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CONSTRUAL OPERATIONS HAVING TO DO WITH ATTENTION

In Cognitive Linguistics construal is a way of understanding an aspect of the world. It is used in the sense of interpretation or conceptualization [1, p.227]. When we say that an entity or situation is construed in a particular way, what we mean is that it is interpreted or conceptualized in some way. Often there are several different ways of conceptualizing the same "thing." We call such different ways of conceptualizing the same thing alternative construal. Alternative construal may be achieved by means of a variety of cognitive operations, such as categorization, framing, metaphor, and others. We can often categorize, frame, or metaphorically understand the same thing in several different ways.

The notion of alternative construal changes our conception of meaning. In the new view, meaning is not to be identified with conceptual content alone; it is constituted by conceptual content, as well as the construal of that content. In many cases, the construal aspect of meaning plays a more important function in discourse than conceptual content.

Construal operations have been discussed by a number of cognitive linguists. The four who proposed a classification, or taxonomy, of such mental operations are Ronald Langacker [2], Leonard Talmy [3], and William Croft and Alan Cruse [4]. Here we will follow Croft and Cruse's classification in its general outline because theirs seems to be the most comprehensive one and takes into account the results of the other two authors.

Croft and Cruse[4] provide a four-way classification of construal operations. First, there are construal operations that have to do with attention. A second group is based on what they call judgment and comparison. A third group is organized around the operation of taking a perspective on an entity. Fourth and finally, a group of construal operations relies on how we establish the overall structure of entities and events. On the basis of this classification we will present construal operations having to do with attention.

We use attention in a number of different ways to understand and talk about a situation, event, or entity. The task of the article is to analyse alternative construals of attention in terms of focus of attention, scope of attention, detail of attention (scalar adjustment), and dynamic or static nature of attention.

Let us start with the focus of attention. We can select, or choose, a particular facet, or aspect, of the situation, event, or entity. When we do this, we are focusing on that facet, or aspect. To use terminology on frames, we can

say that we profile a particular facet, or aspect of the situation, event, or entity. We call the facet so profiled the focus of attention. For example, we can profile, or bring into focus, different facets, or aspects, of the circle frame by means of using the words radius, arc, and circumference[1,p.228]. The arc, radius, and circumference represent different facets of the same frame. Another interesting case where we have a profile shift within a frame is when we focus attention on the agent or instrument rather than the action within the frame. For example, in the writing frame we have the elements of the person who writes, the action of writing, the instrument used in writing, the surface on which the person writes, the letters the person writes, and so on. We can focus attention on the action of writing. When we do, we use the verb write. We can also focus attention on the person who writes. When we do, we use the noun writer. The suffix -er indicates the choice of a particular facet of the frame. It shifts attention from the action of writing to the agent of writing. But the focus of attention does not need to be indicated by explicit grammatical elements like suffixes. For example, in the gold seeking frame we have the instrument of pan and the action of panning. Here the focus of attention can be indicated by the same word form, pan. However, there would be a difference in word class. When the action is the focus of attention we use the form as a verb, and when it is the instrument we use the form as a noun.

Let us consider some other examples:

(1) The Finance costs a hryvnya.
(2) The Finance called for his resignation.
(3) The Finance went bankrupt.

Although the same phrase, the Finance, is used in all three sentences, the different sentences indicate different aspects of the entity. The first focuses on the tome, the physical object itself, the second on the editor of the magazine, and the third on the company.

In the second set of examples, although we are understanding the concept of "window" and we are using the same phrase, the window, the focus is different:

(4) The window is clean.

(5) She came in through the window.

The first sentence profiles the windowpane, while the second profiles the frame of the window.

Finally, consider some well-known examples that can be thought of as metonymic in nature:

(6) He played lots of Bethoven.
(7) He heard the piano.
(8) I'm in the phone book.

Recall the definition of metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics: In metonymy, an element in a frame provides mental access to another element in the same frame. Thus, the first example provides mental access to the works of Bethoven through the person Bethoven (based on producer for product). In our new terminology, we can say that the focus of attention is the product and that it is focused on by means of the producer. In other words, we can suggest that "providing mental access to something" means the same as "focusing on something."

The other two examples are cases of the active zone phenomenon. Here the whole stands for a part. The piano (whole) focuses attention on the sounds made (part) and the personal pronoun I (whole) on the name I have (part). In such cases, the shift in profile, or focus of attention, is accomplished by the verb. We can't hear the piano, only the sounds made by it, and we can't actually be in the phone book, but our names can.

In all these cases, a particular aspect of a situation, event, or entity is highlighted.

Now let us move to the scope of attention. The focus of attention is surrounded by the periphery of attention, or consciousness. This peripheral area of attention is called the scope of attention. The focus and scope of attention have consequences for the grammaticality of sentences. For example, we conceive of knuckles as being parts of the finger, fingers as parts of the hand, the hand as part of the arm, and the arm as part of the body. Thus, it makes sense to say that the domain within which an entity becomes accessible to attention has an entity [2, p.119]:

(9) A finger has three knuckles and a fingernail.
But it is not really acceptable to say:
(10) ???A body has twenty-eight knuckles.

The reason is that the concept of "knuckle" has as its immediate scope the "fingers" or the "hands," but the "body" is not within this immediate scope. In other words, this kind of statement is only possible when the immediate scope—but not when the more distant scope—is involved.

We also make use of the notion of the "scope of attention" when we construe the location of an entity in relation to other entities. For example, we can tell someone about the location of money in relation to the kitchen, which has a counter, which has a cabinet underneath it, which has shelves, and which has a meat grinder on the top shelf. We can express this as follows [4, p.50]:

(11) The money is in the kitchen, under the counter, in the lefthand cabinet, on the top shelf, behind the meat grinder.

The meat grinder provides the most immediate scope of attention and the kitchen the most distant scope. The sentence suggests a construal in which we start with the most distant scope of attention for the profiled entity, the money, and then we move on to successively narrower domains in which the profiled entity can be found.

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Now let us focus on the detail of attention or scalar adjustment. The notion of scalar adjustment has to do with how closely we attend to the details of the scene. This aspect of construal was studied extensively by Len Talmy who identified a coarse-grained or a fine-grained view of the same situation[5, p. 227]. Look at the following sentences:

(12) He ran across the field.

(13) He ran through the field.

The first sentence looks at the situation "from a distance," so to speak. No details of the scene are suggested in any way. However, the second sentence indicates through the word through a more fine-grained view; it lets us imagine the field as having grass, weeds, bushes, and so on, through which the person runs.

The same idea can be exemplified with the following sentences:

(14) I drove along the road.
(15) A rabbit ran across the road.
(16) The construction workers dug through the road.

As far as the degree of detail in construal is concerned, the basic difference among the three sentences is that they represent different degrees of attention to detail. In the first sentence, the road is merely a line, a one-dimensional object; in the second, it is a two-dimensional one; and in the third, it is three-dimensional.

Scalar adjustment is not limited to visual experience only. We can construe other types of experience with lower or greater degree of detail. When we say that "Ira's being silly," the construal is more fine grained than when we say that "Ira's silly." Ira's silliness is temporary in the former case with clear temporal boundaries, while it is permanent in the latter and it is taken to be a personality trait in the latter.

And finally, let us describe dynamic or static nature of attention. Our attention can scan a scene dynamically or statically. We can either move our attention across a scene or construe it as something static. This difference in construal has been applied to the state-process distinction by Talmy[6, p.29] and to the predication-nonpredication distinction by Langacker[2, p.181]. Let us take the following examples:

(17)   The road winds through the valley and then climbs over the high mountains.

What we find here (indicated by italics) is what Talmy calls "fictive motion," that is, motion that does not really take place. When we use this sentence, we talk about observing a static scene. After all, the road does not move. However, we view this static scene dynamically, as if the road were moving. Consider now the following examples:

(18) The Town Bridge collapsed.

(19) The collapse of the Town Bridge.

In the first sentence, the word collapse is used in a predicative function; we say what happened to the Town Bridge. That is to say, we have a dynamic scene viewed dynamically. Langacker calls this sequential scanning [2, p.223]. The scene is dynamic because we can observe something happening through time.

By contrast, the second phrase construes the situation differently. It suggests what Langacker calls summary scanning [2, p.224]. This is viewing the situation as a single static frame that somehow "summarizes" a whole series of events— not in terms of a process unfolding through time. The collapse of the bridge is an event, an essentially dynamic situation, but we choose to present it in a static way by making use of summary scanning.

Typically, dynamic situations are construed by means of sequential scanning and are expressed by means of verb phrases in sentences. The verb phrases are used predicatively. However, we can construe essentially dynamic situations by means of summary scanning and we can express them by means of noun phrases that we do not use predicatively. This is what happens in the case of the collapse of the Town Bridge. But of course we can predicate something of such noun phrases; for example, we can say, "The collapse of the Town Bridge was quick."

In general, the two kinds of scanning a situation (summary vs. sequential scanning) are used by Langacker to distinguish things and relations—the highest-level conceptual units. Things are expressed as nouns and adjectives, while relations are expressed as verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions.

In conclusion, construals are particular ways of understanding the world. As we saw, the relationship between language (linguistic expressions), construal, and the world is manifold. The same linguistic expression may be used to refer to different aspects of the same situation (e.g., window can refer to the pane or the frame). Different linguistic expressions may be used to reflect different construals of the same situation (e.g., walk across the field and walk through the field). All of these possibilities involve cases of alternative construal.

The main job of the embodied mind is the understanding of the world. The capacity of the mind for alternative construal is one extremely important aspect of the process of comprehending the world. There are many cognitive operations that we use for the purpose of alternative construal. One of them has been identified in this article, namely, cognitive operations having to do with attention. The next three might be the area for further research.

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Бокун І.А. Інтерпретативні операції, пов'язані з увагою.

В статті поставлено завдання проаналізувати когнітивні операції, які пов'язані з увагою.

Ключові слова: альтернативна інтерпретація, когнітивні операції, фокус уваги, межа уваги, деталізація уваги, динамічна та статична природа уваги.

Бокун И.А. Операции интерпретации, связанные со вниманием.

Статья анализирует когнитивные операции, затрагивающие внимание.

Ключевые слова: альтернативное толкование, когнитивные операции, фокус внимания, пределы внимания, детализация внимания, динамичная и статичная природа внимания.

Bokun I.A. Construal operations having to do with attention.

The article analyses cognitive operations having to do with attention.

Key words: alternative construal, cognitive operations, focus of attention, scope of attention, detail of attention, dynamic and static nature of attention.