

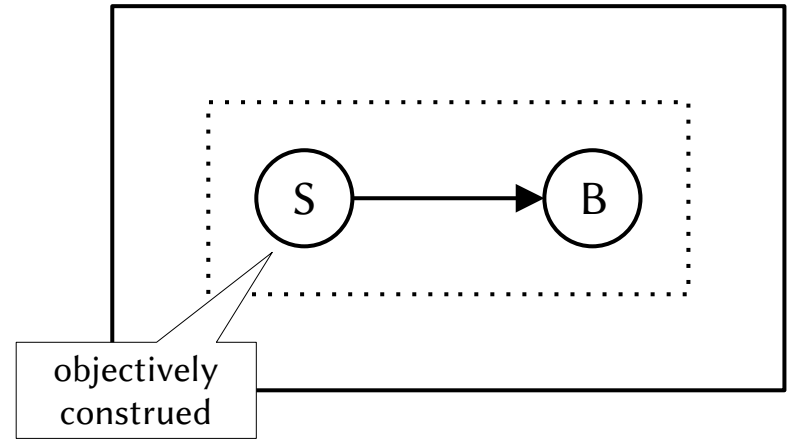
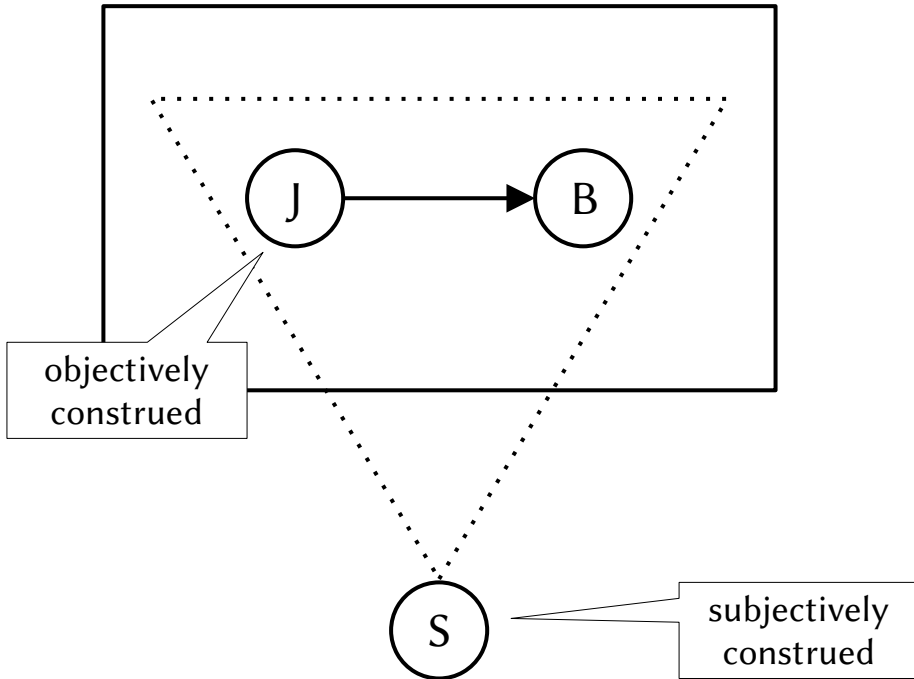
Morphosyntax & semantics – lecture 9

Subjectification

Viewing arrangement

John is reading a book.

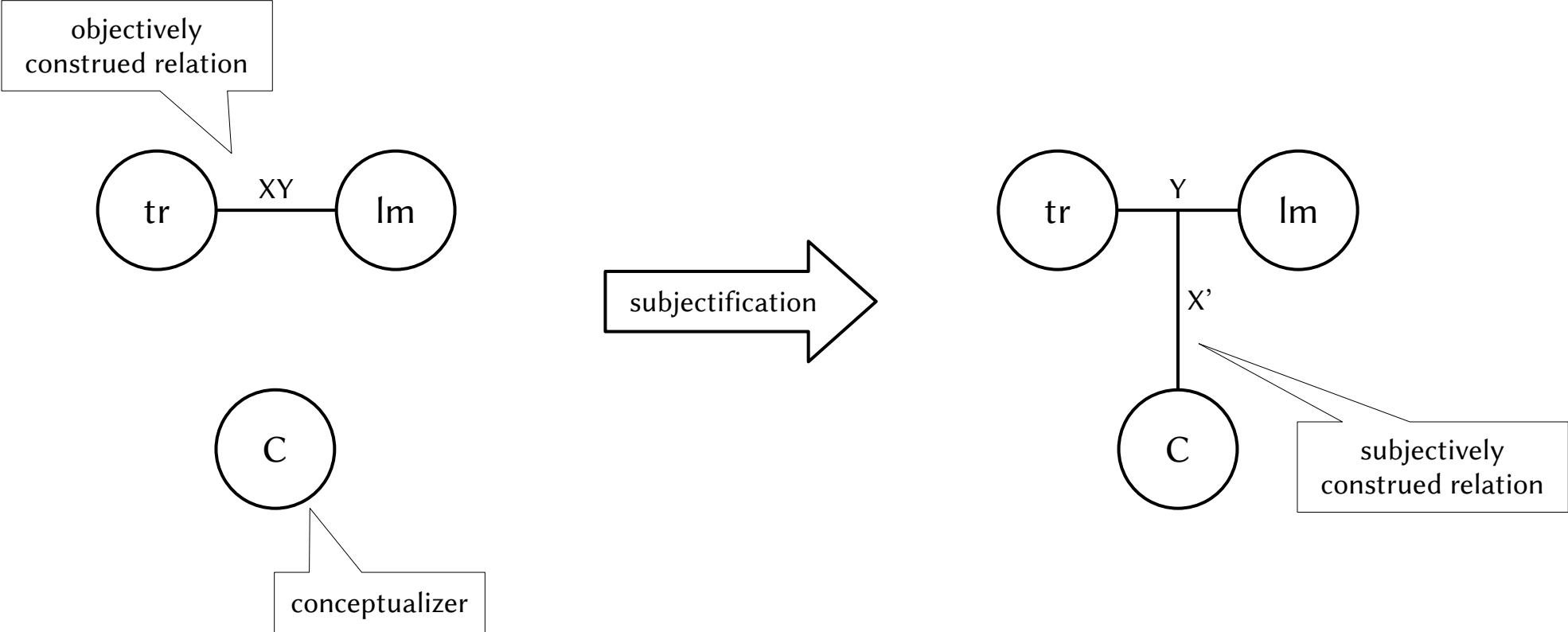
I am reading a book.



Subjectification

- Subjectification is a process of semantic change where a part of the meaning of a word or expression becomes more subjectively construed compared to the original meaning.
- This often means that a part of the original meaning has to “filled in” by the conceptualizer, because it is no longer present in the onstage region.
- In other words, the elements of meaning construed subjectively are more “in the mind” of the speaker than in the real world.

Subjectification



Subjectification in *across*

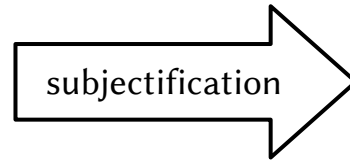
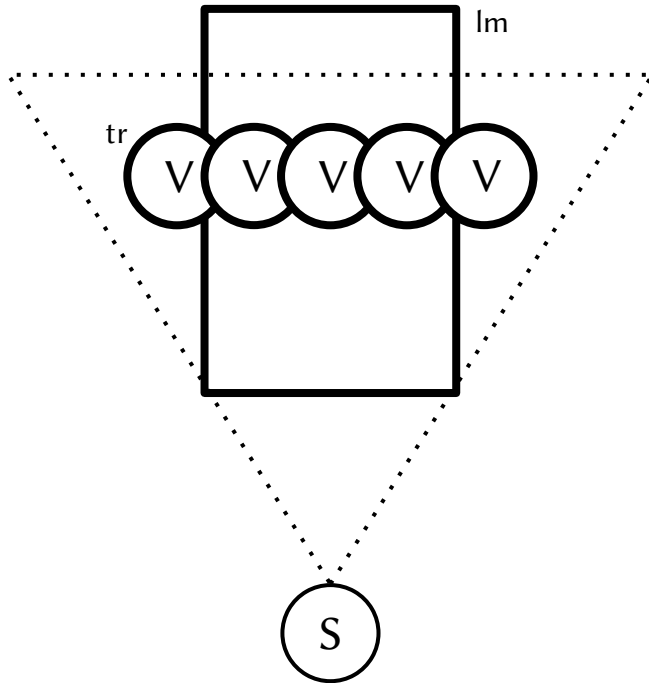
(1) (a) *Vanessa jumped **across** the table.*

(b) *Vanessa is sitting **across** the table from Monica.*

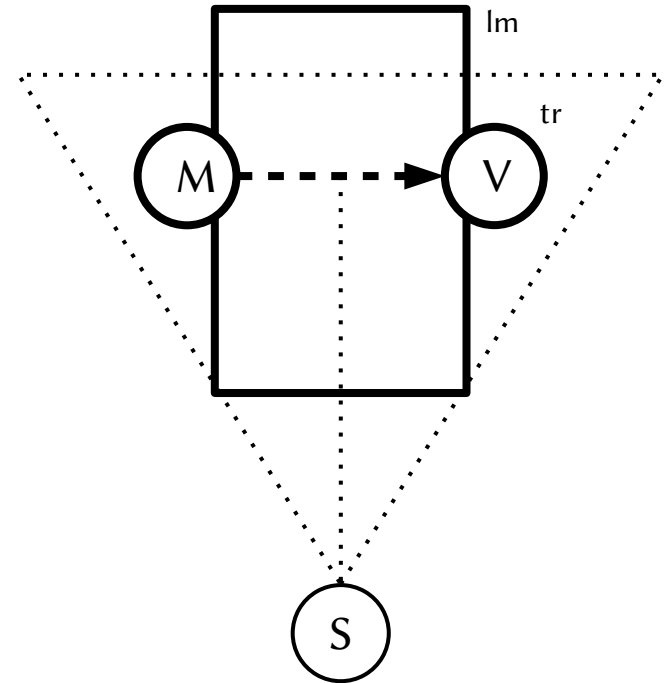
- In (1a) the preposition *across* profiles a complex relation, i.e. a relation with many stages. This is its basic meaning. However, in (1b) *across* profiles a simplex relation, i.e. a relation with one static stage only.
- The semantic change is caused by the **attenuation** (weakening) of the stages along a path inherent in (1a), so that only the final stage is prominent.
- More technically, “spatial motion on the part of an objectively-construed participant is replaced by subjective motion (mental scanning) on the part of the conceptualizer” (Langacker 1990, 19).

Subjectification in *across*

Vanessa jumped across the table.



Vanessa sits across the table from Monica.

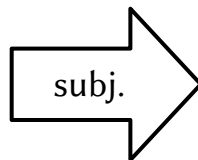
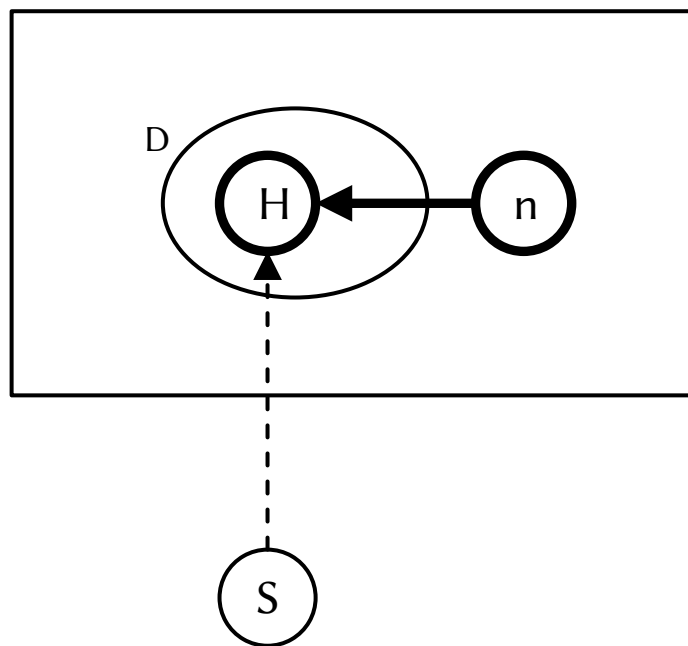


Subjectification in *wziąć*

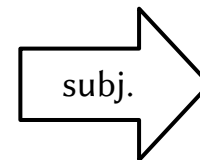
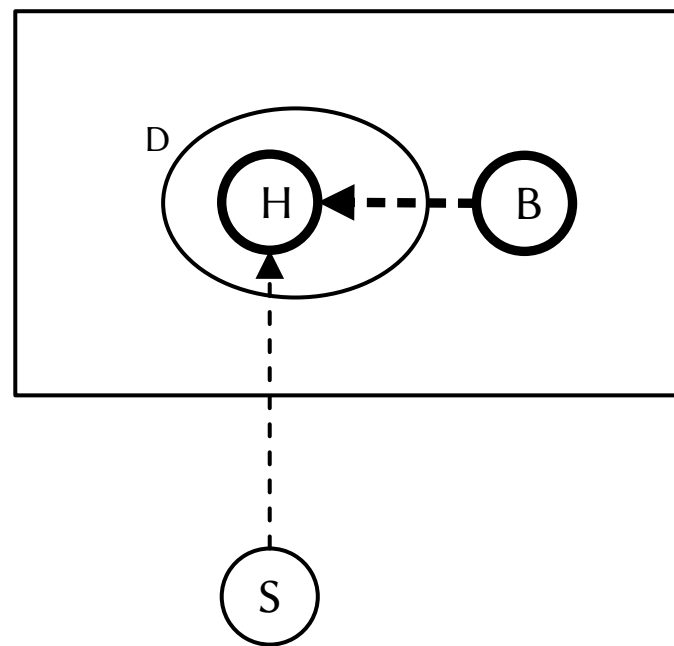
- (2)(a) *Weź nóż!* → physical (inter)action
- (b) *Weź prysznic!* → attenuated physical (inter)action
- (c) *Weź babcię do siebie!* → social (inter)action
- (d) *Weź się w garść!* → mental action
- (e) *Weź przestań!* → action

Subjectification in *wziąć*

Weź nóż!

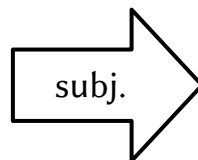
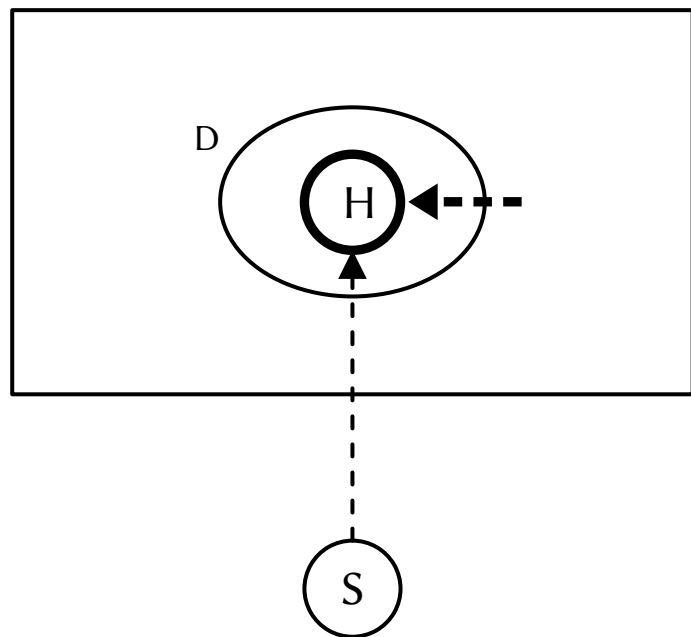


Weź babcię do siebie!

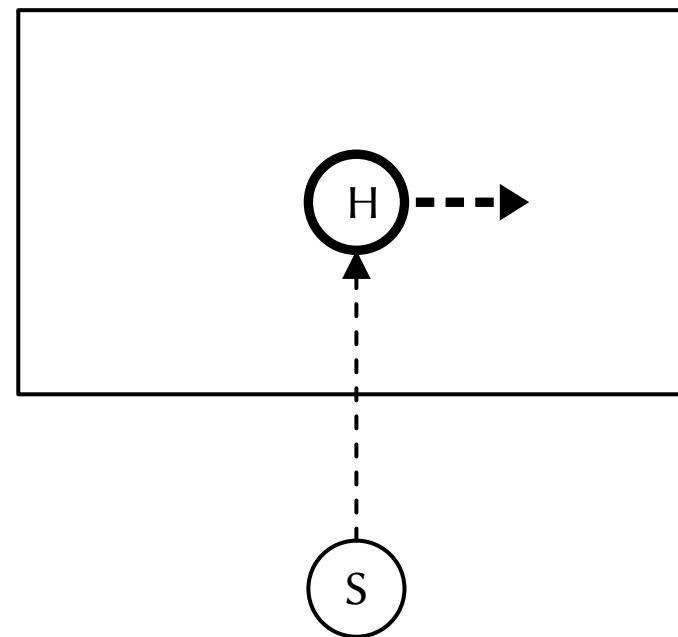


Subjectification in *wziąć*

Weź się w garść!



Weź przestań!



Subjectification in *literally*

- The original meaning: “exactly as stated, without exaggeration or metaphor.”

(3)(a) *She **literally** ran a marathon yesterday – 42 kilometers.*

- The new meaning involves the speaker emphasizing or intensifying what is said.

(3)(b) *My head **literally** exploded with amazement.*

EXACTLY AS STATED + EMPHASIS → EXACTLY AS STATED + EMPHASIS

Subjectification and grammaticalization

- Subjectification can often be found in **grammaticalization**.
 - Grammaticalization is a process in which a “lexical” meaning of a word or an expression becomes more “grammatical.”
- The loss of objectively construed meaning is often reflected by a loss of formal independence; e.g. a word becomes a prefix or is obligatorily used in a certain construction.

Grammaticalization of *to be going to*

- (4)(a) *Thys onhappy sowle... **was goyng to be** broughte into helle for the synne and onleful lustys of her body. (1482)*
- (b) *The council sat upon it, and **were going to** order a search of all the houses about the town. (before 1680)*
- (c) *It seems as if it **were going to** rain. (1890) (after Traugott 1995)*

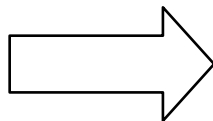
Grammaticalization of *to be going to*

- The original meaning was ‘to go to a physical location to do something (in near future)’.
- Gradually, the notions of ‘physical motion’ and ‘deliberate action’ were attenuated.
- Eventually, only the notion of ‘action/event in near future’ remained in the meaning.
- The construction lost some of its formal independence: it can only use gerund (*-ing*) form of *to go* (e.g. **to go to sleep* is ungrammatical if it has future reference). It is also frequently reduced to *gonna*.
- The construction may undergo further changes.

Grammaticalization of *trzeba*

- The Old Polish lexical verb *trzebić* meant ‘to need something’ evolved into a modal verb in modern Polish; only the 3rd person singular form survived.

	Singular	Plural
1.	<i>trzebię</i>	<i>trzebiem</i>
2.	<i>trzebisz</i>	<i>trzebicie</i>
3.	<i>trzeba</i>	<i>trzebią</i>



(5)(a) *Trzeba się uczyć.*

(b) *Trza się uczyć.*

reduction in form

Future tense vs. *voy a...* in Spanish

- Spanish has an inflected future tense, but presently it is used mostly for expressing the degree of certainty.

(6)(a) *Comerá*. ‘S/he will eat’ → *Comerá*. ‘S/he may eat’

- To talk about future, the construction *ir a* + $V_{\text{infinitive}}$ is typically used.

(6)(b) *Va a comer*. ‘S/he is going to eat’

References

- Langacker, Ronald W. 1990. “Subjectification.” *Cognitive Linguistics* 1: 5–38.
- Traugott, Elizabeth C. 1995. “Subjectification in Grammaticalisation.” In *Subjectivity and Subjectivisation: Linguistic Perspectives*, edited by Dieter Stein and Susan Wright, 31–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554469.003>.