

# LINGUIST List 26.727: Review: Cognitive Science; Semantics; Typology: Evans (2013)

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**Review: Cognitive Science; Semantics; Typology: Evans (2013)**

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AUTHOR: Vyvyan Evans

TITLE: Language and Time

SUBTITLE: A Cognitive Linguistics Approach

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## SUMMARY

“[T]his book is doubtless not for the faint-hearted [...]”. These are the author's own words given in his preface to precede the volume “Language and Time. A Cognitive Linguistics Approach.” The statement is indeed true – not only with regard to the complexity of the issues addressed, namely the metaphysics of time and its perceptual as well as linguistic conceptualization, but also due to the fact that it combines three different goals, each of which constitutes an ambitious and multifaceted issue by itself:

(1) The volume aims at offering a taxonomy of temporal reference frames based on a comparison of the domains of space and time.

(2) By taking temporal reference as a testing field for a general theory of access semantics, it further aims at serving as an empirical application of Evans' Lexical Concepts and Cognitive Models Theory (LCCM Theory, Evans 2009).

(3) Moreover, a revision of the role of Conceptual Metaphor as a driving force for meaning construction is intended to serve as a basis for investigating the relationship between the linguistic and conceptual level, and hence for contributing to the development of a general theory of meaning.

Committed to these different aims, the book is divided into three main parts: An orientation

section lays the theoretical groundwork with respect to the concept of Frames of Reference (FoR) and Evans' Theory of Lexical Concepts and Cognitive Models (LCCM Theory). The second part is devoted to a comparison between space and time which leads to a taxonomy of temporal FoRs. The final part is concerned with the differentiation between literal and figurative meaning and its implications for a general theory of meaning construction.

## Part I: Orientation

The orientation section offers an overview of the main questions of the volume and its theoretical background. The starting point of Chapter 1 is the common premise that time is conceptualized in terms of space. Under this premise, it seems natural to suggest that time is conceptualized by Frames of Reference (FoR) as have been made evident for the spatial domain by Levinson 2003. One of Evans' central aims therefore is to establish a taxonomy of temporal FoRs (t-FoRs) and to investigate their specific properties in relation to spatial FoRs (s-FoRs).

The theoretical and methodological background for identifying t-FoRs is provided by Evans' Theory of Lexical Concepts and Cognitive Models (LCCM theory) as presented in Chapter 2. LCCM theory presupposes a principled separation between a conceptual structure (i.e. non-linguistic representation that derives from sensory-motor, proprioceptive and subjective experience and is structured by what Evans calls "cognitive models") and a semantic, language-specific structure, whereby the semantic structure is considered to provide access to non-linguistic, encyclopaedic knowledge (21). According to this theory, t-FoRs can be described as lexical concepts, i.e. sentence-level "units of mental knowledge that encode language-specific knowledge of semantic nature" (45), and can be identified by their collocation patterns in language use.

## Part II: Temporal Frames of Reference

Part II is the core of the volume and offers a taxonomy of t-FoRs, based on a comparison between the nature of spatial and temporal reference. The overall hypothesis of Chapter 3 is the following: If temporal reference shows the same patterns like spatial reference, temporal reference should exhibit similar FoRs as Levinson 2003 has evidenced for the domain of space. On the other hand, the t-FoRs are additionally supposed to reflect the specific characteristics of temporal conceptualization. In this respect, the distinctive feature of time is seen in Galton's 2011 parameter of "transience" which refers to the "felt experience of (temporal) passage" and is further specified by the following three different types of temporal representation (66):

- DURATION - the felt experience of the extension of passage of time as an ontological entity in its own right, linked to the MATRIX-relation, "in which time constitutes 'the' event in which all others occur" (70);
- SUCCESSION - the felt experience in terms of an EARLIER-LATER-relation between two temporal events;
- ANISOTROPICITY - a felt experience of the asymmetric distinction concerning the FUTURE-PRESENT-PAST-relation.

This three-partite distinction constitutes the basis for Evans' taxonomy of three different t-FoRs: the deictic, the sequential, and the extrinsic FoR. Based on an empirical analysis of a range of distinct lexical concepts as linguistic reflexes of t-FoRs in English, Evans offers a classification between deictic, sequential, and extrinsic FoRs.

Deictic t-FoRs (ego-centric, experiencer-based, future-past-relation) are discussed in Chapter 4. The deictic t-FoR is characterized by a coordinate system with an Origo constituted by the experiencer's awareness of now, "anchoring the system to the phenomenologically real experience of anisotropy – the felt experience that the passage of time exhibits inherent asymmetry: a felt distinction between future, present and past" (82). The deictic t-FoR can be seen as derived from the phenomenologically real and neurologically instantiated experience of

the perceptual moment, which “cuts” time in different sections of future, present, and past, and is manifest in linguistic manifestations such as “Christmas is approaching”.

Sequential t-FoRs (allocentric, event-based, earlier-later-relation) are focused on in Chapter 5. The sequential t-FoR relates to the transience type SUCCESSION, which “involves the felt experience that time constitutes a sequence of events, one preceding another” (114) and is based on the neurological ability to perceive succession in form of an earlier-later-distinction. The coordinate system is provided by a sequence of events so that a given target event is fixed in relation to another event which serves as reference point (115). This relation is allocentric, i.e. independent from the experiencer's now, cf. Evans' example “Christmas comes before New Year's Eve” (116).

Extrinsic t-FoRs (allocentric, field-based, matrix-relation) are addressed in Chapter 6. Like the sequential t-FoR, the extrinsic t-FoR is also allocentric by being independent of an observer's experience. The difference with respect to the sequential t-FoR is that the transience type of time is conceived as “an extrinsic matrix or absolute temporal reference frame which can be deployed to fix events in time, extrinsic to the subjective experience of time” (127). The extrinsic t-FoR relies on external periodicities (e.g. day/night cycle, solar cycle) and can be based both on event-reckoning (e.g. calendars) and time-reckoning systems (e.g. clocks) (129).

This taxonomy constitutes the basis for a comparison of space and time concerning their common and specific features in Chapter 7. In this respect, the distinction between different reference strategies (allocentric versus egocentric) is seen as bound to the perceptual level and hence as a general property of both space and time conceptualization. While time and space are equally fundamental on a perceptual level, time, by contrast, appears to require a representational format in terms of space. This asymmetric relationship between space and time – the fact that time is activated automatically by space, but not vice versa – leads Evans to the more general claim that the asymmetry is not based on the neurological level, but on the level of representation in the conceptual system (149). The representation of time in terms of space is facilitated, at least in part, by conceptual metaphor, which builds the link to the third part of the volume.

### Part III: Meaning Construction and Temporal Reference

Part III is concerned with the relationship between linguistic and cognitive conceptualization by taking a look at conceptual metaphors as a central mechanism of figurative language understanding. The starting point of Chapter 8 is a distinction between 'conceptual metaphors' that are based on an experiential basis, and 'discourse metaphors' which arise within the linguistic system in order to serve a specific communicative function. These are, in essence, lexical concepts (176ff.). While Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds the implicit premise that conceptual metaphors directly motivate patterns in language usage (as laid out in section 8.1), Evans argues that there is a level of linguistic knowledge representation that is dissociated from conceptual metaphors and which actually drives figurative language use (188).

This claim is the basis for developing an account of figurative language in LCCM Theory (Chapter 9). Based on an overview of neurolinguistic and behavioral studies concerning the processing of literal versus figurative meaning, Evans dismisses a dichotomic distinction between figural and literal meaning (193) and argues in favor of a conception of figurativity as a graded phenomenon whereby literality and figurativity constitute idealized end-points of a continuum (195). In consequence, the understanding of literal and figurative meaning is seen as based on the same compositional mechanisms, related to three crucial factors: (i) the degree of figurativity, (ii) the relative salience corresponding to the degree of entrenchment, and (iii) the relative complexity corresponding to the access route length (194, 214).

The theoretical observations of Chapters 8 and 9 constitute the background for addressing the question of temporal reference. The central thesis for Chapter 10 is that t-FoRs are lexical concepts that “serve as a schematic template for the integration of other lexical concepts and interpretation via non-linguistic content” (237), whereby conceptual metaphor is just one possible factor in the interpretation of t-FoR lexical concepts.

In his final Chapter 11, Evans tackles the issue of universals and diversity in the temporal representation of time in language. By drawing to recent work on the Amondawa language by Sinha et al. (2011), Evans suggests that space-to-time metaphors such as 'NOW IS HERE' and 'DURATION IS LENGTH' might be universal, since they involve basic aspects of phenomenological experience (245). On the other hand, space-to-time Ego-Moving Time metaphors such as “Christmas is approaching” do not seem to be universal (244), as seen by the fact that the Amondawa language “may lack a (subset of a class) of space-to-time motion metaphors” (241). Evans hastens to say that this does, however, not imply that the Amondawa lack one of the three t-FoRs. Neither does it have any implications on the conceptual level of time, as LCCM Theory presumes a principled separation between conceptual and linguistic level. As lexical concepts are language-specific, LCCM Theory “predicts that speakers of different languages should have distinct conceptual representations” (232).

## EVALUATION

The overview already indicates that Evans' volume is a multifaceted approach that will meet the interests of various disciplines such as semantics, psycholinguistics, metaphor theory, linguistic relativity, metaphysics and conceptualization of time, anthropology, and philosophy of language. As the book can be read with profit from different angles with different interests in mind, the following remarks can be nothing else but some prospects for future research as seen from the angle of Evans' three main goals.

Looking at the fact that the classification of s-FoRs is well established by both theoretical and cross-linguistic empirical studies, it is indeed “surprising” (10) that rather few studies have been so far concerned with temporal FoRs. By offering a taxonomy of t-FoRs based on a comparison of the metaphysics of space and time which is further substantiated by recent neuroscientific and behavioral studies, Evans' volume is a groundbreaking work in order to open up this discussion. On the one hand, the classification constitutes a tertium comparationis for cross-linguistic comparisons of temporal conceptualization – as becomes evident by Evans' exemplary short discussions of languages such as Arabic and the languages of the Aymara, Amondawa and Pormpuraaw communities (124ff. and Chapter 11). In addition, further cross-linguistic studies will allow for specifying the taxonomy of t-FoRs and their relationship to s-FoRs, and therefore contribute to the understanding of space and time conceptualization in general. In both aspects, the comparison of s- and t-FoRs in different languages will constitute a promising testing area concerning the basic questions about linguistic relativity and the relationship between linguistic variance and universals.

By offering a detailed approach of t-FoRs, the volume can also be seen as a companion to Evans' previous works on time conceptualization in language (Evans 2004) in providing an application of LCCM Theory. While the crucial principles of LCCM Theory and its methodological premises become very clear by examining t-FoRs as lexical concepts, one could furthermore ask about the interrelationship to grammatical reference frames as e.g. induced by tense semantics – especially as time due to its transient nature is commonly believed to be more relevant for the verb paradigm. Evans excludes tense from his investigation, based on the argument that with tense “the event is not being anchored with respect to anisotropic transience”, but to coding time and is hence “independent from t-FoRs” (95). Evans is certainly right to state that tense displays a different quality of time reference function. Against the background of studies treating tense as a perspectival category which conceptualizes an event with respect to the speaker's “mental field

of vision” (cf. Janssen 2002) and is interrelated to basic referential strategies such as ‘allocentric’ versus ‘egocentric’ (Zeman 2012), the interrelationship between lexical and grammatical anchoring relations seems nevertheless to be a promising endeavor for future research.

With respect to the discussion about a general theory of meaning, this is also linked to the question about the role of grammar in LCCM Theory. Within LCCM Theory, lexical concepts concern purely linguistic semantic content and are “conventionally associated with linguistic forms of all kinds”, as well as including bound morphemes and grammatical constructions (Evans 2006: 501). Grammar, however, is also seen as the context of lexical concepts which exhibit specific patterns in terms of grammatical collocational tendencies (cf. Evans 2006: 505f.). In other words, grammar is both part of the “footprint” (Evans 2009: 127) that lexical concepts leave in the usage data, and, at the same time, linked to the semantic structure of “lexical concepts”. In this respect, the challenge for future research remains in how to account for the different semantic functions of grammatical and lexical items and integrate them into a general theory of meaning.

Altogether, the volume is indeed not a book for the faint-hearted, since Evans makes clear that there are no simple answers for complex issues. However, the brave-hearted are rewarded with insights that are much more multifaceted than the review could have pointed out and will form the basis for new kinds of discussions on “our ongoing discovery of time's essence, and its mystery” (Evans 2013: xv).

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## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Sonja Zeman is assistant professor in the German Linguistics department at LMU Munich. Her research interests include the semantics of verbal categories (ATME), the conceptualization of

space and time, grammaticalization & language change, discourse structure, and the semantics/pragmatics interface. Currently, she is working on patterns of perspectivization from a cognitive and diachronic point of view.

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