

Abstract

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Event Structure

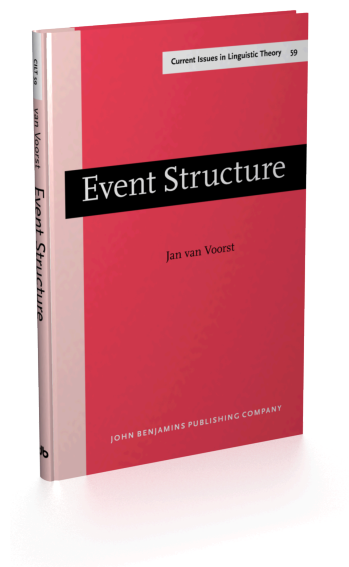
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ABSTRACT

A relation is established in this study between the semantics of the subject and the direct object noun phrase and aspect. The notion of event is central to my analysis. Events have a beginning and an end. This means in temporal terms that events have a point in time at which they begin and a point in time at which they end. However, events are not defined in temporal terms but in spatial terms. This means that they are defined in terms of the entity that can be used to identify their beginning and the entity that can be used to identify their end. These two entities are denoted by the subject and the direct object NP respectively. The name of the event is provided by the verb. It is these three notions that make up Event Structure: the entity denoting the beginning, i.e. the object of origin; the entity denoting the end, i.e. the object of termination; and the event itself. The three primitives are independently motivated in the domain of tense interpretations of sentences. Their presence or absence affects these interpretations in a systematic way.

An important theoretical consideration of my analysis is that semantic notions are only relevant to a grammatical system when they strictly tie in with phenomena occurring in that system. This means in a more traditional way that there must be a strong connection between form and meaning. The relation between Event Structure and the grammatical system is shown throughout this thesis. Different phenomena in English, Dutch and French are explained in terms of Event Structure.

Subject semantics is analyzed in terms of the notion of object of origin or in terms of the related notion of object of actualization. Unaccusativity is shown to be directly related to the presence of an object of termination in an intransitive construction. Passive is sensitive to the presence of an object of origin or of actualization in the construction it operates on. Resultative constructions can be understood better when direct objects occurring in them are not analyzed as objects of the action but as pure objects of termination. Finally, a tentative analysis is given of the semantics of the French

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reflexive in terms of Event Structure semantics. This analysis is also based on the theoretical assumption that there is a close relation between form and meaning.

The notion of Event Structure specifies the location of the event's point of origin and its point of termination but not the location of the event itself. The location of the event can be determined through the semantic system of Involvement, which is indirectly related to Event Structure. This system also stands in a close relation to the grammatical system, as it predicts possibilities of intransitivization.

In short, when aspect is defined in nontemporal terms, an interesting relation can be established between such obviously nontemporal phenomena like subject selection etc. and temporal phenomena like tense interpretations of sentences. Aspect, under this approach, represents the way people see events, as has often been stated in the literature. However, it is not the way people interpret events at their own will that is important. What is important is the relation between the structure of the event and the ways they are perceived.