

Language & Cognition – lecture 9

Virtuality

Virtuality in Cognitive Grammar

- In CG, virtuality pertains to the ontological status of the referent of a word or an expression.
- Virtual entities are “fictions” conjured up in the mind of the speaker/conceptualizer for certain communicative purposes.

Virtuality, actuality, reality

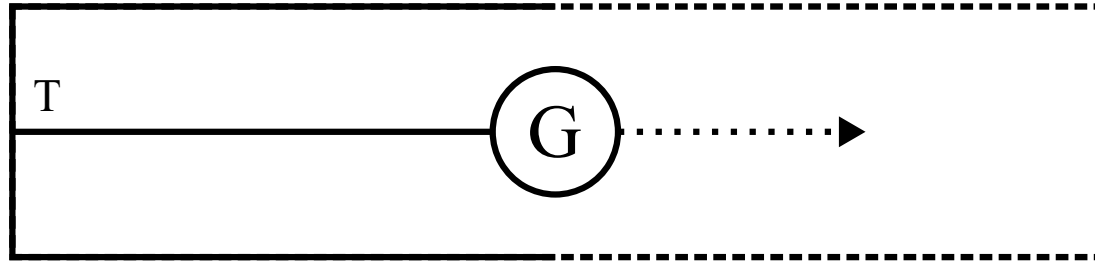
- In CG, these terms have special technical meanings.
- **Virtuality** is juxtaposed with **actuality**, i.e. the world where the speaker and the hearer interact.
- **Reality** is a part of actuality embracing the history of the actual world up to the moment of the speech event.

Virtuality, actuality, reality

virtual plane



real plane



actual plane

Virtual or actual event?

(1)(a) *Adam ate an apple.*

- direct description of an actual, though mythical, event

(b) *Some unicorns trampled a Martian.*

- false description of actuality

(c) *Joe believes a unicorn bit him.*

- direct description of belief about actuality

(d) *Joe is imagining that he's feeding a unicorn.*

- direct description of an imagined virtual event

Virtual or actual referents?

(2)(a) ***T-rexes** roamed the Earth 66 million years ago.*

- actual and real, concrete animals

(b) *We may be able to revive **T-rexes** in the future.*

- actual and non-real, concrete animals

(c) ***T-rexes** are theropod dinosaurs.*

- virtual, a type of animal

Virtual or actual cat?

(3)(a) *I want a **cat**.*

- virtual, “fictional” animal

(b) *I have a **cat**.*

- actual and real, concrete animal

(c) *I'm a **cat-lover**.*

- virtual, type of animal

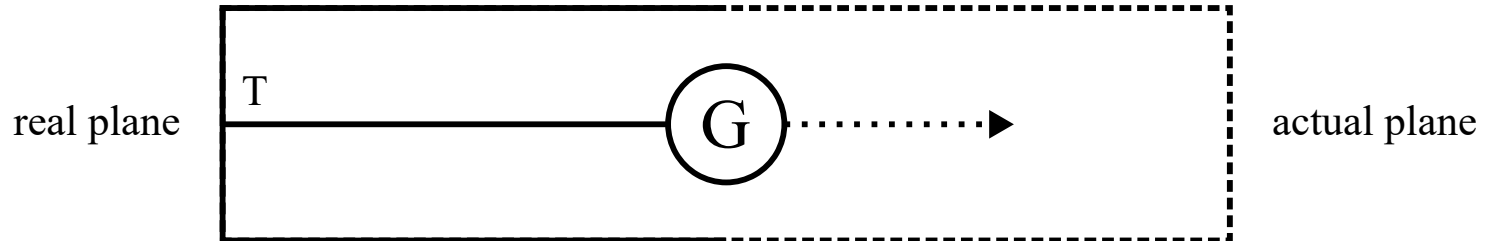
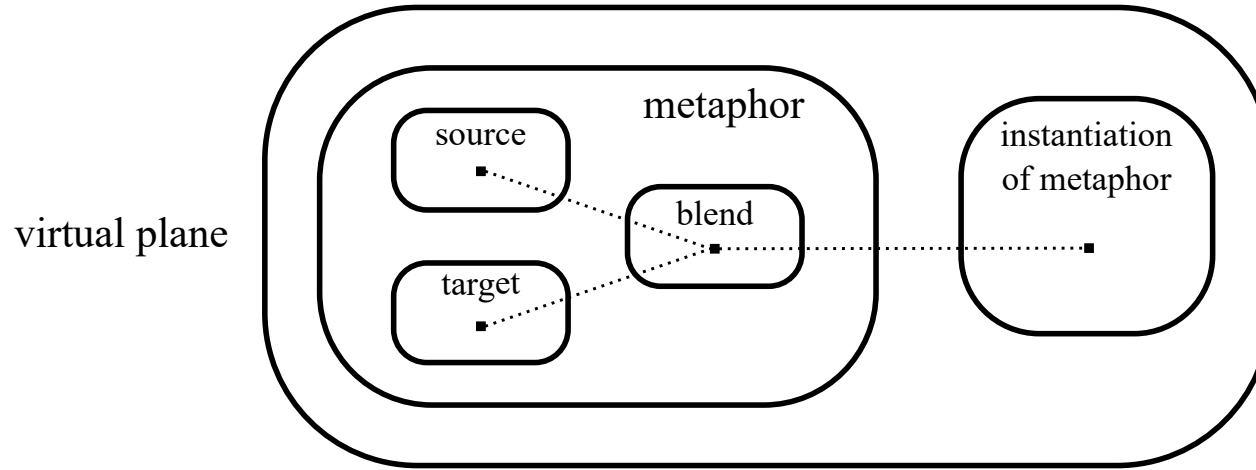
Virtual motion and change (due to sequential scanning)

- (4)(a) *The hill gently **rises** from the bank of the river.*
- (b) *The hill gently **falls** to the bank of the river.*
- (5)(a) *An ugly scar extends **from** his wrist **to** his elbow.*
- (b) *An ugly scar extends **from** his elbow **to** his wrist.*
- (c) *?An ugly scar extends **to** his wrist **from** his elbow.*
- (6) *Our Christmas tree **gets smaller** every year.*

Virtuality in metaphor

- (7)(a) *You're wasting my time.*
- (b) *This gadget will save you hours.*
- (c) *I don't have the time to give you.*
- (d) *How do you spend your time these days?*
- (e) *I've invested a lot of time in her.*

Virtual metaphorical entities



Virtual speech acts

- Speech acts are actions performed with linguistic expressions, e.g. orders, requests, promises, greetings, etc.
- Some speech acts can be performed indirectly, i.e. by means of expressions typical of other speech acts.

(8) *Can you pass me the salt?*

- virtual question to perform an actual request

Functions of virtual entities

Generalizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>Water boils at 100 °C.</i>– <i>John smokes cigarettes.</i>
Instructions (mental simulations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>Add flour and milk, then stir for 2 minutes.</i>
Counterfactual situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>I wish I had 1 million dollars.</i>– <i>If I were you, I would take this job.</i>
Modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>You can't bring sharp objects on a plane.</i>
Etc.	

References

- Langacker, Ronald W. 1999. “Virtual Reality.” *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 29 (2): 77–103.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.