Characteristics of the cognitive approach to grammar

Evans and Green (2006), pp. 500-506

Leonida, Rachael and David

Two Commitments

1. Generalisation

A dedication to seeking the broadest generalizations possible to investigate all aspects of human language

2. Cognitive

A dedication to provide characterization of language principles that reflect human cognition apart from other disciplines

1. Grammatical knowledge: a structured inventory of symbolic units

Knowledge of language/mental grammar = inventory of symbolic units (Langacker)

Symbolic units must be:

1. entrenched (used frequently enough to be a habit/cognitive routine)
2. conventional (shared knowledge in a speech community)

Conventionality as a **spectrum**:

tree/car/... *morpheme*

more conventional ——————————————————— less conventional

normally known by all the English-speakers

specialist knowledge needed to be understood (here in Linguistics)

1. Grammatical knowledge: a structured inventory of symbolic units

Symbolic units can be simplex or complex

Simplex: smallest symbolic unit, for example: *sugar, book, eat, sleep, -s, -ed*

Complex:
1. Words: *house-s*, *drink-ing*
2. Phrases: *John's book*
3. Clauses/sentences: *The news is bad.*

1. Grammatical knowledge: a structured inventory of symbolic units

Relationships between units structure the inventory → structured network

3 kinds of relationships between the units in the network

1. Symbolisation: the connection between the semantic pole (concept) and phonological pole (string of sounds)

2. Categorisation: *apple* < *fruits* < *food*

3. Integration: the relation between the simplex contained in a complex: *house-s, eat-ing*

2. Features of the closed-class subsystem

Overt:

Elements can be bound (inflectional morpheme: -er) or free (determiner: the)

Implicit:

Elements represent speaker knowledge of categories and relations

Structuring function: restricted

Ex. **Those** dog**s are** chas**ing these** cat**s**.

3. Schemas and instances

Cognitive model: content and grammatical units are BOTH form-meaning pairings

Spectrum between open-class and closed-class units

(Rather) **open-class units**

meaning = specific

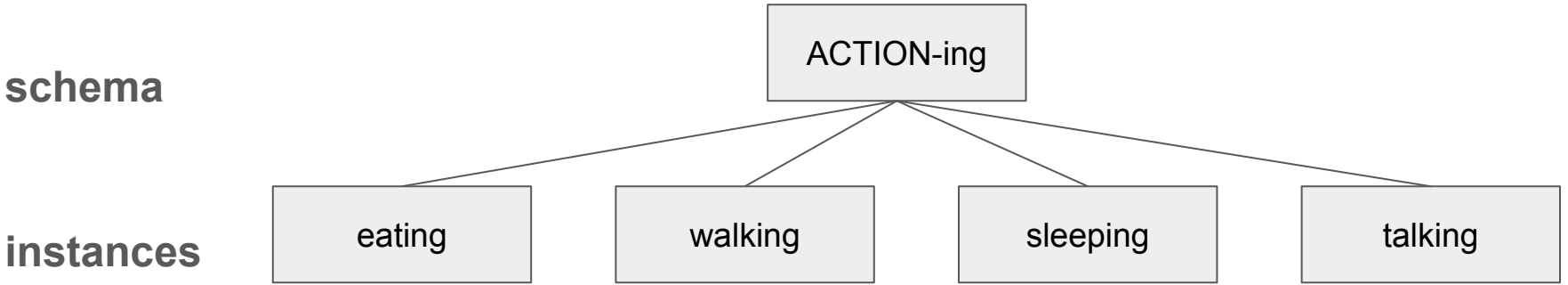
(Rather) **closed-class units**

meaning = schematic

3. Schemas and instances

Schema-instance relations structure the inventory of symbolic units

- Schema = concept in our mental grammar created from the common features of the instances
- Instances = more specific and concrete symbolic units linked to the schema



3. Schemas and instances

- Hierarchical relationship between schema and instance

- A schema can be a symbolic unit but it is not only applicable to symbolic units

4. Sanctioning and grammaticality

Graded grammaticality judgments

Examples with passive constructions

More acceptable

1. That house was built by construction workers Tim and Tina.

   A cat was pet by the boy.

2. A house was built by construction workers Tim and Tina.

   A cat was touched by the boy.

3. Houses were built by construction workers Tim and Tina.

   A cat was regarded by the boy.

Less acceptable