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SCOPE AS A COGNITIVE TOOL IN TENSE ANALYSIS

The present article takes up one of the needs present in today's Cognitive Linguistics: applying its theoretical assumptions to a detailed study of the phenomena encountered in particular languages. The instrument tested for this purpose is one of the aspects of construal offered within Cognitive Grammar – scope (Langacker 1987, 2000, 2008, etc.). It is applied to the description of several English temporal constructions in order to check both the range of phenomena which it can refer to as well as the efficiency and accuracy of such an account.

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics offers a wide variety of both theoretical models as well as precise tools to be used in linguistic research. Despite their conceptual unity, an application of them may “highlight different (although related) facets of the shared conceptualization of language” (Broccias 2006: 83). However, acknowledging so is only a beginning for, as the same author observes, “one of the next challenges for cognitive linguistics is to see how we can put this view into effect by relating it to the realm of applied linguistics” (ibid.: 111).

The present article is supposed to take this challenge and check the applicability of one of the tools offered within Cognitive Grammar, scope (Langacker 1987, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2008, etc.), to applied linguistics. The area of study is the grammar of the English language or, more specifically, its temporal constructions. The analysis aims to check the construct's potential – both the type as well as the range of observations which are possible with it.

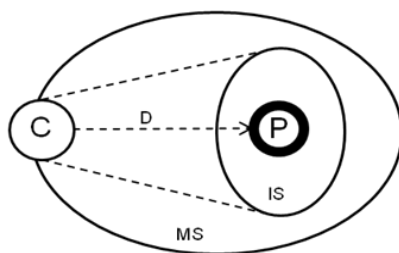
Scope is not an individual tool – it is one of the aspects of a more general human ability of construal. Consequently, even when we analyse one of those aspects, it is necessary to mention at least the ones which influence it. To obey these guidelines, the article starts with a brief characterization of the phenomenon of construal: its origin, applicability, and aspects which it covers. What follows is a detailed

description of scope – its relations with other construal aspects and a set of features which it consequently reveals. Finally, it will be transferred to the more specific area of temporal constructions, where scope adopts more specific characteristics. There, through an application of this construct to an analysis of different temporal constructions, its applicability is tested. The article is concluded with a review of the possible observations which were possible thanks to it and the author's opinion whether it is suitable for a linguistic tool.

2. Scope as one of the aspects of construal

One of the tenets of Cognitive Linguistics is the claim that different expressions encode alternative manners of viewing a situation (e.g. Croft, Cruse 2004: 1–2, Geeraerts, Cuyckens 2007: 3–5, etc.). The cover term for all these manners is *construal*. However, the choice of how we construe a process or an entity is not entirely free – we can construe something only to an extent which is already encoded in a language. In other words, a construal of some conceptual content is part of the meaning of an expression (Langacker 2008: 55). We can only influence the construal by picking a different expression which will better reflect what we wish to convey. Such a status of construal places it and its aspects among the most significant semantic phenomena.

There are several construal aspects. Although their ultimate number and type of classification is still unsettled in theoretical considerations (cf. Verhagen 2007), it is useful to observe that apart from *scope*, there are also such aspects as *vantage point*, *acuity*, or *distance* (Langacker 2000). At the same time these are the ones which originate from, and are thus intimately related to the viewing arrangement (fig. 1). The *vantage point* can be characterised as “the spot at which the viewer is situated and from which the scene is viewed” (Langacker 2000: 207). The viewer is, of course, the *conceptualizer* – the subject of conception. The *profile* is the object of conception and the bold line around it signals both its salience against the immediate scope as well as its degree of *acuity* (also called resolution or granularity) for the conceptualizer. The *distance* between the conceptualizer and the object of conception is self-explanatory. The distance arrow also represents “the construal relationship wherein the conceptualizer entertains the overall conception (of the profile – GD) and structures it in a certain manner” (ibid.). The *maximal scope* comprises “the full content of a given conceptualization” (ibid.), and the *immediate scope* is the area which we are specifically attending to.



C – conceptualizer, P – profile, D – distance, MS – maximal scope, IS – immediate scope

Fig. 1. The viewing arrangement and its components as a basis for the conceptual arrangement

The proper issue of the present article is one of these construal aspects – scope, which can be defined as “the conceptual content appearing in the subjective viewing frame inherent in its apprehension” (Langacker 2008: 63). However, to delineate its properties accurately, a relation between it and some other aspects of construal needs to be discussed.

2.1. *Scope and base*

One of the aspects of construal which can be applied in semantic analyses in a manner largely parallel to scope is *base*. This term has been defined as “an array of conceptual content” (Langacker 2000: 366) evoked by the designated entity – the *profile*. Actually, in one of his latest publications Langacker (2008: 66) pointed explicitly to the link between scope and base: “Construed broadly, an expression’s conceptual base is identified as its maximal scope in all domains of its matrix (or all domains accessed on a given occasion). Construed more narrowly, its base is identified as the immediate scope in active domains”.

Despite such a high degree of correlation, I would like to point to several operational differences between the two constructs which may turn out decisive in selecting a tool for analysis. As Langacker (1987: 120) admits, the profile – base distinction was inspired by the figure – ground organization. What it means is that the distinction between the profile and base can be reduced to a simple alignment: the designated element (profile) and the remainder (base). However, such a basic division of the temporal content can work only in specific cases, e.g. when the temporal scene underlying the use of a tense can be clearly divided into profiled and backgrounded elements, as in the case of the Present Perfect tense (Drożdż 2009b). In the case of scenes with only one profiled element, e.g. the Present Continuous tense (cf. Drożdż 2010) or Past Simple, such a division would be of little use. This contrast is illustrated in figure 2, where two of the uses of the respective tenses are shown. In the first of them (fig. 2a), Present Perfect, profiles two out of three elements of the conceptual scene underlying this use: a moment in the past when the designated process began

and its continuation till the present moment (like in the sentence *She has lived here for a year*). The third element of the scene, the present moment, is not profiled in this use – it belongs to the base. Despite a lack of any other tools, the diagram seems to play its schematic role quite well pointing to the salient elements of the scene. What the second figure (fig. 2b) shows is the main use of Past Simple: an action performed before the moment of speaking. Because this use profiles a single occurrence of an action (like in the sentence *I read an article yesterday*), very little can be shown by means of just profile and base: virtually only the process (profile) which takes place against the rest of the temporal content (base). Such a representation would not convey much information about the temporal boundaries within which the process is placed, the reasons for a lack of relation to the present moment, etc. What is needed, then, is some other tool or tools which would supply it, like in the figure 9b where scope was introduced.

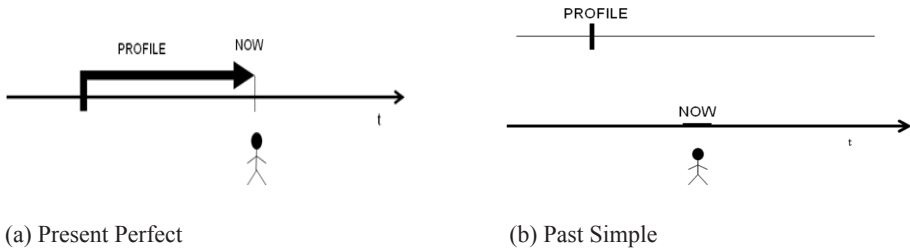


Fig. 2. An application of profile and base to an analysis of uses of Present Perfect and Past Simple

Let me now proceed to a more detailed characterization of the properties of scope resulting from its co-occurrence with other construal aspects.

2.2. *Scope and the vantage point*

Scope co-occurs with several other construal aspects. Keeping in mind the fact that the notion of construal originates from the visual scene, it should come as no surprise that the first to be mentioned is the *vantage point*. On the one hand, it has been characterized as the position adopted by the conceptualizer. On the other hand, it is also the position where the boundaries of the visual scene converge. It is important to observe at this point that the extent of scope is limited: it has a beginning and an end, as well as a place where the two meet. However, the status of these elements is not equal – from a certain perspective this last of them seems more significant than the other two because, as Langacker (2008: 157) notices, the immediate scope is in fact positioned with respect to the vantage point (fig. 1). And in default cases the vantage point is equated with the time of the speech event (ibid.: 76). Although it plays no direct role in the below analyses I believe it is necessary to acknowledge both its existence and significance.

2.3. *Scope – distance – acuity*

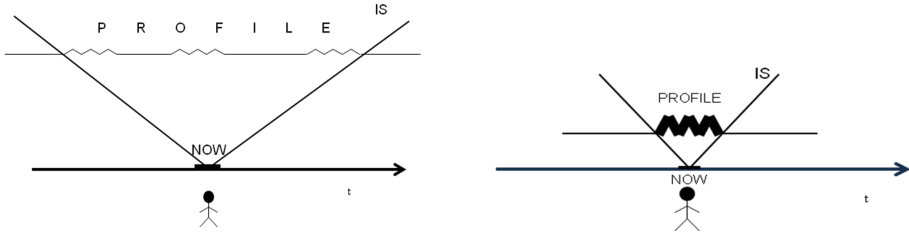
The last set of relations that I wish to point to hold between scope and two other construal aspects: *distance* and *acuity*. These correlations stem from visual perception: if we focus on a distant object (the *distance* between the conceptualizer and the object is long), we can hardly distinguish the details of it (the object's *acuity* is low). At the same time, the scope of our attention covers a large area of the world around us (the *scope* is broad) (fig. 3a). Considering a converse situation – attending a proximate object – the above parameters will adopt converse values: at a short *distance* the object's *acuity* will be high and the *scope* within which we perceive the object will be narrow (cf. Langacker 2000: 206, Lakoff 1987: 428).

3. Construal aspects in the temporal domain

So far the considerations focused on the construal aspects and their properties in the spatial domain. Let us now see how they hold in the temporal domain.

As for the vantage point, its interpretation in time is rather unproblematic. Adopting a spatial position for viewing means at the same time entering the temporal domain within which the viewing will be done. As Langacker (2000: 207) observes, “the time of speaking is a temporal vantage point”. The other construct which does not require much elaboration is the profile – the designated process.

The temporal relationships between distance, acuity, and scope is a more complex matter for the correlations known from space do not necessarily have to hold in time. An example can be the Past Continuous tense – although it describes a process in the, often correlated with Past Simple, it construes the process with high acuity. Concluding, the distance between the time of speaking and the denoted process does not exclusively depend on the temporal distance between the conceptualizer and the process. Rather, it seems more intimately correlated with the extent of the temporal scene (scope) which the conceptualizer embraces while viewing. In other words, the broader the scope the more distant the process and, at the same time, the lower the acuity of the process (fig. 3). Actually, such a situation establishes good grounds for postulating two different, albeit related types of acuity: process and time acuity. However, this detailed issue is dealt with more extensively elsewhere (Drożdż 2010).



(a) Broad scope, distant process, and low acuity

(b) Narrow scope, proximate process, and high acuity

Fig. 3. The relations among scope, distance, and acuity of a process

4. Temporal characteristics of scope

Now I would like to elaborate more fully on a more precise characterization of the very notion of scope. This will proceed along two dimensions: on the one hand, a discussion of the elements of scope will be held: the immediate and maximal scope and the type of processes which it can encompass. On the other hand, they will be presented in a manner suited to the present analysis: as functioning in the temporal domain.

4.1. Maximal and immediate scope

So far scope has been treated as a unitary construct. However, it does not have to be so – sometimes it is necessary to distinguish between “an expression’s maximal scope in some domain, i.e. the full extent of its coverage, and a limited immediate scope, the portion directly relevant for a particular purpose” (Langacker 2008: 63). What it means is that in a characterization of e.g. the term *hand*, the arm would constitute the immediate scope, and the whole body – the maximal scope, as illustrated in figure 4.

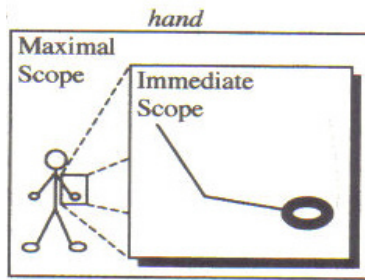


Fig. 4. Immediate and maximal scope of *hand* (Langacker 2008: 64)

In the temporal domain these types of scope receive very precise definitions. However, at this juncture an important difference between Langacker's approach and the one adopted in the present article needs to be noted. The main motif in Langacker's (2001, 2008: 147–160) temporal considerations is the distinction between perfective and imperfective processes. By the former he means processes which are “bounded in time” and designating “occurrences with a beginning and an end” (Langacker 2008: 147) while the latter group can be characterized as profiling “stable situations of indefinite duration” (*ibid.*) (fig. 5).

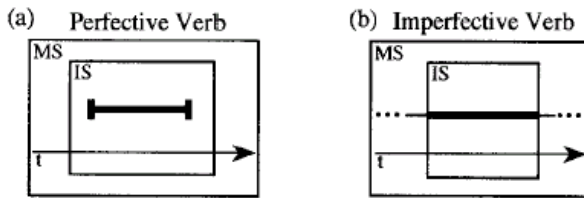


Fig. 5. Perfective and imperfective verbs (Langacker 2008: 153)

This division is reflected in the definitions he offers for the two types of scope – the *maximal scope* is defined as “a span of time containing the full, bounded process” (Langacker 2001: 12), whereas the *immediate scope* as the one which “subtends only an arbitrary portion of its internal development”. What is more, “only that portion is profiled since – as a matter of definition – the profile is the focal point within the immediate scope” (*ibid.*), as shown in figures 6b, d.

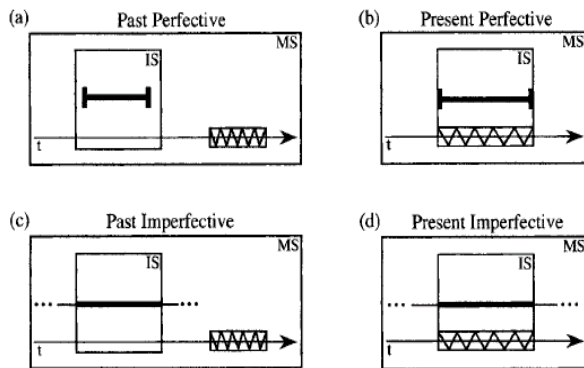


Fig. 6. An application of the perfective – imperfective distinction to different temporal constructions (Langacker 2008: 158)

Although the perfective – imperfective distinction is unquestionably vital for grammar, I believe it would be profitable to modify the definition of scope. Rather than focusing on the type of process designated by the verb, I suggest taking into account

the type of construal which the given structure imposes on the denoted process. It is worth noticing that such an approach is not contradictory to the Cognitive Grammar assumptions: “an expression imposes a particular construal, reflecting just one of the countless ways of conceiving and portraying the situation in question” (Langacker 2008: 4). I believe that thanks to such a modified definition some important properties of the constructions in question can be pointed to, as the below discussion aims to prove.

Consequently, in the present article the *maximal scope* of a temporal construction will be understood as embracing the whole of time, and the *immediate scope* as embracing the part of temporal reality within which the conceptualizer positions the whole of the profiled action (fig. 7). What extends beyond the immediate scope is the existence of the conceptualized object or person before and after the designated process and whether it is marked is actually a matter of convenience. One more issue concerning the profile should be born in mind – the conceptualizer is not entirely free in his choice of construal – he or she cannot impose *any* construal of the given profile by means of a structure for it will not be understood properly by the hearers (e.g. Past Continuous cannot point to a single occurrence of a process in the past). He or she can manipulate the type of scope only to the extent which the structure affords. Construal, then, is both a function of the applied construction and the conceptualizer’s choice.

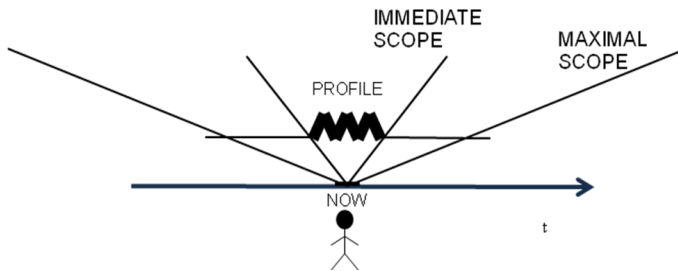


Fig. 7. A temporal characterization of the immediate and maximal scope

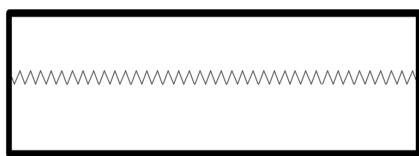
Concluding, an operational remark needs to be added. Since the maximal scope reveals a constant value which is not crucial in the majority of analyses, for the sake of convenience it will be excluded from the below analyses.

4.2. Scope and profile

Now I wish to discuss another dimension of scope – its relationship with the profiled process. This is also an area where the model proposed in the article parts from Langacker’s. Although they still have much in common, for instance the fact that the profiled process must be manifested within the immediate temporal scope (Langacker 2008: 157), the type of manifestation remains at issue.

4.2.1. Present Simple and Present Continuous

In the present approach the emphasis is put on the type of construal which the construction imposes on the process. In other words, although it is unquestionable that unbounded verbs basically appear in Present Simple and bounded in Present Continuous (Langacker 2008: 147–148), from our encyclopaedic knowledge we know that relatively few processes are *really* unbounded (even the existence of the world and the movement of the Earth around the Sun began at some point). As a consequence, it will be assumed that choosing a tense like Present or Past Simple we impose a holistic construal of the profiled action (fig. 8a), while by means of such tenses as Present or Past Continuous we adopt an internal perspective on the profiled actions (fig. 8b).



a) The holistic construal



b) The internal construal

Fig. 8. A comparison of the holistic and internal construal of the process

It is important to observe that in this sense the immediate scope does not coincide with the time of the speech event, which the profiled actions can exceed, as proposed by Langacker (2008: 157–158) (fig. 6b, d). It embraces *the whole* of the profiled process, whatever its length. Now the breadth of the scope, the distance to the profiled action, as well as the acuity of the profile can be seen as a result of selecting the given construction. At the same time, as has been discussed, a change in any of them entails a change in the others. An illustration of it can be the difference between the type of construal encoded by Present Simple and Present Continuous. The first diagram (fig. 9a) illustrates a sentence like *I know him well*, where by *knowing* the conceptualizer means the process extending between the moment when the two people met and when one of them will die. As can be seen, the immediate scope of such a process is very broad, the distance between the conceptualizer and the profile is long and, as a consequence, the acuity of the process is low. At the same time, the process of knowing is not perceived as if it was in progress but it is viewed holistically. Such a construal explains why repeated actions, e.g. *She reads books*, are also generally expressed by means of Present Simple – due to the broad scope, long distance, and low acuity of the process the repeated actions seem one, continuous process (though this use is classified by Langacker (2008: 148) as “special”). A different type of construal is encoded in Present Continuous (fig. 9b). Here, because of the narrow scope, short distance, and high acuity of the process it is possible to adopt “an “internal perspective” on the verbal process” (Langacker 2008: 166), as in the sentence *I’m reading a book now*.

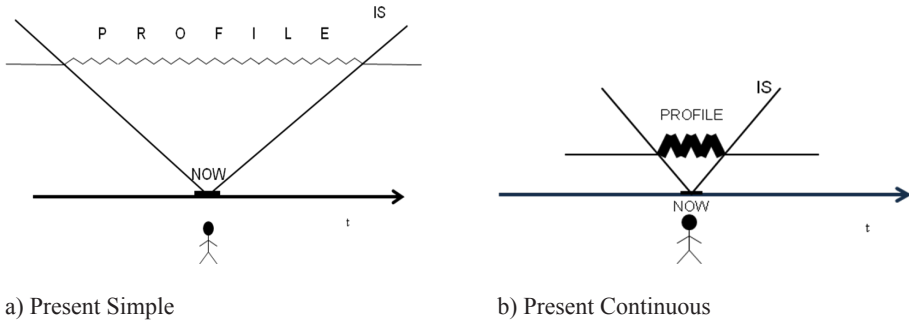


Fig. 9. A comparison of the types of construal encoded in Present Simple and Present Continuous

4.2.2. Present Simple and Past Simple

Such an approach to tenses enables also another type of observation – what such tenses as Present Simple and Past Simple have in common. From the point of view of their temporal reference they seem different. Also, when we think of the type of designated process they appear with different types of verbs: the former usually with imperfective, while the latter with perfective. However, there is a strong bond between them – they base on the same type of construal. Of course, not in absolute terms – in visual ones. The process encoded by Present Simple might be compared to seeing a large field from a distance, when we embrace the whole of it and little can be seen but the field. On the other hand, from such a position we can hardly attend to any details of it (fig. 10a). What Past Simple encodes can be compared to the perspective achieved when we move from that position even farther away from the field: at a certain distance it becomes only a single point on the horizon, and the visual scene will encompass a broader perspective than just the field (fig. 10b).

In other words, all the values assumed by the construal aspects in one tense can be found in the other: in both cases the distance between the process and the conceptualizer is long, the acuity of the process is low, and the scope is broad. Actually, in all these cases Past Simple is construed as more distant than Present Simple (longer distance, lower acuity, broader scope). Of course, the distance is not purely temporal – it is the one which the selected construction affords, and it seems more closely related to the mental distance between the conceptualizer and the profiled action. However, for descriptive purposes I believe it would be sufficient to assume that the distance encoded in them is parallel. Naturally, there is a difference between the distance to a past, completed process and a process which is not completed. Still, in both cases we construe them holistically, without focusing on their development.

In fact, the above remarks lead to the conclusion that the holistic construal unifies two distinct types of processes: on the one hand, even processes which are relatively long are expressed in Past Simple as if they were punctual. We know that e.g. going on holiday to Spain takes a long time – booking a hotel, plane, packing, going there,

spending there one or two weeks, and coming back. Still, when we say a sentence like *I went on holiday to Spain last year* we construe all these activities and all this time as if it was a single, punctual event. This is also what happens to repetitive processes – they are rendered as if they were single occurrences of the action. In English the same form of the verb can be used to mean a single process as well as a repetitive one, e.g. *I watched a film yesterday* as opposed to *I watched a film every day when I was a child*. In other words, the distance between the described processes and the conceptualizer is so great that they *seem* punctual despite their actual length or number of occurrences.

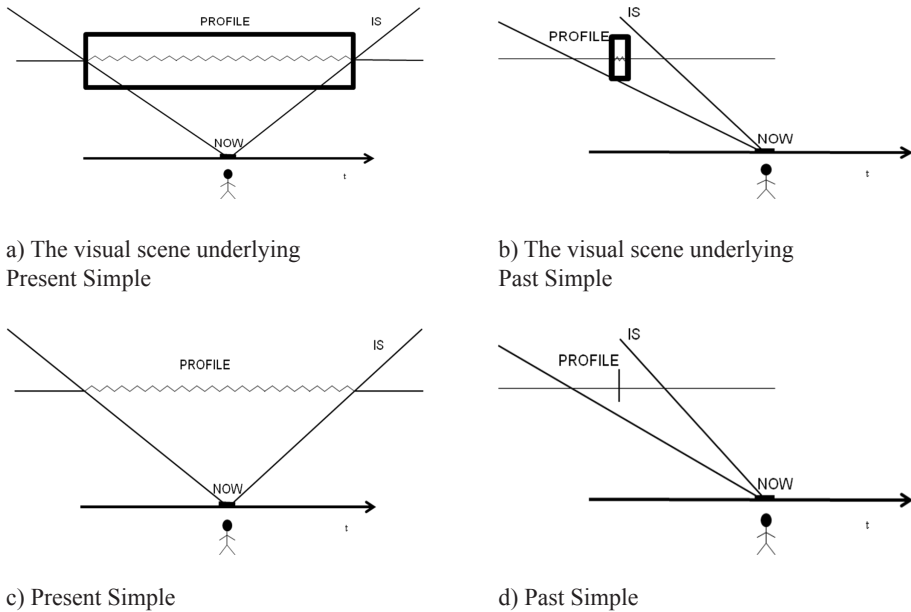


Fig. 10. A comparison of the types of construal encoded by Present Simple and Past Simple

4.2.3. Past Simple and Past Continuous

To exhaust the problem of the distinction between a process taking the whole immediate scope and occurring once within it I wish to discuss one more contrast – between Past Simple and Past Continuous. Most grammar books will probably agree that the two constructions share at least a common temporal reference – the past, and that the major difference between them is the aspect (simple, as opposed to continuous). Can the scope and other construal aspects be of any help in this respect?

Past Simple has already been discussed in detail: despite its misleading graphic representation, the scope is broad, the distance between the conceptualizer and the process is long, and the profiled process reveals low acuity. What is more, because of the large distance it is construed as if it was a single occurrence of the process within

the scope (fig. 11a). Past Continuous is on the opposite side of the scale in all of these respects: the distance between the conceptualizer and the process is construed as very short. Consequently, the acuity of the process is so high, and the designated process so detailed, that it fills the whole of scope. At the same time, the graphic representation of the scope is convergent with what it symbolizes – it is very narrow (fig. 11b). A suitable example of the tense might be *Yesterday at six I was writing a letter*. Concluding, from the point of view of construal aspects two constructions can hardly be more different than these two.

Still, it must be noticed that they commonly co-occur, which might suggest that they are not so different. And this is where another observation should be made: the processes expressed by means of Past Simple are so long that they can easily receive a different construal – as developing in time. It is enough to change one parameter – shorten the mental distance to it. Although this means that actually *any* process construed holistically can be turned into durative, this is perfectly congruent with one of the Cognitive Grammar claims – “the perfective/imperfective contrast is anything but a rigid lexical specification” (Langacker 2008: 148). In other words, despite such differences in characterization, the two types of construal have one common characteristic – flexibility. And due to it one type of construal can unproblematically turn into the other.

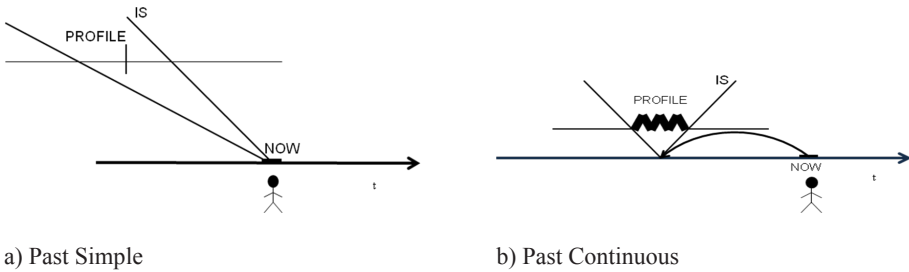


Fig. 11. A comparison of the types of construal encoded by Past Simple and Past Continuous

Summing up the problem of process duration vs. punctuality, I would like to observe that a question which might be expected to lead to some aspectual considerations turns out to be inappropriately formulated. The similarity of the profiles taking the whole span of scope turns out to be superficial – such tenses as Present Simple and Continuous denote in fact two different types of processes. This can be best seen in figure 9a and 9b – the former tense construes the process as a whole and, as a consequence, its development is in the base. The latter imposes a converse construal – profiling the development of the process it backgrounds the process as a whole. And although these types of construal can be easily exchanged, they are nevertheless distinct. Concluding, the real similarity between different uses of tenses does not lie in their graphic representations, for diagrams which seem different depict in fact parallel processes (e.g. fig. 10c, d) – it lies in similar types of construal which the uses receive.

4.2.4. Present Continuous

The last problem which I would like to discuss in the present article is the question arising from the above considerations – constructional polysemy. On the one hand, Langacker (1995: 51) states that “a symbolic element is often *polysemous*: it has not just one meaning but a family of related senses”. On the other hand, in his analyses he strives to arrive at a characterization of different uses of a tense which shows what the uses have in common, e.g. the present tense “indicates the occurrence of a full instantiation of the profiled process that precisely coincides with the time of speaking” (Langacker 1991: 250).

The approach adopted in the present article is that one construction can possess several distinct, albeit related, uses. What it means is that both the types of processes profiled by them as well as the parameters of construal aspects characterizing them can be different. A good illustration of the point is Present Continuous. In the majority of its uses (cf. Drożdż 2010), it profiles durative processes of high or medium acuity which take the whole of time encompassed by the immediate scope. An example can be the process depicted in figure 12a, which can be an illustration to *I'm reading a good book this week*. Although the denoted process is repeated over the week, the construction renders it as durative. In this use the three construal aspects adopt the following values: middle temporal distance, middle acuity and middle scope. However, in its future use Present Continuous profiles a different kind of action – a punctual one (fig. 12b) (cf. Drożdż 2009a).

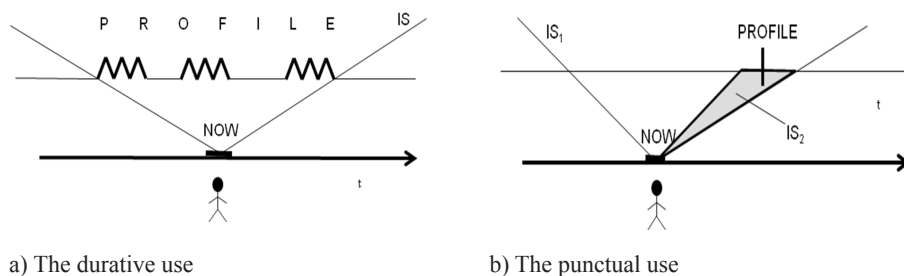


Fig. 12. Two of the uses of Present Continuous

Despite the fact that the diagrams of the two uses may seem similar to those of Present Simple and Past Simple (fig. 10c, d), the two uses encode a different type of relationship. Unquestionably, they have a lot in common: all the construal aspects adopt identical values – middle. However, they also reveal significant differences. The first of them has already been mentioned – the type of profiled process: durative versus punctual. Another becomes clearer if one refers to the contrast between Present and Past Simple. The main distinction between the two tenses stems from the difference in the perspective – it is so big that the processes are not compatible – one cannot be a part of the other. Here, with Present Continuous the opposite is true: the processes

are construed from more or less the same distance and the punctual one can be a part of the durative. In other words, this time the distinction between them is really about the contrast between a durative and punctual one or, more specifically, one designating the completion of a process.

The above considerations lead to at least one observation – that it is plausible to claim that tenses are polysemic structures. There can also be a complementary one – the processes encoded by a tense can vary significantly though the degree of their variation is limited.

5. Conclusion

The analysed construct, scope, has been tested from different perspectives. First, it is a tool which can be precisely defined and characterized for linguistic purposes. Another point is that due to its origin in visual perception it is not a sophisticated tool – it does not require extensive study for the phenomena which it covers are commonly shared. What is more, it is not an only tool – it is one of several construal aspects so even if it cannot describe adequately some aspect of language on its own, thanks to its co-occurrence with other aspects the needed precision can be ultimately achieved. Finally, the range of temporal observations which were possible thanks to it justifies the concluding opinion that scope can be classified as a fully-fledged linguistic tool.

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