Conceptual Categories and Linguistic Categories

Syllabus

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Dates/time: Mondays and Thursdays, July 7-August 1, 10:30am-12:15pm
Place: Muenzinger E050
Office hours: TBA
Office location: Hale 160

Course Description: This course will explore conceptual categories that find expression in language, and, thus, that are central to the mapping between words and the world, while highlighting the methodological issues involved in the identification of such categories. The greater part of the course will be devoted to conceptual categories claimed to be central to the representation of events and states and, concomitantly, to the classification of verbs, including scalar change, external vs. internal causation, possession, and motion. The remainder will consider the domain of entities, exploring those conceptual categories that affect the naming of entities and the grammatical properties of nouns, such as artifacts vs. natural kinds and the mass/count distinction. Class discussion and readings will provide theoretical, typological, and psycholinguistic perspectives on the material covered.

Prerequisites: The course assumes no specific background in lexical semantics, but does assume familiarity with basic semantic and syntactic concepts.

Course Requirements: Those taking the course for credit must complete a written assignment, which will include a variety of questions that students can choose among. The assignment will be handed out about halfway through the series of lectures. Hard-copy typed answers are due at the beginning of the last class meeting on Monday, August 1. Due to the tight grading deadline, absolutely no late assignments will be accepted. We will not accept e-mailed answers because of the large number of students registered.

Course Readings: Various readings will be available online, mostly via CULearn, the CU Library, or Levin’s personal publications web page. A list of major readings may be found on p. 3.

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Lecture Outline (Tentative)

Lecture 1 (Thursday, 7/7): Construals of the world that matter for grammar
Conceptual and linguistic categories introduced: Case studies and methodological issues
Course organization and overview
READING: Levin & Rappaport Hovav (L&RH) 2005

Lecture 2 (Monday, 7/11): Conceptual categories critical to event construal
A unified view of event construal that falls short: The Localist Hypothesis
Two critical categories: Manner and result
Grounding manner and result: Scalar change introduced
READING: Jackendoff, Rappaport Hovav & Levin (RH&L) 2010

Lecture 3 (Thursday, 7/14): More on manner and result
Classifications of predicates in terms of scalar change vs. traditional aspectual classifications
A constraint on possible verb meanings: Manner/result complementarity
Manner and result in argument realization
READING: L&RH in press, Rappaport Hovav, Kearns (background)

Lecture 4 (Monday, 7/18): Another category fundamental to event construal: Causation
Internally and externally caused events and the causative alternation
The causative alternation: Distributional generalizations posing challenges to previous work
READING: L&RH 1995, McKoon and Macfarland (suggested)

Lecture 5 (Thursday, 7/21): Causation continued: An account of the causative alternation
Lexical entries for alternating verbs
Introducing and licensing causers: The Direct Causation and Proper Containment Conditions
Distributional challenges revisited
READING: RH&L in press, Haspelmath (suggested)

Lecture 6 (Monday, 7/25): Expressing caused possession and caused motion
The dative alternation: Verb sensitivity in argument realization
Crosslinguistic variation in mapping event schemas to morphosyntax
READING: RH&L 2008, Levin (suggested)

Lecture 7 (Thursday, 7/28): Conceptual categories in the nominal domain
Artifacts vs. natural kinds: Naming patterns
The mass/count distinction and beyond: Lexical encodings of individuation status
READING: Frawley, Grimm

Lecture 8 (Monday, 8/1):
The nominal domain continued
Expressing motion events: Lexicalization patterns as epiphenomena of morphosyntax
(Time permitting)
Course wrap-up
READING: Beavers, Levin & Tham (suggested)
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Course Readings

NOTE: Unless a URL is given, readings are available at the course’s CULearn web page, via the CU Library (if journal articles), or, if preceded by an asterisk, at http://www.stanford.edu/~bclevin/pubs.html.


