

Exploring the Concept of Objectivity Through Cognitive Grammar and Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract. The existence of objectivity and the definition of it has always been a vital discussion in many fields, suggesting humans' primitive desire for the present of justness. However, this paper argues that objectivity does not exist through two linguistic theories - stage model and SFL (systemic functional linguistics). By analyzing these two linguistic models discovered by Langacker and Malinowski, it is proven that objectivity is an ideal illusion. For Langacker's stage model, this paper will start with listing the three components of the theory - pragmatic function, context-dependence, and cultural embeddedness, then deconstruct the concept of objectivity through their views. This review will also include SFL's perspectives, also begins with defining three components of the theory - the architecture of the stage model, the critical cognitive process of subjectification, the principle of grounding. After reviewing these two linguistics models and their relationships with the ultimate objectivity, it is proven that all linguistic meaning is subjective.

Keywords: Concept Of Objectivity, Cognitive Grammar, SFL

1. Introduction

The classical view of objectivity represents human's desire for the ultimate possibility of a neutral and universal perspective that mirrors the world 'as it is'. This ideal notion of objectivity is simply a philosophical fiction. Malinowski states that objectivity does not exist, by revealing the process of humans' comprehension in languages [1]. He argues that human understanding is not a passive reflection of an external reality, but achieved through pragmatic, context-dependent, and cultural linguistic practices. In a word, it is a constructed and negotiated process [1].

Langacker's theory on stage model could also prove that objectivity does not exist from another point of view. Langacker argues that every act of conception necessarily involves a conceptualizer occupying a specific vantage point [2,3]. Thus, a 'view from nowhere', is proven to be an incoherent notion. Ronald W. Langacker's Cognitive Grammar offers a particularly potent and detailed framework for deconstructing the concept of objectivity [4,5]. Unlike formal grammatical theories that treat language as an autonomous algebraic system, cognitive grammar posits that linguistic structure is not arbitrary but is directly motivated by and reflective of more general cognitive processes and our embodied experience of the world [6]. Language, in this view, is a keyhole into the workings of the human mind. This model provides the analytical tools to demonstrate that

perspective is not an accidental or eliminable feature of thought and language; it is its very condition of possibility.

2. Context of situation

2.1. Three components of context of situation

Before Malinowski, the dominant view of language in the Western philosophical tradition was largely representational. Language was seen as a set of labels for objects, ideas, and feelings - briefly, a 'counter-sign of thought' [1], as he put it. Meaning was seen as a thought to reside in the words themselves or in the mental concepts they represented.

Malinowski argued that this view was inadequate based on his extensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands. He suggests that language was not a mirror of reality, but a mode of action with a theory constructed by three core components: pragmatic function, context-dependence, and cultural embeddedness [1].

2.2. Pragmatic function

The first component of his theory is pragmatic function. It means that the primary purpose of language is not to describe the world or state facts, but to get things done [1]. Meaning is found in actions, not in its dictionary definition nor its correspondence to a state of affairs. Observing the daily life of the Trobriand Islanders gives Malinowski the conclusion that speech was intertwined with activities like fishing, gardening, trading, and ritual. In these contexts, words were used to function as following: first, coordinate labor - 'Pull that net now!' ; issue commands - 'Bring me the axe.' ; to express appeals or reactions - 'Give us some food!' or 'How terrifying!' ; and to establish social bonds - What he would later call 'phatic communion' [1,4].

In all these cases, the 'meaning' of the words is their practical effect or their function within the ongoing activity. A command is 'meaningful' if it is obeyed; a plea is 'meaningful' if it elicits a response. The truth or falsity of the statement is often irrelevant.

The phatic communion is Malinowski's most famous concept for illustrating the pragmatic function. Phrases like 'How are you?' or 'Lovely weather today' in English, or their equivalents in any culture, are not meant to convey factual information or inquire into objective truth. Their meaning is purely social and pragmatic - to open a channel of communication, to acknowledge another person's presence, and to create a bond of goodwill. The function is the action of creating social unity [1]. That means, pragmatic function is constantly contributing to the construction of the developed human culture, it is used to deepen the social bonds between individuals.

2.3. Context dependence

Context-dependence states that words alone are meaningless fragments [1]. They only gain full meaning when embedded in their immediate context of use, which Malinowski called the 'context of situation' - the immediate physical, social, and purposive circumstances of the speech event [1,5]. This notion simply means that it is impossible to understand what someone is saying just by having a dictionary. The knowledge of 5w (who, what, where, when, and why) of the speech is essential. Who refers to who is speaking to whom; what refers to what is their social relationship/what are they doing while speaking (fishing, arguing, and praying); where and when refer to where and when is this happening (in a sacred space/during an emergency); why refers to the reason that they are speaking/what is their goal.

The "context of situation" is an essential component of the meaning itself. Without it, an utterance is just a dead letter.

Imagine someone says the word 'water.' Out of context, it's almost meaningless. Now, place it in different contexts of situation:

- A person crawling through a desert, whispering 'water...' In this sentence, it stands for a desperate plea for survival.
- A plumber pointing to a leak, saying 'water!' In here, it stands for an identification of a problem.
- A parent warning a child near a pool, saying 'Water!' Now in this, it is a cautionary command to be careful.

For Malinowski, this is not an exception but the rule for all languages. The context of situation is an active, constitutive component of meaning itself [1]. In conclusion, even the word is the same, its meaning is still entirely shaped by the situation. For Malinowski, this wasn't an exception - it was the rule for all language.

2.4. Cultural embeddedness

Cultural embeddedness states that language is also influenced by culture. Its meanings lie within specific social institutions, myths, rituals, and shared knowledge [1,7]. There is no universal 'thought' that language expresses; thought itself is shaped by a culture's specific engagement with the world.

Malinowski argued that to understand the meaning of a Trobriand word, you couldn't just get a definition. You had to understand the cultural reality it was part of. This includes:

- Technical vocabulary for gardening, boat-building, or fishing only makes sense when you see these activities being performed and understand their importance in that society.
- Myths and stories are not just tales. They justify social structure, validate political power, and explain the natural world. The function of a myth is to uphold the cultural order.
- Kinship terms such as 'father', 'mother's brother' are not biological labels but bundles of rights, duties, and social expectations unique to that culture.

Language, therefore, is a 'cultural inventory.' Words are like knots tying together a whole network of practices, beliefs, and objects. To translate a word is not to find an equivalent label, but to explain an entire cultural concept.

The Kula, a complex ceremonial exchange of shell armbands and necklaces, is the perfect illustration. Words associated with the Kula, including the names of the valuables, the terms for the partnerships, the magic spells, are meaningless without understanding the entire institution - the long ocean voyages, the social status gained, the rituals performed, and the myths that sanctify it. The language of the Kula is embedded in its practice.

Language is thus a 'cultural inventory' [1]. A perfect illustration is the Kula ring, a complex ceremonial exchange system. The vocabulary of the Kula—terms for valuables, partnerships, and magic spells - is meaningless without understanding the entire institution: the ocean voyages, social status, rituals, and sanctifying myths [1,8]. The language is embedded in the practice.

These three concepts are not separate - they are deeply intertwined. The pragmatic function explains why language is used to act. Context of situation lists the conditions it gets its immediate meaning in a specific situation. Cultural embeddedness demonstrates how larger framework, such as culture, are able to highlight those situations and actions [1,9]. In that sense, shared history, myths, and institutions of the culture are also able to shape languages.

Together, language is shaped as a living, dynamic, and practical force, deeply connected with the flow of human activity and collective life. This view contrasts to any theory that sees language as a

neutral, abstract code for representing an objective world.

3. Cognitive grammar

3.1. Three components of the stage model

Langacker's Stage Model systematically exposes the impossibility of pure objectivity by revealing the inescapable presence and activity of the conceptualizing subject. Start by explicating the architecture of the Stage Model, detailing its components and their functional relationships. Then, through exploring the critical cognitive process of subjectification, it illustrates how objective properties of the world often originate in the subjective relationship between the conceptualizer and the scene. Finally, by examining the principle of grounding, it is proven that all linguistic meaning, even its most abstract forms, is ultimately anchored in the shared, embodied context of communicative interaction—a context that precludes a detached, objective stance [10,11]. The cumulative force of this analysis is to show that what we call "objectivity" is better understood as a special, highly refined case of intersubjective coordination, a consensus built upon shared cognitive models, conventionalized viewing arrangements, and communal practices [12].

3.2. The inescapable architecture of perspective

The Stage Model is a vivid analogy of a theatrical performance [2,3]. This model is a formal representation of the constitutive elements involved in any act of thinking, perceiving, or describing. It consists of three primary components that together form an irreducible system, fundamentally challenging any notion of a presuppositionless gaze.

First, there is the Maximal Field of View, or the Stage itself. This represents the full extent of a conceptualizer's awareness at any given moment. Within this maximal field, attention is selectively focused on a specific area termed the Immediate Scope or the Onstage Region. This is the portion of the stage that is currently 'illuminated' by conscious attention. It is within this onstage region that the profile = the specific conceptual figure or focal entity of the expression - appears. For instance, in the phrase 'the cat under the table,' 'the cat' is profiled against the relational background of being 'under the table.'

The third and most crucial component is the Conceptualizer / Viewer. This is the subjective source of the conceptualization, the conscious mind that is doing the viewing, construing, and interpreting. Egocentric viewing arrangement - the arrangement people operate in most of their daily lives - the conceptualizer is offstage. They are not themselves an object of conception but the implicit, unseen subject for whom the scene unfolds. This configuration is what Langacker calls the optimal viewing arrangement [2]. Along this, attention is maximally focused on the object (the onstage content), while the subject's role is attenuated to the point of invisibility within the explicit content of the scene.

It is precisely this optimal arrangement that has been historically mistaken for an 'objective' view. The apparent transparency and self-evidence of the onstage scene, with no visible viewer to 'distort' it, create the illusion that we are accessing reality directly. However, the Stage Model makes it clear that this is an illusion born of a specific cognitive setup. The conceptualizer is not absent; they are subjectively construed - their presence is the indispensable ground of the entire event but is not itself profiled. The fundamental S (Subject) > O (Object) relationship remains intact and irreducible. One cannot have a viewed scene without a viewer, a conceived content without a conceiver. Every linguistic expression, by profiling one entity against a background (its base), performs an act of

selection and perspectivization [3]. To say 'The glass is half-full' versus 'The glass is half-empty' is not to report two different objective states of the world but to profile two different aspects of the same scene, choices made by a conceptualizer with a particular vantage point and perhaps intention. This act of construal, the ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways, is fundamental to Cognitive Grammar and fatal to the myth of a single, objective description [6].

Furthermore, the Stage Model accommodates more complex viewing arrangements, such as those involving mental space construction or distributed cognition. When we report another person's belief ('She thinks the glass is full'), we set up a secondary onstage region - a mental space - where a surrogate conceptualizer (she) operates. Yet, even here, our own conceptualizing presence as the builders of this layered scene is inescapable.

The model thus universalizes perspective: Whether viewing the physical world, entertaining a counterfactual, or interpreting another's mind... A conceptualizing subject, situated somewhere, is always orchestrating the view. This architectural inevitability of perspective forms the first pillar of the argument against objectivity.

3.3. Subjectification and the nature of scientific objectivity

If the Stage Model establishes the structural necessity of a conceptualizer, the process of subjectification explains how the very content we often deem 'objective' can emerge from subjective cognitive operations [3]. Subjectification is a dynamic cognitive process whereby a relationship that was originally construed objectively - that is, as an onstage, profiled feature of the object of conception - undergoes a conceptual shift. It is reanalyzed and reconstituted as an aspect of the subjective relationship between the conceptualizer and the scene. This process strips the illusion of inherent objectivity from many of our most basic conceptualizations.

A canonical example is the conceptualization of motion and change. Consider the sentence, 'The road widens ahead.' In a naive objective reading, one might attribute the property of 'widening' to the road itself, as if it were an inherent, geometric feature. However, subjectification reveals that this sense of expansion is not an objective property of the static road. Rather, it is a subjective experience stemming from the conceptualizer's simulated movement along the road's path. The objective construal would involve an actual, onstage process of the road's edges moving apart. The subjective construal takes this image and compresses it into a static property ('widens') that is only valid from the perspective of a moving observer. The motion has been subjectified; it has migrated from being an onstage process to being part of the offstage conceptualizing relationship. This linguistic pattern is not an anomaly but a window into how our perception of stable properties is often a cognitive achievement built upon subjective experience.

This process has profound implications for our understanding of scientific 'objectivity.' Many of the core constructs of scientific theories - force, energy, field, causality, even fundamental particles - are not direct objects of perception. They are theoretical constructs or conceptual models that we, as a community of conceptualizers, impose upon our observations to make them coherent, predictable, and manipulable [6]. These models are frequently built from conceptual metaphors that root abstract understanding in embodied experience. For example, understanding energy as a substance that can be transferred or conserved [6]. Newtonian gravity as a 'force' acting at a distance is not an objective entity we see; it is a magnificent cognitive model that successfully organizes our experience of falling apples and orbiting planets. Its 'objectivity' lies not in its mind-independent existence, but in the robust intersubjective agreement. It commands within a community that has adopted a shared set of conventionalized viewing arrangements - a shared paradigm [13].

Scientific discourse masterfully employs the optimal viewing arrangement. A research paper states, 'The compound inhibited the enzyme by 75%.' The scientists, their equipment, their theoretical assumptions, and the institutional context are all pushed offstage, maximally subjectively construed. The result appears as a pure, objective fact about the world. But this is a rhetorical and cognitive achievement, not an ontological revelation. The entire statement is grounded in a vast, implicit network of intersubjective practices: the calibration of instruments, the peer-review process, the statistical methods deemed valid, and the very definition of 'inhibition.' The conceptual ground - the speech event of the scientific community—remains the essential foundation. What we call scientific objectivity is, therefore, a form of highly disciplined and critically examined intersubjectivity. It is the most reliable method humans have devised for achieving stable, shared conceptions, but it does not escape the fundamental $S > O$ structure of cognition. This intersubjective stability is what Kuhn described as the hallmark of "normal science," a consensus that is always potentially revisable, not a final picture of nature [13].

3.4. Linguistic grounding and intersubjective coordination

The argument against a transcendent objectivity finds further, concrete support in the linguistic principle of grounding. Langacker argues that a full nominal, such as 'this cat', or a finite clause such as 'the cat sleeps' does more than merely profile an entity or process; it grounds that profile in the immediate context of the speech event and its participants [2]. This ground (G) comprises the speaker, the hearer, their interaction, and their immediate circumstances (time, place, shared knowledge). Grounding is what allows an expression to be situated and thus communicatively relevant. It is the antithesis of a context-free, objective statement.

Deictic elements make this grounding explicit. Words like I, you, here, now, this, and that are pure grounding devices, their meanings wholly dependent on the parameters of the speech event. However, even the most abstract, technical, or 'objective-sounding' language is ultimately grounded. The statement 'Water boils at 100°C at standard atmospheric pressure' is grounded in a shared scientific discourse community that accepts the metric system. It is a statement designed for a specific ground of knowledgeable interlocutors. This grounding extends to the very acquisition of language and concepts, which, as Tomasello demonstrates, is a profoundly intersubjective process [10]. Children learn words and concepts not in isolation, but through joint attentional scenes. That is because, in attentional scenes, their understanding is coordinated with that of a caregiver, thus it builds a common ground of shared experience from the very beginning.

This points to the primary function of language, particularly in epistemic contexts: intersubjective coordination [11]. Language is not a system for transferring pre-packaged, objective thoughts from one mind to another. It is a tool for managing and aligning the cognitive domains of different individuals—for guiding the hearer to construct a mental scene that resembles, as closely as possible, the one the speaker intends. An 'objective' scientific report is, in this light, a sophisticated instrument of alignment. It uses a specialized lexicon, a precise syntax, and an impersonal voice (the optimal viewing arrangement) to prompt a vast community of conceptualizers to perform highly similar construal operations, thereby achieving a coordinated understanding. Verhagen frames this as "perspectivization," where every utterance involves managing perspectives to achieve cognitive coordination [11].

This coordination relies on a continuously negotiated common ground. This includes shared experiences, cultural knowledge, and conventionalized cognitive models [10,11]. Therefore, the stability and apparent objectivity of our shared world are a product of continuous, dynamic intersubjective negotiation and calibration, instead of a reflection of an unmediated external reality.

Our most 'objective' truths are those that have achieved the highest degree of conventionalization and stability within our intersubjective networks. This process of achieving shared understanding through language and other symbolic means is the cultural-evolutionary mechanism, creates what we experience as a stable, objective world [11].

3.5. Discussion

The processes of subjectification and grounding further elucidate how this perspectival nature is often hidden, giving rise to the powerful illusion of objectivity. Subjectification shows how objective-seeming properties are often cognitive traces of our subjective interaction with the world [3]. Grounding reveals that all meaning is ultimately anchored in a specific communicative context, requiring a conceptualizer and an audience [2,11]. What humans valorize as objective fact—in both everyday life and scientific practice—is more accurately understood as intersubjective stability: a consensus built upon shared, conventionalized cognitive models, viewing arrangements, and cultural practices that have proven effective for action, prediction, and communication [11-13].

This deconstruction does not lead to a defeatist relativism or a denial of the real world. On the contrary, it advocates for a more sophisticated and honest embodied realism. It acknowledges that we are finite, embodied beings with specific cognitive architectures, interacting with a real environment. Our knowledge of that environment is always mediated by our cognitive and linguistic systems, and shaped by our social and historical position [6,10]. Recognizing this should not paralyze inquiry but should instead foster intellectual humility, a critical reflexivity about our own presuppositions, a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human conceptual systems, and a clearer understanding of science as the most rigorous form of human intersubjective sense-making [12,13]. The end of objectivity as a God's-eye ideal marks the beginning of a more mature, responsible, and nuanced understanding of how we, collectively, build and inhabit our worlds with mind and word.

4. Conclusion

Malinowski's demonstration of language as a pragmatic, context-driven, and cultural tool, which dismantles the foundational possibility of pure objectivity. This theory proposes a better notion that is fully capable of replacing objectivity - a recognition of inter-subjectivity—the shared, negotiated, and practical understandings that allow communities to function.

Simultaneously, acknowledging the death of objectivity is a call for intellectual humility, a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, and a more honest understanding of how we, as social beings, collectively build our worlds with words.

Langacker's Cognitive Grammar, through the analytic power of the Stage Model, delivers a compelling and systematic argument against the philosophical tenet of pure objectivity. It demonstrates that conception is an active, constructive process of construal, inherently governed by perspective, attentional focus, and abstraction. The conceptualizing subject is not a passive camera recording the world but an active architect. It situated offstage yet fundamentally responsible for the scene that appears onstage. The very structure of cognition renders a 'view from nowhere' a logical and phenomenological impossibility.

This research has examined the concept of objectivity through two theoretical linguistic models, providing explanations on pragmatic functions to broaden people's view on beliefs - as it has been proven by linguistic studies, there is no such thing as an authorized objective stand point. However, as the resources of this field are not rich, the study is done on limited models, hope the researchers

in the future may dive deeper into this field, combining classic linguistic theory with modern phenomena, offering enriching perspectives to motivate human species' reflection.

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