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# 12. Intersubjectivity and grammar

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## 1. Introduction

From the start of cognitive linguistics, it has been one of the basic tenets that all use of language is subjective. By their choice of words and grammatical constructions, speakers unavoidably present a specific conceptualization, or *construal* (Langacker 1987: 487-8; Langacker 1990: 61), of reality. However, in more recent years it has been argued that there is an additional dimension of language and communication that should not be neglected by cognitive linguists: the intersubjective dimension of 'cognitive coordination' between speaker and hearer (Verhagen 2005: 7). In fact, as will show in this chapter, the function of many grammatical constructions can only be adequately understood if, in addition to the subjective dimension, the intersubjective dimension of language is taken into account. We will start out, in section 2, with a brief introduction to the notion of intersubjectivity and its relation to subjectivity and argumentativity. Then its relevance is shown for the analysis of negation, modality, implementation and conditional constructions in sections 3 to 6, respectively.

## 2. Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

### *2.1 The descriptive dimension*

In most semantic traditions, specifically in formal semantics (see Heim and Kratzer 1998 for an introduction and Portner & Partee 2002 for an overview), the focus of research is on the

descriptive dimension of language. Accordingly, language is analyzed as a referential tool, i.e. a linguistic means for exchanging information *about* something. In this sense, Ducrot's (1996: 42) example below seems to be a clear case.

(1) There are seats in the room.

When this sentence is seen as a purely descriptive expression, its semantics can be described truth-conditionally: knowing the meaning of (1) equals knowing under which conditions the sentence is true, i.e. knowing when there are indeed seats in the room. Such an approach sets out to 'explain how linguistic expressions say things about the world' (Jackendoff 2002: 294). Whereas it seems undeniable that language may be used to describe the world, cognitive linguists have always questioned whether this descriptive dimension can provide the semantics of linguistic items. Moreover, describing the world may not be the primary function of language use. These questions are addressed in the following sections respectively.

*2.2 The subjective dimension*

In response to an objectivist kind of semantics, cognitive linguists starting with Lakoff (1987) have pointed out that instead of expressing 'things about the world', linguistic utterances tell us how the speaker conceives of, or construes, the world. One and the same situation in reality, such as that of seats being in a room, may be presented in many different ways, using different words or grammatical constructions, as in (2) and (3), presenting only two of a principally infinite number of alternatives.

(2) Seats are standing in the room.

(3) The room has seats.

It is hard to see how the alternative phrasings of (1), in (2) and (3), correspond to different truth-conditions and yet one would like to be able to represent the semantics of the presentative *there*-construction in (1), the effect of adding a progressive construction and a posture verb in (2), and that of taking the room rather than the seats as 'starting point' for the sentence in (3). In the words of Langacker (2008: 55): 'Every symbolic structure construes its content in a certain fashion'. The meanings of linguistic elements, then, are to be identified with different *construals of* the world rather than with *references* to the world (Langacker 1991: 1-2). This account of linguistic meaning shifts the focus from reference and truth-conditions to construal and subjectivity, i.e. from equating the meaning of a sentence with its truth-conditions (cf. Heim & Kratzer 1998: 1) to 'equating meaning with conceptualization' (Langacker 1991: 1).

The subjective dimension of language is captured by Langacker (2008: 73-4) in his 'viewing arrangement', as visualized in figure 1.

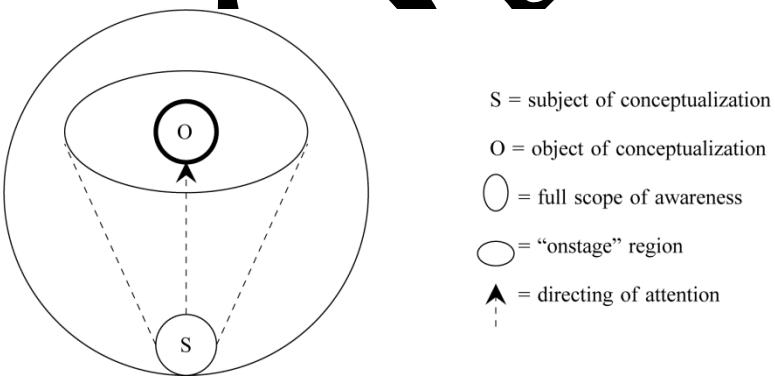



*Figure 1. Subjective and objective construal (Langacker 2008: 260 by permission of Oxford University Press, USA)*

The diagram in Figure 1 shows the conceptualizing subject (S), i.e. the speaker, and the object conceptualized (O), i.e. what the utterance 'is about'. Here, the bold line indicates that the object of conceptualization is profiled maximally, while the subject is not. In example (1), for instance, the fact that there are chairs in the room (O) is explicitly presented, while the speaker (S) is not mentioned. This should not, however, be taken as an indication that such utterances are objective expressions. In fact, there is always a subject of conceptualization directing attention and because in (1) this S is not 'put onstage', the construal is in fact maximally subjective: the activity of focusing attention on the object of conceptualization is not itself explicitly addressed and thus S lacks 'self-awareness' (Langacker 2008: 260). In sentences such as (4), on the other hand, the speaker is 'onstage'.

(4) I think that there are seats in the room.

Here, the speaker is part of the conceptualization and may thus be considered 'objectified': she is less subjectively construed than in (1), (2) and (3).

*2.3 The intersubjective dimension*

The emphasis on subjectivity and conceptualization, may suggest that Langacker's approach is entirely speaker-oriented. However, the notion of 'subject of conception' in Figure 1 is an abstraction. It is made more specific and concrete in Figure 2, illustrating that both speaker (S) and hearer (H) are the 'primary conceptualizers'.

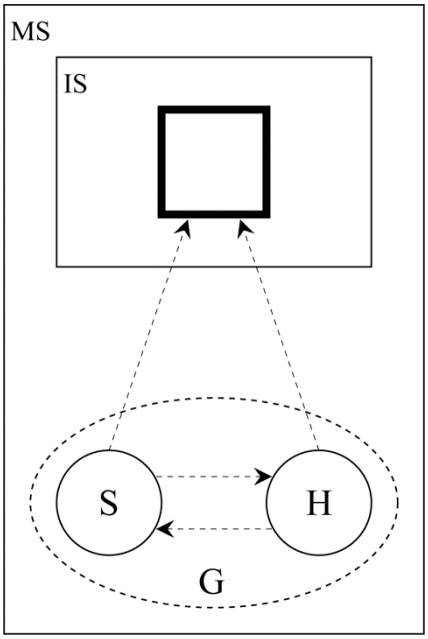



*Figure 2. Basic scheme for the meanings of expressions (Langacker 2008: 261 by permission of Oxford University Press, USA)*

The 'general locus of attention' of an expression is captured in the maximal scope (MS), while the immediate scope (IS) includes only what is put onstage and is directly relevant (Langacker 2008: 63). The speech situation, including the interaction between speaker and hearer – as symbolized by the arrows going from S to H and vice versa – constitutes the Ground (G) of the discourse: it is always there, but it may be more or less explicit in linguistic expressions and, therefore, less or more subjective (as in (4) versus (1)-(3)). Langacker, then, clearly acknowledges the role of the speaker and in fact ascribes a 'dynamic, intersubjective, context-dependent' nature to meaning construction in actual discourse (2008: 28).

However, when one thinks about the *reasons* for spending cognitive effort on producing linguistic expressions, neither a truth-conditional nor an exclusively 'subjective' analysis will suffice. Why would S in (1) present her description or conceptualization of reality to H in a

linguistic utterance, if not to achieve certain effects with that utterance)?[1] What would be the point of S exchanging information about chairs in the room (O) to H? It is basically in view of such questions that Verhagen (2005) proposes a modified version of Langacker's viewing arrangement, as visualized in Figure 3.

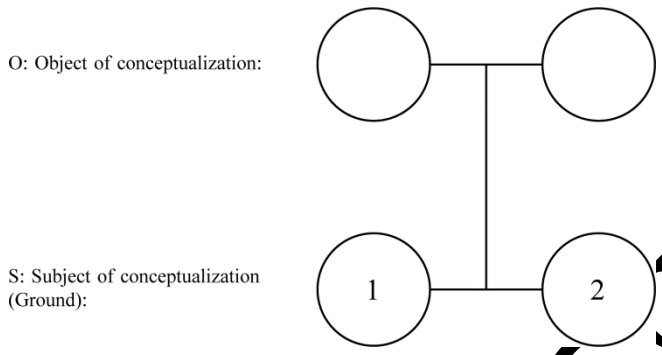



*Figure 3. Construal configuration and its basic elements (Verhagen 2005: 7 by permission of Oxford University Press, USA)*



Verhagen's *construal configuration* incorporates both the descriptive and the subjective dimension of language use. The latter is represented by the vertical line in the middle connecting the Ground (the subjects of conceptualization; the S-level) to the descriptive contents of the utterance (the objects of conceptualization; the O-level). However, more than in Langacker's account, this is a shared perspective between language users: speaker and hearer engage in what is called 'cognitive coordination' (Verhagen 2005: 7), as represented by the horizontal line connecting Speaker and Hearer. In this view, the goal of linguistic communication is to invite the other 'to jointly attend to an object of conceptualization in some specific way, and to update the common ground by doing so' (Verhagen 2005: 7). This

[1] Also see Croft's (2009) notion of 'construal for communication' and Harder's (2010) 'social turn in cognitive linguistics'.

means that the speaker invites the hearer to change his cognitive system by drawing inferences evoked by the linguistic utterance used, and to adjust the common ground accordingly.

In fact, these inferences, at the S-level, rather than the linguistically coded descriptive content of the utterance, at the O-level, constitute the point of the utterance. When language is seen from this perspective, as a social instead of an informational tool, the focus of analysis automatically shifts from its referential properties and its subjective perspectival properties to its intersubjective dimension: a speaker expresses (1a) not to describe a room containing seats, nor only to subjectively construe this situation in some way, but to invite an interlocutor to draw inferences about, for instance, the comfort provided in the room. This is not 'merely' a case of pragmatics, like indirect speech acts or pragmatic implicatures put 'on top of semantics', but a systematic effect of language itself, as can be exemplified by the use of the conjunction *but* in (1a).[2]

(1a) There are seats in the room, *but* they are uncomfortable. (Ducrot 1996: 42)

The use of *but* here demonstrates opposing orientations of the two connected utterances; the first induces positive inferences (e.g. 'the possibility of sitting down'), while the second cancels such inferences by inducing negative ones (e.g. 'the impossibility of sitting down'). Because of these opposed orientations, use of the contrastive conjunction *but* produces a coherent discourse. Now consider (1b), in which *but* is replaced by *and moreover*.

[2] For an elaborate discussion on this point in reply to criticism by Hinzen and Van Lambalgen (2008), see Verhagen (2008).

(1b) # There are seats in the room *and moreover,* they are uncomfortable.

Because the connective here is not contrastive but additive, the second utterance is incompatible with the inference licensed by 'there are seats in the room'. This shows that (1) is not the neutral (objective), nor merely subjective utterance it seemed to be. The utterance, in and of itself, has a certain 'argumentative orientation': it is meant to trigger specific inferences rather than others. Otherwise, it could not be explained how only the use of *but* makes (1a) a coherent sequence. Consequently, the reverse is true when the second utterance invites inferences which are in accordance with those of the first.

(1c) # There are seats in the room *but* they are comfortable.

(1d) There are seats in the room *and moreover,* they are comfortable.

From a purely descriptive point of view, it is unclear why such systematic differences exist, but from an intersubjective perspective, the meaning of words resides in their contribution to the argumentative orientation of an utterance (Ducrot 1996: 27); these orientations are opposed in (1a), requiring a contrastive conjunction like *but*, while they are similar in (1d), requiring an additive connective.

Intersubjectivity, in this view, thus relates to the participants in linguistic communication and consists of the mutual influence they exert on each other's cognitive systems (Verhagen 2005:

26). [3] The nature of this influence is called *argumentative,* since utterances are conceived of as arguments for conclusions, thus as means to invite the discourse participant to draw certain inferences. This argumentative nature of language is what characterizes the relation – or cognitive coordination – between subjects of conceptualization.

## 3. Intersubjectivity in grammatical constructions

If, as Du Bois (1985: 363) argues, 'grammars code best what speakers do most', and cognitive coordination is always involved in language use, it is to be expected that grammatical constructions encode meaning on the level of intersubjectivity (Verhagen 2005: 4).[4] Including this level of analysis sheds light on persistent problems occurring in the more traditional analysis of grammatical constructions. To illustrate this point, the following sections will discuss a number of widely studied linguistic phenomena from this perspective, starting with negation.

### *3.1 Negation*

Negation is an extensively studied phenomenon (see Horn 2010 for an overview) and it makes intuitive sense to attribute to negation a truth-conditional semantics. In terms of the construal configuration in Figure 3, this would boil down to the speaker using a negative statement to

[3] Verhagen (2015) discusses the relationship between this notion of intersubjectivity and other interpretations.

[4] The role of speaker-hearer interaction in grammar is also emphasized in Du Bois' (2014) *dialogic syntax*, the notion of *fictive interaction* introduced by Pascual (2014) and in the framework of interactional construction grammar (see Deppermann 2006, cf. Boogaart, Colleman and Rutten 2014: 9-11).

inform the hearer that something is not the case in 'the world', thus at the level of the object of conceptualization. In principle, this is not incompatible with the general argumentative perspective on language use sketched in the previous section. After all, at the S-level, H could combine such negative information about O with shared cultural and contextual knowledge to draw all kinds of relevant inferences. However, Verhagen's (2005: 28-77) analysis of negation and related negative expressions takes a crucial step further, as he argues that linguistic meaning itself, including that of negation, may be conventionally associated *directly* with the S-level.

More specifically, rather than concerning the connection between language and the world, negation regulates the relation between distinct 'mental spaces' (Fauconnier 1994) that, for this purpose, may be identified with conceptualizers 1 and 2 in the construal configuration of Figure 3 (Verhagen 2005: 30-31). By using negation, S instructs H to entertain two different cognitive representations – both the negative one and its positive counterpart – and to adopt the first while abandoning the second.[5] The fact that negation (¬ p) triggers the construction of a mental space in which its positive counterpart (p) is valid, is evidenced by the observation, in (5), that both p and ¬ p are available for reference in the subsequent discourse.

(5) This time, there was no such communication [about the plans]. *It*'s a pity because *it* could have resulted in greater participation by the employers. (Verhagen 2005: 29)

Whereas the first *it* in the second sentence of (5) refers to the fact that there was no communication, the second *it* refers to the presence of communication (that could have

[5] Experimental evidence for this is provided by Beukeboom, Finkenauer & Wigboldus (2010).

resulted in greater participation). Apparently, both are made cognitively accessible by the first sentence. Additional evidence for this claim may be adduced by the behavior of *on the contrary* in (6) (Verhagen 2005: 31).

(6a) Mary is not happy. On the contrary, she is feeling really depressed.

(6b) #Mary is sad. On the contrary, she is feeling really depressed.

(6c) #Mary is unhappy. On the contrary, she is feeling really depressed.

In (6a), the fact that Mary is really depressed is not the 'contrary' of the fact that she is not happy. In fact, it is contrary to Mary being happy, i.e. to the positive counterpart of the situation expressed in the first sentence. This second mental space must be activated by the use of sentential negation: it is not made available by the lexical item *sad* in (6b) or by the morphological negation (*unhappy*) in (6c). Since 'feeling really depressed' is not contrary to being 'sad' or 'unhappy', and no other space is available for reference, (6b) and (6c) are incoherent. Use of sentential negation is thus intrinsically argumentative since S explicitly – as part of the linguistic meaning of negation – activates a standpoint in order to oppose it. As Dancygier (2012) argues, there is a general correlation between linguistic elements triggering alternative spaces, like negation, and their use as argumentative or stance device.

The crucial role of the intersubjective dimension rather the descriptive dimension of language in the system of negation and related expressions is further illustrated by the sentences in (7) (adapted from Verhagen 2005: 42-47).

(7a) Our son *did not pass* the exam,

(7b) Our son *barely passed* the exam.

(7c) Our son *almost passed* the exam.

(7d) Our son *passed* the exam.

In section 2, it was shown how, from an argumentative perspective on semantics, the function of linguistic items is to trigger inferences on the part of H. In (7a), then, S is not so much sharing the information about the son's result as he is trying to make H infer the consequences thereof. The exact content of these inference may differ, depending on contexts and cultural models, but negation as such has a 'negative argumentative orientation'.[6] Interestingly, this is true also of *barely* in (7b). If we look at this utterance from a descriptive perspective, it is clear that the son did pass his exam. However, the inferences S wants to trigger in uttering (7b) are actually similar to the ones in (7a), i.e. they are inferences that would follow from the son not passing, albeit it in a weaker form. While (7a) and (7b) may differ in argumentative *strength*, they share their negative argumentative orientation. Conversely, in (7c), *almost passed* means that our son did not pass the exam and yet the utterance has a positive ring to it that is lacking in (7b) . This is because *almost* has a positive argumentative orientation: S wants H to draw inferences that follow from our son passing the exam, as in (7d), but the positive argument in (7c) is of course weaker than that of the unmitigated utterance in (7d).

It is important to note that positive and negative argumentative orientation are context-independent functions of 'argumentative operators' like *almost* and *barely* that concern the polarity of the associated inferences rather than their evaluation. Thus, the negative

[6] In a somewhat different but compatible way, this notion is used in experimental research on attribute framing (e.g. the difference between 'half full' and 'half empty') by e.g. Holleman and Pander Maat (2009).

orientation of *barely* in (8a) triggers inferences associated with 'not failing the exam' and the positive orientation of *almost* in (8b) triggers inferences of the kind that 'failing the exam' would.

(8a) Our son barely failed the exam.

(8b) Our son almost failed the exam.

From the perspective of evaluation, these inferences will probably be relatively hopeful in (8a) and somewhat disturbing in (8b), opposite to those in (7b) and (7c). This is determined by general cultural knowledge and more specific contextual information. The argumentative orientation of the linguistic items involved is, however, constant and can thus be considered part of the linguistic system.

*3.2 Complementation constructions*

In most syntactic theories, both traditional and modern, complementation constructions, such as in (9), are basically analysed as simple clauses with a clause instead of a noun phrase as direct object, as in (10) (Verhagen 2005: 78).

(9) George said *that his opponent was closing in*.

(10) George said *something*.

Consequently, any difference between (9) and (10) is attributed to the difference between clauses and noun phrases, arguing that there are no crucial differences between simple transitive clauses and complementation constructions; as in (10), the matrix clause in (9) *describes* an event of saying, rendering the complement clause as subordinate to it.

However, Thompson (2002) shows that complementation constructions function differently in discourse; finite complements such as 'it's cool' in (11) do not have lower prominence than the matrix clause they are subordinate to. Rather, they present a 'common object of attention' to which the matrix clause adds epistemic stance.

(11) (talking about a photo collage on the wall)

Terry: I think it's cool.

Abbie: it i = s cool.

Maureen: it i = s great. (Thompson 2002: 132)

This view is corroborated by Diessel and Tomasello's (2001) observation that the earliest uses of complementation constructions by children include marking of epistemic stance and illocutionary force.

These findings suggest that when viewed in terms of the construal configuration in Figure 3, complementation constructions do not represent an event (of *thinking, saying*) as an object of conceptualization, but they invite the hearer on the level of subjects of conceptualization to adopt the perspective (or 'stance') of the onstage conceptualizer (Verhagen 2005: 97).

Consider the following example from Verhagen (2005: 107), which, in a referential analysis, would amount to analyzing all of B's reactions to A's question as references to the world: ($B_1$) refers to the scheduled time, ($B_2$) to the belief of the speaker and ($B_3$) to the speech act of John.

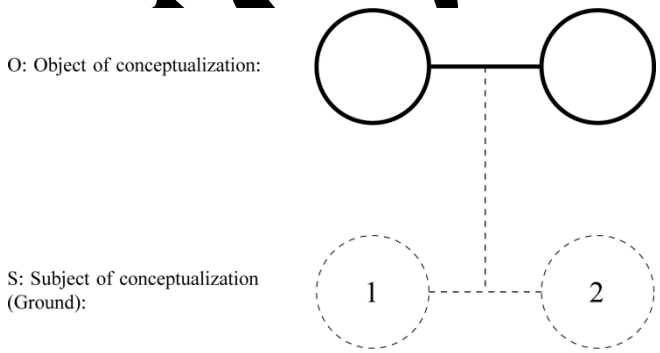
(12) A: Will we be in time for the launch?

$B_1$: It was scheduled for 4 p.m., so we still have lots of time.

$B_2$: I think it was scheduled for 4 p.m., so we still have lots of time.

$B_3$: John said it was scheduled for 4 p.m., so we still have lots of time.

From an intersubjective point of view, the difference between B's expressions cannot be adequately expressed in terms of references to the world. Rather, all of B's expressions are considered means to invite the same inference (i.e. 'we still have lots of time'). They have the same argumentative orientation, while they differ in argumentative strength, i.e. the force with which the hearer is invited to draw the inference. The non-embedded clause in $B_1$'s response presents the strongest argument, because the information profiled at the level of objects of conceptualization is shared directly between conceptualizers 1 and 2.[7] The speaker is not put onstage as subject of conceptualization (see section 2.2), which is represented by dotted lines in Figure 4, while the object of conceptualization is profiled, represented by bold lines.




[7] In Langacker's terms, both $B_1$ and $B_3$ would be 'maximally subjective', as the subjects are not linguistically referred to. One benefit of the intersubjective approach is that it is able to explain the difference between $B_1$ and $B_3$ on the level of subjects of conceptualization.

*Figure 4. Construal configuration for non-perspectivized utterance (Verhagen 2005: 106 by permission of Oxford University Press, USA)*

In $B_2$, the speaker is put onstage by the expression of the matrix clause (*I think*), presenting a perspective on the object of conceptualization in the complement clause. The indirect introduction of the object of conceptualization into the Ground opens up the possibility of a difference between the speaker's perspective and reality, decreasing the force with which the hearer is invited to draw the intended inference. This is visualized in Figure 5 below, in which both the object of conceptualization and the first-person perspective are profiled.

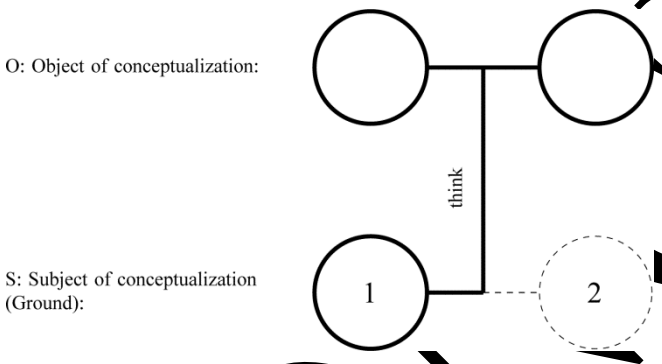



*Figure 5. Construal configuration for first-person perspective (Verhagen 2005: 106 by permission of Oxford University Press, USA)*

In $B_3$, the relation of the complement to the Ground is even more indirect. The speaker temporarily adopts a third person's perspective, as represented by the arrow in Figure 6. (For a more elaborate intersubjective model of third-person perspectives, see Van Duijn & Verhagen 2016.) It is crucial here that this perspective is not analyzed on the level of the object of conceptualization, but on the level of subjects of conceptualization; i.e. the object of conceptualization in $B_3$ is shared between conceptualizers 1 and 2 through the temporary adoption of the perspective of onstage conceptualizer 3. Consequently, the lower

argumentative strength results from the possibility of a difference between the perspective of the speaker and the onstage conceptualizer.

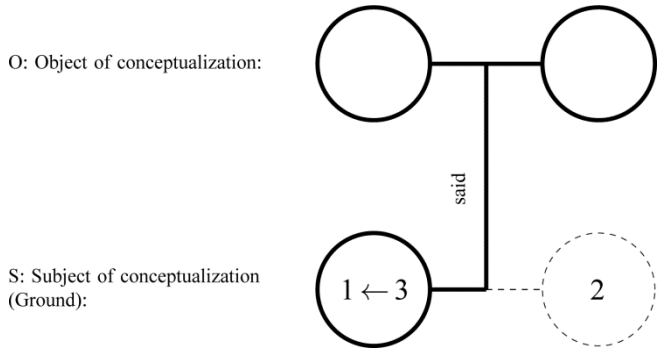



*Figure 6. Construal configuration for third-person perspective (Verhagen 2005: 106 by permission of Oxford University Press, USA)*

By including both the intersubjective and objective dimension in the analysis of B's reactions in (12), their grammatical differences can be explained in terms of argumentativity: the simple clause and complementation constructions share the same orientation, while they differ in strength.

What this shows, is that the parallel between simple clauses and complementation constructions stems from a theoretically motivated desire to describe constructions syntactically in terms of general rules, and semantically in terms of references to the world. The linguistic expression of *viewpoint* by means of complementation constructions can be analyzed more adequately in terms of negotiation between Speaker and Hearer (cf. Sweetser 2012: 6; Dancygier 2012a). It shows that complements operate on the level of objects of conceptualization, while the matrix clauses present the speaker's stance towards it (sometimes indirectly, through another point of view). The intersubjective approach has also been successful in analyzing the more general phenomenon of speech and thought representation.

Vandelanotte (this volume) remarks that viewpoint 'is construed intersubjectively, in a negotation with other participants in a given speech event.' Third-party perspective in narrative texts, for instance, is analyzed in terms of the mutual coordination of perspectives (see Vandelanotte 2009, Dancygier 2012a; 2012b, Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2016, Van Duijn and Verhagen 2016 and several contributions to Dancygier, Lu and Verhagen 2016).

When we finally return to the difference between (9) and (10) at the start of this section, we see that (10) is not 'just' a case of a direct-object slot filled by a clause instead of a noun phrase, but a non-perspectivized invitation to adopt the claim made by the speaker, resulting in maximal argumentative strength, while (9) is an invitation to adopt George's perspective temporarily adopted by the speaker, resulting in lower argumentative strength. Consequently, the function of complementation constructions is to link the intersubjective dimension of communication, linguistically expressed in a matrix clause, to the objective dimension of communication, expressed as a complement.

*3.3 Modality*

Modality is crucially concerned with the speaker's perspective on reality and, thus, with construal and subjectivity. (See Boogaart & Fortuin 2016 for an overview of mood and modality in cognitive linguistics.) More specifically, within Cognitive Grammar, Langacker (1991: ch. 9) has argued that English modal verbs are grounding devices connecting the object of conceptualization to the Ground of the discourse. As such, they may be called subjective since they express the speaker's assessment of the world, without the speaker and the Ground being profiled. Furthermore, different uses of modal verbs are assumed to differ in the extent to which they subjectively construe elements of the Ground. For instance, the use of *must* in (13a) is considered less subjective than the use of *must* in (13b).

(13a) He must be home by 6, so he should really go now.

(13b) He must be home since the lights are on.

The deontic use of *must* in (13a) refers to an obligation the subject referent has in the world, whereas the function of epistemic *must* in (13b) is to attribute a certain degree of probability to the situation described. Since the latter is entirely a matter of reasoning and evaluation by the speaker, the interpretation of *must* in (13b) is more dependent on the speaker than is the interpretation of *must* in (13a). Synchronically, the different uses of *must* exemplified in (13) can thus be described in terms of their different degree of subjectivity and, diachronically, the development of epistemic uses of modals from non-epistemic uses is an instance of *subjectification* (Traugott 1989, 1997).

Given the characterization of (12a) and (12b), this is in fact more generally applicable to the difference between non-epistemic and epistemic modality, it will be clear how these different meanings may be related to Verhagen's construal configuration in Figure 3: non-epistemic modals (also) profile an element at the O-level, while epistemic modals are concerned with the construal relation and the relationship between S and H at the S-level. However, in contrast to the subjective dimension, the latter, intersubjective dimension of modality has so far not received much attention in the literature. We want to mention two, interrelated ways in which this framework could further contribute to our understanding of modals.

First, taking Verhagen's claim on the argumentative nature of language use seriously, we should treat utterances as a means S uses to trigger specific inferences on the part of H. In the general sense outlined in section 2.3, this is true for utterances with or without modals, but it

seems that modal verbs constitute a conventional linguistic system, like the system of negation, that speakers use to provide arguments for conclusions with greater or lesser argumentative strength (see Rocci 2008 for a compatible perspective in argumentation theory). In (13a), it was already shown how a (non-epistemic) modalized utterance may be used as an argument for a conclusion: S mentions her obligation to be home on time to motivate his urgency to leave. Of course, epistemic utterances such as (13b) are used to trigger inferences in a highly similar way. For instance, depending on the context, a relevant inference may be the one made explicit in (14).

(14a) He must be home now, so this is a good time to try and talk to him.

(14b) He could be home now, so this is a good time to try and talk to him.

As the difference between (14a) and (14b) shows, the epistemic modal system comprises both necessity modals and possibility modals and thus provides S with the possibility of distinguishing between stronger and weaker arguments for basically the same conclusion. This parallels, in fact, the difference between sentential negation and words like *barely*, discussed in 3.1 and between the various kinds of matrices in the complementation construction from 3.2. A further point of comparison between modality and negation concerns the fact that by using a modal, S explicitly introduces different possible scenarios, or mental spaces. From the perspective taken here, these can be regarded as competing standpoints and, like in the case of negation, this makes the use of modals inherently argumentative.

Another way in which the intersubjective perspective on language may be helpful in the domain of modality relates to the well-known polysemy of modals, that was already illustrated in (13), and the fact that it is often very hard to distinguish between 'objective'

(non-epistemic) and 'subjective' (epistemic) uses of these verbs. This is true also for the two uses of the Dutch verb *beloven* ('promise'), illustrated in (15) (Verhagen 2000, 2005: 19-24, cf. Traugott 1997 and Cornillie 2004 on its English and Spanish equivalents respectively).

(15a) Het debat belooft spannend te worden.
'The debate promises to be exciting'

(15b) Hij belooft de grondwet te verdedigen.
'He promises to defend the constitution.'

In (15b) the verb describes an actual act of promising at the O-level, whereas in (15a) the use of *beloven* is epistemic in the same sense as *must* in (1[illegible]): it is confined to the S-level of intersubjective coordination. In addition to such clear cases of 'objective' and 'subjective' *beloven*, however, there are many intermediate cases that allow for both readings and, when asked about them, speakers of Dutch do not really agree on where to draw the line (Verhagen 2005: 21). This situation, then, is very much like the distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic uses of the core modals, that are often very hard to distinguish as well. (The problems are discussed at length by Boogaart 2009.) Now, with respect to *beloven*, Verhagen makes the interesting point that, in practice, the distinction between its subjective and objective use does not make much difference for communication to be successful, since the different readings share their argumentative orientation at the S-level. Just like, in (15b), the act of promising counts as an argument strengthening the expectation that the constitution will be defended, the contribution of *beloven* in (15a) consists exclusively of this argumentative orientation. Now, if linguistic elements are primarily meant to trigger certain inferences at the S-level, it is clear that the problem of the polysemy of modals does not really have to be a problem for communication. The different uses of modal verbs may occupy different

positions on the scale from O-level to S-level,[8] but if their contribution consists of their argumentative orientation and strength, there is no need to determine their exact position on this scale and language users do not have to agree on this for communication to be successful.

### *3.4 Conditional constructions*

In formal-semantic traditions, conditionals are analyzed in terms of truth conditions (for an overview, see Bennet 2003; Von Fintel 2011 and Kratzer 2012). The main distinction made is that between indicative and subjunctive conditionals, as in (16) and (17) respectively (Von Fintel 2011: 1517).

(16) If Grijpstra played his drums, de Gier played his flute.

(17) If Grijpstra had played his drums, de Gier would have played his flute.

The difference between (16) and (17) is that the latter carries an implicature of counterfactuality (i.e. it is at least suggested that Grijpstra did not play his drums; cf. Comrie 1986), while the former leaves either possibility open. The similarity between (16) and (17) is that the situation expressed in the main clause or *consequent* is caused or enabled by the situation expressed in the *if*-clause or *antecedent*; i.e. the truth of the consequent depends on that of the antecedent. This focus on the descriptive dimension works for hypothetical conditionals, as in (16), (17) and (18) below, but it encounters problems when other uses of conditional constructions are considered, as exemplified in (19) to (21).

[8] Modal verbs used as hedging device or politeness strategy are clear examples of the most intersubjective use (Traugott 2003, cf. Sweetser's 1990 notion of speech-act modality).

(18) If Mary goes, John will go. (Sweetser 1990: 114)

(19) If she's divorced, (then) she's been married. (Sweetser 1990: 116)

(20) If you need any help, my name is Ann. (Dancygier & Sweetser 2005: 113)

(21) My husband, if I can still call him that, hates onion soup. (Dancygier 1998: 106)

While in (18) the situation expressed in the antecedent ("Mary goes") causes the situation expressed in the consequent ("John will go"), in (19) to (21) there is no such direct causal relation; i.e. being divorced does not cause being married, needing help does not cause someone to go by the name Ann and being able to call someone your husband does not cause him hating onion soup. Consequently, it cannot be argued that the antecedent and consequent of conditionals in general are connected by direct causality. In cognitive linguistics therefore, the causal character of *predictive conditionals,* as exemplified in (18), is taken to be the prototype for other, less central (i.e. *non-predictive*) types of conditionals (cf. Dancygier 1998: ch. 7; also see Athanasiadou & Dirven 1997).

Dancygier and Sweetser (2005), building on earlier work by Sweetser (1990) and Dancygier (1998), provide an analysis of different conditionals as 'mental space builders' (cf. Fauconnier 1994) in different domains. Contrary to the predictive nature of (18), in (19) there is a less direct connection between antecedent and consequent. Knowledge of the truth expressed in the antecedent enables the conclusion expressed in the consequent and accordingly, these *inferential conditionals* (cf. Dancygier 1998) operate in the epistemic domain of reasoning rather than in the domain of real-world causality. In (20), the relation between antecedent and consequent is even more indirect: the former addresses a felicity condition (cf. Austin 1962) for uttering the latter and as such, it functions in the domain of speech acts and is consequently known as a *speech-act conditional*. The last type of non-

predictive conditional discussed by Dancygier and Sweetser (2005) is the *metalinguistic conditional* exemplified in (21), in which the antecedent comments on the appropriateness of the linguistic form of the consequent, thus operating in the domain of metalinguistic communication.

What can be observed, then, is a decreasing directness in the relation between antecedent and consequent in (18) to (21). Many classifications essentially describe this relation exclusively in terms associated with the level of objects of conceptualization, i.e. the construal configuration (e.g. necessity, sufficiency, recurrence, fulfilment). However, the domain approach by Dancygier and Sweetser is compatible with the intersubjective approach to grammar. The degree of directness from predictive to metalinguistic conditionals can be said to be inversely proportional to the degree of intersubjectivity. In predictive conditionals, there is not only an intersubjective component, as in all utterances, to the relation between antecedent and consequent, but it clearly also resides on the level of objects of conceptualization in the construal configuration. There is a real-world causal link between antecedent and consequent and the degree of intersubjectivity is relatively low. In epistemic conditionals, the relation between antecedent and consequent is primarily construed at the level of subjects of conceptualization, i.e. the speaker construes one object of conceptualization as an argument for another, *based on* a real-world causal connection and therefore the degree of intersubjectivity is higher. In speech-act and metalinguistic conditionals, the relation resides solely on the intersubjective level, i.e. relating a felicity condition in the antecedent to a speech act in the consequent or commenting on the linguistic form of an utterance.

The added value of the intersubjective approach is that conditionals can be analyzed on more than one level at the same time. This makes it possible to explain why different constructions are used to express conditional relations. The function of various constructions can differ from *if* both on the level of objects and subjects of conceptualization. For instance, paratactic conditionals, as in (22), may be paraphrased by means of *if* while maintaining their relation on the truth-conditional and the domain level (i.e. a predictive relation between antecedent and consequent).

(22) Break that vase and I will break your neck. (Fortuin & Brugaart 2009: 642)

(23) If you break that vase, I will break your neck.

However, (22) and (23) clearly differ on the intersubjective level: the former is a stronger threat than the latter is. The grammatical form used (a combination of a directive imperative and parataxis with *and*) functions as a grounding element in the same way as wording might reflect the stance of the speaker towards what is expressed (e.g. *commie* vs. *communist*; Langacker 2008: 562). It thus has the same argumentative orientation as the *if*-conditional in (22), but it differs in strength, i.e. the speaker directs the hearer more strongly towards the intended inference not to break the vase, making the paratactic construction particularly suitable for threats.

In contrast to focusing on antecedents, consequents and their relations, this approach enables the analysis of a conditional construction as a whole, showing its function in discourse. It contributes a more grammatical perspective to the growing number of studies on the use of conditionals as threats and advice (e.g. Ohm & Thompson 2004; Evans 2005; Haigh, Stewart, Wood & Connell 2011) by explaining the function of conditionals in terms of argumentative

orientation (positive and negative) and argumentative strength.[9] In line with Dancygier's (2008) suggestion to relate different conditional constructions to partly overlapping construal configurations, it is expected that differences between prototypical *if* and other conditionals, including for instance the conditional use of prepositional phrases as exemplified in (24), might be explained in a similar way.

(24) That course is mandatory: without a license, the couple will not be permitted to marry. (Reuneker 2016)

Notions from more traditional analyses of conditionals rest mainly on the level of objects of conceptualization. In the construal configurations central to the approach presented here, this does not make them incompatible with more pragmatic analyses of conditionals in terms of, for instance, desirability (Akatsuka 1999) and control over the consequent (Ohm & Thompson 2004). These notions function mainly on the level of subjects of conceptualization and by combining both levels, the intersubjective approach to language may enable a next step in the analysis of conditional constructions in language use.

## 4. Conclusion

In this chapter, the notion of intersubjectivity was used both in a general sense and in a more specific, linguistic sense.

[9] On a more speculative note, Mercier and Sperber (2011) argue that, in the evolution of language, the argumentative use of conditionals may even have preceded their use in reasoning.

In general, the term describes communication as cognitive coordination between two subjects of conceptualization. A speaker invites a hearer to construe an object of conceptualization *in a certain way* (Langacker) and to update the common ground with the inferences that follow from this specific perspective on reality. This intersubjective dimension (the relation between Speaker and Hearer) is mostly neglected in accounts that focus on either the descriptive dimension of language (the object of conceptualization) or on the subjective dimension (the relation between Speaker/Hearer and the object of conceptualization). Following Anscombre and Ducrot (1983), the intersubjective relation may be regarded as argumentative force, in this view, utterances are meant primarily to invite the hearer draw certain conclusions.

In a specific, linguistic sense – and this is the main contribution of Verhagen's (2005) work – the meaning of grammatical elements may operate directly on the intersubjective dimension: many grammatical constructions exhibit an argumentative orientation restricting the inferences the hearer is supposed to make, and the argumentative strength providing weaker or stronger arguments for these conclusions. By way of illustration, we demonstrated how Verhagen applies this perspective to the study of negation and complementation, and we explored how it could be extended to research on modality and conditional constructions. All grammatical constructions discussed show that there is an intimate connection between alternative spaces, viewpoint and argumentativity.

What we have presented in this chapter illustrates that moving beyond the descriptive and the subjective dimension of language to the intersubjective dimension may be fruitful in both solving some long standing problems in the study of grammar and understanding the very essence of human communication.

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