

CONSTRUAL AND ITS REPRESENTATIVE FORMS IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine construal as a basic human cognitive operation and its representative forms in Cognitive Linguistics. To achieve this purpose, the paper focuses on two main points: (a) a brief introduction to construal and some of its classification models; (b) an examination of the representative forms of construal which we often see in the literature of Cognitive Linguistics.

Keywords: Construal; Fictive motion; Mental scanning; Profile; Viewpoint; Windowing of attention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Construal is one of the central concepts of Cognitive Linguistics. This concept denotes one of the basic human cognitive operations; it relates to the way a language user chooses to “package” or “present” a conceptual representation as encoded in language, which in turn “has consequences for the conceptual representation that the utterance evokes in the mind of the hearer” (Evans, 2007, p. 40). In other words, construal is the basic cognitive operation that helps to choose the appropriate structural possibility among different alternatives, which are different ways of seeing a particular situation or scene, thereby deciding how language is used. For example, when “a speaker who accurately observes the spatial distribution of certain stars can describe them in many distinct fashions: as a constellation, as a cluster of stars, as specks of light in the sky, etc. Such expressions are semantically distinct; they reflect the speaker’s alternate construals of the scene, each compatible with its objectively given properties” (Langacker, 1991, p. 61). This shows that the user of language “is assumed to have the ability of construing one and the same situation in a number of alternate ways and of making different senses of it” (Langacker, 1991, p. 61).

The purpose of this paper is to examine construal as the basic human cognitive operation and its representative forms in Cognitive Linguistics. To achieve this purpose, the paper focuses on two main points: the first is a brief introduction to construal and some of its classification models, and the second is an examination of the representative forms of construal which we often see in the literature of Cognitive Linguistics.

2. SOME CLASSIFICATION MODELS OF CONSTRUAL IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

2.1. Langacker's classification model

In his 1987 classic work, Langacker (1987, pp. 116-137) classified construal operations into three components, which he called “focal adjustments.”¹

- 1. Selection
- 2. Perspective
- 3. Abstraction

¹ *Focus adjustment* is a kernel concept in Langacker's Cognitive Grammar. This concept signifies how the speaker focuses attention on a particular facet of a given scene. In language, this is gain by making focal adjustments of any given scene's particular aspect using different linguistic expressions or grammatical constructions to describe that scene. For example, the visual metaphor is the focal adjustment expression that shows visual perception is fundamental to how we focus attention on aspects of the experience. “By choosing a particular focal adjustment and thus linguistically 'organizing' a scene in a specific way, the speaker imposes a unique construal upon that scene.” (Evans 2007, pp. 81-82).

The component *selection* is understood as language users' capacity to attend selectively to these facets of a conceptualization while neglecting others. The components *perspective* involves linguistic exhibitions of the position from which an observed situation and this component comprise four subtypes: (a) Figure/Ground alignment, (b) viewpoint, (c) deixis, and (d) objectivity/subjectivity. *Abstraction* is the component that describes our ability to set commonalities among distinct phenomena and abstract from differences, and therefore to organize concepts into classes and categories.

However, in 1993, in *Universals of Construal*, Langacker revised his 1987 classification into the following four components:²

- 1. Specificity
- 2. Prominence
- 3. Perspective
- 4. Dynamicity

It is easy to see that the *specificity* component approximately corresponds to the previous *abstraction* component. The *prominence* is a new component that includes notably Figure/Ground phenomena and the phenomena previously classified under the *selection* label. *Perspective* is not modified, excluding the Figure/Ground subtype now has to be placed in the *prominence* component. *Dynamicity* is an additional component. This component is related to a conceptualization's development by processing time (rather than by conceived time). It is the first component of four ones related to the inherently temporal nature of utterances: Presenting a conceptualization's elements in different order results in differences of meaning. Besides, a dynamic and sequential concept can also lead to a dynamic concept's application to an object of conceptualization that is not itself inherently dynamic (as in *Con đường này uốn lượn qua Thung lũng Tình yêu* [The road winds through the Valley of Love]).

2.2. Talmy's classification model

Initially, in his 1988 work, Talmy offered to classify the following "imaging systems" as the main components of construal operation:

- 1. Schematization
- 2. Perspective

² However, Langacker (1993, p. 448) also pointed out that if only for expository purposes, can classify construal into the following five general components: *specificity*, *scope*, *prominence*, *backGround*, and *perspective*.

- 3. Attention
- 4. Force Dynamics

It is easy to see the considerable overlap between Talmy's and Langacker's classifications. Talmy's *schematization* mostly corresponds to Langacker's *specificity*; they both have a *perspective* component containing similar phenomena, and "Talmy's *attention* component overlaps with Langacker's *prominence*". *Force Dynamics* does not appear in Langacker's classification.

However, in 2000, Talmy (pp. 40-84) revised and adjusted his 1988 classification, so that now the main construal components are as follows:

- 1. Configurational structure
- 2. Perspective
- 3. Distribution of attention
- 4. Force Dynamics

Talmy (2000) called the main construal components *schematic systems*. A schematic category that cuts across these four schematic systems is called *domain*. This domain category involves only two major construal dimensions, namely *space* and *time*.³

Therefore, a particular construal form from the configurational structure schematic system (e.g., [\pm boundedness]) may apply to some domains. For example, concepts may be construed both in the space domain and the time domain as continuous (as *masses* in space or *activities* in time) or as discrete (as *objects* in space or *actions* in time). These construal forms' cross-combination may be provided by linguistic evidence from nominalization (which "transforms concepts from the time domain to the space domain) by the construe acts as objects and activities as masses.") Observe the following pairs of sentences in (1) and (2) from Talmy (1988, 2000, p. 43):

- (1) John called me. – John gave me a call.
- (2) John helped me. – John gave me some help.

³ Talmy (2000, p. 47) views "*domain* as a schematic category perpendicular to his four schematic systems", and Croft and Cruse (2004, chapter 3) consider *domain* as an additional system. Besides, Talmy introduces *identificational space* as a complementing member for the *domain* category "to accommodate such differences as ones between *you* and *they* in their vague uses (*you* indicating identification with the speaker, and *they* nonidentification)."

According to Talmy's analysis, *call* in the first clause in (1) is an act, and in the second clause of (1) it is reified as an object. While *help* in the first clause in (2) is an activity, and in the second clause of (2) it is reified as a mass.

Compared with Langacker's approach, we see that Talmy's *space* and *time* domains match Langacker's noun-verb distinction. In particular, Langacker (1987, 2005a) views "nouns as *things*, read as a construal emerging from conceptual grouping and reification, and verbs as *processes*, understood as a construal rising from sequential scanning of a temporally displayed relationship". Besides, Langacker does not handle the noun-verb distinction as reflecting a fundamental schematic kind but as a particular case of Figure/Ground organization (in particular, the profile-based organization) and categorization organization. For example, Langacker (2005a) illustrated that "the English noun and verb *cook* shared the same conceptual content. But in one construction class (*the cook*, etc.) this content is profiled, and in another construction class (*to cook*, etc.) encoded a processual construal". Because of these patterns, *cook* can be explained as having a schematic understanding, which does not impose a particular profile, thus it serves as a superordinate kind for the specific nominal and verbal uses of *cook* (Langacker, 2005a).

From the mentioned points above, it is easy to see that while the concepts deployed in Langacker's and Talmy's analyses play a slightly different role than that in their respective frameworks, but basically, their approaches achieve the same insights. Besides, both Langacker and Talmy keep the idea that some construal components can be involved in the meaning of a single linguistic expression. The common of these two approaches is that, at least to some extent, any classification of construal phenomena in a particular language is arbitrary because linguistic units often participate in more than a single construal kind.

Croft and Cruse (2004, pp 43-46) also point out, to some extent, "the classification of construal phenomena is arbitrary or cannot be entirely motivated. They remark that the classification models proposed by Langacker and Talmy share many features, but it is difficult to reconcile their differences." They note that in both Langacker's and Talmy's models, some construal components are still missing. Their integration into the two proposed models is not evident.

2.3. Croft and Cruse's classification model

Based on an earlier comparison of Langacker's and Talmy's construal classification models, Croft and Wood (2000, p. 45) state that the main components in such a classification "should correspond to psychological processes and capacities". Therefore, there is no surprise when Croft and Cruse's (2004) proposed classification model overlaps with Langacker's and Talmy's classification models. Aside from some trivial reassignments of specific construal kinds to other major components, the main difference between Croft and Cruse's classification model and Langacker's and Talmy's classification model is that the former is more comprehensive than the two latter ones. In Croft and Cruse's (2004) model, the main components are:

- 1. Attention/Saliency
- 2. Judgment/Comparison
- 3. Perspective/Situatedness
- 4. Constitution/Gestalt

It is easy to see that the components of *attention/saliency* comprise the same construal types as “the ones subsumed under Talmy’s *attention* component and Langacker’s *prominence*. But it also contains—as subcomponents—certain construal phenomena that had the status of primary construals in Langacker’s and Talmy’s models.” Specifically, it includes Langacker’s *abstraction and dynamicity* and Talmy’s *schematization*. Furthermore, it contains the subcomponent *scope*, a component that both Langacker and Talmy not discussed explicitly (for details, see: Croft & Cruse, 2004).

The component of *judgment/comparison* contains the *metaphor, categorization, and Figure/Ground* as its subcomponents. *Figure/Ground* reassigned from *attention/prominence* in Talmy’s and Langacker’s models. And *categorization* is not seen as a schematization phenomenon, as Talmy did, although there is a close connection between the two. The addition of *metaphor* in construal phenomena gives this classification model more comprehensive than the two previous classification models.

Perspective is the component most similar to the other offers. Finally, *constitution/gestalt* overlaps with Talmy’s (2000) *configurational structure* and also contains *force dynamics*.

2.4. Some remarks on construal classification models

From consideration of the three construal classification models above, can be drawn the following remarks:

Firstly, although all three classification models mentioned above share “the requirement that they should reflect general and well-established psychological capacities”, they are still considerably different. Indeed, despite being the formulators of this requirement most emphatically, Croft and Cruse’s (2004) proposal raises the same kind of questions as those raised by the others. For example, why should the *fictive motion* be grouped under *attention/saliency* but not under *constitution/gestalt*? This fact shows that the group, assignment, or arrangement of particular construal operations under one rubric rather than another cannot always be motivated transparently. Besides, the increase in coverage of construal operations in Croft and Cruse’s (2004) model goes hand in hand with a further decrease in its clearness. Moreover, it looks as if the development of any new construal operation requires its newly specific component. This reality tells us that construal operations may vary in many aspects and that efforts for an exhaustive classification necessarily have a significant degree of arbitrariness.

Secondly, from a cognitive perspective, it is reasonable that one should not expect that a complete and comprehensive classification model of construal operations can be possible. Therefore, from this perspective, the most suitable approach is to present the well-studied construal operation and its most key representative forms systematically.

Capture a complete and comprehensive classification model for construal operations is infeasible because some construal operation subsets share more features than others. For example, “the entire set of construal phenomena is related to a structure containing some general rubrics under which construal operations can be grouped based on their recurrent or shared features”. This reality is not surprising since the *construal* is the concept function as a theoretical entity to capture some cognitive aspects of conceptualization. These aspects cannot be analyzed adequately in terms of the object of conceptualization but require reference to a subject’s perception, choice, or point of view.

Finally, in Cognitive Linguistics literature, there are many representation forms of construal operation, and several of those forms sometimes overlap each other. Hence, we may count the general rubrics under which the grouping representative types of construal operation can be satisfactory as establishing a conceptual space kind for construal. In principle, a linguistic element conventionally conveying a specific construal kind may hold any position in this space. If any element sharing features then can be thought of as close together, forming “clusters” in this space, regardless of whether it belongs to bounded, pre-established regions or not. Based on such a view of the *construal* phenomenon, the remainder of this paper will survey representation forms of construal operation in terms of the common concepts for characterizing those forms and can be seen as an alternative to the discussed classification models. Note that here not proposing or presenting a new and complete exhaustive classification. It only hopes to share with us a relatively coherent and systematic picture of representative forms of construal so that we can construe most subtly and authentically a situation or a scene.

3. REPRESENTATIVE FORMS OF CONSTRUAL OPERATION IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

3.1. Window of attention

In Talmy's theory of Cognitive Semantics (2000), *window of attention* refers to a model which is used to govern the attention distribution in the attention system as one of his conceptual structuring systems⁴. The model of *attention window* involves explicit mentioning, i.e., some part of an event is windowed, while other parts can be ignored.

⁴ Note also that the model of *attention window* should not be confused with the model of *attentional focus* in Talmy's conceptual structuring system. The model of *attention window* differs from the model of *attentional focus* in that the model of *attentional focus* focuses attention on the participants. For details, see: Talmy (2000, chapter 4); Drong (2016, p. 479).

For example, a moving route consists of a starting point, a middle point and an endpoint, as in (3):

- (3)
- | | |
|--|------------------|
| a. This bus goes from Da Lat, through Dinh An, to Lien Khuong. | |
| b. This bus goes from Da Lat. | [starting point] |
| c. This bus goes through Dinh An. | [middle point] |
| d. This bus goes to Lien Khuong. | [endpoint] |

We see the whole moving route is windowed in (3a), while in examples (3b-d) only the starting point, the middle point, or the endpoint of the route is windowed.

In reality, we cannot cover all stimuli that occur around us, so our brain subconsciously selects salient or important stimuli for our attention⁵ Accordingly, our attention focusing is a cognitive operation that locates our attention on selected elements and downplays others of a situation. The language use practices show that something is mentioned explicitly in the discourse means that we direct some attention to it. Thus, in this sense, the language may be considered as “an inventory of attention-directing devices”.

To a certain extent, language provides us with the capabilities to open our attention. For example, in the sentence (3a) above, we window attention to the whole route, including the bus journey's starting point and endpoint. We may also window the journey's final stretch to its endpoint, as in (3d), or window the starting point, as in (3b).⁶

We can describe a single situation in several different ways by windowing our attention to its determinant parts. A well-known example that clearly illustrates this point is the commercial transaction situation, given by Fillmore in his Frame Semantics framework. According to Fillmore (1982, pp. 116-117), to understand the word-group that is related to the commercial event frame, such as *buy, sell, pay, spend, charge, cost*, and so on, we need access to a *commercial event frame* that is to provide “the background and motivation for the categories which these words represent.” The *commercial event frame* four key participants: a buyer, a seller, goods, and money; and the exchange of goods and money, as illustrated in Figure 1.

⁵ A well-known example is the “party phenomenon.” At a party, there may be different conversations happening at the same time around you. But you can only understand what the interlocutor is talking directly to you, or you can hear your name mentioned by someone else at the opposite table, and you cannot hear and understand all conversations. This fact is because you filter out mentally all irrelevant bits of conversations.

⁶ According to Radden and Dirven (2007), English does not accept the use alone “the starting point from another viewpoint”, i.e., we cannot say *This bus goes from Da Lat*.

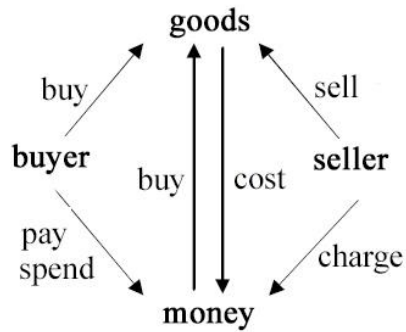


Figure 1. Elements and relations of the “commercial event” frame

Note: Adapted from Radden (1992, p. 522, Figure 2).

We can imagine a scenario for the commercial event frame as follows:

- Participants: The buyer, the seller
- Other entities: The goods, the money

(a) Scenario:

- Initial state:

The buyer: has the money and wants the goods.

The seller: has the goods and wants the money.

- Exchange:

The buyer: gives the money to the seller.

The seller: gives the goods to the buyer.

- Final state:

The seller: has the money.

The buyer: has the goods.

(b) Definitions

- *Buy* indicates the buyer gives the money to the seller and profiles the buyer and the goods (and optionally profiles the money and the seller).
- *Sell* indicates the seller gives the goods to the buyer and profiles the seller and the goods (and optionally profiles the money and the buyer).

- *Price* indicates the amount of money, and profiles the money and the goods.
- *Cost* indicates the money from the perspective of the buyer and profiles the goods (and optionally profiles the buyer).

When we want to describe a commercial transaction situation, we can focus on any of these elements by using different verbs: *mua* (buy), *bán* (sell), *trả tiền* (pay), *chi tiêu* (spend), *tính phí* (charge) and *chi phí* (cost). “Each verb evokes the commercial event frame but in different ways”. By selecting a particular verb, we focused our attention on the frame's one element while downplayed others, i.e., “they are not mentioned, or their inclusion is optional. In the examples in (4), the optional participants in parentheses” (Radden & Dirven, 2007).

- (4) a. Bác nông dân *mua* một máy tuốt lúa (từ anh kỹ sư) (với giá 20 triệu).
(The farmer *bought* a thresher [from the engineer] [for 20 million].)
- b. Anh kỹ sư *bán* (bác nông dân) máy tuốt lúa (với giá 20 triệu).
(The engineer *sold* [the farmer] the thresher [for 20 million].)
- c. Bác nông dân *trả* (anh kỹ sư) 20 triệu (cho máy tuốt lúa).
(The farmer *paid* [the engineer] 20 million [for the thresher].)
- d. Bác nông dân *chi phí* 20 triệu (cho máy tuốt lúa).
(The farmer *spent* 20 million [on the thresher].)
- e. Anh kỹ sư *tính giá* (bác nông dân) 20 triệu (cho máy tuốt lúa).
(The engineer *charged* [the farmer] 20 million [for the thresher].)
- f. Máy tuốt lúa *tính giá* (bác nông dân) 20 triệu.
(The thresher *cost* [the farmer] 20 million.)
- g. 20 triệu *mua* (the farmer) một máy tuốt lúa tốt.
(20 million *buys* [the farmer] a good thresher.)

In each case, we directed mainly attention towards the entity expressed by the subject and secondarily attention towards the entity indicated by the object. Here we can witness how a verb's semantics interacts with a sentence's grammatical structure. In pair of sentences in (5), the situation viewed from the person's perspective who expressed as the sentence's subject:

- (5) a. Bác nông dân *mua* máy tuốt lúa với giá hời.

(The farmer *bought* the thresher for a good price.)

b. Anh kỹ sư *bán* máy tuốt lúa với giá hời.

(The engineer *sold* the thresher for a good price.)

What are the meanings of *giá hời* understood depends on the subject participant. It means that the buyer pays very little money in (5a), whereas, in (5b), it means the seller makes a lot of money. “Thus, if we want to draw mainly attention to the buyer and secondarily to the goods, we use *mua* (buy) as in (4a) and (5a); if we want to draw mainly attention to the seller and secondarily to the goods, we use *bán* (sell) as in (4b) and (5b)” (Radden & Dirven, 2007). As illustrated in Figure 1, the Vietnamese language has many verbs for expressing any of the relations which may contain a commercial situation's four key participants and so that they may become our attention focus.

However, there are still restrictions on the organizations of participants that can be windowed in a sentence. For example, the verbs of *chi tiêu* (spend) and *chi phí* (cost) not accept windowing on the seller—although a seller, of course, is present in a commercial situation. Thus, we cannot say *Bác nông dân chi tiêu 20 triệu cho anh kỹ sư* (The farmer *spent* 20 million to the engineer) and *Anh kỹ sư chi phí 20 triệu cho máy tuốt lúa*. (The engineer *cost* 20 million from the *thresher*).

3.2. Figure and Ground

According to Talmy (1978, 2000), human perception appears to automatically segregate any given spatial scene into two parts: a *Figure* and a *Ground*.⁷ A Figure is an entity that has a dominant shape due to a definite contour or prominent coloring, and the Ground is the part of a scene that is relegated to “background.” The Figure stands out against the Ground. In other words, when we focus our attention on a scene, we

⁷ *Figure/Ground* originated as a pair of concepts in Gestalt psychology in which the Figure is the most prominent element, and the Ground is the less prominent element in the Figure-Ground organization. The Figure-Ground organization was conceived by the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin (1958) in 1915. He proposed “a number of perceptual differences between the Figure and the Ground. For instance, a Figure is thing-like, closer to the viewer, and in front of the Ground; it is more dominant and better remembered. In contrast, the Ground is substance-like, relatively formless, broader, and extends behind the Figure”. It is less dominant and less well remembered. Figure-Ground organization was adopted by Talmy who was the first to apply it to Cognitive Linguistics. It has been generalized to language by Talmy with his notions of *Figure* and *Ground* through a conceptual structuring system approach within his framework of Cognitive Semantics, and by Langacker with his pair of theoretical constructs, *trajector* and *landmark*. Also note that it should not be confused with the concept of *Ground* as used by Talmy and Langacker. Within Talmy’s framework of Cognitive Semantics, as we see, *Ground* is the less-prominent element in Figure-Ground organization (also known as the *reference object*), and in Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar, *Ground* relates to any utterance and includes the participants, the immediate physical context, and the time of speaking. Therefore, in Langacker’s conception, both the subjective construal and the objective construal are understood relative to the notion of *Ground*.

automatically assign prominence to a scene's this element and downplay that scene's others. As Gestalt psychology has demonstrated, we automatically organize and arrange the elements of a visual scene into a salient *Figure* and a non-salient *Ground*. For example, when we look at a lighthouse tower, as illustrated in Figure 2, we may see the lighthouse tower silhouetted against the sky. Here, the lighthouse tower is the *Figure*, and the sky (made up of the gray horizontal lines) is the *Ground*.

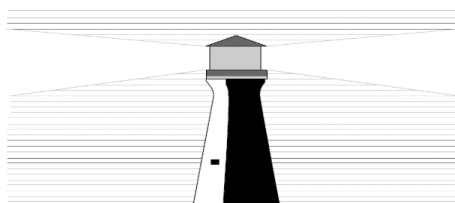


Figure 2. Figure-Ground organization

Note: Adapted from Evans and Green (2006, p. 66, Figure 3.1).

Besides Figure/Ground organization, Figure/Ground alignment also applies to language. Observe the following scenario: when a seagull comes flying by and perches on the lighthouse tower's top, the seagull becomes the *Figure*, and the lighthouse tower's top is the *Ground*. The *Figure* tends to be more conspicuous, more mobile, better delineated, and smaller in size than the *Ground*; therefore, it attracts our particular attention and interest. Besides, just as there is a preferred way of seeing the seagull's spatial location relative to the lighthouse tower's top, “there is a preferred way of construing and describing this situation” (Radden & Dirven, 2007). Thus, it is more natural to say *Con hải âu ở trên đỉnh tháp hải đăng* (The seagull is on the lighthouse tower's top) than *?Đỉnh tháp hải đăng ở dưới con hải âu* (?The lighthouse tower's top is under the seagull).

Furthermore, “if the two entities are equal in size and prominence, we can reverse *Figure* and *Ground*. The *Figure* and *Ground* reversal is a well-known perception phenomenon” (Radden & Dirven, 2007). For example, Figure 3 may be seen as a white vase at one moment and as two black faces at the other, but we never see both a vase and faces simultaneously. Likewise, in language, we can speak of either *trường học gần bệnh viện* (the school is near the hospital) or *bệnh viện gần trường học* (the hospital is near the school). Here either the school or the hospital serves as the *Ground* for locating the *Figure* entity. In such spatial situations, Vietnamese, like many other languages, expresses the *Ground* using prepositional phrases.

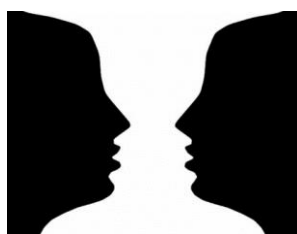


Figure 3. Reversal of Figure and Ground

Note: Adapted from Rubin (1958, p. 201, Figure 3).

According to Talmy (2000, chapter 5), in a simple transitive sentence's structure, the entity expressed by the subject is the Figure, and the entity described by the direct object is the Ground. In the commercial transaction situation considered in example (4), the human participant, i.e., the buyer or seller, almost always functions as the Figure, and the non-human participant, i.e., the money or the goods, often plays as the Ground. If human participants do not have attention windows, it is often the goods that are more prominent than money and are selected to become the Figure, as shown in (4f). However, “we may reverse Figure and Ground to yield more prominence to the money and express it as the Figure” (Radden & Dirven, 2007), as shown in (4g).

Talmy (1978, 2000) has proposed that “in linguistic terms, smaller and more mobile objects are typically interpreted as Figures, while larger, more immovable objects are typically interpreted as the Ground”. This observation accounts for the asymmetric behavior of linguistically encoded spatial scenes. For instance, the two following utterances (6) and (7) are essentially reversals of one another, and the utterance (6) is acceptable, while the utterance (7) is normally judged as being semantically anomalous.

- (6) Chiếc xe đạp gần [ngôi nhà]. (The bike is near [the house])
 (7) [Ngôi nhà] gần chiếc xe đạp. ([The house] is near the bike)

This indicates that “the grammatical organization of linguistically encoded spatial scenes reflects Figure-Ground organization: the subject position corresponds to the Figure, and the object position corresponds to the Ground” Talmy (1978). Sentence (7) seems odd because an entity that would normally serve as the Ground in a spatial relationship serves instead as the Figure.

Similarly, in complex sentences, the described events are also divided into Figure and Ground. Consider the pair of sentences in (8):

- (8)
- | <i>Figure</i> | | <i>Ground</i> | |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| a. Chúng tôi kết hôn | <i>sau khi</i> | có con. | [sự kiện ₂ – sự kiện ₁] |
| (We got married | <i>after</i> | we had children.) | [event ₂ – event ₁] |
| b. Chúng tôi có con | <i>trước khi</i> | kết hôn. | [sự kiện ₁ – sự kiện ₂] |
| (We had children | <i>before</i> | we got married.) | [event ₁ – event ₂] |

Both sentences in (8) describe the same sequence of events. And each event is indicated by the subscripted number: first, we had children and then we got married. According to Talmy (1978, 2000), a subordinate clause's function is to provide the Ground for the Figure event described in the main clause. Analyzing the sentences as in

(8), Radden and Dirven (2007, p. 29) show that in the sentence (8a), children-having is the Ground event, that “Figure event of married-getting is located in time relative to which”. While in the sentence (8b), married-getting is the Ground event that the Figure event of children-having is positioned in time relative to which. “These sentences so display Figure/Ground reversal, and concomitantly, mean different things”. Our knowledge of the marriage and children-having frame allows us to read more than a purely temporal meaning into the sentence (8a): “we tend to understand it in the sense that we got married *because* we had children”. The sentence (8b), by contrast, only can be explained in a temporal sense. And a causal interpretation is removed because our children-having-the Figure event-occurred earlier than our married-getting-the Ground event-and thus cannot possibly have been caused by the latter.

3.3. Profiling

Profiling is a special kind of Figure/Ground relation that lives between an expression and its conceptual base. *Profiling*⁸ is the indicating conceptualization using “a linguistic form, and a *base* is the immediate broader conceptual content characterizing it” (Radden & Dirven, 2007). For example, when you mentioned *Sunday*, you profile this particular day relative to the base *week*. Likewise, the *elbow* profiles the connection between the upper and lower arm and evokes the conception arm as its base, and the *arm* profiles one of the two upper limbs and evokes the conception human body as its base. Can illustrate this as in Figure 4:

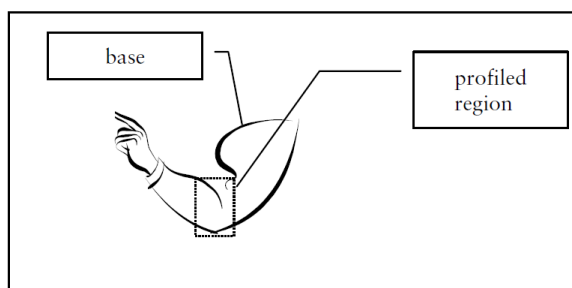


Figure 4. Profiling of *elbow*

Note: Adapted from Evans and Green (2006, p. 538, Figure 15.12).

⁸ In Langacker's Cognitive Grammar, the *profile* represents the conceptual highlighting of some aspect of a domain. The *domain* is a concept entity; it creates a coherent knowledge structure, in principle, having any complexity or organization level. For instance, a domain can make a *semantic frame*, a *concept*, or some other representational space or conceptual complex. It is a coherent knowledge representation kind against which characterized other conceptual units. For example, the words *hot*, *cold*, and *lukewarm* relate to different lexical concept kinds that only can be understood fully concerning the *temperature* domain. So principal function of the domain is to provide a relatively stable knowledge context against which to understand other conceptual unit kinds. According to Evans and Green (2006), *profiling* is the selective process of the base's some aspect. For instance, the *elbow* profiles a substructure within the larger structure is *arm*, as illustrated by Figure 4 above.

To know a conceptual unit is an immediate base or not, we can use the tests *part of-* or *kind of-* relation, such as: *the nail is part of the finger; the finger is part of the hand; a rectangle is a kind of a quadrilateral,* This explains why (9a) and (10a) are natural, while (9b) and (10b) are not acceptable:

- (9) a. Bàn tay năm ngón em vẫn kiều sa. (Ngô Thụy Miên)
(Rough translation: She is still lovely with her five-finger hand.)
b. Cánh tay năm ngón em vẫn kiều sa.
(Rough translation: She is still lovely with her five-finger arm.)
- (10) a. Bàn tay em năm ngón ru trên ngàn năm. (Trịnh Công Sơn)
(She still lulls over a thousand years with her five-finger hand.)
b. Cánh tay em năm ngón ru trên ngàn năm.
(She still lulls over a thousand years with her five-finger arm.)

3.4. Viewing frame

According to Langacker (2007, p. 425), the *viewing-frame* is the subject space within which an expressed conceptualization. This space delineates the general locus of visual attention (it can be metaphorically called the “onstage” region). Any aspect of the communicants’ conceptual world can appear in this frame, and in that scope, they focus their attention. In other words, a viewing-frame is a situation view or its part that the observer is accessible immediately.

In viewing a situation, you may take a more distant or a closer location. That helps to give you a broader or more restricted viewing-frame. Observe the described situation in (11):

- (11) Xe buýt này đi từ Đà Lạt tới Liên Khương.
(This bus goes from Da Lat to Lien Khuong.)

If you—as an observer—are looking at the situation from an airplane, then you have a *maximal viewing-frame*: the whole bus route, including both its starting point and endpoint in the two towns and the surrounding areas, are in your viewing. You also have the bus route's maximal viewing-frame when you consider a road traffic network map of Đà Lạt and trace the connection between the two towns by dragging your finger over that map. However, when sitting on the bus, the view from your window seat only allows you to see the route's part that you are passing at any given moment. The bus route's starting point and the endpoint outside the viewing-frame, even though, of

course, you know that the bus journey has its a starting and an end. You now have a *restricted viewing-frame*.

3.5. Viewpoint

The concept of *viewpoint* was introduced into Cognitive Linguistics by Langacker (1987, 2007), Talmy (2000), MacLaury (1995), and many others under the phenomenological influence of Leibniz, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty. It is the process of describing an object from the speaker's point of view. In Cognitive Linguistics, viewpoint is considered as a cognitive mechanism or operation of the construal of an object in discourse from the point of view of the speaker (the conceptualizer). A construal act performed by the speaker will affect the hearer's cognitive state.

In visual perception, you always view a situation from your *viewpoint* or vantage point, i.e., from the point anywhere you are located as the observer. In cognition, you may also borrow or select another person's viewpoint. For example, the same newly published book but maybe uttered or as a *phát hành mới* (a new release) or as a *hàng mới về* (an arrival newly.) The difference between these two expressions resides in the adopted different viewpoints. In utilizing the expression *bản phát hành mới*, you use the publisher's point of view, whereas in using the expression *hàng mới về*, you take the bookseller's point of view. In this way, the publisher might say (12a) and the bookseller (12b):

- (12) a. Người xuất bản: “Phòng xuất bản đã gửi *phát hành mới* đi chưa?”
 (Publisher: “Has the publishing department sent out *new releases* yet?”)
- b. Người bán sách: “Cậu đã trưng bày *hàng mới về* chưa?”
 (Bookseller: “Have you displayed *new arrivals* yet?”)

We often look at the world and describe it from our viewpoint. A good illustration of this is found in arguments such as in the following conversation in which two children give their own versions of the same event:

- (13) a. Tý: “Mẹ ơi! Anh Tèo đạp con.”
 (Tý: “Mom! Tèo tripped me up with his foot.”)
- b. Tèo: “Không có đâu mẹ ơi! Cu Tý vấp phải chân con đó chứ!”
 (Tèo: “No I didn't, Mom! Tý just tripped over my foot.”)

According to Langacker (1991, p. 117), there are many modes of viewing the same experience, so speakers are often forced to decide how to describe or conceptualize a particular object or scene (see also Croft & Cruse, 2004, §3). Besides, in

language, some expressions have a built-in viewpoint on a situation. Typical of which is the system of deictic verbs. Following Fillmore (1997), deictic verbs are the verbs whose interpretation relies on the spatial and temporal location of the speech participants. These are verbs whose usage depends on the speech situation. For example, in the Vietnamese language, the deictic verbs *đến* (come) and *đi* (go) essentially select the speaker's viewpoint and indicate motion towards or away from the speaker (S), respectively. Compare the sentences in (14) below:

- (14) a. *Bố đến dự lễ tốt nghiệp của tôi.*
 (My father is *coming* to my graduation.)
 b. *Tôi đi dự lễ tốt nghiệp của chị gái.*
 (I'm *going* to my sister's graduation.)

When S is the goal motion towards, as in (14a), the verb *đến* used to describe S's viewpoint. When S is not the motion goal, but away from S, as in (14b), the verb of *đi* used. S is the *deictic center* because these two sentences use the point of view of S.

When the mentioned hearer (H), we have two options: by using *đi* as in sentence (15a), S keeps her viewpoint relative to the H; however, S may also mentally change this viewpoint as in sentence (15b).

- (15) a. *Tôi đi dự lễ tốt nghiệp của anh.* (I'm *going* to your graduation.)
 b. *Tôi đến dự lễ tốt nghiệp của anh.* (I'm *coming* to your graduation.)

With using *come* in the sentence (15b), S accepts H's viewpoint, i.e., H becomes *the deictic center*. We also usually use our point of view. However, in our perception of a situation and its language expression, we may place ourselves in someone else's position. And we do so mainly because this has sympathetic and polite effects.

The two construals of viewpoint - S-centered and H-centered - are diagrammed in Figure 5, where the bold-printed circles indicate the deictic centers.

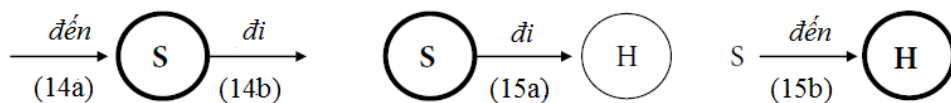


Figure 5. Construals of the two Vietnamese deictic verbs *đến* (come) and *đi* (go)

Besides, also there is another viewpoint form. This form is has seen in authority relations, as the relations between parents and children, between doctors and patients, or between traffic-policemen and drivers. Parents or doctors often express their patronizing sympathy towards their children or patients, and traffic-policemen may feign empathy

with a traffic offender by identifying with the offender, by sympathizing with the hearer's viewpoint, as examples in (16) shown:

- (16) a. Mẹ nói với con: “Bây giờ *chúng ta* cùng nhau đi ngủ.”
 (Mother to child: “And now *we*'re going to sleep.”)
- b. Y tá nói với bệnh nhân: “*Chúng ta* lại phải uống thuốc rồi.”
 (Nurse to patient: “*We* must take our tablets again.”)
- c. Cảnh sát giao thông nói với tài xế: “*Chúng ta* đâu muốn đậu ở đây đâu.”
 (Traffic policeman to driver: “*We* don't want to park here, do we?”)

3.6. Objectivity and subjectivity

We often think that we perceive the world objectively as it is. However, as a part of the world, we perceive and build our relation to this world. Therefore, we may also construe a situation more objectively or subjectively. *Objectivity* indicates a situation's construal as detached from us as the speakers; *subjectivity* means a situation's construal in which we are involved. Compare the following socio-political statements:

- (17) a. Thủ tướng quyết định tuyên chiến chống đại dịch Covid-19.
 (The Prime Minister decided to declare war against the Covid-19 pandemic.)
- b. Tôi sẽ truy tìm kẻ tung thông tin thất thiệt gây hoang mang dư luận.
 (I will track down the person who released the false information, causing public confusion.)
- c. Vẫn còn những kẻ đầu cơ và trục lợi khẩu trang trong mùa đại dịch.
 (There may still be persons who are speculating and profiting from face masks during the pandemic.)

The spokesman for Government Office might use the sentence (17a) when he describes Prime Minister's policy objectively. In this case, the speaker is not part of the described situation. And Prime Minister might also use that same sentence when he speaks of himself as *Prime Minister*. In doing so, he presents “an objectified view of himself as the institutionalized representative of the country. By using the pronoun *Tôi* (I) in the sentence (17b), the speaker includes himself as a participant of the described situation—in this case, the construal is subjective” (Radden & Dirven, 2007). At the same time, the speaker can depict his role like that of any other participant in that situation—in this respect is the objective construal. Sentence (17c) involves a

maximally subjective construal of this situation: “the speaker presents his view subjectively of the described event without mentioning himself overtly. And this is obtained by using the modal verb *có thể* (may), which expresses the speaker’s assessment of the situation as being potential” (Radden & Dirven, 2007).

In summary, a subjective construal is a construal form in which there is implicit dependence on the ground. Thus, the utterance context, including participants, time of the speech event, etc., are not mentioned explicitly. For instance, both speaker and hearer are usually construed subjectively, or “off stage,” and only become construed objectively or “on stage” when profiled linguistically by expressions such as *tôi* (I) or *anh* (you). Conversely, an objective construal is a construal form in which there is explicit dependence on the ground. Thus, the utterance context, including participants, time of the speech event, etc., are mentioned explicitly. Both speaker and hearer are usually construed subjectively or “off-stage” and only become construed objectively or “on-stage” when profiled linguistically by expressions such as *tôi* or *anh*. For example, if *Nam* uses the first person pronoun *tôi* (I), he places himself in the foreground as an object of perception. In this way, the speaker is objectified, giving rise to objective construal. These two construal forms can be illustrated as in Figure 6 (where bold circles denote the conceptualization's object and subject.)

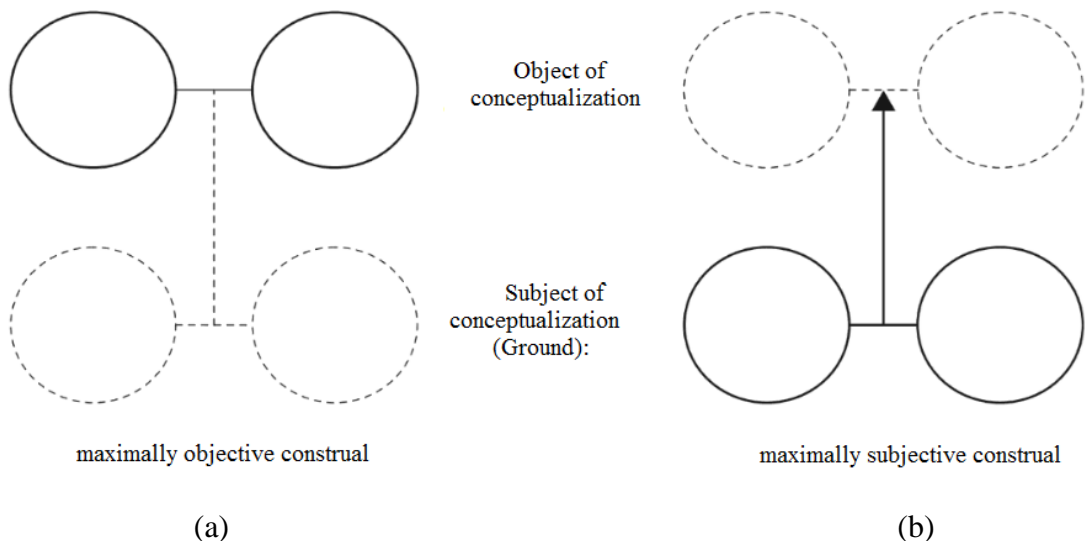


Figure 6. Relations of objective construal (a) and subjective construal (b)

3.7. Generality and specificity

According to Langacker (2008, p. 55), the notions of *generality* and *specificity* are valenced to “the level of precision and detail at which a situation is characterized” (Talmy (2000, pp. 82-84) called specificity a *level of particularity*). These notions denote the precision degree thanks to which a situation is seen or perceived. A distant view often gives us a general impression of that situation, while “a close view enables us to discern in-depth details of that situation”. In language and cognition, taxonomic

hierarchies reflect different generality and specificity levels. Thereby, when using higher-level terms, the speaker construes this situation in a more general fashion, known as a *generality*. And using lower-level words, the speaker construes that situation in a more specific style called *specificity*, or *granularity*. Can illustrate this point with examples from (18): in (18a), car types denoted by the superordinate term *phương tiện* (vehicle), the basic-level term *xe* (car) in (18b), the more specific term *Inova* in (18c), the even more specific term *Ford Ranger Wildtrak 2.0* in (18d), and the still more specific term *Honda Civic 2020 bạc* in (18e), in which the specification obtained by using the adjective *bạc*:

(18) a. Một số *phương tiện* đã va chạm nhau trên đường cao tốc đêm qua.

(Some *vehicles* collided on High Street last night.)

b. Hầu hết các *xe* đều lái quá nhanh.

(Most of the *cars* drove way too fast.)

c. Chiếc *Inova* đâm vào một chiếc xe khác.

(A *Inova* struck another car.)

d. Chiếc *Ford Ranger Wildtrak 2.0* do một tài xế say rượu lái.

(The *Ford Ranger Wildtrak 2.0* was driven by a drunk driver.)

e. Chiếc *Honda Civic 2020 bạc* bị kẹp giữa hai xe tải.

(The *silver Honda Civic 2020* was sandwiched between two lorries.)

Each of these alternative expression modes has its specific contextual meaning. For example, the superordinate term *phương tiện* in (18a) might use in the Departments for Transport or traffic reports. The basic-level term *xe* is used to describe situations in the most usual and general style, such as in (18b). Car enthusiasts can use subordinate words like *Inova* or *Ford Ranger Wildtrak 2.0*. “The same thing may thus be seen in different detail by different people in different situations” (Radden & Dirven, 2007).

As Langacker (1987) and Talmy (2000) demonstrated, and as already pointed out, we can use lexical categories to make specific differences, while “using grammatical categories is tended to express very abstract or schematic notions, like those of the present, past, and future time”. And grammar also allows us to distinguish different specificity levels.

3.8. Mental scanning

In Langacker’s *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (1987), *mental scanning* means the construal of a situation concerning its phasing in time (T). In other words, in

the same style as that we may visually scan a mountain range, we can do the same with a situation. There are two mental scanning modes: *sequential scanning* and *summary scanning*. The mental scanning of that situation in its all successive phases is called *sequential scanning*. *Summary scanning* concerns the mental scanning mode in which all periods of that situation are did simultaneously, i.e., that situation understood as timeless. The English sentences in (19) illustrate these two mental scanning modes (Radden & Dirven, 2007, p. 26):

- (19) a. The couple next door *has adopted* a baby.
- b. Another couple down the road wants *to adopt* a baby, too.
- c. *Adopting* a baby can be a joyful experience.
- d. Older couples cannot apply for the *adoption* of a baby.

According to Radden and Dirven (2007, p. 26), in (19a), “we mentally scan the whole process of adopting a child” as it is happening in time. The sequential scanning is expressed linguistically with tense forms of verbs. In other words, any situation verbalized by “a tensed verb form involves sequential scanning”. In sentence (19a), the present tense verb *has* invoked sequential scanning of the situation's phases. The three remaining sentences of (19) involve *summary scanning*. Summary scanning is expressed “linguistically in the lack of tense forms”, i.e., situations whose expressions do not have a tensed verb involve summary scanning. The timelessness of both the infinitive *to adopt* in (19b) and the gerund *adopting* in (19c) invokes summary scanning, the noun *adoption* in (19d) also has this timelessness effect. These two scanning modes illustrated in Figure 7:

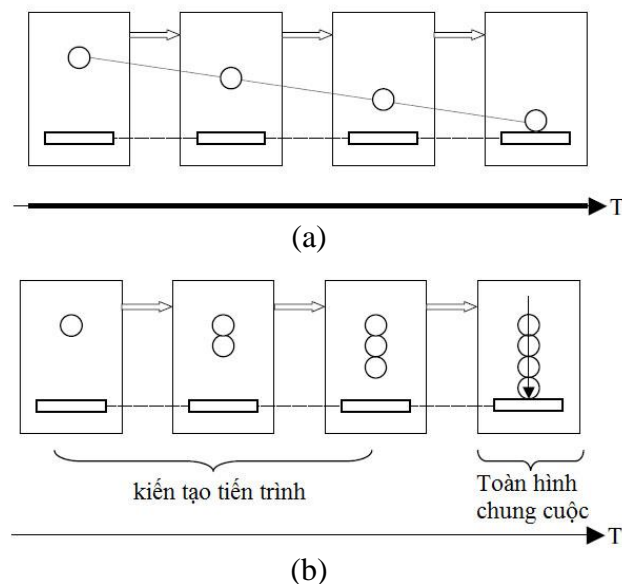


Figure 7. Sequential scanning (a) and summary scanning (b)

Source: Langacker (1987, p. 144).

3.9. Fictive motion

According to Talmy (2000, chapter 2), “a pervasive cognitive pattern can be posited in which two different cognitive subsystems in an individual form discrepant representations of the same entity. Furthermore, a third subsystem in the individual assesses one of those representations as more veridical, or ‘factive’, and the other as less veridical, or ‘fictive’.” In particular, language has many “fictive motions,” in which a factively stationary entity is represented as motion. Langacker (2005b, 2008) argues that fictive motion reflects subjective imaginary mental constructions used to talk about the existence of objects in real-life situations. It is a special kind of *mental scanning*, which is used to reactivate the conceptualized original experiences along an imaginary trajectory. Observe (20) and (21):

(20) a. Hàng rào này chạy dích dắc từ đồi cù xuống tận hồ Xuân Hương.

(This fence zigzags from the hill to Xuân Hương lake.)

b. Hàng rào này chạy dích dắc từ hồ Xuân Hương lên tới tận đồi cù.

(This fence zigzags from Xuân Hương lake to the hill.)

(21) a. Cổng này dẫn ra vườn.

(This gate leads to the garden.)

b. Con dốc này đổ dài xuống bên cảng gần cây số.

(This slope descends nearly a kilometer to the port.)

The meanings of motion verbs like *chạy* (run), *dẫn* (lead to), *đổ* (descend), as these examples show, can be extended semantically to express spatial relations that are neither related to the motion itself nor related to a change of state. The motion's figurative representations are attributed to stative situations, immovable physical objects, or abstract concepts. They all are considered fictive movements (Langacker 2005b, 2008; Talmy 1996, 2000, chapter 2). Fictive motion consists of a series of linguistic expressions in which the physical movements are the basis, and other information is the foreground to convey a visual metaphor. However, in the actual ones, a moving object continuously changes its positions over time, while in fictive motion, we mentally scan an imagined path. For example, in (21a), our eyes mentally track the imagined path from-gate-to-garden, and in (21b), our eyes mentally scan from the slope top down to the port.

Talmy (2000, chapter 2) details two of the various types of fictive motions. The first type, which he called *coextension paths*, is used in static spatial relation expressions, as in example (20). “A ‘coextension path’ depicts the form, orientation, or location of a spatially extended object in terms of a path over the object’s extent” (Talmy, 2000, p. 138). This object is stationary and has no entity passing through the

described path; however, it is mean as moving along or throughout its spatial configuration, as in (20) above. According to Talmy, in example (20), one cognitive subsystem in a listener has the world knowledge that the fence is stationary. But another subsystem responds to the literal wording—specifically, the motion words *chạy, đích đắ, từ, xuống*—to evoke a sense of motion along with the linear extent of the fence that “serves to characterize the fence’s contour and positioning” Talmy (2000, p. 138). A parallel sentence (20b) evokes a sense of motion in the opposite direction. Two these sentences together show how a concept—in this case is that of a sense of directed movement—can be imposed on or assigned to notions of phenomena in the world through linguistic devices (see also Dương, 2016).

The second type, which Talmy (1996, 2000) called *emanation paths*, involves “the fictive conceptualization of an intangible line emerging from a source object, passing in a straight line through space, and terminating on a target object, where factively nothing is in motion” (Talmy, 1996, 2000). This fictive motion type has the following subtypes:

- (a) “Demonstrative paths” subtype: “a directed line emerges from the pointed front of a source object” (Talmy, 1996, 2000). This is seen in *Mũi tên này chỉ tới/chỉ lui/chỉ rời khỏi thị trấn* (The arrow points toward/past/away from the town).
- (b) “Radiation paths” subtype: a beam/ray of radiation emanates from a radiant object and terminates on an irradiated object, like *Ánh sáng chiếu từ mặt trời vào hang* (Light shone from the sun into the cave). According to Talmy (1996, 2000), “it might be claimed that photons do factively emanate from a radiant object, so that fictive motion need not be invoked. However, we do not see photons, so any representation of motion is cognitively imputed.” In another case, considered as a small related subtype—those are shadow paths—none claim the existence of “shadow ons,” and this fictive motion is seen in a sentence like *Đèn hắt bóng lên tường* (Light shadows on the wall).
- (c) “Sensory path” subtype “is represented as moving from the experiencer to the experienced object” (Talmy, 1996, 2000) in a sentence like *Tôi nhìn/vào quá khứ/tới tương lai* (I looked into/past/future). Such an emanating “line of sight” can also be represented as moving laterally, as distinct from vertical fictive motion, as in the sentence *Tôi từ từ nhìn xuống giếng* (I slowly looked down into the well). Both of these forms of motion are called axial motion.

4. CONCLUSION

Construal, as we have seen, relates to different ways of imagining and portraying a situation, but only one of these alternate ways is selected. Construal and its representative forms are fundamental to language and cognition. They show humans’

cognitive capacities with clear linguistic reflections, but there seems to be no way to organize all of them into a comprehensive classification system.

This article examined construal nine representative forms of construal operation that we often see in the Cognitive Linguistics literature. It is easy to see three of these nine forms: *windowing of attention*, *figure/ground*, and *profiling* are related to *prominence*, in which *windowing of attention* denotes selected aspects of a situation focused; “*figure and ground* indicate the division of that situation into salient and non-salient elements; and *profiling* represents the speaker’s choosing a conceptual and linguistic unit”, e.g., *elbow*, thereby implying its *base* (i.e., “arm.”) Six remaining representative forms are related to viewing operation: *viewing-frame* refers to the situation or its part which the communicators conceive or perceive; *viewpoint* denotes the speaker’s perspective of that situation; the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity indicates the extent to which the conceptualizer participates partly in that described situation; the division between *generality* and *specificity* applies to the construal of the situation in a more general or specific way; *mental scanning* shows “the construal of the situation in its phasing in time, and *fictive motion* refers to the construal” of the static situation as the motion situation.

All these representative forms show the diversity of the construal operation. Perhaps, thanks to that, the speaker of language “is assumed to have the ability of construing one and the same situation in a number of alternate ways and of making different senses of it” (Langacker, 1991, p. 61).

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