

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A dialogic view on construal: A study on the instantiations of wh-interrogative words in wh-dialogues

Guocai Zeng*

Sichuan University, Chengdu, China

Abstract: As the basic notion in cognitive grammar, construal is expounded from various aspects in terms of different conversational purposes in linguistic communication. Based on the well-discussed dimensions of construal from Langacker's view, this study investigates the dimensions of construal from a dialogic view, particularly in cases of English wh-dialogues, with the aim of deciphering how the dialogic focus, the wh-word positioned at the head of the wh-question, is cognitively grounded in the answer. According to the ways that such wh-words are grounded, the dynamic adjustment of dialogic focuses in wh-dialogues is then examined, hopefully to shed some light on the interpretation of the utterance meaning from a dialogic view.

Keywords: construal; wh-word; dialogic construction; grounding; utterance meaning

*Corresponding author: Guocai Zeng, College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Sichuan University, Chuanda Road, Shuangliu County, Chengdu 610207, Sichuan Province, China; 2370739862@qq.com

Received: April 15, 2022; **Accepted:** June 17, 2022; **Available online:** August 19, 2022

Citation: Zeng G (2022) A dialogic view on construal: A study on the instantiations of wh-interrogative words in wh-dialogues. *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 4(1): 50–65. DOI: 10.18063/fls.v4i1.1455

1. Interactive nature of construal operation

Construal is a key notion in cognitive grammar. In the view of Langacker (2007: 17), *construal* is our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in different ways. In linguistic communication, grammatical constructions essentially encode the ways interlocutors' interpretations of the shared focuses, and different linguistic expressions might work as descriptions for the same target discussed by speakers in conversation, as **Figure 1** shows.

According to Langacker (2008: 43), there could be four options of construal of the same conceptual content in Figure 1, with four different expressions designating the content distinctly.

Construal (1): *the glass with water in it* designates the container;

Construal (2): *the water in the glass* designates the liquid it contains;

Construal (3): *the glass is half-full* designates the relationship wherein the *volume* occupied by

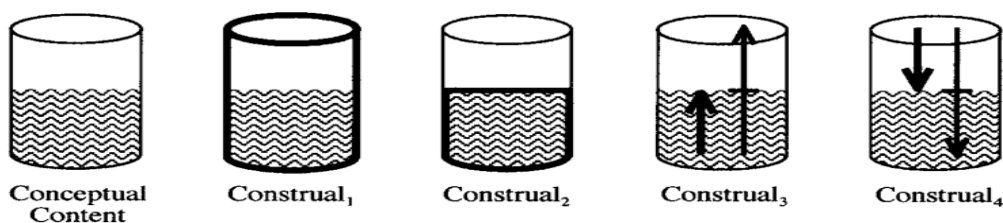


Figure 1. Construal of the same situation (quoted from Langacker, 2008: 44).

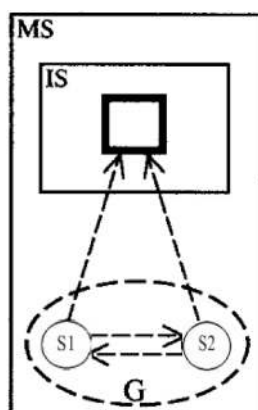


Figure 2. Interactions in the construal process. S1-Speaker 1; S2-Speaker 2; G-Ground; IS-Immediate Scope; MS-Maximal Scope. (adapted from Langacker, 2008: 261).

the *liquid* is just half of its potential volume;

Construal (4): *the glass is half-empty* designates the relationship wherein the *volume* occupied by the *void* is just half of *its potential volume*.

Upon reviewing the above four expressions for the same scene from a dialogic view, they basically indicate how a shared focus in conversation is construed by different speakers, suggesting interactions between speakers, the object being construed, the time and space, and other contextual factors, as shown in **Figure 2**.

To specify, in Figure 2 we can see in the process of construing something in the dialogue, there are interactions between speaker 1 and speaker 2 (the hearer), the object being construed in the immediate scope (IS) and the maximal scope (MS) of interlocutors' joint attention. The ground (G) indicates the time, space, and other elements of circumstance.

This study is to investigate the interactive nature of construal operation from a dialogic view and to discuss the dimensions of construal that function in interpreting the shared focuses in conversations with evidence shown in WH-dialogues. The structure of this study is outlined as follows: at the beginning, the interactive nature of construal operations in conversation is proposed, followed by a fine-grained discussion of how construal works in the grounding of dialogic focuses in English wh-dialogues. After that, types of dynamic adjustments of dialogic focuses in such conversations are investigated. At the end of this study, a brief summary of the dimensions of construal from a dialogic view is provided.

2. Dimensions of construal: A developmental view

From the view of Langacker (2007: 17), there are many dimensions of construal in linguistic communication. In general, the studies on construal in cognitive grammar until now could be classified into four major phrases.

In the early works on cognitive grammar contributed by Langacker (1987, 1991, 1993, 1999), construal is discerned in a broad sense from five aspects, namely the *level of specificity* (or *schematicity*), *prominence*, *scope*, *background*, and *perspective*. Later, Langacker (2007: 17) particularly emphasizes three of them, which are the *level of specificity*, *prominence*, and *perspective*. Along with in-depth explorations of natural languages in the framework of cognitive grammar, the core concept of construal is re-elaborated from four dimensions by Langacker (2008/2013: 55); they are *specificity*, *prominence*, *perspective*, and *focusing* that includes *selection*, *foreground*, and *background*. In his recent studies, Langacker (2015: 120, 2019: 141) re-examines the nature of construal and specifies it with five dimensions, namely *perspective*, *selection*, *prominence*, *dynamicity*, and *imagination*.

With a closer look at the studies on construal in cognitive grammar, we can find that *prominence*, *perspective*, and *specificity* are the fundamental dimensions, whereas *focusing*, *dynamicity*, and *selection* are extended aspects of construal, in contrast to the earliest version of dimensions of construal (cf. Langacker, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1999). Langacker (2014, personal communication) also pointed out that construal basically consists of those factors, but the process of construal is not only affected by the factors listed above. To put it another way, there are different ways to categorize the language phenomenon of construal, and any grouping of the dimensions of construal is primarily for purposes of discussion (Langacker, 2014, personal communication).

Additionally, in different theoretical frameworks, other scholars examine how construal works in linguistic communication. According to Talmy (1988), construal is the imaging system, and it is discussed from four dimensions, namely structural schematization, deployment of perspective, distribution of attention, and force dynamics, whereas Croft and Cruse (2004) analyze construal based on the aspects of attention/salience, judgement/comparison, perspective/situatedness, and constitution/gestalt.

Nevertheless, when Langacker, Talmy, and Croft and Cruse figure out the dimensions of construal, they care more about how an object is construed by a speaker but are less concerned with the dynamic interactions between language, speakers, and dialogic situations. Although Verhagen (2005, 2007) proposes a dialogic account of construal and emphasizes the cognitive coordination between speakers, he does not deal much with the interactions between object(s) being construed, the interaction between speakers, or how the co-focused object(s) can be grounded in conversation.

With the developmental view and taking account of the interactive nature of the process of construal, this study especially proposes dimensions of construal from a dialogic view, as suggested in **Table 1**, to examine how a co-focused object is construed in dialogic interaction.

Table 1 not only summarizes the (shared) features of construal at different phrases of the studies of construal in cognitive grammar, but also proposes the dimensions of construal that might be effective to describe how a dialogic focus is interpreted based on the interactive nature of construal

Table 1. A developmental view on the dimensions of construal

1	2	3	4	5
Langacker (1987, 1991, 1993, 1999)	Langacker (2007: 17)	Langacker (2008/2013: 55)	Langacker (2015: 120, 2019: 141)	A dialogic view
prominence	prominence	prominence	prominence	<i>prominence</i>
perspective	perspective	perspective	perspective	<i>perspective</i>
the level of specificity	level of specificity	specificity		<i>specificity</i>
scope		focusing		<i>focusing</i>
background			dynamicity	<i>dynamicity</i>
			selection	<i>selection</i>
			imagination	

operation in conversation.

3. Dialogic interaction in a typical wh-dialogue¹

Human beings live in the world in a dialogic way (Bakhtin, 1981). Collingwood (1940[1998]: 23) even asserts that every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question. Questioning-answerings are the common dialogic phenomena in human beings' linguistic communication. In this research, the category of a dialogue consisting of a WH-question and one of its answers (WH-dialogue for short) is specially employed to discuss the dimensions of construal from a dialogic view.

In terms of the grammatical pattern, a WH-dialogue is prototypically structured by a WH-question whose regular pattern is “*WH-interrogative word* (WH-word for short) + *auxiliary* + *remainder?*”, and an adjacent utterance *X*, the answer² to the question. The syntactic pattern of a WH-dialogue³ can then be described as the following:

$$A \text{ WH-dialogue} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{WH-word} + \textit{auxiliary} + \textit{remainder} \textit{ ?} \\ \textit{An answer}[X] \end{array} \right.$$

In conversation, a WH-dialogue is employed by a speaker to verify a known message or to garner unknown information.

While a speaker is construing something, s/he is experiencing mental contact with it, demonstrating the interaction between the subject (human being) and the object (something being construed). The dialogic interaction is the way that the subject's conceptualization of something in the process of construing is shared by the dialogic partner(s) (cf. Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018; Dąbrowska, 2014; Fischer, 2015; Hancil, 2018; Hsieh and Su, 2019; Linell, 2009, 2017; Jaszczolt, 2016; Săftoiu,

¹ A WH-dialogue hereafter in this study is the case of an English wh-dialogue.

² In this study, an answer is syntactically defined as the adjacent utterance immediately following the WH-question in a WH-dialogue.

³ Cases where there are more than one WH-word heading a question and where WH-questions are embedded in other sentences do not fall into the scope of this research and will be addressed in another paper.

2019; Weigand, 2017; Zeng, 2021), whereas in dialogue, as Figure 2 demonstrates, the object being construed is jointly focused by the speaker and the hearer. Prototypically, in a WH-dialogue the questioner and answerer work together to negotiate the specified content of the WH-word. What the questioner does is to select a particular WH-word to linguistically encode the unknown information in communication and then place the WH-word at the beginning of the question to attract the hearer's attention. Meanwhile, a WH-question indicates the construal frame(s) working as the background or scope for the answerer to specify the conceptual content of the WH-word. In the ongoing dialoguing process, questioners also evaluate the qualities of the answers, to justify whether the utterances hearers offer can serve as the expected answers to WH-words or questions. In this sense, the interactional dimension of construal in a WH-dialogue is characteristic of the process of questioning-responding as well as the answer-evaluation, wherein interlocutors, utterances, and the given situation are all participants in the dialogic interaction.

4. Construal of the shared focus in WH-dialogue

From a developmental perspective as viewed in Table 1, this study proposes several dimensions to describe the process of construing the dialogic focus in English wh-dialogue. These dimensions, namely *level of specificity*, *dynamicity*, *selection*, *perspective*, *prominence*, and *focusing of attention*, can be well elaborated in the grounding of wh-words⁴ leading questions in these wh-dialogues.

4.1. Level of specificity

In a wh-dialogue, the wh-word (e.g. what, when, who) placed at the beginning of a wh-question essentially indicates a certain category of element participating in structuring an event or a scene. For instance, “*what*” basically refers to *something* that participates in constructing an event or a scene, and “*where*” often denotes *some place* where an event occurs or a scene exists. In other words, in this type of dialogue the semantic content of the wh-word is not specific. Thus, the wh-word heading a wh-question is schematic in nature⁵. Thinking in this way, in terms of the semantic content, a wh-question is also a schematic frame, while the answer to a wh-question is prototypically more specific. From the cognitive view of the schema-instance principle (cf. Langacker, 1987: 373; Taylor, 2002: 125), the pair of a wh-question and the answer to it can therefore be viewed as a whole or a unit, thus acquiring the status of a *dialogic construction* with its own form and function, in accordance with Goldberg's (1995: 4, 2006: 3) definition of a construction (cf. Brône and Zima, 2014; Nikiforidou et al., 2014; Zeng, 2016). That is to say, the answer in a wh-dialogue is quintessentially an instance of a schematic frame that is linguistically encoded by a wh-question. Accordingly, both the wh-question and its answer are in fact the linguistic representations for the conceptualization of the same schema but with different degrees of specificity, as displayed in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the wh-word or the wh-question is a schema whose instance is its adjacent answer. Grounded in the schema-instance relation, the question and the answer in a wh-dialogue signify the different levels of schematicity of the same conceptual structure.

⁴ In this study, a “wh-word” especially refers to the single question word positioned at the head of a wh-question.

⁵ R.W. Langacker shares the same view in my personal communication with him by email on April 2, 2015: “Yes, apart from the difference between questioning and stating, a wh-word is schematic with respect to its possible answers”.

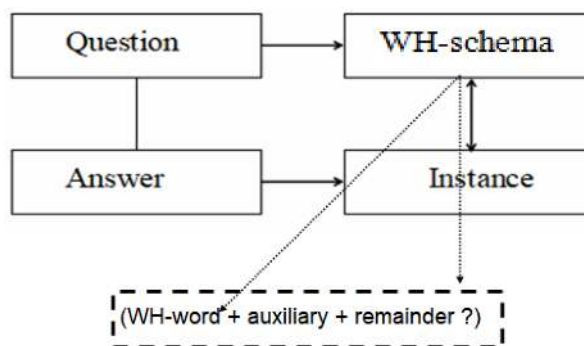


Figure 3. The schema-instance relation in a wh-dialogic construction.

4.2. Dynamicity

The schema-instance relation between a wh-question and its answer suggests the dynamicity of the grounding of wh-word heading the question. Grounding is the process through which an abstract *TYPE* concept is specified as a *CONCRETE* example in the ground that consists of such elements as the speech event, its participants (speaker and hearer), their interaction, and the immediate circumstances (notably, the time and place of speaking) (cf. Langacker, 2008: 259). In a wh-dialogue, the schematic wh-word fundamentally designates a type concept that is the participant to structure a wh-question which is also schematic in nature as a whole. Hence, to answer a wh-question is in essence the dynamic process in which the answerer searches, compares, and then selects a proper instance for the schematic wh-word, as diagramed in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4 shows that the wh-word heading a question uttered by speaker 1 in fact provides a domain of instantiation, while the answer offered by speaker 2⁶ is one (group) of the possible members in this domain. The answer denoting the instantiation of a wh-question means that both speakers 1 and 2 have established mental contacts with the specific member of the type concept indicated by the wh-word, then signifying the successful grounding of the dialogic focus, whereas for the type of wh-dialogues with answers implying non-instantiation of wh-words, the wh-words or the default dialogic focuses are not eventually specified in communication.

4.3. Selection

In a wh-dialogue, the wh-question serves as the structural basis for the following adjacent utterance that is supposed to be an answer. In such a conversation, when constructing an answer, the hearer might selectively reproduce some or all of the linguistic resources including the words, grammatical patterns, prosodies, or functions of the linguistic signs that are previously employed in the question. The reproduced linguistic resources then bring about parallelism between the question and the answer. Consequently, the structural mappings from the answer to the question exhibit structural affinities, thereby producing dialogic resonance between the two utterances. The structural symmetries that emerge in a local wh-dialogue indicate that the basic way human beings produce language in conversations is to take language to make language (cf. Du Bois, 2014: 359).

4.4. Perspective

Normally, speakers with different life experiences might have similar or different interpretations

⁶ For this research, the questioner (S1) and the answerer (S2) are not the same person.

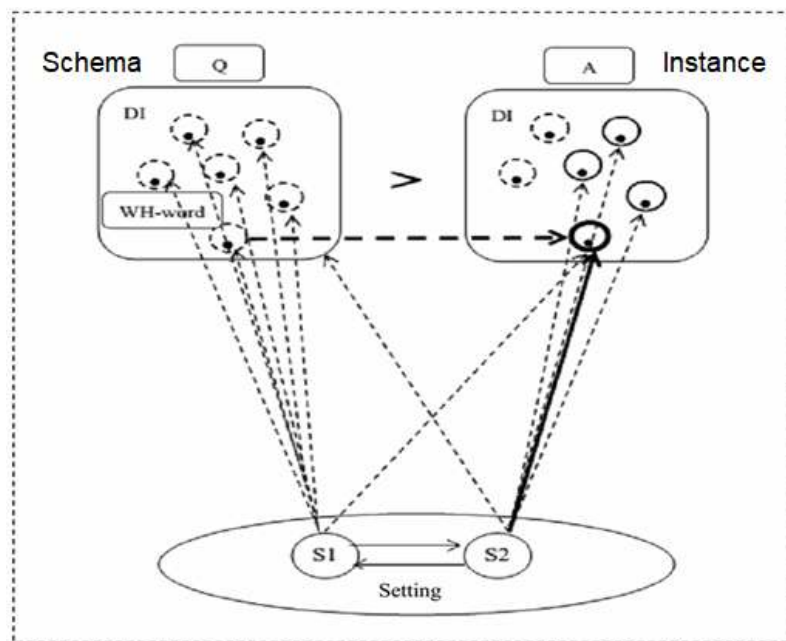


Figure 4. The grounding of schematic wh-word in a wh-dialogic construction.

S1-Speaker 1; S2-Speaker 2; Q-Question; A-Answer. (adapted from Zeng, 2019: 290).

concerning the same event or object being construed, implying that the aspect of perspective functions in the construal operation. It is often the case that in a wh-dialogue, concerning the schematic conceptual content encoded by the wh-word, the questioner and the respondent do not share the same understanding. In particular cases, answerers, who have their own interpretations of the objective reality, possibly take stances distinctive from those of questioners, hence elaborating the schematic wh-word in diverse ways.

4.5. Prominence

Structurally speaking, the head or the end of an utterance, or the stress in intonation could be the syntactic indication of the salient conceptual structure of an event or a scene in the speaker's mind. The most striking structural feature of a regular English wh-question is typically the position of the wh-word, which is at the head of the question utterance and supposed to draw most of the answerer's attention. From the cognitive linguistic view, a wh-word applied to initiate a question, such as *what*, *how*, *when* or *why*, defines a certain salient aspect of an event, viz *what* being the participant(s) in the event, *how* being the way, *when* being the time, and *where* being the place an event occurs. With regard to the cases where the wh-word in a wh-dialogue is successfully grounded (as shown in Figure 4), the wh-word is mentally salient in both speakers' minds, while for the cases with ungrounded wh-words, wh-words are not prominent in the mental world of the answerer.

4.6. Focusing of attention

In a wh-dialogue, the default dialogic focus is the wh-word heading the question. Since the interlocutors are likely to have different perspectives to instantiate the schematic content of the wh-word, the focal information in the question and answer could be matched or unmatched. For the former case, the questioner and the answerer share the dialogic focal information, which is prototypically abstract in the question and more specific in the answer. For the latter one, the focal structure of the

answer is not consistent with that of the question, suggesting that the wh-word is not grounded in the dialogue.

5. Dynamic focal adjustment in wh-dialogic constructions

As shown in Figure 2, the dialogic setting or ground basically consists of the speech event, its participants (speaker 1 and speaker 2) and their interactions, the event linguistically encoded by a wh-question, and the immediate circumstances (especially the time and place of speaking). In a given situation, to start a wh-dialogue, speaker 1 sets the dialogic focus as well as the background for construing it. Speaker 2, based on his or her life experience and knowledge, takes the same or different perspective towards the prominent conceptual content (viz. the wh-word) of the question. For speaker 2, s/he might directly or indirectly provide the answer to the dialogic focus, or s/he does not speak of anything related to the dialogic focus but introduces a new topic, or even shows negative attitude towards the talking and intends to end the conversation. As such, the types of answers in wh-dialogues naturally indicate the dynamic adjustment of dialogic focus in wh-dialogues.

5.1. Focal adjustment in a single wh-dialogue

In a single wh-dialogue, the answer could or could not be the instance of the wh-word positioned at the beginning of a wh-question, implying there are different types of focal adjustment in such a conversation.

5.1.1. Dialogic focus specified

In the dialogic interaction, when the answer contains the grammatical structure that semantically corresponds to the wh-word of the question, the dialogic focus is then specified. In regard to these cases, the schematic wh-word is directly specified by its instance (viz. the answer), as exemplified in the diagraph⁷ of dialogue (1).

Diagraph of dialogue (1)⁸

Question	CHRIS-CUOMO-1-ABC#(Off-camera):	... What	do you want for Christmas	?
Answer	AUDIENCE-MEMBER-1#:	Diamonds		.

In this dialogue, the default dialogic focus is set as “*what*”, which suggests a schematic category of noun indicating THING being wanted by the answerer for Christmas. The answer is structured by only a noun with its plural form “*Diamonds*”, demonstrating the semantic mapping from the answer to the wh-word. To be precise, the answer here serves as a group of instances in the domain of instantiation. Hence, the schema-instance relation is overtly manifested between the wh-word and the answer, suggesting that the abstract dialogic focus is specified as concrete entities in this single wh-dialogue.

⁷“Diagraph” employed by Du Bois (2014) is used in this paper to indicate the dialogic resonance between utterances.

⁸ All the dialogue examples are selected from COCA. The utterances before or after the single dialogue are omitted and indicated by three dots. The bold black structures in the dialogues marked in the diagraph show the syntactic and semantic correspondences between the question and the answer.

Dialogue (2) is another case displaying the dialogic focus specified as an instance indirectly, as revealed in its diagraph.

Dialogue (2)

Question	Mr-BUDZYN:	... Why	am I here	?
Answer	BRADLEY:	<i>If you never hit him at all, how is it that you were charged and convicted of second-degree murder</i>		?

In this short conversation, the reason for the occurrence of the scene “I am here” is the default dialogic focus encoded by “*why*”. The answer, however, is not uttered with the assertive or positive tone that demonstrates the specification of “*why*”, but is structured with a rhetorical question, based on which speaker 1 infers the instance of the schematic “*why*”, namely “*because you hit him*” and then “*you are charged and convicted of second-degree murder*”. Regarding this type of dialogue, the answer could be taken as the extended member from the prototypical answer of the schema “*why*”, whereas the prototypical member of the schema, also the potential direct answer, can be implied from the speaker 2’s utterance(s), as **Figure 5** illustrates.

Figure 5 informs us that the wh-schema is instantiated by the extended member marked by the solid line with bi-directional arrows. The dotted lines with uni-directional arrows mean that the prototypical member of the wh-schema is emergent in the inference process based on the extended member. In such a conversation, the schema-instance relation is implicitly shown though, the dialogic focus is indeed specified.

5.1.2. Dialogic focus shifted

In terms of the case where the dialogic focus is shifted, speaker 2 does not offer any information that could be interpreted as the instantiation of the wh-word. The original dialogic focus established in the question is then shifted to a new one introduced by speaker 2, suggesting that there is no overt or covert schema-instance relation between the wh-question and its adjacent utterance. Dialogue (3) is an example.

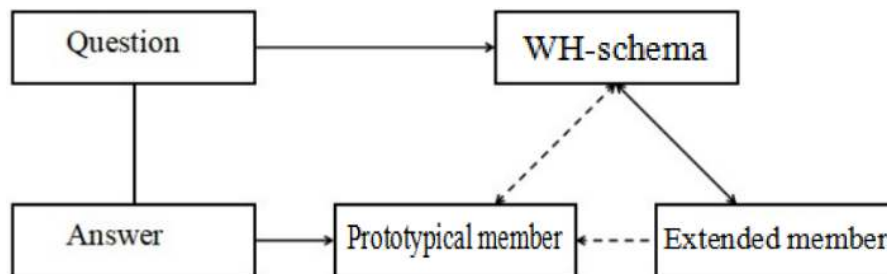


Figure 5. The relation between a wh-schema, a prototypical member, and an extended member.

Dialogue (3)

Question	NEAL-CONAN:	...	How	did	Taylor	defend	the indefensi- ble	?
Answer	MATT-STEINGLASS:	Well, the question is more	how		is lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths,	defended		.

This diagram shows that the questioner inquires how the event “*Taylor defended the indefensible*” occurred, whereas speaker 2 does not provide the detail concerning “*the way*”, but describes a new event “*his lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, defended*”. By doing so, speaker 2 sets a new dialogic focus, *the way the new event came into being*. Accordingly, no semantic correspondence is demonstrated between the utterance, the so-called answer, and the default dialogic focus “*how*” that has in fact been shifted to the salient structure of another event, namely a new “*how*”. For this group of dialogues, the utterances by speaker 2 can be viewed as the instances of new schemas triggered in the dialogue, as seen in **Figure 6**.

Figure 6 shows that the question is followed by an utterance by speaker 2 and the two lines of utterances compose an adjacent pair only in form, as is designated by the solid line without bi-directional arrows. That is, what speaker 2 utters is not the instance of Schema A, viz. the wh-word or the wh-question, whose instance is in fact not provided in this dialogue. The dotted line with arrows implies the absent interactional relation between utterances. Nevertheless, speaker 2’s utterance can be viewed as the instance of schema B, as shown by the solid line with bi-directional arrows. The new schema might function as the template in the anticipated talk turns.

5.1.3. Dialogic focus removed

Any aspect of an event or a scene could be made prominent and then linguistically encoded by a wh-word at the head of an English wh-question. In on-line linguistic communication, it might be the case that the dialogic focus is negated or doubted by the answerer, for whom the salient part of the questioned event or scene is not the right or proper one semantically marked by the wh-word at the beginning of the question, but something else. Dialogue (4) is one of the cases.

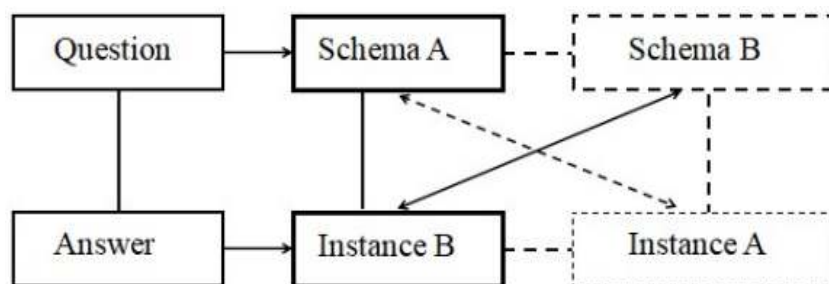


Figure 6. The new schema-instance relation triggered in a dialogic-focus-shifted dialogue.

Dialogue (4)

Question	KOPPEL:	... Where	do	you	expect this sort of	uprising,	if there is to be any,	against Saddam Hussein to originate	?
Answer	Vice Pres. QUAYLE:			I	am not saying that		there is going to be an		
						uprising			.

Obviously, in this dialogue, the structural mappings from the answer to the question show no indication of syntactic and semantic correspondences between the answer and the wh-word “*where*”, but we can see a portion of the non-wh-word part of the question is re-produced in the answer. To be specific, what the questioner most cares about is *the place where the event relating to “uprising” will occur*, whereas the answerer does not share the same dialogic focus with the questioner but negates the occurrence of the event that is linguistically encoded by “uprising”, hence removing the original dialogic focus, the “*where*”, in the question.

5.1.4. Dialogic focus discontinued

In principle, the question in a wh-dialogic construction hints at the domain of instantiation of the dialogic focus. For pairs of a wh-question and an answer, there are examples wherein the answers only partially instantiate the schematic content of wh-words. To put it simply, at the end of a wh-dialogue, a wh-word is not fully instantiated, and more detailed information concerning the wh-word is expected to be offered in the ongoing conversation. In this account, the elaboration process of the dialogic focus is discontinued. Dialogue (5) is a case in point.

Dialogue (5)

Question	UNIDENTIFIED PERSON:	... What	are	the pros	and cons	of	going from one method to the other?	?
Answer	MR-HARDY:			The pros		of	being independent	.
			is					
		that you control your product from start to finish						

This diagram demonstrates that the instance of the dialogic focus “*what*” should include two components, one of which is the specified *pros* and the other the detailed *cons* of “*going from one method to the other*”. However, the instance of “*what*” indicated by the answer only elaborates “*the pros*”, without providing any particular information on “*the cons*” that is also cared about by the questioner. Viewed in this way, the instantiation of the schematic “*what*” is merely half done or discontinued.

5.1.5. Dialogic focus suspended

Cases of dialogic focus suspended refer to those wh-dialogues in which both syntactic and semantic correspondences are exhibited between the question and the answer, but certain grammatical structure in the answer functions to negate the emergent schema-instance relation between the wh-word and the answer, implying that the answer *is not* or *does not contain* the qualified instance of the wh-word, the dialogic focus. The conversation ends but the dialogic focus is not successfully grounded in the dialogic interaction, as exemplified in dialogue (6).

Dialogue (6)

Question	Ms-LIEBERMAN:		... Who	would use that AI	?
Answer	ROKER:	Not	<i>me</i>		.

With regard to this dialogue, the personal pronoun “*me*” in the answer is in the domain of instantiation delimited by the dialogic focus “*who*”, displaying the schema-instance relation between the question and the answer. Nonetheless, the marker of negation “*not*” in the answer negates the qualification of “*me*” as the instance of “*who*”, suggesting that the dialogic focus “*who*” is ultimately ungrounded in the dialogic process.

Still notable is that the above mentioned wh-dialogues with dialogic focuses shifted, removed, discontinued, and suspended share the common feature that qualified instances of wh-words are not contained in answers, whereby they are essentially wh-dialogues characterized by *non-instantiation of wh-words*. The potential schema-instance relation in these dialogues can be depicted in **Figure 7**.

Figure 7 suggests that a wh-question and its adjacent utterance constitute a single wh-dialogue merely at the syntactical level (represented by the solid line without arrows), whereas the part or the whole answer utterance is not semantically correspondent to the wh-word or the wh-question. Consequently, the schematic content of the wh-word is not specified in any part of the answer (indicated by the box with dotted lines), although there might be parallelism emergent between the utterances.

5.2. Focal adjustment in a series of wh-dialogues

Grounded in the immanent schema-instance relation between a wh-question and its answer, section 5.1. depicts the adjustment of dialogic focus in single wh-dialogues. For this sub-section, a series of wh-dialogues consisting of one question but with different answers are investigated, to un-

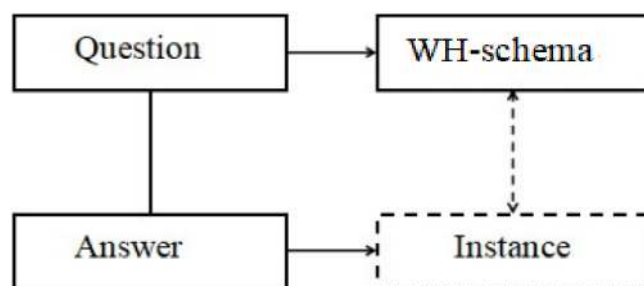
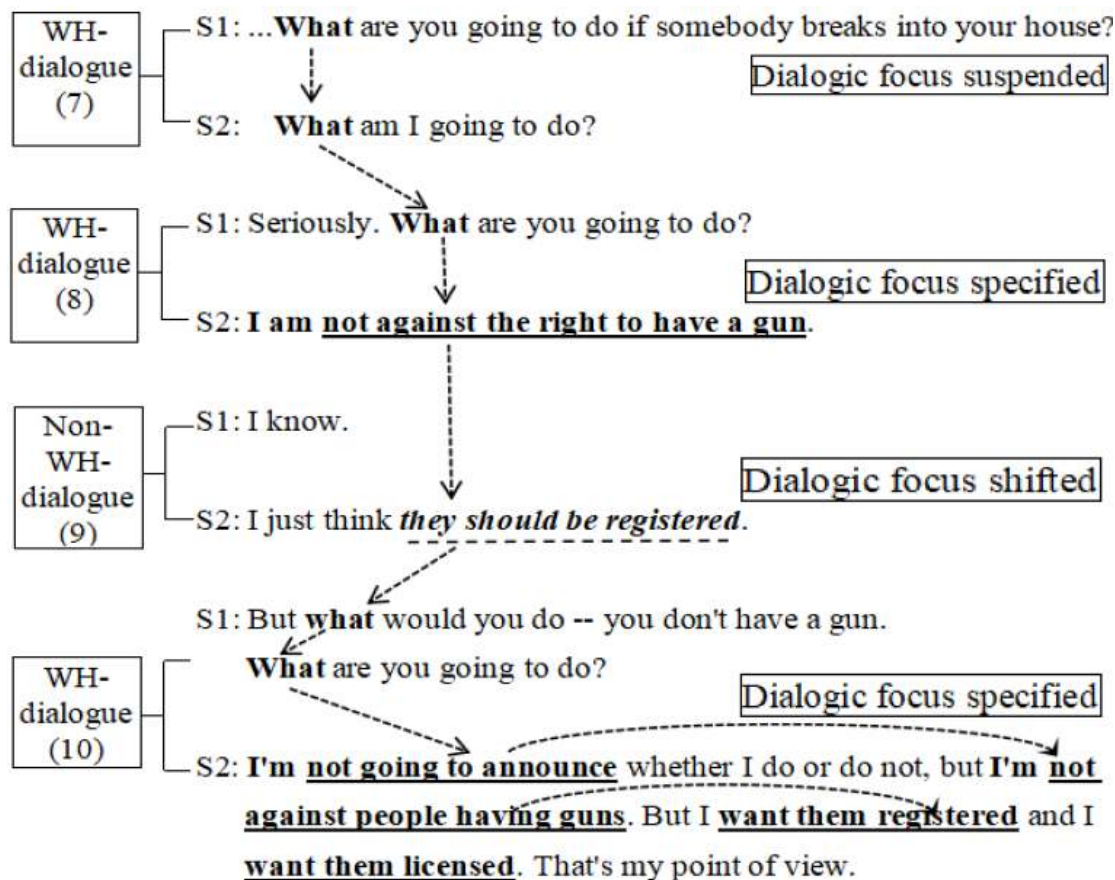


Figure 7. The potential schema-instance relation in wh-dialogues featuring non-instantiation of wh-words.

ravel the dynamic focal adjustment, as displayed in the discourse space consisting of wh-dialogues (7), (8), (10), and the non-wh-dialogue (9).



(S1-speaker 1; S2-speaker 2)

In this local discourse, S1 interacts with S2 to negotiate the specific instance of the dialogic focus encoded as “*what*” in the question “*what are you going to do?*”. To start with, S1 desires to garner the information on the future event that S2 is presumably to describe on the condition that somebody breaks S2’s house, with *what* working as the initial dialogic focus.

Strikingly, S2 does not elaborate the schema-instance relationship between the question and the answer in dialogue (7), but restates the schematic structure of the future event. We can see that the dialogic focus is unspecified and then suspended in this talk turn.

With the intention of cooperating with S2 for the successful grounding of “*what*” in the initial question, S1 iterates the abstract structure of the future event in which S2 is supposed to participate in. By doing so, the dialogic focus “*what*” is clarified for a second time. In response to S1’s concern, S2 narrows down and at the same time defines the domain of instantiation of the dialogic focus “*what*”, which includes any instance of a schematic event that is characteristic of “*being not against the right to have a gun*”. In this process of question-response, namely dialogue (8), the dialogic focus “*what*” is more specific than that in dialogue (7).

As we can see, S2’s response in dialogue (8) receives positive feedback from S1, indicated by S1’s utterance “*I know*”, which then motivates S2’s further elaboration on the negated instance of

“*what*”, by uttering “*they (the guns) should be registered*”. The interaction between these two utterances denotes a non-wh-dialogue (9), and the dialogic focus is now shifted from S1’s concern of the future event that S2 is engaged to the new event that S2 cares about and is related to the guns’ registration.

While, in the ongoing dialogic interaction, without receiving positive answers from S2, S1 claims the dialogic focus “*what*” once again and the schematic future event that has been mentioned in dialogues (7) and (8). S1 also adds more background information, viz. “*you don’t have a gun*” in the case that “*somebody breaks into your house*”, to help S2 construe the situation-specific meaning of *what*. What’s more, S1 repeats the same question “*what are you going to do?*” for a third time, showing again S1’s intention to cooperate with S2 for the successful grounding of the dialogic focus “*what*” that is originally made prominent in dialogues (7) and (8).

Following that, S2 constructs new utterances consisting of both negative and positive statements, which are the detailed conceptual content of “*what*”. Subsequently, wh-dialogue (10) is structured. The expression “*this is my point of view*” by S2 implies that the dialogic focus “*what*” initiated in dialogue (7) is then definitely elaborated with specification in dialogue (10).

In brief, in this local discourse, the utterances by S2 display different degrees of specification of the dialogic focus “*what*”, significantly demonstrating the dynamic focal adjustment in the wh-dialogues.

6. Conclusions

Based upon Langacker’s analyses of the dimensions of construal operation at different phrases of his studies on cognitive grammar, this paper proposes a dialogic view on the dimensions of construal. These dimensions, including *level of specificity*, *dynamicity*, *selection*, *perspective*, *focus of attention*, and *prominence*, are elaborated in detail with the evidence shown in English wh-dialogues. Following this, the types of dynamic focal adjustment in wh-dialogues are investigated, and their classifications can be summarized in **Table 2**.

As Table 2 indicates, the *specificity* in construal operation in a dialogic situation is described in terms of the schema-instance relation, based on which English wh-dialogues might be roughly categorized as (1) dialogues with direct instantiation of the wh-word, (2) dialogues with indirect instantiation of the wh-word, and (3) dialogues with non-instantiation of the wh-word. The *dynamicity* aspect of construal refers to the grounding process of the schematic dialogic focus in situation-specific conversation, implying two groups of wh-dialogues, one with wh-words grounded, the other with ungrounded wh-words. In wh-dialogues, part or all of the linguistic resources in questions might be reproduced in the adjacent answers, suggesting explicit or implicit structural parallelism between questions and answers, exemplifying the dimension of *selection* in construal.

Other cases of wh-dialogues worthy of our attention are the dialogues where interlocutors might take the same, similar or different *perspectives* to interpret the dialogic focus, leading to the fact that there could be different answers to one wh-question, as evidenced in the local dialogues from (7) to (10), while *focus of attention*, another dimension of construal in dialogic interaction, implies the central attention allocated by interlocutors in conversation. As such, there are cases of wh-dialogues with matched or unmatched dialogic focuses between questions and answers. As for *prominence*, it

Table 2. A dialogic view on construal operation and the focal adjustment in wh-dialogues

specificity	schema-instance		schema-(instance)-new schema			
	direct instantiation	indirect instantiation	non-instantiation			
dynamicity	dialogic focus grounded		dialogic focus ungrounded			
selection	previous language resources reproduced/explicit or implicit parallelism displayed					
perspective	similar or the same		different			
focusing of attention	dialogic focus matched		dialogic focus unmatched			
prominence	wh-word salient in the mental worlds of both S1 and S2		wh-word non-salient in the mental world of S2			
the focal adjustment	focus specified		focus shifted	focus removed	focus discontinued	focus suspended

signifies the salient component of the conceptual structure(s) in the mental worlds of the speakers.

The dimensions stated above essentially reveal the interactive nature of construal operation in conversation, in particular indicating the interrelation among speakers, utterances, and the specific dialogic situation. Grounded on these dimensions of construal, the focal adjustment in wh-dialogues could be classified into five groups, namely cases of dialogic focus *specified*, dialogic focus *shifted*, dialogic focus *removed*, dialogic focus *discontinued*, and dialogic focus *suspended*. This study is hopefully to shed some light on the understanding of utterance meaning from a new perspective, that is, a dialogic view on the meaning co-construction in conversation.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (grant number: 18BYY076) and the fund from the China Scholarship Council (CSC grant number: 202006240343) for my research at the University of Cambridge.

References

- Bakhtin MM (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Holquist M (ed.). Emerson C and Holquist M (trans.). Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- Brône G and Zima E (2014) Towards a dialogic construction grammar: *Ad hoc* routines and resonance activation. *Cognitive Linguistics* 25(3): 457–495.
- Collingwood RG (1998[1940]) *An Essay on Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Croft W and Cruse DA (2004) *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Couper-Kuhlen E and Selting M (2018) *Interactional Linguistics: An Introduction to Language in Social Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dąbrowska E (2014) Recycling utterances: A speaker’s guide to sentence processing. *Cognitive Linguistics* 25(4): 617–653.

- Du Bois JW (2014) Towards a dialogic syntax. *Cognitive Linguistics* 25(3): 359–410.
- Fischer K (2015) Conversation, construction grammar, and cognition. *Language and Cognition* 7(4): 563–588.
- Goldberg AE (1995) *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg AE (2006) *Constructions at Work: The Nature of Generalization in Language*. Oxford: OUP.
- Hancil S (2018) Discourse coherence and intersubjectivity: The development of final but in dialogues. *Language Sciences* 68: 78–93.
- Hsieh CYC and Su LIW (2019) Construction in conversation: An interactional construction grammar approach to the use of xiangshuo ‘think’ in spoken Taiwan Mandarin. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 17(1): 131–154.
- Jaszczolt KM (2016) *Meaning in Linguistic Interaction: Semantics, Metasemantics, Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Langacker RW (1987) *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar vol. I: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker RW (1991) *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar vol. II: Descriptive Application*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker RW (1993) Universals of construal. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* 19(1): 447–463.
- Langacker RW (1999) *Grammar and Conceptualization (Cognitive Linguistics Research)*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Langacker RW (2007) *Ten Lectures on Cognitive Grammar*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Langacker RW (2008/2013) *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: OUP.
- Langacker RW (2015) Construal. In: Dąbrowska E and Divjak D (eds.) *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, pp.120–143.
- Langacker RW (2019) Construal. In: Dąbrowska E and Divjak D (eds.) *Cognitive Linguistics: Foundations of Language*. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, pp.140–166.
- Linell P (2009) *Rethinking Language, Mind, and the World Dialogically: Interactional and Contextual Theories of Human Sense-Making*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, INC.
- Linell P (2017) Dialogue, dialogicality and interactivity. *Language and Dialogue* 7(3): 301–335.
- Nikiforidou K, Marmaridou S, and Mikros GK (2014) What’s in a dialogic construction? A constructional approach to polysemy and the grammar of challenge. *Cognitive Linguistics* 25(4): 655–699.
- Săftoiu R (2019) The dialogic turn in language study: A review of *The Routledge handbook of language and dialogue** (edited by Edda Weigand 2017) and *From Pragmatics to Dialogue* (edited by Edda Weigand and Istvan Kecskes 2018). *Language and Dialogue* 9(3): 471–483.
- Talmy L (1988) The relation of grammar to cognition. In: Rudzka-Ostyn B (ed.) *Topics in Cognitive Linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp.165–205.
- Taylor J (2002) *Cognitive Grammar*. Oxford: OUP.
- Verhagen A (2005) *Constructions of Intersubjectivity: Discourse, Syntax and Cognition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Verhagen A (2007) Construal and perspectivisation. In: Geeraerts D and Cuyckens H (eds.) *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.48–81.
- Weigand E (ed.) (2017) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Dialogue*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Zeng G (2016) A cognitive approach to the event structures of wh-dialogic constructions. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 34(4): 311–324.
- Zeng G (2019) *Dialogic Construction Grammar: A Theoretical Frame and Its Application*. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press.
- Zeng G (2021) Repetition in Mandarin-speaking children’s dialogs: Its distribution and structural dimensions. *Linguistics Vanguard* 7(1): 1–14.