Elliptic Coordination

Ronald W. Langacker
University of California, San Diego

ABSTRACT

An attempt is made to expand and refine previous analyses of coordination in Cognitive Grammar. Of special interest are expressions like (1)-(3), which do not clearly qualify as either constituent coordination or clausal coordination. They are analyzed as a special case of ellipsis, which in turn is related to the accentual reduction characteristic of repeated elements in English. The analysis and the descriptive notions it requires are therefore motivated by broader considerations.

(1) *Ann washed, and Bob dried, the dishes.*
(2) *Ann washed the cat, and Bob the dog.*
(3) *Ann came with, and Bob without, a date.*

The account presupposes a number of general notions established in Cognitive Grammar on independent grounds. There is first the adoption of flexible **symbolic assemblies** (as opposed to rigid constituency hierarchies) as the basis for describing grammatical structure. Next is **dynamicity**: structure consists in patterns of processing activity, which occurs in successive windows of attention and on different time scales. This dynamic outlook supports an alternative to the standard compositional metaphor, namely one involving **access**, **activation**, and **conceptual overlap**. Also relevant are various kinds of **abstraction**, including schematicity, the type/instance distinction, and the invocation of virtual entities.

These notions are first employed to describe the conjoining of constituents, including full clauses. Coordination is characterized as the mental juxtaposition of entities conceived as being analogous. With an eye toward non-constituent coordination, as in (1)-(3), attention then shifts to certain kinds of clausal "reduction". One is the accentual reduction, in English, of elements whose conceptual content—being subsumed by that already active in the prior clause (or window of attention)—retains some residual activation. Full accent is reserved for non-overlapping content, termed the **differential**. In the case of ellipsis, overlapping content is not expressed. It is however exploited as the basis for interpreting the differential. This overt content is construed as part of a "reconstructed" clause which is analogous to the prior, **baseline** clause insofar as possible.

Expressions like (1)-(3) represent a special case of this phenomenon. They allow efficient coding of complex conceptions, consisting of just the baseline clause and the differential (conveying non-overlapping content). The structures conjoined by *and* are the differential and the **anti-differential**, comprising the elements of the baseline clause which contrast with those of the differential. Together with *and*, the differential can follow either the baseline clause, as in (2), or the final element of the anti-differential, as in (1) and (3).