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Grounding

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In our linguistic and conceptual functioning it is rarely the case that we conceive of entities out there in the world just in and by themselves

A bare noun may be said to designate just a thing **type**, which is conceptualized in and by itself

dog

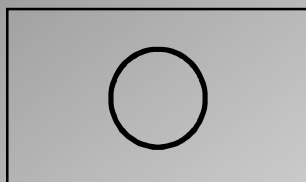


Fig. 1

A bare verb may be said to designate just a process **type**, which is conceptualized in and by itself

love

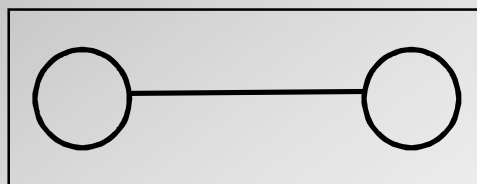


Fig. 2

Conceptualizing entities at the level of **types** has the **classificatory** function

Lexical nouns and verbs:

“[a]s fixed expressions, they provide an established scheme for apprehending the world in terms of culturally sanctioned categories of proven relevance and utility” (Langacker 2008:264)

However:

We think of the world around us as being populated by countless instances of entities of particular types

In our conceptualizations, we typically focus on particular instances (rather than merely types)

In communication, we want our interlocutor to access mentally the specific entity instance that is the focus of our conceptualization

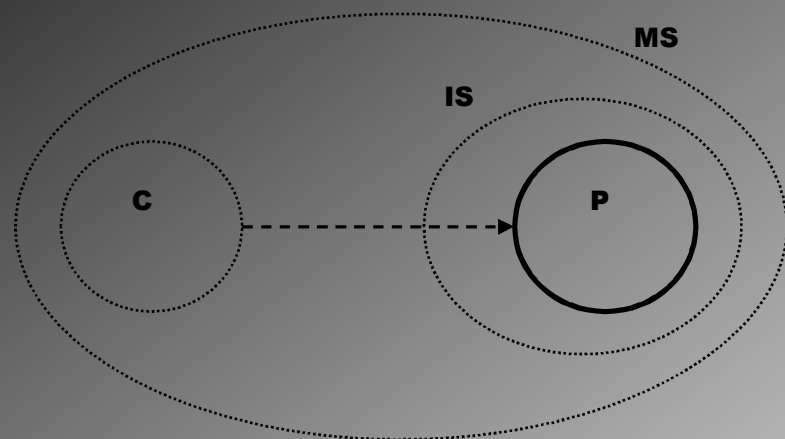
“[A]n instance (as opposed to a type) is thought of as having a particular location in the domain of instantiation, which serves to distinguish it from other instances” (Langacker 2008:268)

domain of instantiation: “the domain where instances of a type are primarily thought of as residing and are distinguished from one another by their locations” (*ibid.*:267-268)

Nominals / finite clauses have primarily a **referential** function – they serve the purpose of directing attention to a particular thing / process instance

This is achieved as a result of the fact that the thing / process instance profiled by a nominal / a finite clause is specifically conceptualized as **grounded** (that is, as assigned a particular status vis-à-vis the ground with respect to such fundamental epistemic issues as definiteness, reality status, etc.)

(a) Canonical viewing arrangement



(b) Egocentric viewing arrangement

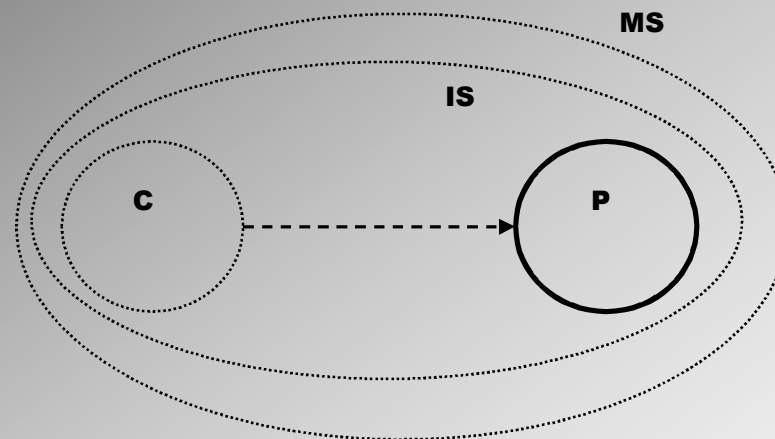


Fig. 3

Full NPs (nominals) and full finite clauses evoke conceptualizations in which the profiled entity (a thing or a process **instance**) is specifically conceived of as related in some way to the **ground** (the speaker, the hearer, the speech event, and its immediate circumstances)

A nominal / a finite clause “directs attention to a particular thing or process accorded a certain epistemic status in relation to the ground. Through grounding, its characterization of the profiled entity serves to distinguish it from other members of its category and identify it for immediate discourse purposes (Langacker 2008:264)

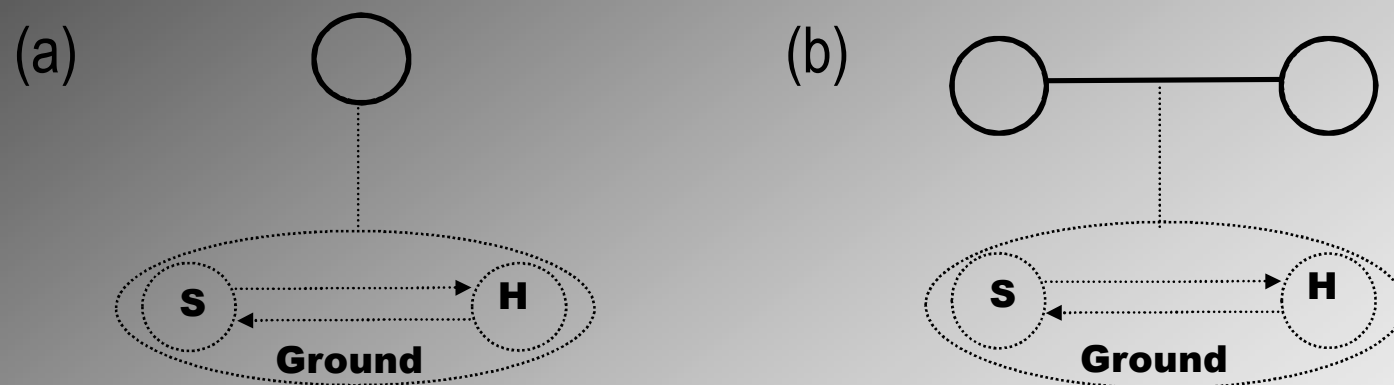


Fig. 4

“[G]rounding establishes a basic connection between the interlocutors and the content evoked by a nominal or a finite clause. If left ungrounded, this content has no discernible position in their mental universe and cannot be brought to bear on their situation. It simply floats unattached as an object of idle contemplation” (Langacker 2008:259)

“Grounding is not a grammatical category (like noun, verb, or preposition). It is rather a **semantic function**, an aspect of conceptual organization by which an expression qualifies as a nominal or a finite clause” (Langacker 2008:272)

Every language has its own grounding system

overt grounding elements (e.g. articles, demonstratives, tense markers, modals)

covert grounding

*They drank **beer***

intrinsic grounding

you California

indirect grounding

***Sheila's** camera*

overt grounding elements

highly grammaticalized (cannot themselves be grounded)

presuppose an epistemic relation of a thing or process to the ground as a salient aspect of their conceptual base

this relation, however, is **subjectively construed** and **unprofiled**; it is only the grounded entity (thing or process) which are selected for profiling

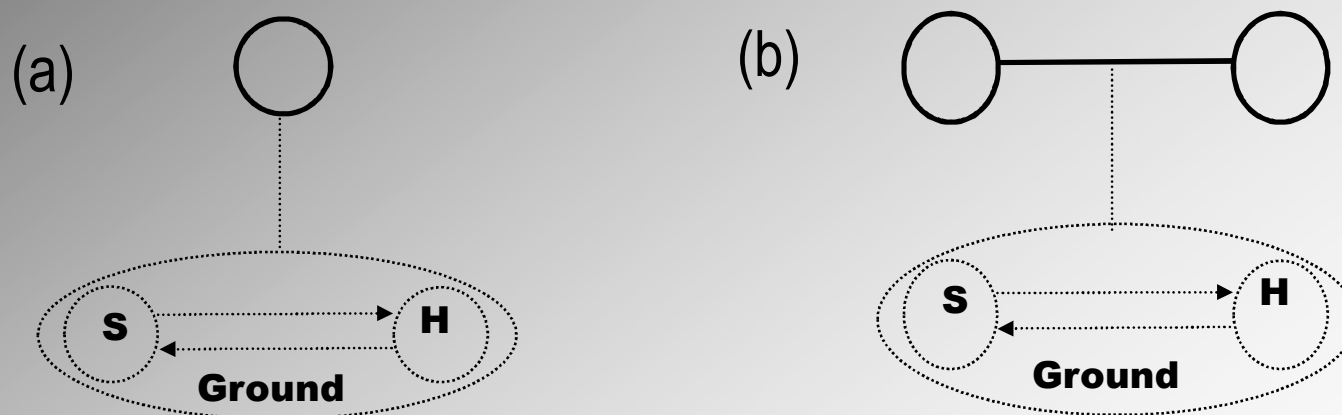


Fig. 4

Clausal grounding

Our experience of the world is, in a large measure, the experience of countless processes (events and situations), which present themselves to our minds in various ways (direct experience, hearsay, records, inference, projection, etc.)

Being alive and conscious means, among other things, striving for **epistemic control** over these processes

Epistemic control over processes amounts to placing them somehow relative to our **conception of reality**

For processes, our basic epistemic concern is their status with respect to their actual or potential occurrence

It is this status of a process (the status with respect to its actual or potential occurrence) that the system of clausal grounding is meant to reflect

The basic system of clausal grounding in English:

the formal structure of the English verb phrase

John may have been being criticized for a long time

John has been being criticized for a long time

modal/tense perfect progressive passive lexical verb

Only modal and tense predications are grounding elements

two formal oppositions:

the presence vs. the absence of a modal

the presence vs. the absence of the “past-tense” morpheme

each opposition (iconically) signals a conceptual contrast

the presence vs. the absence of a modal

- ∅ (no modal) – the grounded process is accepted by the speaker as part of known reality
- presence of a modal – the grounded process is placed in the realm of irreality

the presence vs. the absence of the “past-tense” morpheme

- ∅/**proximal** (no “past tense”/**distal** morpheme) – the grounded process is **immediate** to the speaker
- presence of the “past tense”/**distal** morpheme – the grounded process is **non-immediate** to the speaker

The intersection of these two oppositions yields four basic types of grounding predications

Each situates the profiled process in a particular epistemic region:

immediate reality

non-immediate reality

immediate irreality

non-immediate irreality

One possible realization of the contrast between the immediate and the non-immediate reality is the contrast between the **present** and the **past**

A modal places the designated process in the epistemic region of irreality

a. *John may come*

b. *John will come*

“[T]he modals can be described as contrasting with one another because they situate the process at varying distances from the speaker’s position at immediate known reality” (Langacker 1991:246)

The contrast between immediate and non-immediate irreality

c. *John may come*

extrapolation from immediate reality

d. *John might come*

extrapolation from some hypothetical situation

might – *may* + DIST *might* – indicates a greater epistemic distance than *may*

“[T]he distal predication indicates that the modal’s epistemic distance is not computed directly from immediate reality, but rather from a point that is somehow removed from it” (Langacker 1991:247)

The English present tense

no modal, no DIST

the present tense predication places the profiled process in immediate reality

➤ report on immediate actual experience

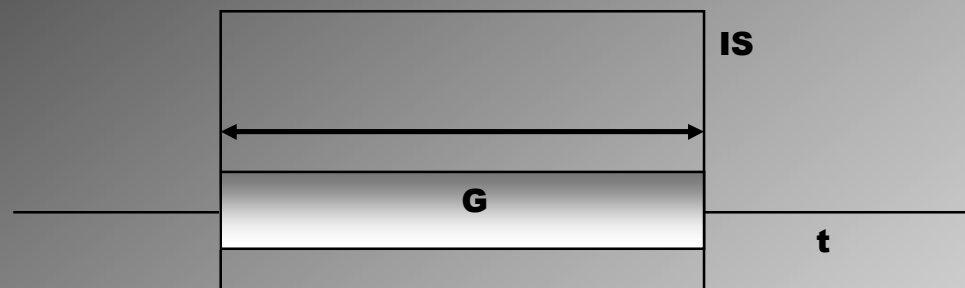
immediate reality has a temporal dimension to it

immediate reality in its temporal dimension (what counts as *now* in the strictest sense) is **not** a **temporal point**, but rather a **period** of time **coinciding with the speech event**

when a verb phrase combines with the present tense predication, an instance of a process profiled by this verb phrase is placed within immediate reality

in other words, the profiled process instance has to be fully manifested within the period of time coincident with the speech event

Fig. 5



Two problems with the coherence of such a conceptual configuration:

- durational**: typically, there is no inherent correlation between the duration of a process and the duration of the speech event reporting on the occurrence of this process
- epistemic**: typically, before we report on the occurrence of a process we first need to observe a full instance of this process to identify its nature; only then can we report linguistically on the processual occurrence

hence, typically, once we have identified the nature of the relevant process, it is already too late to initiate a temporally coincident report on the processual occurrence

However, there are two kinds of processes:

imperfectives: continuation through time of a stable situation; no change; no temporal limits

Tom love Mary

John know the answer

Mary believe in God

continuation through time of a stable situation; no change; no temporal limits

Importantly, in the case of imperfectives any fragment of the relevant situation constitutes a valid instance of the situation in question

perfectives: change through time; temporal limits

Tom kick Mary

John write down the answer

beginning and ending; intermediate phases evolving from the beginning to the ending

Only a complete process constitutes a valid instance

Aspect

•simple aspect:

a full instance of a process type designated by the bare VP is profiled

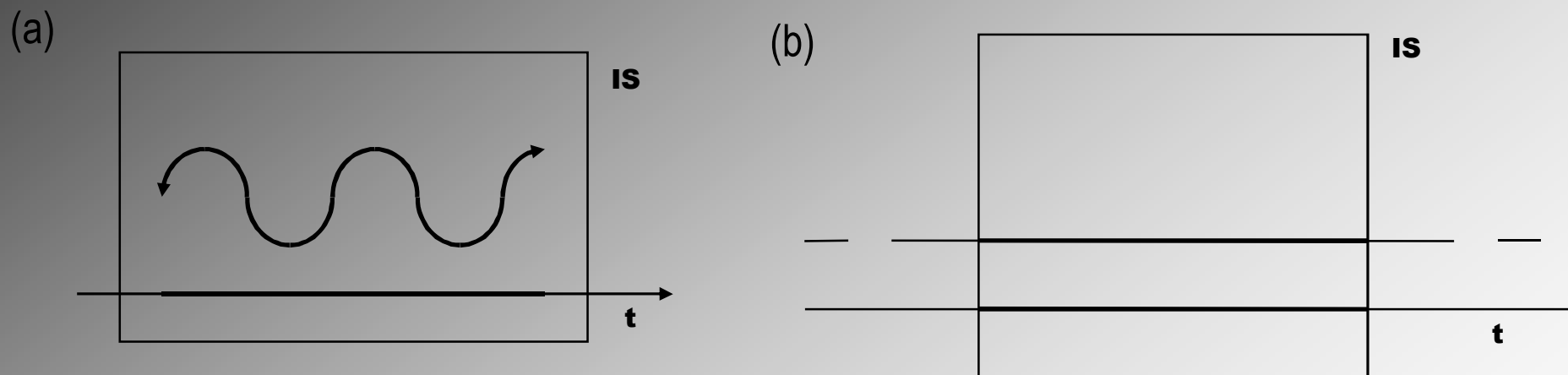


Fig. 6

•progressive aspect:

quantifies over a process

only arbitrary internal phases of the process designated by a bare VP are put in profile

in this way a higher-order imperfective process is derived

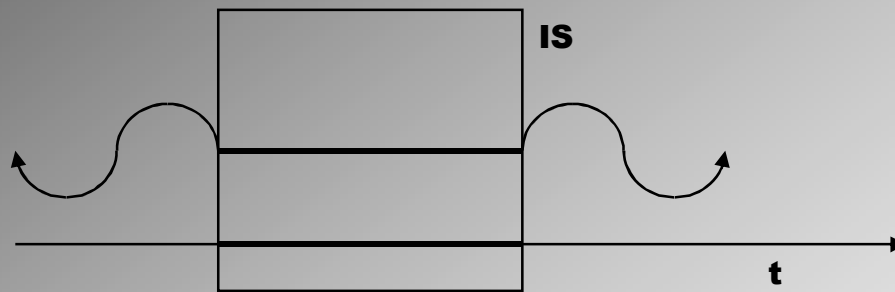


Fig. 7

Imperfectives and the two problems

- **durational**: whatever fragment of an imperfective process coincides with the speech event, this fragment in itself constitutes a valid instance of the process in question
- **epistemic**: we may recognize the nature of the relevant process as a result of observing an instance of this process (a fragment of the situation) preceding the speech event; then we may make a report on the fragment of the situation manifested throughout the period of time coinciding with the speech event (also a valid instance of the same situation)

a. *Tom loves Mary*

John knows the answer

b. **Tom is loving Mary*

**John is knowing the answer*

Potential problem for the proposed analysis

John wear a sweater Mary sit on the sofa

Such processes do not involve any change through time
Nevertheless they behave grammatically like perfectives

a. **John wears a sweater *Mary sits on the sofa*

b. *John is wearing a sweater Mary is sitting on the sofa*

The processes in question do not involve any change through time; they are, however, conceptualized as saliently involving a beginning and an ending (temporal bounding)

The salience of temporal bounding is due to the fact that in our everyday experience such processes typically occur in bounded episodes

Processes of this kind are thus perfective – only a complete process together with the endpoints constitutes a valid instance of process types of this kind

“Exceptional” cases when perfective VPs occur in the simple present (with a true present-time meaning)

➤ explicit performatives

a. *I pronounce you man and wife*

the profiled process and the speech event reporting on its occurrence are one and the same entity

the agent of the profiled process is the speaker

the profiled action is intentional and hence, the speaker knows what kind of action he is about to engage in prior to the speech event

Hence:

In the case of the conceptual configuration of this kind the durational and the epistemic problems are avoided

➤ demonstrations

a. *Now I raise my hand. And now I lower my hand*

b. *Now I drive to work. And now I drive back home* a child playing with a toy car

the process is intentional and its agent is the speaker

the duration of the process roughly coincides or may be made to roughly coincide with the time of speaking

the duration of the process is under the speaker's control

hence, the durational and the epistemic problems are again avoided

A process may be assessed as epistemically immediate to the conceptualizer when it is actually unfolding in front of the conceptualizer's eyes throughout the conceptualizer's *now*

There are also other ways in which a process may be epistemically immediate to the conceptualizer

➤ historical present

a. *Last night I enter the bar and then this guy starts yelling at me and hits me in the face*

➤ scheduled future

b. *Our plane leaves at noon*

➤ generics and habituais

c. *A cat chases a mouse*

d. *John gets up at seven everyday*

In each case actual events in the outside world are represented in the conceptualizer's mind as entries in a mental document of some kind

- historical present – the relevant document is a record of past events
- scheduled future – a mental schedule of how future events are supposed to occur
- generics and habituais – an idea of how the world generally works representing generalizations over individual actual occurrences

Entries in such mental documents are stored in the conceptualizer's mind and may be accessed at any time

Mentally accessing them at the conceptualizer's *now* makes them **epistemically immediate** to the conceptualizer

Grounding at the effective level

a. Leave now!

We are not only concerned with **reporting on** the occurrence (or non-occurrence) of events in reality

We are also concerned with **effecting** the occurrence (or non-occurrence) of events in reality

Grounding at the effective level places the profiled event at the effective level with respect to the issues of the following kinds:

- who is responsible for effecting the relevant occurrence (or non-occurrence)
- what kind of social and psychological force is invoked to effect the relevant occurrence or non-occurrence
- and the like

Virtual and actual grounding

grounding understood as an aspect of the language system is **virtual** in nature

it relates the profiled process to the interlocutors, the speech event, and its immediate circumstances, when these are understood in a **generalized fashion** (that is, conceived merely as the **roles** within a **speech act scenario**)

actual grounding occurs only when the relevant linguistic structure is used in a usage event

then aspects of the virtual ground figuring within the conceptual configuration evoked by the linguistic structure are put in correspondence in some specific way with appropriate aspects of the actual speech event (cf. Langacker 2004:545-552)

strong identification: the virtual ground is “fully assimilated to the actual ground” (*ibid.*:549)

a. *John finished his PhD dissertation. And I'm the Chinese Emperor.*

b. *Thanks for nice cooperation!*

used sarcastically, in the context
of a complete lack of cooperation

weak identification: the virtual ground is only partially identified with the actual ground, that is, it is identified with the actual ground only to the extent which is necessary for **formulating** a proposition (or **presenting** an illocutionary act) as an object of conception, but which does not imply **embracing** this proposition (or **performing** the illocutionary act)

“Clausal grounding reflects our lack of omniscience. We do not have a God’s-eye view of the world, and with our local perspective we directly experience only a very small portion of it” (Langacker 2008:296-297)

“If God speaks a language, Her system of clausal grounding must be very different from ours” (*ibid.*:297 fn. 39)

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Thank you !