

The Dynamic Focal Adjustments in Event Construal: A Case Study on English WH- Dialogic Constructions

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According to Langacker (2007:17), **construal** is our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in different ways, and there are many aspects or dimensions of construal. In the early works on Cognitive Grammar contributed by Langacker (1987, 1991, 1993, 1999), *construal* is discerned in a broad sense from five aspects, namely, **the level of specificity (or schematicity), prominence, scope, background,** and **perspective**. Later on, Langacker (2007:17) particularly emphasizes three of them, which are **level of specificity, prominence,** and **perspective**. Along with the in-depth explorations on natural languages in the framework of Cognitive Grammar, the kernel concept of *construal* is re-elaborated but from only four aspects: **focusing, specificity, prominence, perspective** (Langacker 2008/2013:55). In his recent studies, Langacker (2015:120) further examines the nature of *construal* and also specifies it into five dimensions, which are **perspective, selection, prominence, dynamicity,** and **imagination**. This cognitive study on English WH-Dialogic constructions strongly evidences speakers' employment of such dimension of construal as **focusing, perspective, selection, prominence, dynamicity** in dialogic interactions.

To begin with, in the framework of Cognitive Linguistic Studies, a WH-question construction and one of its answer constructions virtually indicate the different **levels of schematicity** of the same (simple or complex) event structure. To be more specific, a WH-question represents the schematic/type structure of an event, while its answer is the instantiation of this schematic/type structure. The **Schema/Type-Instance** relation between a WH-question construction and the answer construction suggests the dynamic *grounding* of the *WH-word* (e.g. what, when, who) that initiates a question. Then, according to the different consequences of *grounding* of WH-words initiating a question, we group the data of 5,051WH-dialogues collected from COCA into three semantic categories. They are: (1) Answers indicating direct instantiation of WH-words (77.53%); (2) Answers indicating indirect instantiation of WH-words (1.84%); (3) Answers indicating non-instantiation of WH-words (20.63%). Essentially, the different semantic categories of answers in WH-dialogues demonstrate the dynamic **focal adjustments** in WH-dialogues in the process of WH-word *grounding*, resulting in the cases of consistency or non-consistency of **focal attention** between speakers, revealing the facts that speakers have their own **perspectives** to interpret the same event, and their own **focuses of attention** that make certain elements of the event **prominence**. Additionally, the answerer answers the question by employing structures with various levels of complexity and abstractness, suggesting the different **levels of specificity** of the schematic event (viz., WH-question) at the syntactical level.

References

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