

REVIEWS

Ronald W. Langacker 2016: Nominal Structure in Cognitive Grammar: The Lublin Lectures. Eds. Adam Głaz, Hubert Kowalewski, Przemysław Łozowski. Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press. 188 pp. ISBN: 9788377848678. PLN 29.90

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1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The book under review is another highly successful publication in a series of volumes containing transcribed lectures in cognitive linguistics, authored by Ronald Langacker. The series was initiated in 1995 and has been edited by Professor Henryk Kardela and his colleagues at the Department of English Studies of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin.

This time, a series of four lectures edited by Adam Głaz, Hubert Kowalewski, and Przemysław Łozowski focuses on the introduction of sophisticated analytical tools which help to elaborate more fully than before on a unified account of nominal structure, particularly in the English language. In more detail, the volume addresses semantic functions of nominals and their functional organization and use. The volume is structured into four basic parts. Lecture 1, *Structure, Function, System, and Strata*, introduces details of the analytical apparatus, focusing on the theory's foundational concepts of language, meaning, structure, system, opposition and categorization, and linguistic organization. Lecture 2, *Noun Classes and Nominal Structure*, persuasively manifests the adequacy of defining grammatical categories in conceptual and semantic terms, i.e., a theory of grammatical categories based on meaning. Lecture 3, *Nominal Grounding*, presents a comprehensive

elaboration on the whole system of referential function and the mechanisms of nominal contextualization. Eventually, the last lecture on *Quantification* makes precise further issues with respect to reference to real world and virtual world objects and phenomena in English quantifiers.

It is not possible to do justice to all linguistic processes and mechanisms discussed in the lectures, so rather than commenting on every language phenomenon raised, I choose to address only some of the main issues of relevance to larger linguistic circles.

2. LANGUAGE, FORM, AND MEANING

All the lectures elaborate on the issues related to the concept of language, meaning (function), and structure.

On p. 16 Langacker proposes:

Now in the case of language, the first factor (substance vs. activity) is actually irrelevant. Linguistic structure doesn't consist of any kind of substance. It consists in activity, patterns of activity. Whether you look at the neural, cognitive, perceptual, motor, or interactive level, it's just patterns of activity — there's no substance there. But in the case of language we still talk about structure and function. Structure is often identified with grammar, and function with meaning. Or structure with lexicon, morphology, syntax, and phonology, and function with things like semantics, pragmatics, and discourse functions. This is really a kind of disguised metaphor. It's a manifestation of the substance/activity distinction which I think is ultimately wrong. The things that are considered to be structure involve sounds, phonology. Lexicon incorporates sounds, and grammatical expressions incorporate sounds. And sounds, because they are observable, are metaphorically viewed as substantive, compared to meaning, which is felt to be intangible, transient, and mysterious. But as I say, that's really just a metaphor. Really all aspects of language structure consist in activity, ultimately.

I suppose the word *ultimately* in this description is a clue to the interpretation of the above statement. Motion, which is an intrinsic property of activity, is indeed a primary, primitive, and universal attribute of matter in ontology, as philosophers would have it. The definition is also quite broad — everything and anything performed in the organic and inorganic world can be reduced to activity (motion) on different levels, starting from the mental, social to, ultimately, the physical-chemical level. Langacker says that we consider sounds as substantive (matter) because they are observable. On the other hand, the familiar picture of a linguistic sign, having its source in de Saussure's *Cours* (1916), which dominates the traditional linguistic schooling, makes a distinction between *form* (formal structure) and *meaning* (substantive content of the form). In fact then, the term *substance* is used in two dif-

ferent senses in linguistic tradition: first, precisely as a synonym of *content* or meaning, then as an equivalent of something observable in our familiar world, such as sounds, word order, etc., i.e. linguistic structure — although this latter sense is frequently put in the form “physical” (as opposed to the “mental”) manifestation of linguistic signs.

Putting aside the terminological argument, the picture of the linguistic sign as presented by Langacker approaches that of the Saussurean one in this respect. There is an illusory distinction between form (structure) and meaning (activity). The linguistic sign duality is rather close to the familiar picture of metaphorical two sides of the same coin (as evoked also by Evans & Green 2006), although, unlike a real coin, it is obviously not static but can be dynamically combined in terms of form (structure)-meaning (function) symbolic assemblies as constructions, combinable in different ways with different perspectives. As in Jean Aitchison’s (1995) metaphoric picture of meanings subjected to linguistic scrutiny, meanings are like dead butterflies *vis-à-vis* the real, living ones, i.e., meanings in use. Langacker observes that connection always produces a new entity, with *emergent* properties. Such properties represent a *higher-level of organization* and can set up a *grouping*, i.e., a set of elements functioning as a whole for some higher-level purpose. This function is instantiated as proposed in my paper:

Linguistic units are symbolic entities, which are characterized, as other semiotic signs, by a (phonological) form and semantic content. There is an observable *dialectics* between meaning of a lexical unit and semantic interpretation of discourse, emerging dynamically in interaction. On the one hand, a word is a unit abstracted from a verbal act and it is static in this role. On the other, it exerts influence on context and shapes it. The context in turn, moulds the meanings, which are modulated and emerge online. (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2010: 107)

In Langacker’s original vision, the connections define implicit structures that have a potential to build up assemblies, i.e., structures that emerge at a higher level with their roles (functions). Using language involves *activation* of old and *creation* of new elements Langacker calls linguistic structures, with the role of *entrenchment*, degrees of *cognitive salience*, or *likelihood of activation*.

The attribute of function, meaning, is primary in Langacker’s theory, a property characteristic of all cognitive, semantically-based approaches (Langacker 1987, 1991), in opposition to all uniquely structure-oriented theories of language.

3. CATEGORIZATION AND SYSTEM

System in Langacker’s model is categorization from the standpoint of functional, extrinsic factors. Members (exponents) of the same category consti-

tute a system. In traditional terms, they are linked by *paradigmatic relations* and form pairs of oppositions. “But also”, Langacker develops the thought, “they are similar to one another, typically, because if elements serve the same function, they must have a lot in common to be able to do so” (p. 28). This is certainly present in any opposition pair, in negation, etc. (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1996), in which a negative form activates a positive counterpart, while positive ones imply the existence of a number of opposing dormant members, though linked by sharing a common (albeit varying) pool of functional values.

Langacker goes further and proposes that “the exponents of a system are mutually inhibitory, I suppose because they compete for the same resources. If you activate one, it tends to suppress the others. That’s the basis for the notion of *opposition* [and possibly *any contrast*, BL-T] — they’re opposed to one another, which is actually an aspect of their value” (p. 28). Reference to the competition for the same resources may be true of any system (cf. e.g., MacWhinney 1987 on language acquisition), although in actual reality on the part of language production the search for a particular member activates the whole (regions of a) system. It might be of some advantage to resort to — existing and possible — psychological evidence in such matters, though Ronald Langacker is rather skeptical about possibilities to obtain evidence from language psychologists with regard to (at least some) linguistic claims (p. 99). This is signaled in this volume in a discussion concerning a different case (the status of the phrase *this rock* as an instance of grouping), raised by one of the discussants (p. 99) — but it is interesting to note that similar skepticism (perhaps going even further) concerning a cooperation between linguists and psychologists is noted in psychological publications. As early as in 1978, Jim Miller wrote:

For instance, noun phrases are so obvious as constituents and turn up in so many grammatical theories that it would be peculiar if the psychologist failed to find any evidence at all that the linguist’s noun phrase corresponded to a syntactic unit employed by the native speaker of a language. On the other hand, linguists would not abandon noun phrases if psycholinguists found no evidence for them and would doubtless ignore experimental evidence that apparently demonstrated that native speakers of, say, English, do not employ a syntactic unit corresponding to the noun phrase. (Miller 1978: 260)

On the other hand, clear convergence can be observed with respect to cognitive psychological and linguistic research in numerous contemporary publications.

A system is not only of a traditionally paradigmatic nature. It embraces two types, either a task of an *alternative* (i.e., the above-mentioned *paradigmatic*) and a *component* (i.e., systemic, *syntagmatic* in structuralist terms)

nature. Contrary to structuralism, it is the latter that is considered more fundamental in all cognitive linguistic approaches.

4. LINGUISTIC ORGANIZATION

This account of the basic concepts in Langacker's theory is followed by a thorough discussion of the notions of *baseline* and *elaboration* (B/E) as fundamental concepts of his approach to linguistic organization. They pertain to *asymmetries* in language structure or its (conceptual and phonological) basis. The baseline serves as a starting point of reference, already there, possibly stored in memory, while its elaboration (by various processes) produces another structure at another level of organization, both levels being linked either temporarily or logically. Langacker gives a number of convincing instances in support of such organization: current prototypes versus their diachronic change over consecutive steps of growing schematization (as in instances of polysemy), asymmetries between concrete/abstract (as in metaphorization), physical/mental, and real/imagined; or on higher language levels: series of elements in successive clauses in a discourse, or a possessive chain or composite structures of different types.

B/E organization represents an arrangement, *layering*, in terms of *core* and *periphery*, referred to as *strata*. It is interesting to note that Langacker argues for the basicness of core elements over peripheral ones, making reference to their order of acquisition, behaviour in language change, and cross-linguistic universality, strikingly similar to the *unmarkedness* (versus degrees of *markedness*) criteria, familiar from long linguistic tradition. On the other hand, an important point in Langacker's discussion is his explicit withdrawal from the concept of positing a "zero" (\emptyset) unit, i.e., a zero member, which he had previously identified with an unmarked option. This can be understood in traditional linguistic approaches not necessarily as a (fictitious) constructed element (as in Chomsky's (T)G approaches) but rather as having an equivalent in actual linguistic reality in the form of the basic (phonological, lexical, morphological or syntactic) element, acquired first, most frequent cross-linguistically, and older in terms of diachronic change. One can agree though that asymmetries between zero-marked members and others might be more successfully regarded as cases of B/E organization.

5. SEMANTIC DEFINITIONS OF GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES

Consonant with Langacker's thesis of conceptual/semantic primacy of the system over structural one and contrary to standard (i.e., structuralist) linguistic doctrine, Cognitive Grammar claims that basic grammatical categories, in particular noun and verb, have primarily, or even exclusively, concep-

tual-semantic grounds for their identification. Their validity for all members of the categories, on the other hand, could not be maintained as an exceptionless requirement. This thesis, opposing all types of structuralist tradition, had in fact supporters in traditional approaches to grammars, such as e.g., Otto Jespersen's (1924, 1933) or those of others. It is only later, when structuralist approaches took over, that a rigid view of grammatical categories required unique reference to structure.

Langacker is particularly innovative in this area, when he makes reference to notions like objects, events, properties of objects and properties of events as *conceptual archetypes*, i.e., basic concepts reflecting fundamental aspects of human experience and their schematic (general) roles as, possibly universal, category prototypes, expressing *basic human cognitive abilities*. Only these fundamental cognitive abilities figure in the CG definition of basic categories: a noun profiles a thing, a verb profiles a process (a relationship followed through time), while adjectives and prepositions profile non-processual relationships.

6. NOMINALS

Langacker identifies a thing as defined abstractly by its unitary nature. The author calls it *oneness* and accounts for this property as resulting from grouping activity at some level. In the case of nouns expressing objects, the grouping is almost automatic and intuitive, therefore object nouns can be considered prototypical instances of the category. Collective nouns clearly require a two-level conceptual organization, while countability can be equated with multiple cases of oneness and depends on *bounding*. Oneness can also be characteristic of mass nouns in the sense of functioning as a single entity for some purpose. Examples of a varying range of the lexical unit *blue* and *run* and their derivatives in a series of *component* relationships are instances discussed by Langacker in rich detail.

7. GROUNDING AND REFERENTIAL FUNCTION

This part of Langacker's discussion enters more fully the domain of discourse. It concerns referential functions as linked to nominals and clauses, basic units of discourse in their interactive function, enriching intersubjective awareness of the interlocutors by their association with the ground, which is understood by Langacker to refer to the interlocutors, their interaction, and their immediate circumstances. While the primary concern for nominals is shown to be identification, the role of clauses is existence, their epistemic status. One could argue that it is only the present that is "real", while any other temporal location (past, future) or e.g. hypothetical occurrences are in

fact imagined. Alternatively, as proposed by Jaszczolt (2009), all temporality, including the present, is in fact modal, so imagined and (exclusively) mental. Specification of epistemic status is a key task: dimension of elaboration. The semantic function of nouns, on the other hand, is to identify things and provide their schematic account, their schematic definition, accessible to discourse participants as their (momentary) focus of attention, which involves different strategies.

Langacker discusses nominals with unique versus non-unique reference, pointing to conceptual capacities of commonality and difference identification, as well as those of abstracting *types* of things and phenomena. An extensive discussion of all types of nominal grounding, including articles, demonstratives and quantifiers, predominantly in English, identifies nominal classes of different degrees of concreteness (*Joe* > *blue* > *seven* > *justice*), symbolic complexity (*Joe* vs. *Barack Obama*; *seven* vs. *thirty seven*), and specificity (*meat* > *pork* > *ham*). The function of demonstratives and their baseline grounding strategy, i.e., pointing (real or abstract), together with its multiple instantiations in quantifiers, possessives, numbers etc., is expressed in other alternatives for grounding strategies discussed in detail for English with some reference to more or less elaborate grounding observed also in other languages (e.g., classifiers in Mandarin). All fine points of grounding grammar in English are scrupulously accounted for.

The question of nominal reference is treated by Langacker in broad terms, not limited to real-world entities, as every nominal refers to a particular thing in our mental universe. Langacker points to the inadequacy of the narrow definition for linguistic purposes, although he is not a radical in this respect and assumes the existence of the “real world” (without specifying it any further), a range of uniquely mental constructions (e.g., metaphors, blends, and suchlike), as well as the imagined worlds of stories, myths, etc. A further distinction is made there between the *unreal* (not yet realized) and *alternative* worlds (*Santa Claus*), although further discussion suspends the *actual/virtual* distinction as *relative, virtuality* being associated with simulating other minds. There is a certain unclarity concerning this point, taken over in a discussion which follows, when Langacker proposes that “a virtual entity is imagined (“conjured up”) for a particular local purpose, hence limited to the mental space established for that purpose” (p. 129). In fact, both reality/unreality and actuality/virtuality are not strict dichotomies but degrees and dimensions of departure from the *baseline* and are therefore manifold and varied. To sum up, Langacker points to the fact that all grounding in use is local and heavily depends on the Current Discourse Space, emphasizing the discursive nature of all grounding. In this way, a referent’s *epistemic status* is specified through an inventory of varying linguistic markers, starting from pronouns and articles, to a meticulously analyzed system and subsystems

of quantifiers (Lecture 4), which provide alternate forms of epistemic control. In his interpretation of quantification, Langacker resorts to a large pool of linguistic phenomena, e.g., the use (in English) of either singular or plural verbs in cases such as *a flock of geese was/were* is explained as undergoing a metonymic shift by virtue of alternate profiles being imposed on the same conceptual content (p. 164). In other cases, reference to diachronic change and grammaticalization patterns is called forth.

To mention one more issue, through his response to a question about connectionism (p. 57), we learn that Langacker's model of language is not a realia model in the sense of Wittgenstein's picture of a boiling pot, which — to be a "true" representation — would need to have a real pot and real boiling water in it (Wittgenstein 1953: § 297). Langacker talks about connections as basic, although in his model they are used in a representational sense: he sees them as matching the processing mental model. A discussion of the competing connection/disconnection properties that follows (p. 99) is revealing and points out once more to basic properties of categorization: recognition of similarities and differences, i.e., grouping together by identification of differences.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The framework proposed for the present analysis of nominal structure is scrupulously and thoroughly researched for inferences and further implications. It covers significant developments in the explanatory approach to nominal structure and synthesizes Ron Langacker's advances in cognitive linguistic theory of nominal structure, grounding, and reference.

While the analysis presented may not be definitive (recall that the book is a record of a series of lectures, not a finished, carefully edited monograph), I believe it to be more perspicuous and explanatory than previous attempts in this domain. If nothing else, it reflects a number of theoretical notions which, though not new in grammar, are now being made explicit in cognitive linguistic terms and explored in greater depth. These notions include systems of opposing elements, the fundamental role of semantic functions, grammar as the implementation of those functions, and structures being organized in strata.

I want to praise the editorial work put in the publication of the volume as supervised by Adam Gład, Hubert Kowalewski, and Przemysław Łozowski with very few things to improve. We are provided with a bibliography to the lectures — it is not very extensive but this is only to be expected. A well-thought over system of synopses with condensed information on each of the points certainly serves its purpose. Very well structured question-answer parts following each lecture and a comprehensive index of terms provide

a useful help in looking for relevant information. The reader has to appreciate the work of the editors, the whole editorial team and, last but not least, the transcribers, whose names I take the liberty to mention: Ziemowit Janiak, Ewelina Prażmo, Marietta Rusinek, Katarzyna Stadnik, Przemysław Terejko, Anna Wyrwa, Angelina Żyśko, and Konrad Żyśko.

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