

**About the book:**

This study has a dual orientation and a dual aim: theoretical and analytical. On the theoretical side, it presents a relatively little known cognitive model of categorization, Vantage Theory, surveys its linguistic applications and proposes its adaptation, called Extended Vantage Theory. In the analytical part, the adaptation serves a specific purpose: an account of the use of the English articles. The book is thus as much a testing ground for a theory as it is a hands-on struggle with specific data.

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Excerpts from the Introduction:

In the cognitive linguistic enterprise, to which the book subscribes, the most fundamental question is that of the nature of the relationship between language and cognition. An in-depth discussion of the problem would add a third, probably a superfluous dimension to the book; instead, the issue reappears as a recurrent theme in the presentation of VT and of its modified version. In brief terms, the cognitive abilities of the conceptualizer and language speaker as an active agent act as the driving force responsible for language use. This view of language and cognition has been shaped by the scholarly milieu in which the present work took shape, namely the cognitivist approach to language pursued at the Department of English, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Inspired by the work of e.g. George Lakoff, Mark Turner, Gilles Fauconnier, Adele Goldberg, but predominantly Ronald Langacker, the research conducted in the department extended the work of these and other linguists to analyses of Slavic, especially Polish data. Such is for example Henryk Kardela’s (2000) account of noun morphology, aspect, complementation and the structure of events in Polish, couched within Ronald Langacker’s framework of Cognitive Grammar. However, there have also been theoretically more radical proposals, such as Przemysław Łozowski’s idea of language as a symbol of individualized experience. In Łozowski’s panchronic approach, language change is viewed as resulting from an ongoing activity of human symbolic cognition: this the author concludes having analysed King Alfred’s personalized use of the Old English cunnan, magan and motan. Łozowski says that

[being] motivated by their experiential, inferential, and self-expressive predisposition, language users project onto language a subjective picture of human self. [Thus,] we have come up with an individualized approach to grammaticalization, i.e., a language change
that is brought about by the speaker’s spatio-temporal operation on experience in the cross-generational chain of self-expressive inferences. (Łoźowski 2008: 177)

Although responding to very different data and couched within a vastly different descriptive apparatus, such is also, in its fundamental tenets, the approach represented by Robert E. MacLaury, an American anthropologist and linguist, the proponent of Vantage Theory. MacLaury designed VT in order to account for what appeared to be somewhat deviant but nevertheless repetitive behaviour of speakers in the domain of colour categorization. He proposes an account of cognition as a mechanism that enables us to take broad or constricted points of view on categories. This leads him to reformulate the notion of relativity, which is attributed not to the influence of linguistic forms but to the plasticity of cognitive procedures that enable the construction of categories as points of view.

It is in this light that the use of the English articles is considered: as an expression of speakers’ cognitive construals of the situations described, along with the tensions inherent both in those situations and in the ways they are conceptualized. This also pertains to idiomatic, conventionalized uses. Convention does not come from nowhere: from behind its arbitrary appearances – which Bühler (1990 [1934]: 346), in reference to German, calls “labyrinthine” – there frequently lurks a deep cognitive motivation. The analytical parts of the book (part of Chapter 4, plus Chapters 5-6) are devoted to an account of that motivation. The theoretical parts, in turn, are concerned with three subjects: Vantage Theory as originally formulated (Chapter 1), linguistic applications of the theory (Chapter 2 and part of Chapter 4) and a survey of previous approaches to the English articles (Chapter 3).

The cognitive grounding of language in general and specifically of the use of articles requires that one extends the understanding of the term’s etymology. Article comes from Latin articulus ‘small joint’ (artus + diminutive suffix -culus), ultimately from Proto-Indo-European *ar-tu-, from *ar- ‘fit together’. The term fits very well with the Ancient Greek idea of linguistic structure as “articulation”, in the sense of a jointed state or formation, and anaphoric words as "joints" which link the various elements of the structure (Bühler 1990 [1934]: 349). However, as will be illustrated in the analysis, the function does not only pertain to linking the elements for the purpose of textual coherence but also to the way they link what is being talked about with how it is talked about. Ultimately, the link reaches deep into the cognitive processes of the speaker and how that speaker operates mentally in relation to the mental object he or she is dealing with.

It is hoped that by combining the theoretical presentation with the analysis, the book will reveal the huge potential dormant in VT. I became more and more aware of the potential over the course of time, ever since my first encounter with it in the late 1990s. I owe the encounter, through reading, to Henryk Kardela. Then, at the 6th International Cognitive Linguistic Conference in Stockholm, 1999, came a personal encounter with Robert MacLaury. Sadly, the scholar passed away shortly before another conference, where he was to give a plenary lecture, Progress in Colour Studies, in Glasgow, UK, 2004. Over the years in between, however, we exchanged dozens of e-mails devoted to VT; I
also became acquainted, though e-mail or personal contact, with several other VT researchers, notably Keith Allan. Without the help and personal guidance of VT’s originator, understanding the intricacies of the theory and applying it to language data proved challenging, thanks to Keith and many other colleagues it has also been rewarding.

A few words of explanation are in order as to why it is the use of articles that has been chosen as the testing ground for Vantage Theory and its extension. While it may be true that potentially all aspects of grammar involve the notions of viewpoint (recall the title of Maturana 1987: “Everything said is said by an observer”), there are some that offer an especially fertile ground in this respect. In English, these include the use of tenses, word order (in e.g. clefting, pseudo-clefting, inversion) or markers of modality. Articles doubtless belong to the group: their use has been analysed from the logical, functional, pragmatic etc. angles (cf. Chapter 3 here) and it seems that while all of these approaches offer crucial insights, none can do so without leaving gaps for others to fill. This is especially conspicuous in the case of novel, original, surprising and apparently little-motivated uses, oftentimes sidestepped as simply idiomatic or conventional. While I do not negate the existence of convention, I claim that it is all too easily resorted to as the ultimate answer. On the contrary, in the present work I attempt to seek cognitive motivation for what, having sprung up from cognition, later became conventionalized.

Secondly, the English articles constitute a very demanding aspect of usage for native speakers. It is probably a regular experience of thousands of non-native English teachers, translators, writers and scholars to inquire with native speakers about this or that usage and receive different, often contradictory answers from different competent informants. Moreover, the same speaker may provide diverse solutions to the same problems on different occasions. This shows not only that speakers adopt various viewpoints on the same portion of reality, but also that they do not always control these viewpoints at the conscious level. But they need not: the mechanism of categorization described in VT as vantage construction does not require that that the speaker be aware of what happens in cognition and language use and why.

It is therefore especially appropriate that the use of articles be also subjected to an analysis based on the notion of point of view. Because the articles are small in number and form a system of oppositions, it is very tempting to describe them in systemic terms, and indeed such descriptions have been frequently proposed. Yet, despite their neatness and partial appropriateness, they are woefully insufficient. The present account proposes to at least partially amend that insufficiency by searching for the cognitive grounding of both the systemic oppositions and the uses that go beyond them. If language is a system (a view not always shared by the more radical thinkers, such as Łozowski 2008), it is definitely more than a system. Whatever it is, its nature and shape must, I believe, be attributed to cognitive grounding, both in the areas which do and those that do not exhibit systemic features.

The reader is thus invited to embark on this two-directional journey: into the intricacies of Vantage Theory and into the vast but navigable seas of the English article usage. The two paths eventually merge into one, hopefully coherent, account.
from the Conclusion:

The present book is, as far as one can tell, the first monograph-length proposal to use an adapted version of Vantage Theory in an account of a specific area of language use. Although the trail has to some extent been blazed by several earlier publications (cf. Chapters 2 and 4), this book is an attempt to seriously blaze this trail further. But you might ask, since there is no dearth of models, what makes VT attractive enough to warrant such a proposal?

First, VT emphasizes the dynamic nature of category construction: it addresses the emergence of different points of view (vantages) on a category in the conceptualization of a single speaker, as well as across a language community. In that sense, vantages exhibit a certain affinity to Bartmiński's (2009) profiles of a concept, although VT underscores the cognitive but somewhat downplays the cultural aspect of profiling thus understood. Second, it reconciles the systematic nature of categorization with its plasticity and the diversity of categories constructed by speakers of diverse languages. Third, the mechanism of categorization is deeply rooted in fundamental human experience of orienting oneself in space-time, familiar to all human beings, perhaps with the exception of the severely impaired. Fourth, it ultimately reduces to very basic cognitive processes capable of emphasizing similarity or difference when dealing with reality. Fifth, the proposed model of categorization is also claimed to account for the evolution of categorical systems (notably in the domain of colour) in the world's languages.

This approach to categorization entails a redefinition of two crucial concepts: that of a point of view and that of a category. Point of view is not treated here as a static physical or mental location of the conceptualizer but a dynamic cognitive procedure for viewing a category. Although various other terms, e.g. perspective or mode of seeing, might describe it just as well, the construct is unique enough to warrant its own name: vantage. A category, then, may be viewed and termed in more than one way, with specific kinds of relationships obtaining between its vantages. It is a sum or an assembly of its vantages. Crucially, the construction of various vantages on (or profiles of) a category is not an exceptional but a regularly occurring cognitive behaviour.

However, an ambitious and innovative model such as this must necessarily contain problematic areas that require further elaboration or reformulation.

The first of these is the formal specification of the space-time : categorization analogy. Robert MacLaury regarded the proposal as a major contribution to the field and devoted the last few years of his life to explicating the equivalences between the two sides of the analogy. However, his efforts were prematurely terminated by an illness and, eventually, the scholar's death, so that most of the latest (incomplete) findings remain in the form of notes and manuscripts (mainly MacLaury 2003a). Also, not all scholars have shared his enthusiasm for and devotion to the analogy – indeed, some of them consider it a weak aspect of the theory (Kimberly Jameson, p.c.).

Second, one must perhaps more seriously inquire into the psychological and cognitive nature of attention to similarity and difference. MacLaury himself left the task to psychologists, treating the processes as cognitive primitives, and the task remains.
Głaz (in preparation b) is an attempt to survey the literature for various philosophical and psychological approaches to similarity/difference, as well as to locate these notions as used in VT against a wider background. Certainly, more in-depth research, specifically in experimental psychology, is desired.

Third, an issue so far left unresolved is that of an allegedly innate nature of the ability to perform the spatio-temporal analogy. MacLaury’s views are tentative: the author is reluctant to dot the “i” and merely suggests innateness as the most plausible option. In fact, not merely the spatio-temporal analogy but the very process of analogizing may be an innate faculty (1989 [1972]: 103; in Itkonen 2005: 202). But the lack of better alternatives must be replaced by positive evidence. Nyan (2002) warns that it is not easy to find neurological correlates of theoretical constructs: a process must satisfy very rigorous criteria. The author does nevertheless see a chance of finding the neurological basis of categorization, as understood by MacLaury, through carefully planned research on goal-oriented activities, especially on divergent thinking and decision making.

Fourth, because VT was originally proposed for the categorization of colour, its application to other domains calls for a resolution of several questions, such as the number and types of vantages, the types of relationship between them, a vantage’s internal architecture, the kinds of viewing modes and the ability to combine them, the likely candidates for primary fixed coordinates, etc. The questions have in this book been addressed in the context suggested by the data being analysed, while other applications may call for different solutions.

Fifth, any such application requires a transfer of the theory from categorization to conceptualization. The problem is addressed in Chapter 2, section 2.

On the practical side, VT is a demanding model, uninviting for the novice. MacLaury’s rather idiosyncratic writing style has also contributed to its relatively low position on the cognitivist and linguistic market. A textbook-type of presentation of the theory, possibly fleshed out of some of its less central aspects, would greatly facilitate its understanding and appreciation by a wider readership. It would then be more feasible to adapt the findings of VT as originally formulated to accounts such as the one proposed here. A work of this kind remains yet to be written but I hope to have shown that it is well worth the effort.

A separate issue is naturally the extent to which the analysis of the English articles presented here is convincing. This has as much to do with the theoretical model being employed as with the analyst’s clarity of thinking and presentation. The latter issue I will leave for the reader to judge. But the model of EVT proposed here, as well as several publications referred to in Chapters 2 and 4, goes some way to seriously responding to Michel Achard’s challenge: "It would be worth investigating whether Vantage Theory can be used successfully to describe linguistic data" (1999: 242). I believe EVT coherently deals with two major aspects of the data at hand: (i) the cognitive motivations behind the use of articles, grounded in fundamental processes of attention to similarity and difference, and (ii) the speakers’ agency in constructing points of view on the situations to which the speakers relate. In other words, it is the language users’ plastic but systematic cognitive operations, working in tandem with
their ability to override the apparently irresistible forces of context, that function as the engine of linguistic creativity. For it must be appreciated that a recognition of definiteness of a certain entity, an object or an event, involves a two forces, to which Karl Bühler (1990 [1934]: 347) refers as “what is definite and unmistakable in the coordinate system of the here and now ... and what is conceptually unmistakably determinate” (italics original). Certainly, the same applies to indefiniteness; in short, at stake is both what is “out there” in the world and what is “in here” in the human mind when it categorizes and conceptualizes that world. Ultimately, it is cognition that plays the decisive role, as evidenced in the many examples in this book, where the speakers impose their own interpretations on the objective situation, if such can ever be said to exist.