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Yishai Tobin (ed.)

From Sign to Text
A semiotic view of communication

FROM SIGN TO TEXT
A SEMIOTIC VIEW OF COMMUNICATION

For my wife Regina

edited by

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(11). *The following day the victory inspection. And afterwards civilian clothes. You walk down the streets of Jerusalem and they're all yours. Buses pass by. Suddenly someone calls out shalom to me. It's Micha. And then a command car and I see Meirke wearing his green t-shirt. I yell after him: Stop! Stop! ... but he continues driving ... I didn't know then which of the members of the Kibbutz had fallen (14), I was free from worry. The feeling of confidence that the Kibbutz inspires in you, the feeling that there's a home, there's someone who cares, there's nothing that can replace knowing that when it comes to a soldier's morale. (24)*

C. From Shafir (1985)

(1) *I'm excited and nervous, I have few expectations and many hopes for my first meeting. As my custom, I arrived early and looked around to see signs of a school, but to no avail. I got to the army camp and begin to return towards the settlement, when suddenly a flea appears on the gate of the orchard and through it (I see) a trail through the citrus trees. Some new Swedish huts in various stages of construction appear before my eyes and a path leading to a central building, probably the dining room. On the side, there is a pile of red thatching... on the roof a construction worker stands up placing one shingle on another which are being handed to him lazily by another worker ... On the porch of one of the huts a man is standing pensively looking around. One hand rubs his forehead looking for his glasses while the other waves to me from afar. This extended hand — more than the normal greeting, drew me towards him in a most open and inviting way. (11)*

(2) *When a local council decides to establish an educational institution it is guided first of all by the community's needs... The planning committee studies the developmental potential of the area through a demographic census which includes statistics regarding the size and age of the children's population, the age of the parents, the estimated number of additional temporary or permanent residents. Such a census may reveal, among other things, that 2%-8% of the studied population may be in need of special educational facilities beyond the planned norm both in structure and in content. (54)*

Verbal aspects and scripts: an example of interaction between grammatical meanings and cognitive models

Volkmar Lehmann

In my paper I want to make some observations on types of interaction between the meaning of verbal aspect forms and "context", a "context" which can be made explicit by "scripts". Interaction between sign contents and cognitive models such as scripts is one of the most relevant factors which make up the meaning of a text. If we can show that there is in fact such an interaction, this will be a piece of evidence for the autonomy of aspectual meaning relative to "context". For there cannot be a real interaction between different items, between sign meaning and scripts, if the interacting items are not autonomous entities.

Scripts are stereotypical episodes, like, for instance, the sequence of waking up, getting up, washing, having breakfast, leaving (let's call it the morning script), or the parallel actions of speaking and listening (let's call it the oral communication script). The concept of scripts was developed by Abelson (1973) and used e.g. by Schank and Abelson (1975) in order to simulate the understanding of natural language texts by computer programs. Scripts can be looked upon as hypotheses of cognitive models (like "frames" or "prototypes"; for "cognitive models" see Lakoff, 1982). A famous example is the restaurant script. A statement that someone went to a restaurant "is normally interpreted to mean that the entire restaurant script was executed. That is, he went into a restaurant, decided what he wanted to eat, made his choice known to an appropriate employee, the order was conveyed to a cook who prepared the meal, the meal was served, eaten, a check was received, paid, and he left the restaurant. This entire inference chain is conveyed by saying 'I went to a restaurant'." (Lehnert, 1980).

My thesis is that, in the processing of a text, scripts and aspectual meanings are complementary items. Both are necessary for effective com-

munication. I developed the concept of verbal aspect, as proposed here, in order to deal with Russian aspects. Yet its general characteristics can also be applied to English or to French. Verbal aspects provide the temporal setting of actions (and, of course, of other occurrences) in such a way¹ that an *-ing*-form verb expresses an *ongoing process* (*John was leaving*) and that a simple form verb expresses an *event as a whole* (*John left*). These aspectual meanings provide inferences of various types. Thus the meaning "ongoing process" brings about the inference "middle phase of process" (the beginning and the end of the process remaining beyond the focus which is on the middle phase). What interests us most in dealing with interaction between scripts and aspects, however, are the *chronological inferences* brought about by connections of aspectual forms.

Connections of *-ing*-form verbs typically bring about the inference of a *chronological parallelism* of ongoing processes:

- (1) She was speaking and John was listening.
- (2) She was speaking and John was opening the door.

Connections of simple form verbs typically bring about the inference of a *sequence* of events:

- (3) John got up, had breakfast, and left.
- (4) She spoke and John opened the door.

Connections of an *-ing*-form verb and a simple form verb as, for instance, in

- (5) She was speaking and John opened the door.

typically bring about the inference of an event occurring on the background of an ongoing process (this chronological configuration is often called an "incidence").

The parallelism in sentence (1) is in accordance with the parallelism of the oral communication script, the sequence in sentence (3) is in accordance with the morning script. Sentences (2), (4), and (5), however, are *not* in accordance with a script because there is no set of scripts for them. The fact that no scripts are available, chronological inferences being drawn from aspectual meanings, is a first indication of autonomy of the sign meaning relative to scripts. We cannot dwell upon an explanation of these inferences. Since they seem to be universal (cf. for instance Russian and French, see Lehmann 1984: 90), this is a problem to be solved by cognitive psychology. It is, however, not difficult to propose some tentative explanation: If you are instructed by an *-ing*-form verb to imagine an ongoing process (she

is speaking) and then to imagine another ongoing process in the same episode (he is opening the door), you will normally have the impression that there are two parallel processes going on. If you are instructed, however, to imagine an event as a whole (she speaks) and if you then are instructed to imagine another event as a whole (John opens the door), you will perceive the events as a sequence.

Another piece of evidence for the autonomy of aspectual meaning is the fact that even if there *are* scripts, aspectual meaning can be independent from them. Aspectual meaning can *link* different scripts (for instance, the morning script and the restaurant script):

- (6) John got up and went to the restaurant.

Aspectual meaning can be *not in accordance* with a script:

- (7) John was having breakfast and leaving.

Especially the fact that aspectual meaning overrules scripts proves that the content of the aspectual sign can be autonomous relative to "context", a context which can be made explicit by means of scripts.

But scripts are autonomous entities, too. They can provide chronological information if the linguistic units do not do so. Simple verb forms can express events as a whole, providing chronological inferences such as sequences, or they can express habits, duties, dispositions etc. If simple form verbs express a habit, a duty, a disposition, etc., they do not, at the same time, provide the chronological inference of a sequence:

- (8) She spoke — John listened: this was their life.

As in (8) the aspectual forms convey a *habit*, there is no chronological inference of a sequence of events to be drawn from aspectual meaning. Nevertheless, we understand speaking and listening in (8) as being chronologically parallel. This parallelism is inferred from the oral communication script.

There are, moreover, sentences where scripts seem to overrule aspectual meaning. In the following sentences the relation between the actions is not in conformity with the typical chronological inferences from aspects:

- (9) John *predicted the accident*, saying that ...
- (10) John *died* eventually, leaving his relatives without any money.
- (11) John *won* the game, moving his queen to king-knight-seven.

In spite of the connection of a simple form verb and an *-ing*-form verb we do *not* understand the incidence of an event on the background of an ongo-

ing process as in (5). Does the *-ing*-form in these sentences lose its autonomy relative to context? Before answering this question, we must first pose the following preliminary question:

Is the special behaviour of the *-ing*-form in (9), (10), (11) due to its different syntactical status as a participle? The following sentences will help to find an answer to this question:

(12) Playing the piano, John won the contest.

This sentence has at least two interpretations, one being founded on our aspectual meaning "ongoing process" with the inference of an event occurring on the background of a process:

- (12) a. While playing the piano, John won the contest.
 b. By playing the piano, John won the contest.

The second meaning (he won by playing) is a meaning of the type exhibited in the sentences (9), (10), (11). As there is one and the same syntactical structure for both meanings, we can answer our preliminary question, saying that the specific semantic behaviour of these sentences is not due to their syntax.

Concerning the possible loss of autonomy by the *-ing*-form, we must conduct a semantic analysis.

The specific item of aspectual meaning as revealed in the sentences (9), (10), (11), and (12, 12b) suggests a specific type of scripts. A. I. Goldman (1970) called relations between actions like those conveyed in (9), (10), (11) "level generation" or simply "generation". Giving an example (p. 1), Goldman suggests that we "suppose that John does each of the following things (all at the same time): (1) he moves his hand, (2) he frightens away a fly, (3) he moves his queen to king-knight-seven, (4) he checkmates his opponent, (5) he gives his opponent a hard attack, and (6) he wins his first chess game ever." There is one "basic" (bodily) action (John moves his hand) and many generated effects.

Many philosophers (in distinction to Goldman, 1970) think that both generating actions and generated actions are identical. It must be conceded that they are of an identical substance, i.e. that they exist in identical local and temporal coordinates. In other words, they *coincide* in time and place. By contrast, sentences like

(1) She was speaking and John was listening.

or

(12) John won a competition while playing the piano.

do *not* coincide. They convey temporal parallelism or incidence of an event on the background of an ongoing process, but they do not coincide in the same way as do the actions in (9), (10), (11). Nevertheless, parallelism, incidence, and level generation have one common feature: they bring about the inference of an *identity of time*. In all these cases there is an interval of time, relative to which both actions are true: listening and speaking, speaking and opening the door, winning the contest and playing the piano, moving the queen and winning the chess game. All these actions refer to a common interval of time. Identity of time is the basis ("tertium comparationis") for the inference of level generation.

Thus we have to ascribe a general meaning "identity of an interval of time" to the *-ing*-form if the *-ing*-form is connected with another verb form. The existence of at least two actions is a logical presupposition of the notion of "identity of time". We must, therefore, keep the meaning "level generation" apart from the meaning "ongoing process" of the *-ing*-form, which is *not* connected with another verb form (we shall here not be concerned with the use of the *-ing*-form as a gerund). And there is another reason for this: Level generated actions are not necessarily ongoing processes. This is shown by the fact that an *-ing*-form verb with the meaning "level generation" can be synonymous with a simple form verb. Compare e.g. the following sentences:

- (10) John died eventually, leaving his relatives without any money.
 a. John died eventually and left his relatives without any money.
 (11) John won the game moving his queen to king-knight-seven.
 a. John moved his queen and (thus) won the game.

The synonymy of these sentences proves that the actions expressed by *leaving* in (10) or by *moving* in (11) are not ongoing processes.

We can conclude that there is a derived (secondary) aspectual meaning "identity of an interval of time", which has the variants "parallelism" or "incidence on background" on the one hand, and "level generation" on the other hand. With the meaning "level generation" there is again interaction with scripts: (i) In (9), (10), (11) scripts and the "level generation" variant are in accordance. (ii) In the following sentence the script makes the hearer ("understander") choose one of the two variants (parallelism or level generation):

- (13) He won the chess game, crunching peanuts.

This sentence is spontaneously understood in the sense of "he won *while* crunching peanuts" (i.e., there is an understood background), because winning *by* crunching peanuts contradicts the chess game script. (If he won, because he made his opponent nervous by crunching peanuts, the use of *by* is preferable.) (iii) If there is no script available, the aspectual meaning variant can do the job and convey the meaning "level generation":

- (14) Mary answered astonishing the whole world.

- (15) John barred the entrance placing a cupboard in front of the door.

These examples show that the meaning "level generation" — a derived meaning of *-ing*-form verbs — again interacts as an autonomous linguistic entity with script contexts.

NOTE

- 1 The temporal setting provided by the *-ing* form in English, by the forms of the imperfective aspect in Russian, by the imparfait in French, etc., is an *unbounded interval*. The temporal setting provided by the simple form in English, by the forms of the perfective aspect in Russian, by the passé simple and passé composé in French, etc., is a *bounded interval*.

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Syntagmatic relations and paradigms: Tenses and moods in ancient Greek verbal structure

A semantic analysis of the ancient Greek verb system

Cornelis H. van Schooneveld

1. A few years ago, I published a brief article analyzing the grammatical structure of the Russian verb.¹ It confirmed conclusions drawn in earlier investigations,² to wit, that the semantic structure of the Russian language consists of privative binary oppositions in which one (the marked) member carries extra information which the unmarked member does not provide, and that there are six markings (semantic features) in the language which recur in various grammatical, word formative and lexical categories on four levels of deixis.

2. The six features which seem to constitute the core of Russian semantic structure are: *Plurality*, which means that more than one perception is needed to identify the referent; *dimensionality*, stating that the referent constitutes a subset within a larger set or a subcontinuum within a larger space; *identity*, indicating that the identification of the referent is possible only during a given period of time, while *extension* signalizes that the referent is identified more than once. *Cancellation* eliminates the space in which the first identification took place, replacing it by a space with a different identity. Finally, *objectiveness* makes the identification of the referent independent from any previously given space, whether initial or subsequent.

3. These features occur on several levels of deixis, i.e. they can apply to relations within the narrated situation (identificational deixis [notation: id' etc.]) and relations in which both the speech situation and the narrated situation or the speech situation alone are involved (transmissional deixis [no-