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## **DO TENSES INFLUENCE THE AXIOLOGICAL CHARGE OF SENTENCES?**

### **Introduction**

Meaning in cognitive semantics equals conceptualization, which involves concepts, experiences (sensory perception, movement and functioning of the human body, emotions), and the physical, social and linguistic context (Langacker 1998). According to Krzeszowski (1999), evaluation is an inherent element of conceptualization, though not a necessary one. All experiences, including the experience of values, are involved in the process of creating concepts and reflected in meanings of words. Krzeszowski (1997) observes that the axiological element is present in meaning not only in case of lexical items, but also grammatical constructions. For example, the use of a given tense may influence the axiological charge of a sentence.

However, this influence does not depend on the tense alone, but also on other, more pragmatic, factors, such as context. Since such factors appear to play a decisive role in establishing the value of tenses and, consequently, whole sentences, it seems reasonable to postulate that tenses alone do not determine the axiological charge of sentences. Tense merely indicates the time of a situation, but whether that location in time is evaluated positively or negatively depends on context and the point of view of the speaker and/or hearer.

### **The Fundamental Axiological Matrix**

As Langacker (1987) observes, there is an asymmetry between profiled participants in every relational predication. One of the participants, a trajector, is *the figure within a relational profile* (Langacker 1987:217). Other salient entities are landmarks, and a relational predication profiles the interconnections between the trajector and the landmark(s). According to Langacker (1987), there are no

restrictions on the nature of trajectors and landmarks, which need not be things and can themselves consist of relations. They need not be expressed overtly, as well, especially the landmark.

In order to investigate the axiological aspect of tenses we shall use Krzeszowski's (1997) Fundamental Axiological Matrix (FAMA). A trajector (TR), a landmark (LM) and the relation may have either a positive (+) or a negative (-) axiological charge. The values of trajectors and landmarks are inherent (absolute), while the values of relations are inherent (absolute) and derived (actual). The relation in which TR moves to/is near LM is absolutely positive, whereas the relation in which TR moves/is away from LM is absolutely negative. The actual value of a relation may be different from its absolute value, as the actual value is determined by the axiological charge of entities involved in the relation. The actual value (in brackets) is established by means of the axiological schemata of FAMA (Krzeszowski 1997:134), four of which will be used here:

TR		L	
		M	
+	→	+	(+)
-	→	+	(-)
+	←	+	(-)
-	←	+	(+)

As Krzeszowski (1997) observes, FAMA applies to various image schemata, including the CONTAINER schema. The CONTAINER schema consists of the container (LM), the IN area and OUT area, and an entity (TR). *Being absolutely positively related, TR either enters the container or is in it; being absolutely negatively related to the container, TR is moving out of the container or is outside the container* (Krzeszowski 1997:143). We shall apply the CONTAINER schema and its axiological interpretation to the analysis of sentences in various tenses.

### **The concept of time and its axiological aspect**

Since time is an abstract concept, people conceptualize it and talk about it metaphorically in terms of space. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), as well as Comrie (1985), observe that the passage of time is metaphorically presented in two seemingly contradictory ways: (1) time moves past man (Lakoff and Johnson) or past the present (Comrie), and (2) man/the present moves through time. In both cases time changes its position relative to man or the present.

However, the position of one object with respect to another one changes not only when one of them moves and the other one is stationary, but also in cases where two objects move along the same path in opposite directions. It is possible that the passage of time is conceptualized in terms of the latter situation: man, located in the present, moves towards the future, and at the same time the future moves towards man and the present.

Time is a complex concept involving several preconceptual image schemas: recurring patterns in physical experience (body movement, manipulation of objects, and perception), which structure mental experiences (Johnson 1987). Abstract concepts are metaphorically conceived by means of such image schemas (Lakoff 1987). Preconceptual image schemas involved in the concept of time are NEAR-FAR, TOWARDS-AWAY FROM and FRONT-BACK. According to Krzeszowski (1997), image schemas have the axiological parameter PLUS-MINUS. In the schemas mentioned above, the poles NEAR, TOWARDS and FRONT are positively charged, while FAR, AWAY FROM and BACK are negative.

The present is located NEAR (+) man, whereas the past and the future are FAR (-) from man. As time involves movement, man and the present move TOWARDS (+) the future, the future moving TOWARDS (+) them too. The past moves AWAY FROM (-) man and the present, which move AWAY FROM (-) the past too. As a result, the distance between the present and the future diminishes: the future becomes NEAR (+), while the distance between the present and the past increases: the past remains FAR (-). As Kałuża (1983) observes, the future is potential present, whereas the division between the present and the past is irreversible. Finally, creatures and objects usually move forward, with their FRONT turned in the direction of movement. Metaphorically, then, man's FRONT (+) is directed towards the future, and man's BACK (-) is turned towards the past. Summing up, the present is completely positive. The future is less positive (FAR), but because it approaches the present and may eventually become the present, the future is still positive. The past, on the other hand, is definitely negative.

The above interpretation is consistent with Krzeszowski's (1997) view that the axiological aspect of the NEAR-FAR schema is metaphorically extended to time, with the result that the present and the future are positively charged, while the past is negative. Consequently, the present tense and expressions of the future have a positive value, whereas the past tense is negative, since its use may entail negation: the situation presented in a sentence no longer exists.

### **The influence of tenses on sentence value**

The location of a situation (a state or an action) in the present, near man, is positive. Similarly, a situation located in the future has a positive value, as the future approaches and may become the present. The location of a situation in the

past, far from the present, is negative. The relation of a situation to the present, then, is the basis of evaluation.

The actual value of a sentence can be derived by means of the Fundamental Axiological Matrix (Krzyszowski 1997), where a situation is a positive or negative trajector being in a positive (IN(TO)) or negative (OUT OF) relation to a positive landmark – the present. When a positive situation is in the present (present tenses (1), including the present perfect tense referring to a situation continuing to or having an effect in the present) or moving towards it (expressions of the future (2)), the actual value of a sentence (in brackets) is positive:

(1) **He is a rich man.** + (+) *It's hard to believe he was born in a very poor family.*

(2) A: *Will he be able to pay off such a big loan?*

B: *Oh, yes. He is talented and hard-working. **He will be a rich man.*** +(+)

When a negative situation is in the present (3) or the future (4), the actual value of a sentence is negative:

(3) **He is robbing a bank.** – (–) *He may be in trouble again.*

(4) **He is crazy! He is going to rob a bank.** – (–)

Conversely, when a positive situation is away from the present (past tenses (5), or the present perfect tense referring to a situation in undetermined past), the actual value of a sentence becomes more negative, because the sentence may entail that the opposite situation takes place in the present.

(5) A: *He was a rich man.* + (–?)

B: *Yes. And now he is completely broke.*

When a negative situation is in the past (6), the actual value of a sentence becomes more positive, because the sentence may entail that the negative situation has changed.

(6) **He robbed a bank several years ago.** – (+?) *But he has changed and he is an honest man now.*

Krzyszowski (1997) points out that such entailments are possible in sentences describing states (5) or habitual actions (e.g. *He robbed banks*), while single past actions are insensitive to the axiological polarity of the present-past opposition. Nevertheless, it seems that such entailments are also conceivable in case of single actions in an appropriate context (6).

In the above examples, the context suggests that the sentences in bold should be evaluated using the criterion of present validity and relevance of situations. However, in different contexts the same sentences would have a different actual

value. Sometimes what is important is whether a situation is a fact or not. As Comrie (1985) notes, the past is definite and unchangeable, while the future is uncertain and can be influenced. From the point of view of reality, past and present tenses are used to state facts, whereas the use of future forms implies that presented situations are merely predictions or intentions, not facts.

As reality and certainty are positively valued, what is a fact (past or present) has a positive value and what is uncertain (a future prediction or intention) has a negative character. Consequently, the use of past and present tenses is positively evaluated, and the expressions of future are negatively charged. The evaluation of a sentence in this case is based on the relation of a situation to reality.

Again, the actual value of a sentence can be established by means of the Fundamental Axiological Matrix, where a situation is a positive or negative trajector being in a positive (IN(TO)) or negative (OUT OF) relation to a positive landmark – reality. When a positive situation is “in reality” (present (7) or past (8) tenses), the actual value of a sentence is positive:

(7) **He is a rich man.** + (+) *I've seen his house. It's like a palace.*

(8) *I dated him three years ago. **He was a rich man.*** + (+) *And he was very handsome.*

In (8), the sentence in bold does not entail that the man is no longer rich. It merely describes a past situation without any reference to the present. When a negative situation is “in reality” (present (9) or past (10)), the actual value of a sentence is negative:

(9) **He is robbing a bank.** – (–) *Now we have evidence against him.*

(10) A: *Will you employ him?*

B: *No. **He robbed a bank several years ago.*** – (–) *I don't employ criminals.*

In (10), what matters to the speaker is the fact that the person robbed a bank, which makes him a criminal. No reference is made to his present actions.

When a positive situation is “out of reality”, i.e. is a prediction or intention (expressions of the future, (11)), the actual value of a sentence becomes more negative, because it is uncertain and its negation is possible.

(11) A: **He will be a rich man.** + (–?)

B: *I doubt it. He is so lazy and stupid.*

When a negative situation is “out of reality” (in the future, (12)), the actual value of a sentence becomes more positive, as the situation is not a fact and the opposite can happen.

(12) A: **He is going to rob a bank.** – (+?)

B: *I don't believe him. He is such a coward.*

It must be noted that in both types of evaluation (with respect to the present and to reality) the changes of value from positive to negative or from negative to positive are not complete, and the situations still retain some of their inherent value (hence question marks). The reversed value is rather the value of context-based entailments, not of the sentences themselves. That is why the same sentences in different context are evaluated in different ways.

## Conclusion

As the above analysis demonstrates, only present tenses have a positive character in all contexts, while past tenses and expressions of the future are either positively or negatively evaluated. It seems, then, that tenses alone cannot determine the actual value of sentences, as the evaluation depends also on the choice of a criterion: present relevance (the relation to the present) or fact (the relation to reality). This choice is suggested by the context, that is why the same sentence in the same tense can be evaluated positively or negatively in different contexts. Tenses merely indicate at what time a situation is located and indirectly inform whether it is a fact or not. A change of tense can change the value of a sentence, but whether the value is positive or negative depends not on the tense alone but also on context, which suggests the choice of criteria for evaluation.

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