

Subjecthood in specificational copular constructions in Lithuanian

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Abstract

Superficially, copular sentences serving specificational function, such as *The winner of the race is John* or *The tallest girl in the class is Molly*, look like inverted structures as compared with their more usual predicative counterparts, cf. *John is the winner of the race* and *Molly is the tallest girl in the class*. Though in terms of word order the specificational copular construction can be thought of as derived from its predicative counterpart by means of inversion, this inversion is strongly motivated by the communicative demands of specification and adds new structural properties to the construction: the former predicative nominal ‘moved’ into precopular position inevitably acquires an existential presupposition with regard to its unique referent, thus exhibiting role definiteness, and the information structure of the construction becomes bound to the different referential functions of its two nominals (the role defining NP is always a topic and the role specifying NP a comment). There are thus good functional and structural reasons to treat this specificational construction as a distinctive subtype of copular predication. Syntactically, however, the specificational copular construction, as compared to its predicative counterpart, remains, in many respects, a non-canonical predication. For instance, pseudoclefts (which represent a special case of the specificational copular construction), pose serious challenges to Binding Theory because of certain well-known connectivity effects. Another problem with this kind of copular predication – and this will be the topic of this article – is the inconsistency of subject assignment in such constructions across languages (and sometimes even within the same language). For example, in English, Danish, Swedish and French, the morphosyntactic marking of the subject is conferred on the first nominal of the specificational copular construction, while in Lithuanian, Russian, as well as in Italian and German, the second nominal of the construction acquires this marking. The fact that semantically equivalent structures acquire opposite patterns of morphosyntactic coding of the main grammatical relation, suggesting opposite directions of conceptualization of essentially the same specificational relation, poses a challenge to the main principle of Cognitive Grammar, the so-called **content requirement**. If one sticks rigorously to the morphosyntactic coding used in specificational copular sentences, one encounters difficulties with defining grammatical relations in terms of conceptual relevance, i. e., as a trajector / landmark configuration.

Keywords: *agnation, ascriptional subtype, class-inclusional subtype, descriptional-identifying equative, identificational proper equative, landmark, presuppositional question, reference point, role definiteness, specifier, trajector, type–instance relation.*

1. Introduction¹

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1.0 Preliminary remarks

In the literature, problems of specificational predication are mainly discussed in the context of (inverted) copular constructions (as copulas we can consider not only *be* (Lith. *būti*), but its aspectual (lexical or morphological) counterparts *become*, *remain* (Lith. *tapti*, *likti*, *tebe-būti*) as well). This is not a frequent topic, though the discussion of theoretical and descriptive issues of predication in copular clauses has a long history in linguistics (cf. Higgins 1973; Heggie 1998; Moro 1997; Rothstein 2001, 205–338 *inter alia*). Examples of prototypical specificational copular clauses are:

- (1) *The winner of the race is John.*
- (2) *The president of the club is Peter.*

Their exact counterparts in Lithuanian and Russian, two languages structurally close to each other, would be, correspondingly:

(1a)	<i>Varžyb-ų</i>	<i>nugalėtojų-as</i>	<i>yra</i>	<i>Jon-as.</i>	Lithuanian
	Race-GEN	winner-NOM	be.prs.3	John-NOM	
(2a)	<i>Klub-o</i>	<i>prezident-as</i>	<i>yra</i>	<i>Petr-as.</i>	
	club-GEN	president-NOM	be.prs.3	Peter-NOM	
(1b)	<i>Pobeditel'</i>	<i>sorevnovanij –</i>	<i>Ivan.</i>		Russian
	winner. NOM	race.gen.pl	John.NOM		
(2b)	<i>Prezident</i>	<i>klub-a –</i>	<i>Pëtr.</i>		
	president. NOM	club-GEN	Peter. NOM		

The same sort of specificational predication can be found in Lithuanian and Russian constructions with causative predicates (of the type *to appoint*, *to elect*), which contain, as a constituent part, a copular predication (of state) – their general meaning is ‘to cause sb. to become / be sth.’:

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- (3) a. *Klubo prezident-u buvo* Lithuanian
 club-GEN president-INS.SG be.PST.3
paskirtas / išrinktas Jon-as.
 appoint-PPP-NOM.SG.M elect-PPP -NOM.SG.M John-NOM
- b. *Prezidentom kluba byl naznačen* (Russian)
 president-INS club-GEN be.PST.M appoint.PPP.NOM.SG.M
izbran Ivan.
 elect.PPP-NOM.SG.M John.NOM

But cf.

- c. **The president of the club was appointed / elected John.* (English)

However, we find specification not only in the domain of copular constructions proper, but also:

- a) in loose appositional constructions:

- (4) *The greatest Victorian poet, Tennyson, died early.* (example from Van Langendonck 2007:129.)

- b) in Lithuanian in reinterpreted comparative constructions of the type *toks NP1 kaip NP2* ('such NP1 like NP2'), which represents a special case of close apposition (especially those with case attraction):

- (5) *Toki-o žmog-aus kaip Jon-o*
 such-GEN person-GEN.SG like John-GEN
į sveči-us niek-as nekvies
 to guest-ACC.PL nobody-NOM NEG-invite.FUT.3
 'Nobody will invite (to his home) a person like John'

- c) in Lithuanian mono-clausal counterparts of English pseudoclefts (where case attraction is also observed):

- (6) *Ką mėgstu, tai raudon-q vyn-q.*

what.ACC like.PRS.1SG that red-ACC wine-ACC
'What I like is red wine'

In this paper, while analyzing some alignment² problems in specificational clauses, I restrict myself to copular structures only. The choice is not accidental because specificational copular constructions are closely related to other types of copular constructions and largely inherit the descriptive and theoretical problems associated with these (especially those concerning the classification of subtypes, alignment, semantics of the copula, and the referentiality of the two NPs in the copular construction).

1.1 Formal approaches to specificational copular constructions: challenges for Binding Theory

In recent decades a set of specific problems pertaining to specificational copular constructions have been a source of concern for formal semanticists and generative grammarians. The former are mainly concerned with establishing the type of copular constructions represented by specificational constructions, a problem closely related to the semantics of the copula (i. e, whether we should posit two copulas, *be*₁, and *be*₂, or just one *be*) and the referentiality status of the precopular and postcopular NPs in the construction (definite, indefinite, specific). Are specificational constructions an inverted subtype (with discourse-motivated fronting of the second NP, cf. Heggie 1988) of a predicative copular construction of the type NP1 *be* NP2, which is assumed to be the basic type of copular predication (Williams 1983; Partee 1986), or do they represent a special ('asymmetric') instance of the equative predication (Heycock & Kroch 1998; 1999; Heycock 2012; Heller 2005)?

Proponents of the generative approach derive specificational as well as predicative copular constructions from underlying structures with small clauses, the difference between the two types depending on which NP – the 'logical subject' (in

² ² I use *alignment* here as a cover term encompassing morphosyntactic encoding (case marking and agreement) of core arguments, which in copular predication amount to subject NP and predicative complement (NP, ADJ or PP). In the cognitive perspective adopted in this paper, this term naturally also encompasses the linking of grammatical relations in specificational copular constructions to relevant semantic functions of their NPs, viz. role definition and its specification. As such, this term is comparable to the terms (*distribution of*) *grammatical relations* and *argument linking*.

the predicative construction) or the ‘predicative’ (in the specificational construction) – is raised into the sentence-initial SpecIP position (Moro 1991; 1997; Mikkelsen 2004). In some languages, like English, Danish, Swedish, French, the ‘raised’ predicative NP becomes ‘syntactic subject’ of the specificational copular clause. Thus, for generative grammarians, the copula *be*³ is a raising verb of the same sort as *consider*, *believe*, *expect* etc.⁴. Movement of the inherently predicative NP into SpecIP position is motivated by contextual presuppositions: the first NP of a specificational construction is universally topical (‘discourse-old’) (Mikkelsen 2004).

One of the major concerns for generativists, though, is the challenge posed to syntactic binding theory by the so-called connectivity effects in pseudoclefts, which (on one reading) represent a special case of specificational copular constructions. ‘Connectivity effects’ is a general term for a cluster of syntactic and semantic phenomena, such as (the principles of) distribution of anaphoric elements, Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) licensing, *de dicto* readings of NPs in opaque contexts (i. e., under the scope of an intensional operator) etc., that are usually assumed to hold only under a **c-command** configuration, but show up in environments where this configuration is absent. It is generally assumed in generative theory that the c-command configuration, as a structural principle of syntactic representation, holds in a local domain (i. e., under the TP node). Thus the prediction is that in English pseudoclefts, which are bi-clausal structures, a nominal of the postcopular phrase cannot be c-commanded by the subject nominal, which is ‘buried’ inside the precopular (free relative) clause. In fact we find postcopular nominals that behave as if they were c-commanded, i. e., as if a c-command configuration in pseudoclefts held across their copula. That the syntactic locality condition is violated in pseudoclefts is clearly shown by the fact that with respect to the well known Principles A, B, and C (illustrated respectively in the following examples) of the

³ Caroline Heycock and Anthony Kroch (1999: 381–382) extend the small clause analysis to specificational constructions with the aspectual verbs *remain* and *become*, cf.:

- (i) *The best solution remains instant retreat.*
- (ii) *At this point our real problem becomes John.*

⁴ To be more exact, the copula verb is structurally comparable to the raising-to-subject counterparts of these verbs, i. e., to their passive forms, cf. *Mary considers John (to be) the real murderer* ~ *John is considered (to be) the real murderer* and *John is the real murderer*, or it can be compared to such original raising-to-subject verbs as *seem*, *appear*, *turn out*, *happen* etc., cf. *John seems (to be) happy* and *John is happy*.

standard Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981), both NPs contained in them behave in the same way as they do in the corresponding mono-clausal paraphrases, cf.:

- (7) a. *What Mary_i was was proud of herself_{i/*j}.*
b. *Mary_i was proud of herself_{i/*j}.*
- (8) a. *What Mary_i was was proud of her_{*i/j}*
b. *Mary_i was proud of her_{*i/j}.*
- (9) a. *What she_i was was proud of Mary_{*i/j}.*
b. *She_i was proud of Mary_{*i/j}.*

We can see, for example, that in sentence (7a) principle A of standard Binding Theory is violated: the anaphor *herself* is licensed in the postcopular phrase even though it is not c-commanded by the antecedent *Mary*, which is embedded inside the precopular free relative. Despite this violation of the locality condition, the bound reading of the sentence is grammatical.

One of the recent solutions to this problem is reached by postulating the relevant c-command configuration at a more abstract level of the syntactic representation of pseudoclefts. Caroline Heycock and Anthony Kroch suggest that this level should be “more abstract than LF under most current conceptions” (Heycock & Kroch 1999: 365). According to them, the relevant representation of these sentences “is built up in the process of discourse interpretation and may constitute the interface with the conceptual-intentional system of mind” (ibid.). These authors suggest that only on the surface are pseudoclefts bi-clausal (equative) copular constructions, serving as a pragmatic ‘information-packaging’ device in discourse for focusing new information. The relevant ‘post-LF’ level of syntactic representation, needed for semantic interpretation (including binding relations), is reached by the pragmatically driven ‘unidirectional’ derivational process in the course of which mono-clausal structure (similar to the corresponding simple sentence paraphrases) is arrived at by applying to the surface structure a logical ‘iota-reduction’ operation. The mono-clausal Lithuanian pseudoclefts, which supposedly have evolved from bi-clausal copular structures, empirically support this suggestion.

1.2 The cognitive approach: challenges for the content requirement principle

None of these problems bother those working in the framework of Cognitive Grammar, as all kinds of underlying structures or raising procedures are impermissible there. But it seems that the varying alignment in specificational constructions, depending on the language type, poses no insignificant challenge to the universality of the main principle of Cognitive Grammar, viz. **the content requirement**⁵, (Langacker 1987: 52–55): 488) also known as the principle of **form–meaning pairing**, or the **symbolic thesis** (Taylor 2002: 592).

The fact that in different languages different *nominals* (a Cognitive Grammar term roughly equivalent to the traditional notion of *noun phrase*; Langacker 1987: 126), bearing different semantic roles in specificational copular constructions, show the morphosyntactic coding and syntactic behaviour of a subject, challenges the aspiration of CG to define the subject and the object (or the predicative complement in our case) of the clause in conceptual terms, as trajector and landmark (or as figures of the first and second focal prominence) of the predicated relation. In Cognitive Grammar this definition of the main grammatical relations is supposed to hold universally across languages (Langacker 2008: 378–382). The aim of this paper is to tackle this problem in some depth, and to provide an attempt at reconciling the principles of cognitive theory with the atypical (non-canonical) syntax of specificational copular constructions.

In what follows I will argue that the main grammatical relation, i. e. the subject, plays a minimal, if any, role in the conceptualization of specificational copular constructions even in such subject-prominent languages as English. My argument is based, first of all, on the empirical fact that in different types of languages different *nominals*, exhibiting different referential properties, receive the morphosyntactic coding of the subject in the specificational construction under discussion. Secondly, it is based on the observation that the asymmetry needed for conceptualization (and processing) of the specificational relation in the construction is

⁵ The content requirement is the requirement that “the only structures permitted in the grammar of a language (or among the substantive specifications of universal grammar) are (1) phonological, semantic, or symbolic structures that actually occur in linguistic expressions; (2) schemas for such structures; and (3) categorizing relationships involving the elements in (1) and (2). Hence no descriptive constructs are permitted that lack both phonological and semantic content. Furthermore, overt structures cannot be derived from hypothetical “underlying” structures having a substantially different character.” (Langacker 1987: 53–54).

ensured by the different referential status of its two nominals and its fixed topic–comment structure. This asymmetry, which can, in cognitive terms, be formulated as a trajector / landmark configuration, is, in this construction, established independently of clausal grammar, i. e., externally, by the relevant contextual presuppositions.

Meanwhile, in section 2, I will present the treatment of copular constructions in Cognitive Grammar, which is mainly based on instantial semantics, a notion elaborated by Ronald Langacker. In section 3 I will provide a definition for the specificational copular construction, which turns out to be a contextually motivated subtype of the equative construction. In section 4 I will briefly review the definition of the grammatical relations in Cognitive Grammar and envisage difficulties in implementing it in some cases of non-canonical marking. In section 5 I will discuss in detail the issue of subjecthood in specificational copular constructions of two different types of languages. Additional arguments for my claim will be adduced from pragmatically marked cases of the English-type specificational constructions, which are erroneously excluded from the domain of specificational predication by proponents of the formal approaches. In section 6, I will present my concluding remarks.

2. The treatment of copular constructions in Cognitive Grammar

Copular constructions of the type NP *be* ADJ (*Jane is tall*) are unproblematic in Cognitive Grammar, because adjectives, being themselves relational predications, naturally serve, along with the copula, the role of clausal predicates, the copula merely providing finiteness features for the complex predicate of the clause. Such copular sentences predicate some property of, or ascribe some feature to, the subject nominal, and can be classified as the *ascriptional* subtype of the copular construction.

The nature of the predication in copular constructions of the type NP1 *be* NP2 is not so straightforward. In Cognitive Grammar it is explained through the type-instance relation established by the predicative nominal (NP2): the referent of the subject nominal in the copular construction is identified with an instance of the type represented by the postcopular (predicative) nominal (on ‘instantial semantics’ see Langacker 1991: 55–71). Two semantic effects can be created through the identificational relation between two nominal referents: that of class inclusion and that

of equation. Class inclusion entails that the referent of the subject nominal, through its identification with a type instantiation, is included into a broader class of same-type referents: typically the postcopular NP is indefinite, cf. *Cicero is an orator and (a) philosopher*. Equation, in turn, is found when two specific referents (coded by definite NPs) are equated in an identificational relation as one and the same individual, cf. *Cicero is Tully*. Accordingly, the two cases represent the class-inclusion and equative subtypes of the copular construction.

The advantage of the cognitive approach to the classification of (sub)types of copular construction consists, firstly, in that in all cases (even in those with a postcopular adjective) we can get by with one *be*, that of identity, and, secondly, it consists in the naturalness of the classification, differences between (sub)types depending mainly on the grammatical class or referential properties of the predicatives (more on this type-classification of copular constructions see Mikulskas 2009: 141–151).

For the purpose of the present paper only copular constructions of the type NP *be* NP are relevant, especially those with two definite nominals, representing the equative subtype. Notably, this subtype of the copular construction is not homogeneous. Functionally, we can discern two species of equative structures: *identificational proper* and *descriptive-identifying*. The following sentences represent the first kind of equatives:

(10)a. *My cousin Harvey is the guy who got drunk at our wedding.*

b. *The guy who got drunk at our wedding is my cousin Harvey.* (example from Langacker 2008: 523.)

In both instances – a and b – the equation of two definite nominal descriptions (the referents of which, each in its own way, are known to the speaker and the hearer) serves the purpose of identifying their designates as one and the same person. We observe that this construction shows some sort of symmetry by virtue of the exchangeability of (10a) and (10b). Though word order, representing topic–comment

structure in these sentences, depends on the presuppositional question, by inverting the word order we do not create a new type of copular construction⁶.

Sentences (11)–(12) represent the descriptive-identifying kind of the equative subtype:

(11) *John Smith is our English teacher.*

(12) *Jane is the tallest girl in the class.*

A distinguishing feature of these sentences is that the referents of their predicative nominals are not necessarily unique: their uniqueness depends on support from the relevant frame information (or cognitive model), cf. *Jane is the tallest girl in the class, but last year it was Mary; John Smith is our English teacher besides two others teaching English at our school.* Naturally only in the latter case can we speak of equative predication. In English, we are luckily able in this case to distinguish a postcopular nominal designating a unique referent from its non-unique ('predicative') use formally, by using different question words, *who* and *what* respectively, in presuppositional questions: **Who** is John Smith? as against **What** is John Smith? Only the former refers to the unique position occupied by John Smith⁷. This kind of equation, especially from the perspective of the identificational construction proper, can be seen as a limiting case of class-inclusion.

3. Defining specificational copular constructions

Equative constructions of the descriptive-identifying kind show no such symmetry as can be observed in equatives proper: by inverting word order, and

⁶ Possibly objections might be raised against this statement: one could find grounds, say, to treat (10b) as representing a limiting case of the specificational construction. For example, Caroline Heycock lists a similar sentence *One gang member turned out to be someone I knew* among specificational constructions (Heycock 2012: 209). Indeed, superficially such sentences (if we leave aside functional differences) are reminiscent of the specificational constructions under discussion, but descriptions like *The guy who got drunk at our wedding* or *One gang member* (whom I somehow got to know about) in the above examples hardly satisfy the specifications of *role definiteness*. Besides, these sentences lack one important feature of the specificational construction (as I define it), viz. their postcopular 'specifiers' (though they are known at least to the speaker) are not chosen 'from the finite list of known candidates' (for the definition see section below).

⁷ In Lithuanian this test is not available: in both cases we must use the same question word *kas*. So for the Lithuanian counterpart of sentence (11) *Jonas Kalvaitis yra mūsų anglų kalbos mokytojas*, irrespective of the presupposed referentiality of its postcopular nominal, only one question can be posed: **Kas** yra Jonas Kalvaitis?

correspondingly topic–comment structure, in these constructions we create a new subtype of the copular constructions, viz. the specificational copular construction. By the inverting procedure a new structural property is added, establishing the asymmetry of the specificational predication: the nominal in the precopular position necessarily acquires the property of role definiteness⁸ – it defines some role, the existence of the unique referent of which is presupposed and which is yet to be identified, or specified, by the postcopular definite nominal (prototypically a proper name, but not necessarily, cf. *The culprit is me; The real problem is your parents*; Heycock 2012: 213). The specifier of the definite role is usually chosen from a finite list of known candidates⁹. It is important to note that the role definiteness of the first NP of the specificational construction is established by the very presuppositional question. For example, the sentence *Our English teacher is John Smith* possibly presupposes the question *Who is your English teacher?* – the poser of which has no doubt about the existence of some individual teaching us English and asks only to identify, or specify, this referent. It should also be clear from this observation that the role-defining nominal is always the topic of the sentence, and the specifier always its comment, providing new, rhematic, information.

Now we are in a position to define the specificational copular construction in more rigorous terms. The unidirectionality of the specificational relation between the two nominal descriptions in this subtype of the copular construction is iconically reflected in the asymmetry of two kinds of nominal definiteness, the precopular NP displaying role definiteness whereas the postcopular NP is characterized by individual definiteness. Another structural property defining the specificational constructions under consideration is that, independently of discourse pragmatics, they have a fixed topic–comment (or theme–rheme) structure in that the role description is always the topic, and the specifier is always its comment (needless to say this known–new information structure naturally conforms to the asymmetry of the role-specifier disposition).

By now it should be clear that the specificational constructions are an equative subtype of the copular predication and that they have their counterparts in the ‘predicative’ domain of this kind of predication, viz. *descriptive-identifying*

⁸ Cf. the role / value distinction in Langacker (1991: 71–73) and the notions of attributive / referential usage of a definite description in Donnellan (1966).

⁹ An example of the specificational construction from Heycock (2012: 209) is highly indicative of this principle, cf. *The murderer is one of those men over there*.

equatives. There are good conceptual and structural reasons to consider the latter to be primary structures with respect to the former. For example, taking the matter from a truth-conditional perspective, we can produce an utterance like *The winner of the race is Jane* if and only if we really know that Jane won the race, i. e., that the utterance *Jane is the winner of the race* is true. In terms of word order it seems reasonable to view specificational constructions as inverted structures, their source structure being descriptonal-identifying equatives.

One should not forget that this inversion is not of the complement fronting sort, that is, pragmatically motivated by considerations of contrasting new information, but is a device for producing a new predicational type, driven by the corresponding contextual presuppositions (and, as we have seen, it carries structural consequences, such as role definiteness of the precopular NP and fixed information structure of the sentence). Alternatively, wishing to avoid undesirable derivational overtones in this approach, we can formulate the undeniably systematic relations between specificational constructions and their predicative counterparts in terms of **agnation**, a notion borrowed from systemic-functional grammar¹⁰. By the same token, locative and existential constructions will be agnates in Lithuanian, standing in the same kind of inverted word order (resp. topic–comment) relation:

- (13) a. *Pieštuk-ai* *yra* *stalči-uje*.
pencil-NOM.PL be.PRS.3 drawer-LOC.SG
‘The pencils are in the drawer’
- b. *Stalčiu-je* *yra* *pieštuk-ų*.
drawer: LOC.SG be.PRS.3 pencil-GEN.PL
‘There are (some) pencils in the drawer’

4. Short review of the subject definition in Cognitive Grammar

¹⁰ The term *agnation* designates a ‘regular and systemic’ relationship between two grammatical constructions which have the same major lexical items, but are different in structure, as in (i) and (ii):

- (i) *The dog bit the man.*
(ii) *The man was bitten by the dog.*

More about relationships of ‘enation’ and ‘agnation’ between constructions see Heyvaert (2003: 35-40).

Before getting into the midst of the problems concerning subjecthood in specificational constructions, we will briefly recall some relevant points of the definition of grammatical relations in Cognitive Grammar. At the very beginning we should note that in the theoretical framework of Cognitive Grammar the main grammatical relations – subject and (direct) object – are defined as syntactic figures of conceptual relevance. ‘On the surface’, subject and object are recognizable from their morphosyntactic encoding (prototypically nominative *vs.* accusative or fixed positions in the syntactic sequence, respectively) as well as from well-known behavioural characteristics (Keenan 1976). Importantly, in Cognitive Grammar, the subject / object alignment also encodes viewing or perspective, i. e., some attitude (construal) of the conceptualizer toward the situation profiled. A situation viewed from a certain stance is in its very essence asymmetrical. In terms of argument structure, verbal lexemes are also usually asymmetrical: this asymmetry is prototypically supported by the corresponding semantic roles¹¹. For example, in the canonical transitive event, an agent affects a patient. So we can say that verbal lexemes provide, for encoding purposes, structural templates which are explicitly encoded in the corresponding morphosyntactic marking. Of course, for discourse purposes these standard structures may be overridden using the constructional devices that are at hand in languages, cf. subject / object inversion in passives.

It is also important that the conceptualization of the content of the verbal lexeme (i. e., the *process*) in Cognitive Grammar is a dynamic cognitive procedure formulated in attentional terms as **sequential scanning**. This unidirectional processing of the verbal relation therefore has its time dimension (processing time), which also adds to the asymmetry of the conceptualized content.

Finally, two salient participants of the verbal relation, even if only abstractly figuring in it, are chosen as reference points for processing purposes. They set the endpoints of the verbal relation and are usually formulated in spatial-dynamic terms, as its **trajector** and **landmark**. But they are also understood in attentional terms, as **foci of primary and secondary salience**. Prototypically, in the process of conceptualization of the verbal relation, the salience of the trajector and the landmark

¹¹ Cf. “The profiled relationship is rendered asymmetrical by the very fact of one participant being elevated to the status of relational figure – what varies is whether this status is inspired by objective factors (i. e., the content of conceived relationship), or whether its origin is purely subjective, in the sense of being imposed extrinsically as part the conceptualization process itself.” (Langacker 2002: 223).

is supported by the putative semantic roles, thus forming a natural sequence of reference points for a better understanding of the verbal content (often implying complexity of the event, cf. *Peter smashed the window* and (consequently) *The window smashed to pieces*). In the finite transitive clause both the trajector and the landmark of the verb are elaborated by the relevant nominal descriptions and are morphosyntactically encoded as the subject and the object of the sentence.

Of course, the morphosyntactic encoding of the trajector / landmark configuration as a grammatically relevant asymmetry facilitates the task of conceptualizing the clausal predication, but its role in this matter may be thought of as secondary in the case of rich verbal semantics, there being other sources for maintaining the relevant asymmetry. But, for example, in semantically interpreting such well-known symmetrical structures as *Marsha resembles Hilda* / *Hilda resembles Marsha*, the role of the morphosyntax is much more prominent, being in this case indicative of the construal rather than of the semantics of the predicate (more see Langacker 1991: 305–321; 2001; 2008: 363–382; 512–524).

4.1 Some problems envisaged in the Cognitive Grammar approach

It is generally suggested in Cognitive Grammar (at least in its Langackerian version) that the morphosyntactic encoding of the main grammatical relations (viz. subject and object) in conceptualizing matter directly reflects the trajector / landmark configuration, the latter constituting the conceptual content of the former. This view neatly conforms to the content requirement principle, fundamental in Cognitive Grammar. But in some cases the ‘form-meaning’ pairing is, in this respect, not so straightforward.

Take, for example, Lithuanian inferential evidentials with non-canonical marking of grammatical relations, recently discussed in Lavine (2010):

- (14) *Ing-os* *nuramin-t-a* *vaik-as*.
 Inga-GEN.SG calm.down-PPP-NONAGR child-NOM.SG
 ‘Inga must have calmed the child down’

In this construction the subject is in the genitive and the object is in the nominative, non-canonical case marking (according to the Minimalist approach adopted by

Lavine) being determined by the morphology of the (non-agreeing) neuter past passive participle¹². So, when identifying grammatical relations in this construction, we cannot rely on the standard nominative / accusative marking, but must resort to our knowledge of the transitive verb's semantics (or to the standard construal of the transitive event).

The situation is not so clear, in this respect, in the copular or copular-like constructions, where one cannot rely on verb semantics at all. Take, for example, another Lithuanian construction, recently intensively discussed in the literature (Holvoet 2005; Mikulskas 2006; Holvoet 2006):

- (15) *Onut-ės* (*yra*) *žali-os* *ak-ys*.
 Ann-GEN.SG be.PRS.3 green-NOM.PL.F eye-NOM.PL
 'Ann has green eyes.'

The precopular nominal (presumably the subject) is in the genitive and its postcopular attribute – in the nominative. When identifying grammatical relations we can, in this case, rely only on structural analogy with other constructions (namely, on the analogy with the ascriptive copular construction *Onut-ė_{NOM} yra žali-ų_{GEN.PL} aki-ų_{GEN.PL} (mergin-a_{NOM})}}}* 'Ann is a girl with green eyes' (lit. Ann is a girl of green eyes') or, alternatively, with the possessive Dat + *esse* construction *Onut-ei_{DAT} yra žali-os_{NOM.PL} ak-ų_{NOM.PL}}}}* 'Ann has green eyes' (lit. 'to Ann are green eyes'); more see Mikulskas 2006: 41–50).

In the equatives of the type NP1_{NOM} *be* NP2_{NOM}, either nominal can, in principle, be chosen for the grammatical function of subject, the choice depending mainly on the communicative perspective, which is reflected in the syntax of the sentence:}}

- (16) a. *Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens.*
 b. *Samuel Clemens is Mark Twain.*

The situation is somehow more complicated in specificational equatives, as we will see later.

¹² In Lithuanian passive participle constructions the indirectly introduced agentive argument is always in the genitive.

We can thus conclude that there are constructions in language with regard to which, in identifying grammatical relations, we cannot rely on the morphosyntactic marking of their nominals. If, in these cases, one sticks rigorously to the content requirement principle, suggesting that morphosyntax is always indicative of the conceptual relevance of the clausal elements marked and vice versa, one risks falling into the trap of circularity. It is clear that, especially in the case of copular predication, some other grounds, independent of morphosyntactic marking, must be found for judging the conceptual relevance of both nominals in the construction, i.e., for establishing the trajector / landmark configuration reflected in it.

5. Subjecthood in specificational copular constructions

Now we shall take a look at the alignment of grammatical relations in specificational constructions in a few languages of different types. In English (as well as in Danish, Swedish, French and some other European languages) the grammatical role of subject is undoubtedly assigned to the precopular nominal characterized by role definiteness. In terms of constituency the postcopular specifier can be thought of, then, as verbal complement. In English¹³ this alignment clearly manifests itself in verb number agreement and in pronominal reference in tag-questions:

(17a) *The cause of the riot was / * were the pictures on the wall.*

(18) *The tallest girl in the class is Molly, isn't it / *she?* (example from Mikkelsen 2004: 93)

But in the Italian translation of (17a) the picture of the alignment is the reverse:

(17b) *La causa della rivolta *fu / furono le foto del muro.* (examples from Moro: 1997: 28.)

¹³ Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (at least their standard varieties) have lost all traces of agreement on finite verbs, but the first nominal in their specificational constructions is undoubtedly in the subject position. For instance, in Danish, the subjecthood of the NP1 in specificational copular construction can be detected by various tests based on verb second word order (for example, position of negation in 'inverted' copular construction), or on pronominalization (for example, tag-questions) (Mikkelsen 2004: 22–28; 120–129).

Not surprisingly, Portuguese, Spanish, and Catalan pattern with Italian showing the NP2 agreement in their specificational constructions (Heycock 2012: 211). But, surprisingly, French, another Romance language, shows in its specificational sentences the NP1 agreement, an agreement pattern as in English¹⁴, cf.:

- (19) *L'état c'est / *ce suis *je / moi.*
 the state that be.PRS.SG.3 / that be.PRS.SG.1 me
 'The state is me' (example from Heycock 2012: 213.)

Likewise German, in contrast to its Germanic relatives¹⁵, consistently shows the NP2 agreement in its specificational sentences (consequently, in this language the second nominal of this copular construction is selected for the subject role), cf.:

- (20) *Das eigentliche Problem sind / *ist*
 the real problem be.PRS.3PL / be.PRS.3SG
deine Eltern.
 your parents
 'The real problem is your parents.'
- (21) *Die Königin von England bin / *ist ich.*
 the queen of England be.PRS.1SG/be:PRS.SG.3 I
 'The queen of England is me' (examples from Heycock 2012: 211–12.)

¹⁴ Nicole Nau, though, draws my attention to the fact of possible variation of verbal agreement in French specificational constructions. According to her, the common native speaker, instead of saying *L'enfer c'est les autres* (Sartre; literally: hell is the others), would rather say *L'enfer ce sont les autres*. I am not in a position to judge to what extent this variation in French occurs and if it is statistically relevant.

¹⁵ However, an experimental study of agreement patterns in German and Dutch specificational constructions (Fischer 2003; referred to in Heycock 2012: 223–224) shows that in such sentences as Singular NP1 *be* Plural NP2 (*The real problem is your parents*), Dutch speakers are much less confident than Germans in choosing the second NP for agreement. There is widespread speculation that inconsistency in NP2 agreement in Dutch specificational sentences is due to restricted scrambling possibilities in this language when compared with German. However, Faroese does not allow scrambling at all and hence might be expected to show NP1 agreement in specificational construction like English, another language without scrambling. But as Caroline Heycock shows in her study (2009), agreement in Faroese specificational sentences is variable and depends on the syntactic context: for example, sentences of the type NP1 *be* NP2 tend to show NP2 agreement, while in those of type NP1 Modal *be* NP2 the picture is the reverse. These agreement facts complicate the theoretical problems connected with subject assignment in specificational constructions even more than the (overstudied) dichotomy English-type vs. Italian-type specificational constructions would suggest (if one is a follower of Generative Grammar, one inevitably has to postulate, in the case of variable agreement, two different underlying 'deep' structures (or 'logical forms') for essentially the same specificational proposition). For the sake of simplicity, though, my further discussion bears on this traditional dichotomy.

In specificational constructions of the languages with rich morphology, such as Russian and Lithuanian etc., it is also the postcopular specifier that receives the morphosyntactic marking of the subject. In Russian, in sentences referring to the past, this alignment reveals itself not only in verbal number agreement, but also in gender agreement:

- (22) *Edinstvenn-yj, kto stal na našu storonu,*
 only-person-NOM.SG.M who stood on our side
**by-l/by-l-a Varvar-a.*
 be-PST-M/be-PST-F Barbara-NOM.SG
 ‘The only person who defended us was Barbara’
 (example from Geist 2008: 95.)

In Lithuanian, in such cases, gender agreement is manifested in the participial forms of the copular verb (serving, in the following example, an evidential function):

- (23) *Šios mokykl-os direktori-us*
 this.gen.sg.f school-gen.sg headmaster-NOM.SG
**esqs/esanti toki-a JaninaPetraitienė.*
 be.PPA.NOM.SG.M/be.PPA. NOM.SG.F such-NOM.SG.F PN-NOM.SG
 ‘The head-master of this school reportedly is (a certain) Jane Petraitiene’

In Lithuanian specificational constructions, in addition, the copular verb agrees with the first and the second person pronouns occurring in the post-copular specifier position:

- (24) *Klub-o prezident-as esu / *yra aš.*
 Club-GEN.SG president-NOM be.PRS.1 / be.PRS.3 I.NOM
 ‘The president of the club is me.’

An additional argument in favour of postcopular subjects in the specificational constructions in this type of languages can be adduced: in Lithuanian (as well as in Russian) the precopular NPs can receive the instrumental marking (mirroring the

same case marking variability in their predicative counterparts). Semantically, copular clauses with instrumental marking of their predicative NPs differ minimally from those with nominative marking: the former bearing in their meaning some overtones of temporality (i. e., change over time) of the situation (mainly in references to the occupation of the subject referent) described¹⁶. So there are good reasons to treat such copular clauses as representing one and the same construction with variable case marking on the same (postcopular) nominal (though there are attempts, in the literature, to assign them different underlying syntactic structures, cf. Pereltsvaig 2008: 10–14; 66–94). Such an attitude toward different case marking on the same nominal is even more justified in the case of specificational constructions, where the role-defining nominal with instrumental marking has the same presupposition of existence of its role-unique instantiator as that with the nominative marking (the uniqueness of the instantiator being the object of the same presuppositional question):

- (25) *Mokyklos direktori-us / -umi (pernai) buvo*
 School.gen head-master-NOM / INS (last year) be.PST.3
Jon-as Petrait-is.
 PN-NOM
 ‘(Last year) the headmaster of the school was John Petraitis’

The variability of case marking on the first nominal of the construction cannot, of course, be compatible with the subjecthood of this nominal.

5.1 Encountering problems

Now we can see the contours of the problem. On the one hand, the alignment of grammatical relations in specificational copular constructions in the two different types of languages which we have considered shows reverse pictures, and this suggests different construals of the same equative predication. On the other hand, the specificational constructions of all these languages show a very simple unidirectional

¹⁶ Such a semantic distinction between two morphosyntactic codings of the predicative NPs in copular constructions is sufficient for our purposes, but, of course, it is an oversimplification. On a more elaborated view, adopted in Timberlake 1990, the temporality of predicative situations signalled by the instrumental is seen as depending on the lexical semantics of predicative nouns (descriptive *vs.* restrictive nouns), which in its turn correlates (or interacts) with aspectuality and tense of the copula.

predicational scheme, which is clearly motivated by the same kind of presuppositional questions concerning the identity of the unique instantiator of the role defined: the definite role description is specified (or its unique referent is identified) by equating it with some individual, not *vice versa*. Technically, the informativeness of the predication in the specificational copular construction is ensured by the different scope of descriptions, or by the different referential potential of its two nominals. So there hardly is any space for alternative construals in the case of specificational constructions¹⁷. This discrepancy in conceptual / coding must somehow be accounted for.

Needless to say, postulating two different underlying syntactic structures in Lithuanian-type and English-type specificational constructions, in line with the generativist tradition, will make the problem even worse. Surely there is no alternative for one who attaches a paramount importance to the constituency structure of the

¹⁷ The anonymous reviewer suggested to me that “before the strongest conclusion is drawn from the data under consideration, the possibility should at least be entertained that the conceptual configuration evoked by specificational constructions is ambivalent in the sense that it offers competing motivations for the choice of the primary and the secondary figure within the scene”. Indeed, some basis for conceptual ambivalence in this respect can be found in the fact that the specifier nominal in the specificational construction designates an ‘actual’ entity and thus is conceptually more salient than the role nominal, which designates a ‘virtual’ entity. Undoubtedly, salience of this sort, along with topicality, becomes crucial for the assignment of the subject role to the first nominal in the predicative counterpart of the specificational construction. The canonical alignment of grammatical relations goes in line, in this case, with the common topic–comment information structure, in which the establishment of the trajector / landmark configuration is unproblematic: the topical nominal in the predicative construction, which designates the definite (‘actual’) entity, naturally becomes the trajector of the profiled equational relation and, consequently, the subject of the clause. In the comment part of the structure this entity is matched against, or identified with, the relevant type instance, which is essentially a ‘virtual’ entity “conjured up by the speaker and hearer solely for purposes of making a type attribution” (Langacker 1991: 68), and which naturally serves the function of the landmark in the equation of two entities. In the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions, however, conceptual motivation for the assignment of the subject role to the same nominal, occupying postcopular position, is admittedly different if only because there we are not dealing there with a topic–comment information structure but with a topic-referent identifying one. We may hypothesize that in this case the specificational relation is processed in the opposite direction, starting from the (postcopular) specifier nominal. This nominal (which has the morphosyntactic coding of the subject) thus becomes a reference point for the conceptualization of the specificational construction. Then the unique referent implied by the role nominal (and which yet has to be specified) serves the function of the landmark in this construal. We may speculate further that particular languages (like Lithuanian, Russian, Italian, German and so on) focus on this particular motivation and conventionalize the corresponding alignment of grammatical relations in their specificational constructions. But in that case we are compelled to draw one undesirable conclusion, namely, that there may exist more than one ‘conventionalized’ construal of the specificational constructions in one and the same language! This is because, as we will see later, in the English specificational constructions with unmarked and marked word order different nominals are selected for the grammatical role of subject: the role nominal in the first case, and the specifier nominal in the second. It seems therefore to me that while the relative conceptual salience of the ‘actual’ participant in the specificational situation is undoubtedly important for subject selection, at least in the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions it is not sufficient to trigger alternative construal of this highly externally motivated structure.

clause. But constituency is not fundamental in the cognitive analysis of the clause: one can arrive at the same conceptualization of its content by alternative compositional ways (Langacker: 147–170). Grammatical relations, being figures of conceptual relevance in Cognitive Grammar, encode, by definition, some construal of the clausal content. However, in the specificational constructions of different languages we encounter the same construal, clearly reflecting the same communicative perspective by distinct referential functions of their two nominals, but with different alignments of the grammatical relations in the sentence. Maybe other structural characteristics of the nominals than their morphosyntactic coding could be more important in the matter of conceptualization of the specificational propositions?

5.2 Some preliminary speculations

The defining structural properties of the specificational construction provide good grounds for maintaining the asymmetry of the clausal predication. Indeed, the asymmetry of the specificational relation is supported by the different semantic roles of the two nominals in the construction – definite role / (the identification of its unique incumbent) specifier – and, correspondingly, by their different referential potential; this asymmetry is even more enhanced by those roles being tied to topic–comment structure, which is achieved by posing corresponding presuppositional questions. So, in a specificational copular construction, the role defining nominal is always the topic and its specifier the comment. The semantics of the copular verb being of no relevance, the different semantic and informational functions of the two nominals in the construction provide good grounds for laying down a trajector / landmark configuration. The role-defining nominal, also providing known information, naturally becomes the starting point in the conceptualization of the specificational relation, i. e., its trajector, and its postcopular specifier, providing new information, naturally establishes the endpoint of this relation, i. e., becomes its landmark.

However, this conceptually relevant trajector / landmark configuration is supported by subject marking only in the English-type specificational constructions, thus facilitating the task of conceptualization of the content predicated. In the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions, by contrast, subject marking falls on the postcopular nominal, and this alignment entails the opposite directionality of the

conceptualization of essentially the same relation. Intuitively such ‘backward’ processing of the specificational relation is less natural if not hardly plausible. Though, admittedly, ‘backtracking’ and ‘reconceptualization’¹⁸ plays some subsidiary role in the matter of processing the specificational relation. This role may be more prominent in the case of Lithuanian-type specificational constructions than in the English-type. Indeed, the morphosyntactic coding of the subject in the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions is essentially the same as that in their predicative counterparts, which are, as I have stated earlier, conceptually primary with respect to the former. The same alignment of grammatical relations may favour, at least to some extent, reconceptualization of the specificational construction as an ‘inverted’ predicative construction. Thus, Lithuanian speakers may feel a closer relation between the two agnate constructions than English speakers.

We can try to account for these alignment differences in the specificational constructions of the different types of languages in terms of grammaticalization, the English-type constructions being more grammaticalized in that subject marking is conferred on their topics. Consequently, the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions, whose alignment is the same as that of their predicative counterparts, have somehow not yet evolved into a new (sub)type of copular construction. But such speculation is not correct and, as we shall see later, is even in contradiction with the facts. It would be more correct to say that in the English-type specificational constructions the topical nominal, occupying the clause-initial position, becomes its subject by default. Also worth noting is that in languages with relatively free clausal word order it is not unusual for a rhematic complement to be coded as the subject of the sentence. Take, for example, Lithuanian existentials:

- (26) *Kieme* *auga* *žilvit-is*
courtyard.LOC grow.PRS.3 willow-tree.NOM
‘There is a willow-tree growing in the courtyard’

¹⁸ To think of conceptualization as strictly linear processing is an oversimplification. Cf. what Ronald Langacker says in this respect: “Processing occurs simultaneously in various dimensions and at multiple levels of organization. There is not invariably any sequence of access for the elements of a complex conception, nor is one fully adhered to in actual practice. And given the pressures of online processing, any actual rendition is likely to be discontinuous and complicated by factors like backtracking and reconceptualization” (Langacker 2008: 501).

We could suggest that, the referential properties of the two nominals and their fixed roles in the information structure of the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions being the same as in the English-type constructions, different subject marking in the former plays no direct role in the processing of the specificational relation. Subject marking is relevant in this case insofar as it is indicative of the systemic relation of the specificational copular construction to its agnate counterpart in the predicative domain.

5.3 Yet more puzzles

Though, structurally, specificational copular constructions are clearly motivated by corresponding contextual presuppositions and have a fixed topic–comment structure, to some minimal degree one can pragmatically manipulate informational accents in the construction, changing its intonational contour and /or word order for the expression of contrast without essentially affecting the type of the predication. For our purposes it is important that the specifier can be fronted and moved into initial position in both types of languages. This pragmatically motivated movement of the constructional complement carries no grammatical consequences for the Lithuanian-type specificational construction, but it inverts the selection of the subject nominal in those of the English-type (so we can add the feature of subject / complement reversibility to the structural characteristics of the latter). The fronting of the specifying complement in specificational constructions can be induced by the appropriate presuppositional question, cf.:

(27) Q: *Who is the mayor?*

A: *The mayor is John.*

(28) Q: *Is the mayor Sam?*

A: *No, **John** is the mayor (Sam is the fire chief).*

Thus, in (28) A, the specifier **John**, fronted into initial position, by default becomes the subject of the clause (cf. **John** is the mayor, isn't **he** / *it?). Maintaining that (28) A remains a specificational predication creates a problem of constituency for the generative analysis, because in a raising structure the same nominal cannot occupy

SpecIP position while being at the same time in CompIP position. To avoid this problem, generative grammarians (cf. Mikkelsen 2006; Heycock 2012: 216–217¹⁹ *inter alia*) claim that the (28) A-type answers are predicative constructions, not specificational ones. But the structural type of copular constructions in all the languages considered so far is established for communicative purposes of nominal specification externally, by posing corresponding questions in presupposition, and it minimally depends on the alignment pattern occurring in them, which is mainly an internal matter of clausal grammar, depending, if not on verbal semantics (as is the case in copular predication in general), then on the very syntax of the language type. So, while escaping problems inherent to their theory, proponents of the generative approach fail to do justice to the adequate type description of specificational constructions, including relevant aspects of their grammar.

Taking into account instances of the English-type specificational constructions with pragmatically marked word order, it becomes even clearer that if one wants to come to terms with the content requirement principle, fundamental in Cognitive Grammar, in dealing with the conceptual organization of specificational constructions, one should not stick to the morphosyntactic coding of their nominals. The conceptual organization (and presumably also the trajector / landmark disposition) in marked cases of the English-type specificational construction remains the same as it was in their unmarked counterparts: the specificational relation is, in both cases, processed unidirectionally, starting from the definite role description, while the new alignment of grammatical relations in them goes the opposite way. In the Lithuanian-type

¹⁹ Arguing that in both (i) and (ii) the answers are predicative copular sentences, Caroline Heycock refers to comparable pitch accent variability in examples (iii) and (iiii), which is ‘the norm for English’, but specificational sentences, because of the fixed pitch accent on their focal NP, are out of this ‘default rule’ (thence the infelicity of (ii) A’), only predicative sentences conform to it:

- (i) Q: *Who was the culprit? (John or Bill?)*
 A: **John** was the culprit?
- (ii) Q: *What was John? (Was John the culprit or the victim?)*
 A: John / he was the **culprit**.
 A’: *The **culprit** was John.
- (iii) Q: *Who checked the cockpit?*
 A: **John** checked the cockpit.
- (iiii) Q: *What did John check?*
 A: John checked the **cockpit**.

But this argumentation, based on ‘parallel accentuation patterns’, is superficial and clearly incorrect: taking into account the communicative perspective established by question (i), the answer to it can hardly be called predicative, and for the same reason the ‘infelicitous’ (ii) A’ does not represent specificational predication.

specificational constructions, both in unmarked and marked cases, alignment is the same, its asymmetry being opposite to the conceptually motivated direction of the processing of the specificational relation.

6. Concluding remarks

The fact that in different types of languages (and even in the same language type, if we take into account pragmatically marked cases, not to mention the complex situation in Dutch and Faroese specificational constructions mentioned in footnote 15) different nominals, with different referential properties and serving different semantic functions in specificational predication, are chosen for the grammatical function of subject, renders it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define grammatical relations in the specificational copular constructions in conceptual terms, i. e., as a trajector / landmark configuration, which is the usual practice in Cognitive Grammar.

The conceptual organization of the specificational copular construction is based on the referential properties of its nominals and on their fixed roles in the informational structure of the construction. The best candidates for the roles of trajector and landmark are the role-defining nominal and its specifier, respectively serving as the starting point and the end point of the specificational predication. This configuration is supported by the alignment of grammatical relations only in the unmarked cases of the English-type specificational construction, while the conceptualization (processing) of the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions (as well as of the pragmatically marked cases of English type) dispenses with the direct support of the grammar.

It is clear that, generally, the logic of morphosyntactic coding in specificational constructions does not reflect the logic of their conceptual organization: in most cases the latter is not recoverable from the former. In this sense we can speak of a violation of the content requirement principle in the syntax of specificational constructions, which is an undesirable conclusion for Cognitive Grammar.

Deprived of conceptual relevance, the subjecthood of the first nominal in the English-type specificational constructions is mainly indicative of the syntactic properties associated with initial position in this type of languages. Inasmuch as the subjecthood of the complement is not an exclusive property of the Lithuanian-type

specificational constructions, it is also a syntactic property of this type of languages. But also worth noting is the fact that in the Lithuanian-type specificational constructions, subject marking falls on the same nominal as it does in their predicative counterparts, thus emphasizing the agnate (or paradigmatic) relation between them: this may have some relevance for the conceptualization of the specificational predication.

Taking a general view of the matter, it is not unexpected that the syntax of the contextually driven constructions considered in this article does not exactly conform to the specific communicative purposes, showing some kind of language-type specific inertia.

Abbreviations

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