

# Conceptualization of events in English academic texts: A Cognitive Grammar approach

Elma Kerz  
(RWTH Aachen University)

One of the central tenets of Cognitive Linguistics is that language users are equipped with the capacity to construe one and the same situation in alternate ways and that linguistic configurations reflect language users' construal. There have been several proposals accounting for the relation holding between conceptualization of events and the selection of particular constructions. Fisher, Gleitman and Gleitman (1991) say that constructions serve as a 'zoom lens' which the speaker uses to direct the reader's attention to a particular perspective on a scene. Talmy (1996) describes the use of constructions to highlight certain aspects of a scene, at the expense of other aspects, as the 'windowing of attention'. Langacker (1987) speaks of constructions forcing a certain 'construal' of a situation. Langacker (ibid.) lists three parameters which are used to construe a specific situation: 'selection', 'perspective' and 'abstraction'. He uses the term 'focal adjustment' to refer to variation in terms of these parameters.

By adopting Langacker's Cognitive Grammar approach, the present study will investigate the way in which the prevalent use of specific constructions in the register of academic writing reflect authors' conceptualization of events being reported in academic texts. It will be shown here that particular focal adjustments motivate authors' selection process of constructions in the register of academic writing.

It can be argued that academic texts provide "snap-shots" of different stages of the research process. The major objective of the research process is an incremental and progressive discovery of facts and hence academic discourse is a transparent description of how knowledge is constructed and made persuasive.

The focus here is placed on the use of two groups of high frequency lexical items denoting two key stages of the research process, viz. verbs of studying (e.g. *study*, *examine* or *investigate*) and coming-to-know verbs (e.g. *find*, *show* or *indicate*), including the nominalized forms of the both groups. The present study is based on corpus data derived from the written academic subcomponent of the BNC (approx. 15,5 million word corpus). According to corpus data, these items are prevalently used in constructions which force a certain 'construal' on a research process reported.

## References:

- Fisher, C., H. Gleitman and L.R. Gleitman 1991. On the semantic content of subcategorization frames. *Cognitive Psychology* 23:331-392.
- Langacker, R. 1987. *Foundations of cognitive grammar, vol. 1: theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Talmy, L. 1996. The windowing of attention in language. In *Grammatical constructions: their form and meaning*, M. Schibatani and S. A. Thompson (eds.), 235-87. Oxford: Clarendon Press.