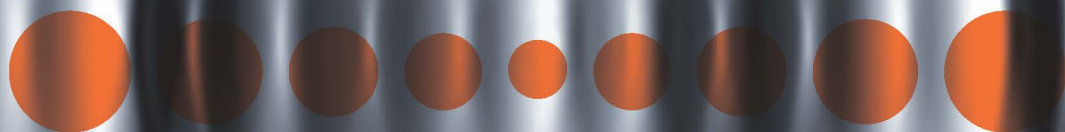


Topics in Syntax and Semantics

Linguistic and Philosophical Perspectives

Editor

Wiktor Pskit



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**Linguistic and Philosophical
Perspectives**

Łódzkie Studia z Językoznawstwa Angielskiego i Ogólnego
Łódź Studies in English and General Linguistics

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Wiktor Pskit

Wiktor Pskit – University of Łódź, Faculty of Philology, Institute of English Studies
Department of English and General Linguistics
90-236 Łódź, 171/173 Pomorska St.

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Published by Łódź University Press

First edition. W.07848.16.0.K

Publisher's sheets 6.8; printing sheets 9.75

ISBN 978-83-8088-841-8

e-ISBN 978-83-8088-842-5

Łódź University Press

8 Lindleya St., 90-131 Łódź

www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl

e-mail: ksiegarnia@uni.lodz.pl

phone +48 (42) 665 58 63

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Introduction

Syntax and semantics are traditional areas of the study of language recognised in linguistics and philosophy of language. This overlap of research areas seems to be sufficient motivation for facilitating encounter of scholars from these fields. Obviously, linguists and philosophers do not always agree on the range of theoretical issues included in the two above-mentioned areas, key concepts, terminological and definitional problems, research methodology, or empirical data taken into consideration. One of important aspects of the study of syntax and semantics is the very need to distinguish between them, especially given that recently some linguists (e.g. cognitive linguists) question the motivation for the demarcation between syntax and semantics.

All of the matters listed above run through the contributions gathered in the present volume. The major goal of this collection is to bring together the efforts of linguists and philosophers (representing different schools of thought within respective disciplines) trying to explore selected topics in syntax and semantics. The most obvious contrast between linguistics and philosophy of language – the preoccupation with the morphosyntactic distribution of specific linguistic elements in the former and striving for precise semantic analyses that abstract from language-particular morphosyntactic detail in the latter – is still visible in the papers presented below. Yet, one can observe some degree of openness to insights from philosophical investigation on the part of linguists and from linguistic research on the part of philosophers. This openness involves, among other things, ingesting the results of investigation in the other field, employment of terminology or even ‘borrowing’ some methods of research.

Janusz Badio’s chapter is concerned with selected ways and examples of investigating events and their role in whole narratives. From the theoretical point of view, the author’s approach is grounded in cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology. Badio employs the terms *horizontal* and *vertical* to present various possibilities available in the experimental study of events and narrative. The discussion of theoretical issues is followed by an illustration of techniques used to

examine a single event and then the ways events contribute to the whole story coherence. At the level of events the investigation involves focusing on event participants, perspective or point of view, whereas at the level of narratives it has to do with linguistic and non-linguistic context and with relations that hold between the constituent events.

The point of departure in **Giulia Felappi's** contribution is the observation that the so-called face-value theory of propositional attitude sentences is frequently endorsed without even questioning the plausibility of its tenets. The relevant theory assumes that propositional attitude predicates that occur in propositional attitude sentences designate relations (RP), that *that*-clauses are singular terms (ST), and that *that*-clauses denote propositions (P). Felappi attempts to defeat alternatives for what is at stake with theses (RP) and (ST). She concludes that while these theses cannot be proven true and the alternatives do not necessarily fail, endorsing the two theses allows all the different data to be accounted for in a more elegant and easier way. Thus, it appears that there is some face-value in the theses and an approach that endorses them is to be preferred to the alternatives.

Dariusz Gluch investigates the semantics of two Japanese modals of epistemic necessity: *hazu* and *ni chigainai*. The analysis demonstrates that, while both expressions are of the same type and force, they differ in their semantics. While *hazu* seems to be a modal conveying certainty based on credible premises, *ni chigainai* is loosely connected with premises, and tends to be used as a modal expressing strong belief. The author argues for the treatment of the latter as a modal of possibility that takes a shape of necessity on the surface level. In terms of Kratzerian ordering source, *hazu* involves propositions which in the speaker's opinion prove the utterance to be accepted as necessary, whereas *ni chigainai* has to do with propositions and beliefs that amplify the speaker's belief or surprise rather than support the truthfulness of conclusion.

Andrei Moldovan argues that the referential-attributive distinction concerning definite descriptions is of minor relevance to truth-conditional semantics, although it is of greater semantic significance to a framework of structured propositions. Based on the assumptions that referential uses of definite descriptions are semantically relevant, and that the thesis of Referentialism (as proposed by Devitt (2007) and Reimer (1998)) is correct, one should be able to identify the truth-conditional data that shows that Referentialism is preferable to the alternatives. However, it turns out that such data is not readily available. Instead, it is the classical Russellian and Fregean theories that can easily account for the relevant data.

Wiktor Psakit's study is concerned with syntactic and semantic properties of NPN (e.g. *day by day*) structures. Based on a presentation of characteristics of English NPNs in descriptive terms, the paper conducts a survey of earlier linguistic and philosophical studies on these expressions. It attempts to point out

similarities and differences between the linguistic and philosophical perspectives on the relevant class of expressions. Finally, this study reflects upon the possibility of whether insights from the more or less fragmentary analyses can be put together to yield a more comprehensive account of NPN structures. The conclusion is that, while linguistics and philosophy of language can inform one another in the study of the data in question, a unified ‘linguistic-philosophical’ solution to syntactic and semantic problems discussed in this chapter does not seem feasible. The major reasons include theoretical and methodological divergences between the linguistic and philosophical approaches, the differences stemming primarily from different goals of research in the two fields.

Marcin Wągiel discusses issues related to the semantic interpretation of the plural. The paper reviews two alternative approaches to the problem, namely the inclusive and exclusive interpretation of the plural, and recalls arguments against the inclusive approach. Furthermore, the author proposes that the unified semantics of *pair* developed in this study supports the exclusive account. The analysis accounts for the supposedly heterogeneous behavior of *pair* in phrases in which it combines with regular plural nouns and, on the other hand, with pluralia tantum. The puzzle concerns different cardinality of denoted objects. Wągiel posits that the denotation of regular count nouns includes only sums of individuals, whereas pluralia tantum denote complete semi-lattices. In each case, *pair* selects a minimal element of the denotation of a noun, i.e. either a sum consisting of two individuals or an atom, and turns it into a group which can be further counted. In his investigation the contributor emphasizes the significance of cross-linguistic semantic behavior of the measure word *pair*.

Jan Wiślicki examines the question whether the standard Chomskyan Minimalist framework is in a position to generate quotational expressions. Assuming the crucial elements of the Minimalist architecture, that is the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) and the No-Tampering Condition (NTC) based derivation by phases, Wiślicki shows that the behaviour of quotation poses serious problems for the current Minimalist Program. The theory of phases does not seem to be sufficiently fine-grained in order to account for a wide variety of puzzling features observed for quotational expression. It is argued that the effects that can hardly be explained within the standard Minimalism naturally follow from the layered top-down derivation proposed by Zwart.

The papers in this book were delivered during the fourth edition of *PhiLang* (*Philosophy of Language and Linguistics*) conference held in May 2015. Like previous publications stemming from these biennial meetings, this volume demonstrates that attempts at bringing together studies by philosophers and linguists stimulate fruitful exchange of ideas and, above all, help the representatives of the relevant fields broaden their perspective on the areas of research shared by lin-

guistics and philosophy of language. As a result, linguists have an opportunity to go beyond what is ‘linguistic’ and philosophers to transgress what is ‘philosophical’ in their research in language.

I wish to thank the contributors as well as the reviewer of this volume. I am also grateful to Professor Piotr Stalmaszczyk for his encouragement and support for this project.

Wiktor Pskit
University of Łódź

Some experimental techniques in the study of horizontal and vertical aspects of event and narrative construal

Janusz Badio

University of Łódź, Poland

Abstract

The present article discusses examples of experimental techniques of studying events within narratives. The theoretical basis is Cognitive Linguistics, and cognitive psychology. The terms *horizontal* and *vertical* with regard to event and narrative construal, though somewhat arbitrary, provide a framework for the discussion of the many possibilities that exist in the experimental study of this topic. The theoretical considerations that are foundational for the article are discussed in sections one and two, followed by section three on techniques in the study of a single event, and section four that deals with events as they form the whole story coherence.

Key words: construal, event, story, narrative, experiment, horizontal, vertical

1. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics research implies a close relationship between language and cognition. Hence, studying patterns of language use provides information about the way the mind makes sense of embodied experiences. Construal, a central concept in this interdisciplinary project, is understood as the human ability to present experience in language in multiple ways depending on a number of variables inextricably connected with discourse goals and plans. This work looks at the *narrative*, and at its main component the *event*, where event sequences form narratives.

One general methodology question that faces a researcher interested in studying *construal operations* concerns independent variables at the level of a single event, and at the discourse level, i.e., whole story coherence. For the purposes of this paper, independent variables at the level of a single event will be referred to as the horizontal aspect of construal, whereas the discourse level will be referred to as

the vertical aspect of construal. These names reflect the way of transcribing speech or writing as a sequence of lines of language that code a story, in which a line in transcription is identified with one event, whereas a sequence of lines represents the whole story, or its parts. Transcribing discourse as a sequence of *intonation units* follows the conventions proposed by Du Bois (2003), Chafe (1994, 1996, 1998, 2003) or Stelma and Cameron (2007). To reiterate, the term *horizontal* refers to construal options within a single event, whereas the term *vertical* pertains to construing event sequences that constitute the whole story.

This article will survey the different aspects of construal defined above and discuss different independent variables influencing choices of form when language users present a story. The author makes no claim that there is a one-to-one relation between a particular independent variable and a linguistic coding of an event or event sequences. Rather, language users generally provide clues to the effect that story and event components achieve variable (most often desirable) levels of cognitive salience.

The term and theory of *construal* as it is used in Cognitive Linguistics will be discussed in section two, followed by the presentation of the main units of analysis, i.e., *event* and *narrative* in section three. The remaining two sections, four and five, will be devoted to the presentation as well as the discussion of some methodological options, mainly experimental, that are available in the study of events and narratives.

2. Construal

Construal has been discussed by such cognitive linguistics as: Croft and Cruse (2004), Langacker (1987, 2008), or Talmy (2000). Langacker (1987) defined construal as the relation between the conceptualizer and the object of conceptualization, i.e. between a language user and the entity s/he wishes to communicate about. The operations of construal have been subdivided into three classes: *selection*, *perspective* and *abstraction*.

Selection refers to a knowledge *scale*, *domain*¹ and *scope of predication*. For example, the preposition *near* designates different spatial extents in *near the table* and *near the Earth*. The selection of domain can be illustrated by phrases such as *close to expiry*, *close to breaking*, *close to absolute zero*, or *close to*

¹ “Acoherent area of conceptualization relative to which semantic structures can be characterized (including any kind of experience, concept, or knowledge system)” (Langacker 1991, Volume 2, p. 547).

nothing (p. 113), where the polysemous preposition *close* activates the domain of: time, durability, temperature, and amount, respectively. With regard to the idea of selection, one can also say that a language user is allowed to choose a word or expression that suits his purposes best. Last, scope of predication describes the contention that typically a linguistic expression activates the so-called *base*, an immediate context, also referred to as the immediate scope of predication, understood as a portion of knowledge against which its profile, the attentionally focused entity becomes clear.

The second aspect of construal, *perspective*, is further subdivided into: *figure/ground* organization of a scene/event, *viewpoint*, and *subjectivity/objectivity*. Figure² is the entity that a language user assigns the greatest attention³, and which stands out from the background for various reasons. English codes this fact by placing the figure in the subject position, or the role of the phrasal head (i.e. the most prominent, independent and topical element). Consider the following examples: *The cat is chasing the mouse*, *the school of dancing*, or *dog's tail* (adapted from Langacker 1991). Next, *viewpoint*, or *point of view* concerns ways of conceptualization and linguistic coding of an event or scene. The following examples illustrate this last proposal.

- (1) Dundee is north of Edinburgh.
- (2) It is cold here.
- (3) There is a lamp over the table.
- (4) Mary is left of John.

Example sentence (1) locates Dundee relative to the better-known city of Edinburgh; if (2) were a telephone conversation, the meaning of *here* would refer to some region around the speaker. Sentence (3) describes a canonical way of arranging participants of a scene, i.e. lamp relative to the table, rather than the other way round, but it is arguably not the only possible viewing arrangement. The communicative value of sentence (4) depends on the location of the speaker (e.g. in front of, or behind Mary and John). Last, *subjectivity vs. objectivity*, as an aspect of perspective refers to the degree a speaker (and other participants of an

² Figure and ground were terms discussed by Gestalt Psychologists (Wertheimer 1923, Koffka 1935, Kohler 1929) (cf. Badio 2014, p. 25).

³ Mental experience is identified with a flow of cognitive events. Conscious and unconscious experience happens parallelly in various knowledge domains and different modalities. This is a kind of mixture of perceptual sensations, emotions, autonomous processes, motor events, or even pain. Smaller or greater attention “on” an entity is thus linked to an appropriate energy level of some aspects of this mix.

event) are directly mentioned and thus present in the resulting conceptualization⁴ or backgrounded. For example, in the expression, *Stand up! It's coming*, meaning the bus is coming, the scene minimally involves some speaker, another person and some bus, but only the event of *coming* is coded. Subjective construal can be also illustrated by *Kate is going to sleep* (said by the girl who is going to sleep), whereas in the so-called *objective* kind of construal this situation would probably be coded by *I am going to sleep*. In the first example, it is as if the speaker steps out of his/her own body and looks at the scene involving himself/herself. In the last type of construal, the level of *schematicity*, Langacker (1987, 1991) refers to the idea that speakers variably, though not haphazardly, choose the amount of detail they wish to code in language.

The proposals regarding the theory of construal represented by the remaining three works, i.e. Croft and Cruse (2004), Langacker (2008), and Talmy (2000 and earlier), will not be characterized here in detail for lack of space, but it can be argued that the main idea remains the same, with some details that are different. Let us look at the following table, which sums up the categories from these authors' publications:

Table 1. Comparison of categories of construal operations

Langacker (1987)	Langacker (2008)	Talmy (2000 and earlier)	Croft and Cruse (2004)
Selection Perspective Abstraction	Prominence Perspective Specificity	Schematization Perspective Attention Force dynamics	Attention Judgment/Comparison Perspective Constitution/Gestalt Force dynamics

Source: Badio 2014: 34.

The recurring theme is attention and prominence (otherwise referred to as *cognitive salience*). In line with this observation, the present study will assume that attention and achieving appropriate levels of cognitive salience is the overarching goal of all construal operations. As entities become salient in conceptualization, speakers focus more attention on them, and they receive more processing capacity. Moreover, they become more prominent, or/and easier to remember, which in turn positively correlates with the (high) level of salience of human motivation and goals during action.

⁴ Cf. Talmy (2007: 264–294).

In sum, construal operations are attentional, as they adjust the cognitive prominence of entities in conceptualization. Linguistic coding involves a myriad of choices of language form to provide relevant clues to the listener, or reader regarding the details of the conceptualization, both horizontally and vertically, in the sense described above. The next section will focus on events and narratives.

3. Events and narratives

The working definition of *event* in this paper follows Zacks and Tversky's (2001: 7) use of this term, as a "segment of time at a given location perceived by an observer to have a beginning and end". It follows from the definition that the main participants of an event remain in the same position, or change their location in space as time passes. Thus, the participants' evolution through time is critical for understanding event categories. The boundaries of categories coincide with the maxima of change of numerous characteristics, such as movement, location, activity, character, or body part. The temporal extent that an event encompasses consists of the most salient profile, and a base (examples to follow). The base serves the function of the implied, obvious, but unfocused background against which a salient sub-part becomes most active in a conceptualization. Let us consider a few sentences to illustrate this idea.

- (5) She changed the nappy.
 - (6) She cuddled the baby.
 - (7) He fell asleep.
 - (8) He burped.
- (adapted from Radden and Dirven 2007).

All the above example sentences illustrate so-called *bounded* events, whose construal involves relatively clear temporal boundaries. In addition, (5) profiles the end state (i.e. the baby has a new nappy), (6) focuses on the whole process of cuddling with an understanding that it must have begun some time ago, lasted, and finished, but without considering the subsequent phases, but as a whole, whereas (7) places the focus of attention on the moment at which a person started sleeping, so to say. Last, example (8) is punctual, and the temporal profile is very short.

Similar example sentences can illustrate *unbounded events*, i.e. ones that refer to the same temporal extents connected with the verbal categories: CHANGE NAPPY, CUDDLE BABY, FALL ASLEEP, and BURP, but construed as if someone was looking most intensely at how the events are evolving, and

was almost completely oblivious to the fact that they must have some temporal boundaries. Certainly, this construal is made possible if one uses the progressive grammatical aspect.

- (9) She is changing the nappy.
- (10) She is cuddling the baby.
- (11) He is falling asleep.
- (12) He is burping.

Moreover, any situation involving an event is a complex mix of the conceptual core, time, grounding, and setting (or location⁵). The table below presents this in summary form.

Table 2. Elements of a situation (and event)

Situation							
Conceptual core		Time schema	Grounding		Setting		
relation	participants	situation type	reference	time reality status	place	time	circumstances

Source: adapted from Radden and Dirven 2007: 176.

Only some of this mix is construed as salient and coded appropriately in language. As an example, consider the following picture.



Fig. 1. A boy is getting on a bus

⁵ Cf. Langacker (1991) for the difference between setting and location.