Perspectivizing Space in *Bāŋlā* Discourse

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Abstract

The paper attempts to conceptualize the production and comprehension of spatial perspectives as the synchronization of intentions and contentions in a linguistic discourse. In doing so, it investigates the acts of intending and contending in invoking and instantiating the categories. The paper explains perspective setting and taking in terms of intending and contending which are crucial in shaping the conceptual route for the gradual revelation of the communicative intent. Answer to these questions, in turn, results into an understanding of what constitute the perspectivization process in a discourse.

Keywords: intention; contention; conceptual route; perspective taking; perspective setting.

Introduction

This paper investigates how spatial perspectives are represented and accessed in discourse due to the activation of linguistic expressions. We also explore how these explicitly languaged elements are situated and grounded. The term 'languaging' refers to the manner in which meaning potentials are invoked and realized at the time of discourse production and comprehension. The role of languaging in producing and/or comprehending a discourse is primarily an act of interpretation, since the emergence of meaning in a communicative situation is actually an outcome of the interpretive acts that unfold the structure of the communicative situation and the structuring capacities of the habitual attitudes of the mind (Rochberg-Halton 1982): While producing a discourse, we interpret our thought into language; whereas the discourse comprehension presumes the interpretation of language into the thought. We argue that linguistic expressions trigger two distinct cognitive functions – namely, intending and contending – while languaging spatial perspectives. These two cognitive functions are crucial in accommodating commonsense knowledge into the discourse interpretation through the act of languaging. We test our approach using spatial perspectives in *Bāŋlā* discourse, but the underlying ideas apply to the general question of how meaning is produced and comprehended in discourse.

Researchers have addressed questions related to the issues of spatial perspectives in language from different theoretical persuasions: In these studies, it has been shown that the production and comprehension of spatial descriptions presuppose the activation of asymmetries intrinsic to conceptual categories (Clark 1973). These categories are termed as frames of reference (Levinson 1996; Landau & Hoffman 2005; Majid et al. 2004; Neggers et al. 2006). A frame of reference can function egocentrically or allocentrically. An egocentric frame of reference invokes body-based asymmetries to organize spatial coexistences. In interpreting coexistences, allocentric frames of reference employ external reference frames such as landmark based cognition.

The importance of a frame of reference, as it follows from Piaget and Inhelder (1948), lies in its capacity to mirror the invariant aspects of a category with respect to which perspectives are interpreted. Researchers – see Heine (1989), Heine et al. (1991), Levinson (1996, 2003), Gibbs (2005), Levinson and Wilkins (2006) and others – have studied the linguistic realization of frames of reference at the sub-sentential level in order to answer the following question: how does the linguistic realization of space project the underlying conceptualization of different frames of reference? The answer to this question, in turn, sheds light on old puzzles about the relation between world, language and thought. These 'Whorfian' concerns led researchers to explore spatial universals and their lexicalization in different languages. They are extremely useful in understanding the representation of space in language and in setting correlations between spatial language and spatial cognition.

In spite of these advances in exploring the linguistic realization of space, what remains unanswered is how the users of a language access those representations and correlations while processing a discourse. So, a further investigation of perspective *taking* is long overdue. Additionally, a shift of interest from studying sub-sentential expressions to the study of discourse, as Fauconnier (1981) stressed, will offer "a conceptually different, theoretically more promising, and empirically more broader, system of understanding natural language logic." At the level of discourse, a static correlation between linguistic and cognitive categories is not enough. We also need to understand how these categories are grounded and situated; and, how higher order inferential judgments are integrated during the transformation of one spatial perspective into another (Karmakar 2009). The current investigation seeks to unveil the cognitive structures underlying the

perspectivization[1] process through the study of discourse. We investigate the following two questions: what cognitive functions are at work in perspectivizing space in discourse? How does the languaging of discourse manipulate these cognitive functions? These two questions will be discussed in this paper with reference to *Bāŋlā* language data.

Outline of the Approach

Spatial descriptions are perspectival, like any other linguistic communication (Mead 1938; Chakraborty 1992; Moore 1997; Coventry et al. 2009). In discourse, the descriptions of space, i.e. viewing arrangements, are languaged with respect to certain *vantage points*. A viewing arrangement, as Langacker (2008) defines it, is the 'overall relationships between the "viewers" and the situation being "viewed"'. The process of producing and comprehending spatial viewing arrangements in discourse is termed here as *perspespectivization* – that is the languaging of perspectives.

The act of perspectivization is a consequence of shared linguistic capacity (Akman 2000; Stalnaker 2002; Gibbs 2005), evolving through the generalization process (Mead 1934; Noe 2002; Kristiansen 2008; Langacker 2008) and enabling the interlocutors to understand one another's communicative intent (Lewis 2002; Millikan 2004; Gehlbach 2004; Ganeri 2006). It is a complex phenomenon consisting of perspective setting and perspective taking (Graumann 2002).

The languaging of (spatial) viewing arrangements in discourse can be studied in terms of two cognitive functions associated with linguistic expressions that we term intending and contending. The function of an expression, while intending is to invoke the relevant conceptual category. A conceptual category is a systematic representation of interrelated knowledge systems (Laurence & Margolis 1999; Aarts 2006). For our purposes, a conceptual category is conceived as a cognitive capacitance, storing all possible perspectives of a phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2002; Millikan 2000). As a cognitive capacitance, a category is useful in presupposing and entailing large numbers of facts associated with it, because on activation it illuminates a cluster of other categories with which it is associated (Givon 2005). However, intending alone is not enough to language a discourse, since linguistic communication is always embedded in a specific context. We need another cognitive function, whose role is to situate conceptual categories in that context (Zilberman 1938/1988; Langacker 2008). We call this act of relativization *contending*. The function of a linguistic expression, while contending, is to choose a particular perspective in a discourse context. Consider the expression, 'table'. The act of intending, associated with 'table', invokes the corresponding category which includes information about its structural aspects (like shape, size, constituencies etc.) and functional aspects (like dining table, computer table, drawing table etc.). Depending on the communicative situation, one or more of these structural and functional aspects are selected. This selection procedure is guided by the act of contending provided by an expression like 'on' as in 'on the table' in contrast to the 'under the table'. The role of 'on' – while contending – is to delimit the cognitive capacity of a category to window the cognizer's attention to a specific conceptual configuration.[2] Similarly, in an expression like 'tabletop', the categorial capacity of 'top' is delimited by the modifier 'table', when compared with an expression like 'mountaintop'. The act of contending is a complex phenomenon: It is crucial not only in situating the categorial information in a conceptual configuration (such as when we concatenate 'table' with 'top' or 'mountain' with 'top'); but also equally significant in situating the conceptual configuration in a perceptual set up (as in 'this tabletop', 'that mountaintop' etc.). This issue will be discussed later in this paper.

In our view, expressions are not the ready-made items stored in a mental inventory, but "a made-to-order product reconstructed on each occasion for use" in any linguistic construction (Hirtle 2007). The meaning construing capapcity of an expression in a discourse is determined by the way underlying domains of our cognition are grounded and situated by the respective functions associated with an expression – i.e intending and contending. This way of grounding and situating is what we call the *conceptual route* that a cognizer follows - though intuitively - in order to access the communicative intent. In fact, study of the conceptual route is an effort to explore the way conceptualization processes are structured.

Perspectivizing Space

Though the earlier investigations – as is briefed in the introductory section of this paper, led by different researchers – explore how linguistic realization of oriented space reflects its conceptual structure in different linguistic communities, very little has been done to answer how we language relevant representations and correlations at the time of perspectivizing space in discourse. At the level of discourse, puzzles about the relation between language and thought do not end with setting a correlation between linguistic and cognitive categories; we also need to answer how the above mentioned functions work together while licensing inferences that gradually reveal the conceptual route.

The mental locomotions involved in the construction of the conceptual route do not have an explicit linguistic realization. As we will see in the next two sections, the conceptual route is a combination of first-order perspectivizations that are explicitly languaged, and higher-

[1] In stead of using 'perspectivation' as is used by Graumann (2002), we use 'perspectivization' which is borrowed from Taylor (2003).

[2] In case of the example 'on the table', 'the' also acts as contender. However, this issue is not discussed here since it has no direct relevance in this paper.

order inferential tasks that go beyond what is available in the linguistic input alone. We argue that the formation of the conceptual route is determined by the interactions among various intendings and contendings, activated at the time of setting perspective in discourse.

Phrase level Discourse

The claim outlined above is first explored at the phrase level discourse, like (1) and (2); and then elaborated further in discourse larger than the phrase as is exemplified in (3).

(1) tomār ḍān dik-e
you-of right direction-on
On your right

(2) ṭebil-er ḍān dik-e
table-of right direction-on
On the right side of the table

The interpretations of (1) and (2) presume frames based on bodily asymmetries. It is worth noting that these two phrases are grounded and situated in different ways resulting in two different conceptual routes: (1) is interpreted with respect to the *addressee's* ego-centric perspective; (2) is interpreted from the *addresser'*s ego-centric perspective, since the conceptual category 'table' does not have an inbuilt left/right orientation. More specifically, the right side of the table is interpreted with respect to the cognizer's understanding of his/her own physical asymmetry. Here, the intended asymmetry is extrinsic to the conceptualization of tables. In contrast, an extrinsic frame of reference is not required in interpreting a phrase like *on/under the table*, since tables have an inbuilt sense of vertical opposition. The different interpretation of (1) and (2) is a consequence of the interactions holding between intentions and contentions at the time of conceptual integration.

The act of intending associated with the expression *ḍān dik* invokes our background knowledge of asymmetries intrinsic to the human body. This schematic representation of the human body is an abstract and general invariant cognitive standard, applicable to a range of situations. Consequently, in every concrete situation, the abstract standard needs to be identified with a real world entity/situation in order to convey meaning. In case of (1), the body-schema is identified with the body of a person addressed by the genitive form of the second person pronominal form in *Bāŋlā*. The function associated with the genitive case marker, here in this context, is crucial in contending the relation between pronominal (*tomār*) and nominal (*ḍān dik*) forms. The genitive marker functions in situating the intended categorial information in a conceptual configuration, as opposed to the function of the pronoun in situating intended categorial information into a perceptual set up: Since the body indexed by the pronominal form is identified with the body-schema presupposed by the expression *ḍān dik*, the intended orientation in space is now referred with respect to the indexed body in the real world situation. This shows how the act of contending situates the intended categorial information both in conceptual as well as perceptual environments. The situating of communicative intent in conceptual and perceptual worlds often follows different conceptual routes depending on the types of categories invoked by the intenders. This point will be elaborated further with a discussion of example (2).

The interpretation of *ḍān-dik* in (2) also requires the existence of a body in the real world with which the intended body-schema can be identified. However, unlike (1) it does not has an explicit contender whose function can provide schematic support. The function of the table as intender presupposes a frame of reference that does not support the left/right opposition. In order to satisfy the semantic expectancy activated by the expression *ḍān-dik* in (2), the act of contending invokes a frame of reference which has no explicit linguistic realization: This implicit reference indexes the presupposed body-schema with either addressee or addresser. In discourse, addressee and addressor are the 'last resort' to solve any problem related to the act of contending. Therefore, the act of contending first scans for a local solution which is often explicitly available in discourse; otherwise the function invokes contextualization cues as is shown in case of (2). The mechanism of last resort, as it follows from Lewis (2002), lies with "a system of concordant expectations capable of producing coordination at the salient equilibrium".

The above discussion shows how the formation of the conceptual route at the time of perspective taking (which is a part of discourse comprehension) is influenced by the way perspectives are set at the time of discourse production.

Discourse: Sequence of Connected Phrases

So far, we have discussed how the synchronization of intending and contending is crucial in languaging phrase level discourse that invokes a single frame of reference. In this section, we will investigate how different frames of reference are mapped into one another when more than one frame of reference is languaged in discourse, under the assumption that complexities arise at the level of discourse not because of the multiple perspectives set by the different intenders, but because of the inter-translatability of different perspectives.

Consider the example cited in (3), where various categories are intended, and also contended in order to describe a situation.

(3)

āmi	nadī-r	dhār	diye
I	river-of	bank	through
hā̃ṭ-ch-i	āmār	**bām-dik-e**	dhān-er
is walking	my	left-side-on	of-paddy
kṣet	ār	**ḍān-dik-e**	nadī
field	and	right-side-on	river
sāman-e	sūrya	asta	jācche
front-in	sun	setting	is going

I am walking along the river side. The paddy fields are on my left, and the river is on the right. In front, the sun is setting.

The lexical expressions marked bold in (3) are egocentric, in the sense that they are defined in terms of asymmetries intrinsic to the cognizer's/ego's body-schema; and they produce an egocentric perspective of the landscape described by the cognizer. Further, while egocentric perspectives are the only reference frames that are explicitly languaged in the above discourse fragment, an allocentric frame of reference also plays a crucial role. In (3) the cognizer narrates that the sun is setting in front of him/her. From our commonsense knowledge we know that the sun sets in the west. This fact provides an allocentric frame of reference. Due to the interaction between egocentric and allocentric frames of reference, the following inferences are licensed about the landscape described in (3).

(4) (a) The cognizer's motion is west-directed;
(b) The river, which is on the left of the cognizer, is to his/her south;
(c) The paddy field, which is on the right of the cognizer, is to his/her north;

The information enumerated in (4) is not directly stated in (3). Inferencing, on the basis of the commonsense knowledge, is a significant feature of languaging discourse; it is one way to accommodate the commonsense knowledge in discourse interpretation (Stalnaker 1998).

The inferences enumerated in (4) are drawn out of the conceptual route that emerge through the process of designed coordination among the discourse participants on the basis of the functions associated with different expressions in discourse, just in the fashion it happens in case of (1) and (2). What seems to be of significance, here, is that the inter-translatability of ego and allo-centric frames needs to be viewed as an act of contending – mapping different domains of our cognition.

Observations

Translating one perspective into another presupposes two facts: (i) the structural parallelisms intrinsic to the intended categories used in setting two different perspectives; and, (ii) a capacity to interpret the (asymmetric) configuration of one intender with respect to the other. This process of setting up a relational equivalence among different cognitive domains and facilitating higher order inferential tasks is an act of contending, which remains implicit in discourse level languaging. We will consider this type of contending as a *covert* function crucial to higher-order perspectivization.

While setting a correspondence between the ego- and allo-centric construals of space narrated in (3), the first inference (i.e. (4a)) acts as the vantage point with respect to which ego- and allo-centric references are translated into each other. The *relative salience* of (4a) over (4b) and (4c) also suggests a higher order perspectivization process.

Discussion: Perspectivization as a Process

Our analysis of (1-4) above shows that the viewing arrangement in discourse evolves due to the fixation and translation of vantage points. The translation of vantage points is governed by the relative salience that a vantage point has with respect to other vantage points. In discourse, the viewing arrangement is not a fixed arrangement of different isolated vantage points; rather it is an emergent phenomenon evolving gradually due to the shift of attention from one vantage point to other vantage point with every contention/assertion, as is also argued by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). We identify this process as *second order perspectivization*, in contrast to *first order perspectivization* triggered at the time of setting a perspective.

In brief, first order perspectivization activates the relevant frames of reference to construe the context of interpretation. First order perspectivization, then in turn, intends background information necessary for second order perspectivization; whereas, second order perspectivization contends the interactions between the conceptual categories invoked by the process of the first order perspectivization. Therefore, the viewing arrangement at the level of discourse is a consequence of a two tiered complex cognitive process.

Conclusion

The paper views the production and comprehension of spatial viewing arrangements as the synchronization of intentions and contentions in linguistic discourse. In doing so, it investigates the role of two cognitive functions, namely intending and contending (associated with a linguistic expression), in invoking and instantiating conceptual categories. These two processes underlie cognitive capacities like perspective setting and perspective taking at the level of discourse. We have argued for a bi-layered perspectivization process in order to understand the way ego- and allo- centric perspectives interact in discourse to shape the conceptual route.

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