relationship may be treated as a special case of a somewhat more complex configuration that incorporates the insight that language use comprises more than one subject of conceptualization.⁸ Consider figure 3.4.

The “ground” of any linguistic usage event consists of two conceptualizers—the “communicator” (conceptualizer 1 in figure 3.4), who takes responsibility for the utterance, and the “addressee” (conceptualizer 2 in figure 3.4), with whom the communicator enters into a coordination relation—and the knowledge that they mutually share, including models of each other and of the discourse situation. On this view, the ground is essentially “common ground” (see Clark 1996; also Sinha 1999 for further psychological and philosophical considerations motivating this view of “ground” and Verhagen 2005 for linguistic considerations). The point of a linguistic utterance is, generally speaking, that the first conceptualizer invites the second to jointly attend to an object of conceptualization in some specific way and to update the common ground by doing so; that is, both conceptualizers are involved in coordinating cognition by means of language, with one conceptualizer taking the initiative in each specific instance. This coordination relationship between the two conceptualizers is indicated by the lower horizontal line in figure 3.4, and the relation of joint attention between the conceptualizers and the object of conceptualization by the vertical line.

Figure 3.4 represents a conceptual space which can be organized in different ways and which is reflected in different linguistic expressions. Extreme cases at one end are those in which the meaning of the expression does not in any respect involve an element of the ground and which may thus be labeled maximally “objective.” Schematically, the first type of situation may be represented as in figure 3.5.

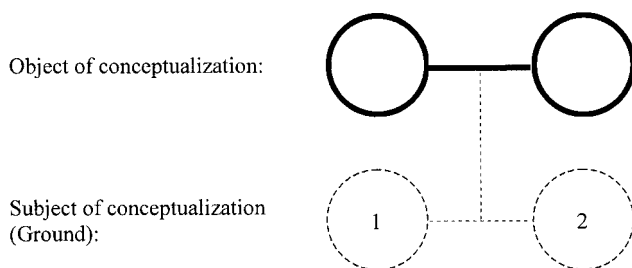


Figure 3.5. Construal configuration in maximally “objective” expressions

The use of dotted lines in figure 3.5 indicates that, although the ground may be said to figure in the interpretation of any utterance (in some “tenuous sense”; Langacker 1990b: 9), it is not signaled by the conventional meaning of “maximally objective” linguistic units. That is to say, these linguistic units wholly pertain to the level of the object of conceptualization, which is indicated by the use of bold lines: they “profile” aspects of the object of conceptualization, but none at the level of the subjects of conceptualization or of the relation between the two levels. Such “pure” cases are relatively rare, and artificial. One might think of “common nouns and verbs considered in isolation (for example *lamp*, *tree*, . . .)” (Langacker 1990b: 9) or a label like “bathroom” on a door (Theo Janssen, p.c.). Even a noun phrase such as *the horse* or a simple tensed sentence (*John owns a horse*) are not purely objective in this sense, as the identity of the referent or the time of the described event are accessed via the communicative situation (which is why the article and the tense marking are called “grounding predications”). Note also that, even though in specific utterances, a single common or proper noun may be used to attract an interlocutor’s attention (*Wolves!*) or to invite him/her to respond in a particular way (*John?*), this occurrence of cognitive coordination is not due to the meaning of the nouns, so the ground is not said to be profiled by these elements.

The construal configuration, as represented in figure 3.4, may be used to indicate differences between linguistic units in the same language, but also between seemingly similar elements in different languages or at different historical stages of a language (with one element conventionally marking only certain elements of the construal configuration, and the other some other, or more, elements). This is the way this representation will be used in the remainder of this chapter. The extreme case at the other end involves the mirror image of the situations depicted in figure 3.5, that is, expressions in which only elements of the ground and/or the relationship between them are profiled, and no aspect of an object of conceptualization is marked linguistically. This is represented in figure 3.6.

Examples of such purely subjective utterances are interjections, as in greetings (*Hi*), apologies (*Sorry*), or calls for attention (*Hey*). Even more simple configurations

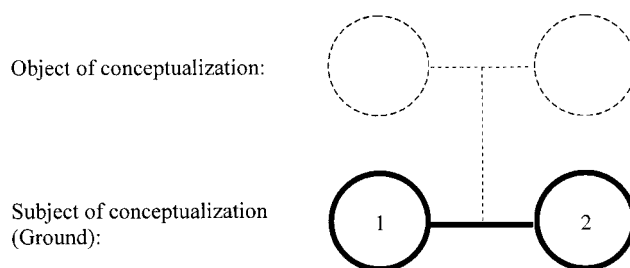


Figure 3.6. Construal configuration in highly “subjective” expressions

may be possible in which only one element is really profiled, as in noninteractional signs of disgust or frustration (*Yuck, Damn*). In actual usage, however, these subjective utterances also involve aspects of language users’ experience that function as objects of conceptualization (such as what triggered the apology or the bad taste of some piece of food), but these objective elements are not indicated by the conventional meanings of these elements, which only express a subjective reaction or organize the relationship between speaker and addressee.

The fact that maximally objective and maximally subjective expressions constitute only restricted kinds of language use demonstrates, in fact, that the normal situation is for linguistic expressions to construe some specified features of an object of conceptualization in relation to one or more facets of the ground. Labeling objects and producing interjections constitute the opposite extremes on a continuum from maximally objective to maximally subjective expressions, and thus the exceptions; expressions in the “middle part” of this continuum are the rule.

It will be recalled that many of the construal operations presented in sections 2 and 3 reflect cognitive abilities relating only to the *object* level of conceptualization. Still, the fact that the classifications of construal operations were in agreement on the importance of a class of perspectival construal phenomena suggests that the structure of the basic construal configuration cannot be complete without a *subject* level of conceptualization. Indeed, expressions evoking perspectival phenomena make explicit reference to the subject level of this configuration, and/or its relation to the object level, while other expressions of construal do not refer to the ground (although, of course, the decision to *use*, or to refrain from using, any expression, normally involves the ground as it is made by speakers on the basis of an assessment of their interlocutors and the rest of the communicative situation). I have furthermore suggested that the basic construal configuration should be seen as involving a relation of intersubjective coordination, reflecting the typically human cognitive ability to identify with conspecifics and thus to conceive of things from other points of view. I will now develop the latter point further, showing that it not only covers traditionally recognized perspectival construals, but may also extend to other construals in a natural way.

5. PERSPECTIVIZATION

5.1. General Grounding

We have seen that a particular spatial configuration of two entities *X* and *Y* can be encoded as *X is below Y* and as *Y is above X*, and therefore that the semantics of these expressions necessarily involves an element of construal, in this case Figure/Ground organization. Another dimension of construal is involved in similar uses of these expressions, as exemplified in (3) and (4):

- (3) The ballroom is below.
- (4) Write to the address above for full details.

In each of these cases, the landmark with respect to which the trajector is located is part of the ground of the utterance. The position of the ballroom in (3) is calculated from the common position of the speech participants or the position of the addressee (for example, when (3) is uttered as an instruction over the telephone). Likewise, if (4) is a sentence in a particular document currently relevant for the speech participants (i.e., part of the common ground), then the location of the address is calculated from the position of sentence (4) in this document. So, in each of these cases, we have a situation, unlike the ones discussed so far, in which a relation between the ground and the object of conceptualization actually *is* profiled in the interpretation of the expressions. This is indicated in figure 3.7 by the bold vertical line representing the construal relation.

Profiling a relationship with the ground is obviously not a necessary condition for the use of such lexical items as *below* and *above*, but it is a necessary condition in constructions where the landmark is not represented linguistically. In particular, spatial expressions indicating the position of specific text portions relative to the currently relevant one, as illustrated by (4) and similar sentences such as *Further instructions are below*, may be considered a conventional pattern. Thus, it has become a convention of English that the items *below* and *above* allow for such a perspectivized construal, and it is this construal which distinguishes them from other items such as *beside*, which does not participate in a construction of the type *X be beside* to indicate a position to the side of some element of the ground. Note also that there do not seem to be specific restrictions on the interpretation of an entity's location relative to the ground, as long as it is computable from the context in which the utterance is interpreted.

Another example in English of an expression whose landmark *may* be construed as an element of the ground is *across*, as is illustrated in (5) and (6).

- (5) Vanessa is sitting across the table.
- (6) Vanessa is sitting across the table from Veronica.

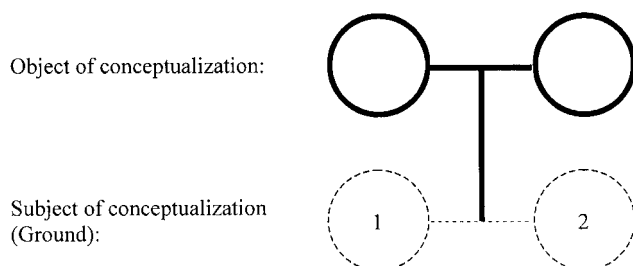


Figure 3.7. Construal configuration in (minimally) “perspectivized” expressions

In (5), the position with respect to which Vanessa is being located is an element of the ground (the speaker), while it is an element of the object of conceptualization in (6). Possibly, there is a difference in degree of conventionality between examples (3) and (4) and examples (5) and (6): the usage of *below* and *above* in (3) and (4) represents a special subtype of their “normal” use, whereas, in (5) and (6), it is the subjective construal of *across* in (5) that can be considered prototypical, and the “objectified” use in (6) a special subtype. For relative spatial indications such as *to the left/right*, construal with respect to the ground is always possible, even when an explicit reference point is mentioned. In (7), Vanessa may obviously be sitting at Veronica’s right-hand side, but the relative order of Veronica and Vanessa may also be “left-to-right” from a conceptualizer’s point of view (even though Vanessa might be at Veronica’s left-hand side from Veronica’s point of view, e.g., when they are facing the conceptualizer).

(7) Vanessa is sitting to the right of Veronica.

From the foregoing examples, it appears, then, that there are differences in the degree of conventionality with which a construal configuration such as in figure 3.7 may be associated with a specific linguistic form. There are also linguistic items that *always* comprise a construal with respect to the ground as part of their semantic characterization. The referent of *yesterday*, for example, can never be determined without using knowledge about the time of the ground. With linguistic items of this kind, we enter the realm of what is traditionally called “deictic” elements (see Brisard 2002, for explorations of deixis from a cognitive point of view). When viewing deixis as a type of construal, however, one no longer restricts it to something limited to and determined by a specific class of linguistic items (so-called “deictic” morphemes). As we have seen, construal with respect to an element of the ground is something that can be associated with different elements to different degrees of conventionality. Of course, one may want to identify the class of elements in a language whose meanings *necessarily* invoke elements of the ground as deictic, but that should not imply that deixis does not occur elsewhere.

Other examples of elements whose meaning requires calculation with respect to *some* element of the ground, that is, as deictic in a broad sense, are the verbs *come* and *go* and the simple past tense (in English and several other languages). A particular situation can be described both as *Santa Claus came in* and as *Santa Claus went in*;

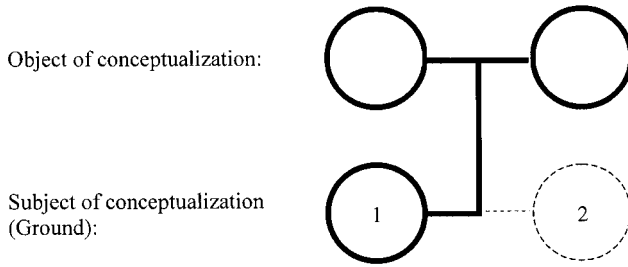


Figure 3.8. “First-person deixis” construal configuration

the different lexicalizations reflect different construals with respect to a “point of view” identifiable for the conceptualizers (*come* involves a point of view inside the space entered by Santa Claus; *went* a point of view outside that space). The choice of this point of view is not further constrained; it may be the speaker’s or the hearer’s, but also that of some participant whose point of view has been introduced explicitly into the discourse (see below, at the end of section 6.2). Slightly differently, the past tense locates an event outside the ground, thus outside the scope of the immediate experiences of the conceptualizers in the ground, without differentiating between them (see Boogaart and Janssen, this volume, chapter 31, for further discussion).

5.2. Specific Grounding

In addition to the deictic elements indicating a general type of grounding, there are other deictic elements that indicate a different, more specific kind of construal. Consider figure 3.8.

This configuration characterizes instances of what may be called first-person deixis and is present in expressions such as *here*, *now*, and *this/these*. For example, while the expression *yesterday* does invoke the ground, it does not *profile* a temporal point of the ground, and it does not invoke a specific conceptualizer as distinct from another. The expression *now*, on the other hand, does profile a time overlapping with that of the ground (i.e., the time envisaged by conceptualizer 1 as the time of communication—not necessarily the moment at which the utterance is physically produced).

Counterparts of first-person deixis expressions are *there*, *then*, and *that/those*. The latter are usually characterized as “distal,” while the former are called “proximate.” The terms “proximate” and “distal” suggest that these sets of expressions express different distances between the conceptualizer and the object of conceptualization. However, as Janssen (2002, 2004) has argued, the terms actually have more to do with the construal relationship between conceptualizer and object of conceptualization than with the distance between them. For instance, when a physician investigating a sore spot on a patient utters *Is this where it hurts?* and the patient responds with *Yes, that is where it hurts*, the difference between *this* and *that*, and especially the patient’s

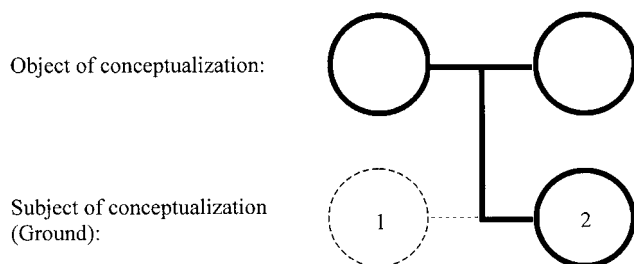


Figure 3.9. “Second-person deixis” construal configuration

use of *that*, cannot be adequately characterized in terms of (non)proximity, since the spot referred to is on the patient’s body. Rather, what the patient does is to indicate that the spot referred to is *not* as much in his/her focus of attention as it is in somebody else’s, in this case, the physician’s (Janssen 2002: 172–73). In this respect, Janssen quotes a suggestion from C. Lyons to the effect that the difference between *this* and *that* can be related to the category of person; indeed, in the situation described, a proper paraphrase of the meaning of *that* would be ‘the spot *you* are focusing on’, so that it would involve a construal configuration as indicated in figure 3.9.

However, although figure 3.9 represents the natural construal configuration for expressions such as *that*, *there*, and *then* in many contexts, it is not applicable to *all* of their uses. In other contexts these expressions can also profile entities, moments, and locations which have neither the speaker’s *nor* the addressee’s immediate attention. Thus, the general rule here is that linguistic items expressing this construal are defined *negatively* with respect to the ground, specifically conceptualizer 1.

Similarly, so-called third-person personal pronouns (*he*, *she*, *they*, and their oblique and possessive counterparts) are defined negatively with respect to the ground and specifically with respect to both conceptualizers 1 and 2. Still, the identification of their referents has to take place via the ground; they are still objects of shared attention (as first and second persons are by participating in the communicative situation), either established ostensively or as prominent discourse referents (see van Hoek 2003).⁹

6. COORDINATION OF PERSPECTIVES

6.1. Implicit Multiple Perspectives

I have characterized the horizontal line between the conceptualizers in the basic construal configuration of figure 3.4 as representing a process of coordinating cognition. This coordination relation does not play a role in the perspectivized construals discussed so far, but it is crucial in an important class of linguistic

expressions, namely, sentential negation and related expressions. Consider, for instance, (8) and (9), each of which is a possible description of a person feeling sad.

- (8) Mary is not happy.
- (9) Mary is unhappy.

Both expressions may be said to invoke the notion of happiness serving as the Ground for the characterization of Mary's actual state of mind (the Figure). In this dimension of construal, (8) and (9) do not differ, so the difference must involve yet another type of construal. The relevant dimension here is defined by the specific human ability to entertain other points of view in the same way as one's own, which we explicitly incorporated into the construal configuration by distinguishing two subjects of conceptualization (the bottom part of figure 3.4). In particular, it is the coordination relation between the conceptualizers that appears to be crucially involved in distinguishing (8) from (9). It is only sentence (8) that profiles *two* distinct views with respect to the proposition *Mary is happy* (or two "mental spaces" in the sense of Fauconnier 1985; see also Fauconnier, this volume, chapter 14), that is, only (8) involves two conceptualizers with an opposite epistemic stance toward this proposition (conceptualizer 1 rejects the positive epistemic stance of conceptualizer 2).¹⁰ This can be observed from the behavior of the phrase *on the contrary* (Verhagen 2005: 31–32):

- (10) Mary is not happy. On the contrary, she is feeling really depressed.
- (11) #Mary is unhappy. On the contrary, she is feeling really depressed.

The use of the negation *not* in (10) evokes a second mental space: it profiles the contrast between the stance toward 'Mary being happy' in some other mental space and the speaker's (the so-called "base" space of conceptualizer 1). It is this evoked second mental space to which the discourse marker *on the contrary* can relate: Mary's being depressed is contrary to the idea of her being happy, not to her not being happy (which is what conceptualizer 1 has just asserted). Morphological negation with *un-* lacks this power to evoke a second mental space contrasting with the base space, and this is what makes (11) incoherent. Sentential negation thus yields a typical and quite general case of the construal configuration depicted in figure 3.10.

What the negative morpheme *not* itself profiles is just the relation between the perspectives of the two conceptualizers, namely, a relationship of opposition, such that the view of the conceptualizer 2 should be replaced by that of conceptualizer 1. However, it is part of the conventional use of *not* that an object of conceptualization has to be specified (so that it may actually more adequately be regarded as a construction, unlike the negative element *No*, which precisely *cannot* be applied to linguistic material profiling an object of conceptualization). This is why the construal configuration for sentential negation is represented as in figure 3.10 rather than as in figure 3.6. Furthermore, other construal phenomena may be operative with respect to the object of conceptualization as represented in the utterance, determining, for example, Figure/Ground-alignments, temporal deixis, and so on.

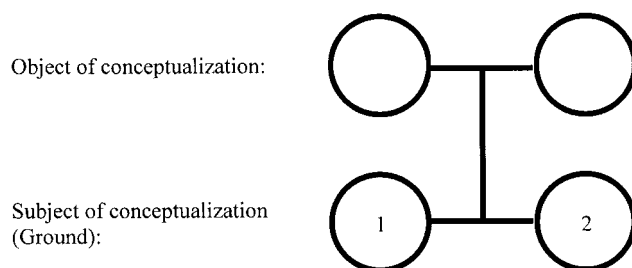


Figure 3.10. Construal configuration for coordination of perspectives

So while any linguistic usage event involves two conceptualizers as part of its ground, sentential negation (as well as a phrase such as *on the contrary* in English) actually *profiles* two viewpoints being brought into coordination *in* the linguistic material. In the language of adult speakers, and in particular in fairly complex discourse, the point of view being rejected does not have to be the *actual* addressee's, and not even a specific person's, but even when it is not precisely "anchored" in the actual communicative situation, it remains a profiled mental space in which a different epistemic stance toward the proposition is entertained than in the space of conceptualizer 1. Another type of construction to which the same general characterization applies is that of concessive connectives (see Verhagen 2000; 2005: chapter 4).

Viewing sentential negation as a case of construal—profiling the coordination relation between two epistemically distinct conceptualizers with respect to the same object of conceptualization—has the advantage of allowing for a natural extension to other elements that behave conceptually and linguistically like negation, even though they may differ from negation in terms of truth conditions. For example, the expressions *few linguists* and *a few linguists* may refer to sets of exactly the same size (whether absolute or relative), but only the former construes the relationship between the two conceptualizers with respect to the object of conceptualization as one of opposition. It exhibits the grammatical behavior of negation (witness contrasts in the context of polarity items, e.g., *any*: *Few linguists have any idea about evolutionary theory* vs. **A few linguists have any idea about evolutionary theory*). The same holds for its discourse behavior, witness the naturalness of the exchange in A–B in (12) in contrast with the exchange in (13), in which A–B is not natural, but A–B' is.

- (12) A: Few linguists still believe in transformations.
 B: So you think they won't be around much longer?
 B': #So you think they'll still be around for some time?
- (13) A: A few linguists still believe in transformations.
 B: #So you think they won't be around much longer?
 B': So you think they'll still be around for some time?

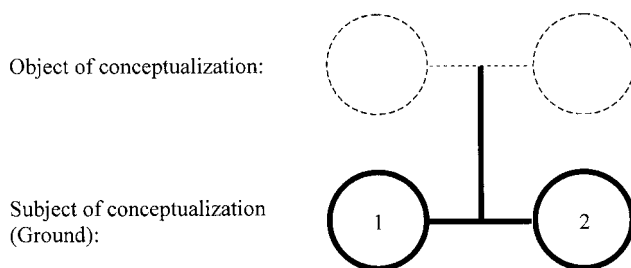


Figure 3.11. Construal configuration for epistemic interpretation

This parallelism between grammatical and discourse properties clearly demonstrates that what is profiled by sentential negation, as well as other “negative” elements, is a relation of epistemic opposition between two conceptualizers, conceptualizer 1 rejecting the cognitive state of conceptualizer 2 in the process of representing it (for further elaboration and discussion, see Verhagen 2005: chapter 2). It should be noted, though, that this brief discussion can hardly scratch the surface of the complexities involved in negation and polarity, especially in relation to the scalar inferences invited by many expressions in natural languages (see Israel 1998, and especially various studies by Horn, of which Horn 1996 is illustrative).

Yet another subtype of expressions that instantiate this type of construal are modal verbs and adverbs, as exemplified in (14) and (15).

- (14) Some theoreticians may deny the relevance of these results.
- (15) Frankly, some theoreticians deny the relevance of these results.

In a sentence like *Someone with such a track record may say things like this*, the modal auxiliary *may* designates a relationship of permission in the *object* of conceptualization (‘being allowed’, the so-called deontic reading).¹¹ But the natural interpretation of *may* in (14) is that it designates a relationship in the *ground*; it evokes the views that some theoreticians deny the relevance of the results and that some do not, and profiles conceptualizer 1 as the ground element endorsing that the former possibility is the one to be reckoned with. It appears, then, that epistemic construal shares properties with sentential negation in profiling parts of the ground but differs from sentential negation in that, besides evoking two conceptualizers with distinct epistemic stances, it also makes a *definite* claim about the object of conceptualization. Although epistemic *may*, as in (14), operates on an object of conceptualization, it does not, in this sense, designate an element of the object of conceptualization, but *only* of the ground; its construal is of the type depicted in figure 3.11.¹²

Similarly, the adverb *frankly* in (15) does not designate the presence of frankness in one of the participants in the conceptualized event. Rather, it profiles both the present speaker’s frankness in saying this, as well as an attempt to acknowledge the fact that the addressee may not like the implications.¹³ The reading in which *frankly* profiles an aspect of the object of conceptualization rather than the ground

is more natural with another word order and intonation contour (*Some theoreticians frankly deny the relevance of these results*). The fact that in front position *frankly* takes elements of the ground (the utterance itself and how it may be taken by the addressee) as its base and not the object of conceptualization implies that the construal relation itself is in this case even less profiled than in the case of epistemic *may*, so that this *frankly*-sentence exemplifies the highly subjective construal configuration of figure 3.6 rather than that of figure 3.11. Yet, the highly subjective nature of a construal is certainly a matter of degree, as the use of *frankly* still imposes a constraint on the nature of the object of conceptualization: it must be some piece of discourse.

Some elements in a language may allow objective as well as epistemic, and “speech act” construals. This has been proposed, for example, for some causal connectives (e.g., *because* in English) by Sweetser (1990). Consider the following examples.

- (16) John typed her thesis because he really loves her.
- (17) John really loves her, because he typed her thesis.
- (18) What are you doing tonight? Because there’s a good movie on.

In (16), *because* profiles a causal relationship as part of the object of conceptualization; in (17), it construes an element of the object of conceptualization (the fact that John typed her thesis) as an argument for the addressee to accept the conclusion that John’s love for her must also be part of the object of conceptualization (an epistemic construal of the type depicted in figure 3.11); and in (18), it justifies an element of the ground itself, namely, the speech act of asking.

What we have seen, then, is that these are all linguistic expressions—just like the spatial markers *below* and *across*—that as such allow both relatively objective and relatively subjective construals. The actual type of construal varies depending on several contextual features (for an illuminating discussion of such factors in the case of modals, see Heine 1995). Whether there are *constraints* on the types of construal allowed for specific linguistic items is a matter of (historically developed) convention. As Sweetser noted, there are languages in which an objective or an epistemic construal of a causal relationship requires distinct causal connectives; the fact that *because* can be used in these different, historically developed ways, is thus a convention of modern English. We will briefly return to this issue in section 7, on subjectification.

6.2. Explicit Multiple Perspectives

The use of modal auxiliaries and adverbs as in (14) and (15) is sometimes called “speaker-oriented” and paraphrased by means of complement constructions with a first-person subject in the matrix clause (e.g., *I consider it possible that . . . , I frankly say to you that . . .*). This raises the issue what aspects of the construal configuration are profiled by such complement constructions themselves. Until fairly recently, it was usually (explicitly or implicitly) assumed that complement clauses are subor-

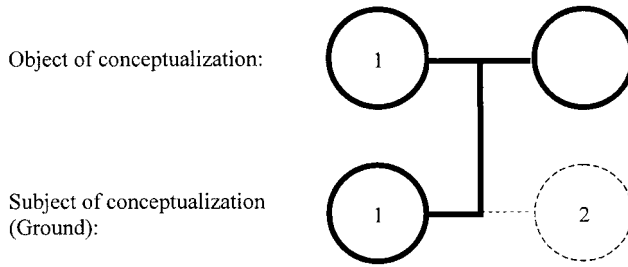


Figure 3.8'. Construal configuration with "first person" as object of conceptualization

dinate structures, occupying an argument position of the predicate in the "main" clause and are thus subordinate (e.g., Jespersen 1933; Noonan 1985, among many others). In cognitive linguistic work, this view has also been the starting point of a number of analyses; for example, Langacker (1991: 436) states: "Complement clauses are prototypical instances of subordination; . . . *I know she left* designates the process of knowing, not of leaving." As the example demonstrates, such a view suggests that the main clause of a complement construction (also when it involves an element of the ground) describes an event in the same way as a simple clause does, that is, as an object of conceptualization. Recent research, however, suggests that in many important cases this is actually a misconception. Studying child language acquisition, Diessel and Tomasello (2001) have shown that, apparently, children's first complement constructions contain "complement-taking predicates" of the type *I think* and *you know*, which function "as an epistemic marker, attention getter, or marker of illocutionary force," and that the whole complex utterance "contains only a single proposition expressed by the apparent complement clause" (97). Thus, the complement-taking predicates do *not* contribute to profiling an object of conceptualization; rather, they instantiate the construal configuration of figure 3.11, only profiling (parts of) the ground. It is only at later stages that children start saying things like *I thought* and *She knows*, in which someone's thinking or knowing may be construed as an object of conceptualization (see figures 3.5 and 3.7) and the complement-taking predications as "main clauses" to which the "complement" is "subordinated."¹⁴ Once this ability has developed, it also becomes possible for a conceptualizer, in uttering *I think*, to construe his own thinking as an object of conceptualization for specific purposes, as in *I think he will arrive on time, but I am not sure/but John is skeptical* (especially with *I* or *think* stressed in the first conjunct). While the use of *I think* as an epistemic marker constitutes an instance of figure 3.11, its construal as an object of conceptualization is a special case of figure 3.8. It is a case of first-person deixis (belonging to the same family as *now*, *here*, and *this*), but with conceptualizer 1 as an element of the object of conceptualization in the construal configuration. It may thus be called an instance of "objectification,"¹⁵ whereby the primary subject of conceptualization is construed as part of its own object of conceptualization; see figure 3.8'.

However, such a “detached” view of one’s own cognitive state cannot be considered a very normal use for these constructions. In fact, the analysis by Diessel and Tomasello entails that even after the development of the ability to construe the content of a complement-taking predicate as a possible object of conceptualization, phrases such as *I think*, *I/You see* simply continue to be used as markers of epistemic stance, attention-getting, or illocutionary force. This is strongly corroborated, at least for conversational interaction, in a study by Thompson (2002), showing that participants in conversation organize important aspects of their interaction, and of their (common) personal relationships with the things being talked about, by means of such complement-taking predicates, and that this organizational role in fact exhausts the function of these fragments of discourse. The analysis by Thompson actually provides the basis for an explanation of the correlation noted by Diessel and Tomasello (2001: 136) between the first complement-taking predicates in children’s utterances and their frequency in the ambient language produced by their parents and caretakers.

Such results, then, show that not only lexical items but also grammatical constructions—including complementation constructions, which are generally considered a core part of syntax—may exhibit variation that can be captured in terms of the general construal configuration, with a crucial role for its subjective part, the ground. This conclusion need not really be surprising for a framework recognizing a continuum between lexicon and grammar and adopting an essentially cognitive view of linguistic semantics, but it still had to be demonstrated.

One specific use of these grammatical constructions is that they may assign an object of conceptualization to a conceptualizer in a particular way. While sentential negation and modal verbs and adverbs implicitly evoke another mental space besides that of conceptualizer 1, complement constructions may to some extent put another mental space “on stage” (but cf. note 13).¹⁶ When they do, they provide the conceptualization of the ground entering into a construal relationship with the content of the subordinated clause; in that case, these complement constructions are not directly interpreted as construed by the *actual* producer of the discourse, but by the *represented* subject of conceptualization. Consider a simple case such as (19).

(19) The president is afraid that he might not be re-elected.

The actual speaker of (19) may have a certain knowledge about the president’s re-election (for example, when the speaker is in charge of the election process and has just completed the count of the votes). The use of *might* relates to the epistemic stance of the president. The alternative mental space evoked by *might*—and the same would go for the negation *not*—are construed with respect to the latter stance and not the epistemic stance of the actual producer of the utterance.

Note that different elements behave differently in such constructions. For example, the first-person pronoun in a complement clause always designates the person responsible for the whole utterance (*The president was afraid that I might fail*), while the “proximate” demonstrative *this* is ambiguous. (In *The president was afraid that he might fail at this point*, *this* either refers to the point that is in ‘his’

focal attention or that is in ‘mine’—the former reading in effect boils down to construing a “free indirect speech” representation.) Shifting of the deictic center occurs not only in the context of complement constructions, although this constitutes the prime grammaticalized instrument for a deictic shift. In principle, any explicit introduction of another person’s state of mind in a discourse may produce such a shift, as illustrated by (20).

- (20) I looked through the window and saw that the children were very nervous. In few minutes, Santa Claus would come in.

The question what constitutes the ground with respect to the elements *few* and *come* should be directly construed, and how this relates to the ground of the producer of the entire discourse may involve considerable complexities (see Sanders 1994). But whatever the details, the very fact that such differential construals are generally possible is a major motivation for characterizing the construal configuration in terms of the slightly abstract roles of “conceptualizers” (e.g., conceptualizers 1 and 2, with the first being interpreted as taking the initiative), rather than in terms of the concrete roles of actual speaker and hearer (see Talmy 2000b: 337). The actual speaker of (20) does not have to be taken as expressing any personal uncertainty or anxiety concerning Santa Claus’s arrival (imagine that *I* refers to the person playing the role of Santa Claus), but *few* still evokes the subjective stance and *come* the deictic origin of the conceptualizer responsible for the thought of Santa’s entering, that is, the children.

7. SUBJECTIFICATION

So far we have used the different profiling patterns in the basic construal configuration of figure 3.4 as ways of capturing recurring features in the meaning and use of several kinds of expressions. It has already been hinted at (in the beginning of section 4 and in section 6.2) that relationships between different profiling patterns can also be conceived of as the outcome of dynamic processes. In the course of children’s language development, for example, complement-taking predicates start out as purely epistemic markers and later acquire the potential of designating an object of conceptualization. Such a process may appropriately be characterized as one of objectification: initially, an expression does not profile any element of an object of conceptualization, but in the end it does.

The reverse process is that of subjectification. In its pure form, subjectification may involve an expression initially profiling no part of the ground or not profiling the construal relationship and then acquiring the potential of profiling, in one or more respects, the construal relationship and/or parts of the ground (a possible example is the shift from marking perfectivity to marking past tense as discussed

at the end of section 3). But it may also consist in an *increase* of the role of the construal relation or the ground in the profile of an expression, or (what ultimately may be part of the same process) a *decrease* of the role of the object of conceptualization.

The phenomenon of subjectification is a highly regular and characteristic feature of many processes of language change, as demonstrated in a considerable body of work by Traugott (e.g., Traugott 1989, 1995, and especially the comprehensive Traugott and Dasher 2002). Traugott defines subjectification as a pragmatic-semantic process whereby “meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude toward the proposition” (Traugott 1989: 35; 1995: 31). Notice two features of this definition: subjectification refers to a *historical process* producing a change, and it is semasiological, that is, it is concerned with linguistic symbols (or assemblies of symbols) and with what they mean. Thus, the development of English *will*, from expressing a desire or intention on the part of the referent of its grammatical subject to expressing a prediction by the speaker of the utterance, is a clear case of subjectification under this definition.

It should be noted, in order to avoid confusion, that the term “subjectification” is used here in a way that is different from, albeit related to, the one proposed by Langacker (1990b: 17). For Langacker “subjectivity” and “subjectification” refer not to expressions, but primarily to the way an element of a conceptualization is perspectively construed, namely, objectively or subjectively (cf. Langacker 1999: 150). For example, the difference between *Vanessa is sitting across the table from me* and *Vanessa is sitting across the table* according to Langacker is that the same content (the speaker as the landmark of the *across*-relation) is “objectively construed” in the former because it is put on stage by the expression *me* (similarly to another nominal expression (see 5 above), whereas it is “subjectively construed” in the latter because it remains offstage as the implicit locus of conception (see (6) above). Accordingly, Langacker uses the term “subjectification” to refer to an increase in subjectivity in this sense, namely, the increased construal of some notion as functioning implicitly in the ground rather than on stage, in the conceived situation; subjectification is “the realignment of some relationship from the objective axis to the subjective axis” (Langacker 1990b: 17), where “subjective axis” refers to the construal relationship.

Although Langacker’s and Traugott’s notions of subjectification are related, each is clearly useful in its own domain, the former primarily in the area of semantic analysis, the latter in that of semantic change. There has been some discussion of the precise relation between Langacker’s and Traugott’s notions (see several contributions in Stein and Wright 1995; Langacker 1999: 149–50; Traugott and Dasher 2002: 97–98). Still, it seems that when restricted to phenomena of semasiological change—which Langacker evidently wants to include under his rubric of subjectification—at least the extensions of the two notions coincide: whenever a new meaning is more based in the speaker’s belief state/attitude than the old one, some realignment from the objective to the subjective axis has apparently taken place. In this section, I am concerned with a certain kind of shift in the

meanings of linguistic items, which is why my use of the term here is basically the same as its use in studies of semantic change.

Diachronic subjectification exhibits “unidirectionality”: the meaning of a linguistic expression (in a semasiological perspective) is much more likely to develop from relatively objective to more subjective than the other way around. Thus, one repeatedly finds a verb of desire and/or intention developing into a marker of future (e.g., English *will*), but seldom a future marker developing into a verb denoting intention. Temporal connectives regularly develop adversative meanings (e.g., English *while*, as in *Mary likes oysters while Bill hates them*), but adversative connectives seldom, if ever, develop into temporal ones (see Bybee, this volume, chapter 36). What is it that makes subjectification largely unidirectional? The answer to that question must lie in the actual processes that produce the changes. For several cases, Traugott has shown that the relevant cognitive and communicative mechanisms involve inferences that are first “only” pragmatic, that is, related to specific instances of use in a particular context, and then become associated with the linguistic expression as such, in other words, “conventionalized.” For example, when the actual relevance of mentioning the co-temporality of two events by means of *while* lies in its unexpectedness and hearers/readers assume that it is this unexpectedness that the speaker/writer intended, the association between *while* and unexpectedness may be reinforced to the extent that it becomes conventionalized (i.e., the marker of co-temporality can be used to mark unexpectedness without the hearer having to compute the answer to the question ‘Why is the speaker marking co-temporality here?’), even to the extent that co-temporality may become unnecessary. The process of the conventionalization of pragmatic inferences explains unidirectionality in that even if the original conventional meaning of an expression at some point in time does not profile a feature of the ground, the communicative acts in which it is used will always comprise participants making inferences—hearers constructing interpretations of what the speakers intended and speakers anticipating those interpretations—so that there are always (more) subjective elements in actual interpretations that may end up getting conventionalized.

The general unidirectionality of subjectification points to a fundamental asymmetry in the construal configuration. The actual *use* of any linguistic utterance always entails that one conceptualizer is trying to influence another one’s cognition in a particular way by means of that specific utterance so that some (further) inferences from the object of conceptualization to the ground are always relevant.¹⁷ But knowing what kind of coordination relationship is at stake in a specific communicative event does not as such license inferences concerning the object of conceptualization. Any expression, even if it does not profile the construal relationship or the ground, *evokes* the basic construal relation of figure 3.4 in a particular way when it is actually used, and the recurrence of such features may gain prominence and become conventional. In this essentially usage-based perspective, all linguistic utterances display subjectivity of some sort, and subjectification may consist in the gradual diminishing of the “weight” of objective features of conventional meaning in favor of subjective ones. For example, consider the difference between (21) and

(22), containing instances of the objective and of the subjectified (epistemic) use of the speech act verb *promise*, respectively.

(21) John promised to be back in time.

(22) The debate promised to be interesting.

It is not the case that only (22) conveys a positive anticipation by the speaker. This is just as much true for (21); witness the kind of inferences (21) licenses with respect to the ground: it counts as a positive answer to the question ‘Do you think that John will be back in time?’, and it would not be felicitous in a context in which the person asking that question obviously does *not* desire John’s timely return. Furthermore, there are also in-between cases such as (23) and (24).

(23) The newspaper promised to publish the results.

(24) The new strategy promised to produce interesting results.

These examples differ from each other and from (21) and (22), not so much in the dimension “subjective, positive anticipation” (which they all share), but in the degree to which a promise is considered to be (also) a part of the object of conceptualization. It is easier for the newspaper in (23) than for the strategy in (24) to be construed as metonymically or metaphorically related to human beings who are conceptualized as committing themselves to something, and this is totally impossible for the debate in (22). Thus, it actually seems better to characterize the cline from (21), via (23) and (24), to (22) in terms of decreasing objectivity than in terms of increasing subjectivity (see Langacker 1999 and Verhagen 1995 for further discussion, including syntactic correlates of the semantic differences).¹⁸ In any case, the differences and changes can all be construed as “shifts” in the degree of profiling of elements and relations in the basic construal configuration.

At the same time, this analysis once more demonstrates that it is crucial to distinguish between the conventional forms of construal made available by the resources of a language, and the construal conveyed in a particular instance of use. In the domain of perspectivization discussed in this section, the phenomenon of semantic change precisely consists in usage becoming conventionalized, which therefore presupposes the distinction.

8. CONCLUSION

Construal operations are central to language and cognition. They involve cognitive abilities of humans with clear linguistic reflexes, but there seems to be no way to organize them all in terms of an exhaustive classification system. Although the basic construal configuration presented in this chapter is not a comprehensive classification system, it incorporates the typically human ability to identify deeply

with conspecifics and provides a unifying conceptual framework in terms of which many semantic phenomena involving different kinds of “perspective” and “subjectivity” can be captured. The dimensions and elements of the configuration may be considered general and universal, but the actual distinctions drawn in this conceptual space differ from one language to another and are variable over time, in individual development as well as historically (in communities). The general unidirectionality of historical processes of subjectification can be taken as indicative of the basic asymmetry between subject and object of conceptualization.

NOTES

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1. In his 1993 paper, Langacker arranged (“[if] only for expository purposes,” 448) construal into the following five general dimensions: specificity, scope, prominence, background, and perspective.
2. It has been suggested (Croft and Cruse 2004: chapter 3) that in his recent work, Talmy dropped Force Dynamics as a separate construal category. Still, although Force Dynamics it is not treated separately in chapter 1 of Talmy (2000a), it is clear from the structure of the book that Talmy intended to maintain it (see also Talmy 2000a: 41).
3. While Talmy proposes Domain as a schematic category perpendicular to his four types of “schematic systems,” Croft and Cruse (2004: chapter 3) rather suggest that Domain is an additional system. Talmy (2000a: 47) mentions one additional member of the category Domain, namely, “identificational space,” to accommodate such differences as those between *you* and *they* in their indefinite uses (the former indicating identification with the speaker, the second nonidentification).
4. The object of conceptualization is represented as having at least some complexity (there are two elements, connected in one way or another) precisely because of the structural construal normally imposed on it.
5. Langacker’s term “ground” is not to be confused with the term “Ground” in “Figure/Ground alignment.”
6. In later work in Cognitive Grammar (e.g., Langacker 1999, van Hoek 2003), one does sometimes find representations in which the roles of S(peaker) and H(earer) are distinguished.
7. For a more recent, and more subtle view, see Tomasello, Call, and Hare (2003a, 2003b).
8. In practice, many instances of construal configurations in the literature exhibit this structure, as in Langacker (1990b) and van Hoek (2003).
9. Van Hoek (1997) provides a cognitive account of the way third-person pronouns find their antecedents in sentences and in discourse, partly drawing on the inherent link between first-person and third-person pronouns as markers of “other first persons.”

10. A possible semantic difference is also that (8) need not entail (9), while the reverse entailment holds, so that (9) is, strictly speaking, more informative than (8). However, in actual usage, one seldom, if ever, uses (8) to convey that Mary's position on the scale of happiness is right in the middle. This actually leads to an interesting observational question: Why do language users so often choose an apparently less informative question when a more informative one is readily available? The answer is given in the analysis in the text (a detailed discussion can be found in Verhagen 2005: 32–35, 70–75).

11. With some interpretive effort, it is also possible to impose a deontic interpretation on (14), e.g., when *some theoreticians* is understood as referring to a group that has a special status for one reason or another, which justifies their being allowed certain kinds of behavior.

12. Langacker (1990b: 14) characterizes modals, also in their epistemic senses, as profiling the object of conceptualization (schematically). He mentions in this connection that modals may function as clausal pro-forms (*She may, You must*). However, this possibility is specific for English and may possibly be ascribed to the existence in the grammar of English of the general pattern Subject + Auxiliary (with the function of indicating a clausal pro-form), so that the function of the epistemic modal itself may still be said to involve only the construal relationship and the ground itself.

13. As such, it represents a case of what Traugott calls “intersubjectification,” i.e., the development of a meaning which not (only) profiles a speaker's subjective attitude toward a proposition, but also his/her assessment of his/her relationship with the addressee in the production of the utterance. Other instances of intersubjectification are *tu/vous*-type distinctions in second-person address forms and honorifics (cf. Traugott and Dasher 2002).

14. In fact, I argue in Verhagen (2001, 2005) that it is *normal* for all complements, also in written texts, to contain the information which an utterance actually contributes to a discourse, even if the main clause may be read as independently designating an event (of communication, cognition, or the like) distinct from the ground. For instance, these main clauses rarely participate in the coherence relations of the discourse (unlike the complements); rather, they serve to specify in what way the information of the complement relates to the perspective of conceptualizers 1 and/or 2 (as someone else's, as something hoped for, as a possibility, etc.). Further consequences, especially for the grammatical properties of the constructions, are discussed in Verhagen (2005: chapter 3).

15. The content of this concept as I use it here is similar, if not identical, to that of Langacker's (1987). As I see it, the difference is that Langacker indiscriminately considers all uses of the pronoun *I* as instantiating the configuration of figure 3.8'—in which conceptualizer 1 “is also the primary object of conceptualization” (131), while I consider many normal uses of the pronoun in such patterns as *I think* as well as in performative utterances as indicating only conceptualizer 1, without turning him/her into an object of conceptualization.

16. Another type of construction with a similar function is conditionals; see Dancygier and Sweetser (1997) and especially Dancygier and Sweetser (2005).

17. For a discussion of the theory of communication underlying this view, see Verhagen (2005: chapter 1).

18. It remains true, of course, that to the degree that objective conceptualization fades as part of the meaning of an expression, the *relative* weight of subjectivity automatically increases.

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