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Futurity: integrating form and intersubjective meaning
Sambre, Paul & Brône, Geert

Context – In contrast to the vast literature on modality, only few cognitive linguistic studies have been devoted exclusively to the expression of futurity. This paper shows how cognitive linguistics (CL) may contribute to a better understanding of the linguistic form and meaning of futurity in Italian and German.

Three theoretical cognitive frameworks – We combine the following theoretical constructs inspired by CL. (1) Langacker's (1991: 244) extended epistemic offers a temporal and modal template for situating future predications, which overlaps with a second, discursive time-line: a conceptualizer's current discourse space (CDS, Langacker 2001) which represents time as discourse unfolds (Chilton 2005). (2) We pursue Verhagen's (2005) idea that linguistic structures do not only profile the object of conceptualization but also potential (inter)subjective viewpoints of multiple, embedded conceptualizers, who refer to specific temporal positions on Langacker's time-line. (3) We discuss the constructional patterns and conceptual representations used in blended (Fauconnier & Turner 2002) co-occurrence of futurity and actuality.

Research questions – We describe the blending of intersubjective positions which implies 4 aspects:

(1)   the relation between conceptualizations of present and future time positions, like a precursive (present) perspective and prospective (future) counterpart;

(2)   the shifts between perspectives on the axis of represented time which occur along temporal, and eventually, through modal and spatial discourse vectors,

(3)   the fact that these vectors are set up by heterogeneous enunciative subjects;

(4)   the German and Italian constructional patterns exploited for blending temporal positions, perspectives and subjects.

Methodology and sample data – Our corpus-based approach combines cognitive approaches with authentic language data in popularizing discourse: a publication ordered by Cordis (European Commission) to the German Science and Training department (BMBF), and its Italian translation by Veneto Nanotech (approximately 100 pp.). Science popularization typically deals with representing possible future everyday applications of complex concepts in scientific theory. One of these popularized concepts is nanotechnology, which deals with the miniaturization of technological artefacts. There is a growing social and political concern about popularization of nanosciences: how can a multilingual audience be convinced of their assets.

Results – We provide a typology and evidence for the CL representation of futurity, based on Italian and German. Generally speaking, the case shows the nexus between conceptualization in CL and its strategic implications for the political-institutional and societal aspects of nanotechnology. More specifically, this grammatical description shows the creative and dynamic nature of meaning construction, which blends multiple temporal representations. It shows how creating new concepts strongly relies on futurity.

References

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