

No, we don't need predicate frames

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1 Introduction

At the beginning of his academic career, Kees Hengeveld made several theoretical proposals that continue to be integral to current Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008) and find interesting parallels in other linguistic frameworks. In this brief contribution I intend to pay attention to two of these proposals, the introduction of illocutionary and predication frames, which in my opinion exemplify Kees's keen understanding of linguistic data and his insightful theoretical observations, both of which have consistently characterized his work over the years.

2 Frames: between FG and FDG

After a first publication on copular verbs in Spanish which was based on his MA thesis (Hengeveld 1986), Kees Hengeveld published a number of articles on clause analysis in Simon Dik's Functional Grammar (FG; Hengeveld 1987, 1989, 1990). Although his most notable contribution in that area is the introduction of a layered approach to clause structure in FG (Hengeveld 1989), I would like to focus here on his proposal to introduce frames as basic units of representation in grammatical analysis.

Taking inspiration from Speech Act theory (Searle 1969) and Ross's (1970) performative hypothesis, Hengeveld (1987) suggested that propositions should be inserted in general illocutionary frames (ILL) which define the grammatically encoded communicative value of clauses. Hengeveld (1989) refined this initial idea and proposed that clauses comprise two levels of representation: a representational and an interpersonal one. At the interpersonal level, illocutionary frames are provided with argument positions for the speech participants (S, A) and the proposition itself (X), and restrict a clause variable (E) (Hengeveld 1989: 129):

(1) (E₁: [ILL (S) (A) (X₁: [proposition] (X₁))] (E₁))

By distinguishing between propositions, which designate propositional contents, and clauses, which designate speech acts, Kees was able to overcome one of the criticisms raised against Ross's performative hypothesis, namely, the fact that units operating at the speech act level were not affected by truth-conditional considerations, which in his proposal are restricted to the propositional layer (X) only (Hengeveld 1990: 5). The result is that together with FG's predicate frames, which define a lexeme's argument structure, utterances are constructed on the basis of two types of frames (Hengeveld 1990: 6):

(2) Illocutionary Frame: ILL (S) (A) (X₁)
 Predicate Frame pred_β (x₁)... (x_n)

The representation in (2) might suggest that predicate frames are also general schemas in which predicates need to be inserted. This, however, was not the case in classical FG, where basic predicates were stored in the lexicon with a predicate frame specifying their quantitative and qualitative valency, their syntactic category and selection restrictions in argument positions. An example taken from Dik (1989: 68) is given in (3):

(3) $\text{give}_V(x_1: \text{<anim>}(x_1))_{A_g}(x_2)_{G_0}(x_3: \text{<anim>}(x_3))_{R_e}$

One consequence of this analysis was that rules of derivational morphology necessarily took predicate frames as input structures, which led to a number of theoretical problems. One of them was the need to postulate one rule for the use of terms in predicative function (e.g. *Sarah is a musician*). Hengeveld (1992a), however, proposed an alternative solution which involved representing predicates with a variable ‘f’, a possibility hinted at by Dik (1989: 50) and also argued for by Keizer (1992). This allowed the insertion of referring expressions (symbolized by ‘x’) in the head position of predicative units in non-verbal predication of different kinds. Indeed, a typological study of non-verbal predication was the topic of his doctoral dissertation (Hengeveld 1992b) in which he made use of this solution too and proposed the introduction of “very general predicate frames” like the one in (4) (Hengeveld 1992b: 80):

(4) (f_i: (x₁) (f_i)) (x₂)

In a joint publication entitled *Do we need predicate frames?* (García Velasco & Hengeveld 2002), we generalized this idea and argued on pragmatic, psychological and typological grounds that predicate frames were not necessary at all in FG and should be replaced with the more general ‘predication frame’, whose inventory should be determined on a language by language basis. This

meant doing away with the notion of a lexeme's argument structure altogether, as it was replaced with general predication types with which lexemes themselves can be combined given semantic compatibility.

Together with many other ideas and theoretical considerations put forward by different scholars working in the FG tradition, the introduction of frames paved the way for the emergence of a grammatical model of declarative and modular nature, two properties which characterize current FDG. In the following section, I will comment on the historical significance of those proposals and provide examples of their current relevance by referring to work in non-FDG circles.

3 Predication frames and interpersonal grammar

The use of frames, syntactic templates or constructions may seem natural these days given the significant success of constructional approaches to grammar. It is therefore important to view Kees's proposals as described in the previous section in their historical context. Construction Grammar emerged in the early 80's as a reaction to mainstream generativist approaches that made use of phrase structure rules in syntactic analysis and disregarded the notion of ready-made construction as a relevant theoretical tool. As discussed in Fried & Östman (2004: 41), the construction grammar approach to argument structure, which characterizes the work of Goldberg (1995), took inspiration from Fillmore's frame semantics, which introduced interpretive frames as general conceptualizations of events. Lexemes are assumed to provide the list of participants necessary to express their meaning in morphosyntax. The result is a complex lexical entry which contains both an interpretive frame, the lexeme's argument structure or valence and its syntactic realization. Kees's proposal, however, is more restrictive, as predication frames contain semantic information only. In fact, by avoiding the use of constructions as signs containing syntactic and semantic information, the notion of frame could be extended to morphosyntactic and phonological analysis, thus creating a much more flexible system which allows different combinations of units among levels of representation. This idea is akin to Jackendoff's (1997) parallel architecture, a theory which also posits autonomous levels of linguistic representation.

It is also worth noting that the introduction of general predicate frames is crucially based on typological findings. The existence of languages with lexemes which can be used in different syntactic functions (Hengeveld 1992a; 1992b) as well as languages which show severe restrictions as to the number and type of arguments their predicates may take (see García Velasco & Hengeveld 2002: 108 for some discussion) suggests that a system which separates lexemes

from the syntactic environments in which they can occur is more adequate to account for the diversity found in the languages of the world in this domain.

Another consequence of the introduction of the frames in (2) above is that the predicate-argument relation can be extended to other areas of grammatical analysis. Together with the assumption that utterances encode information of representational and interpersonal nature, the door was open for a detailed characterization of interpersonal meaning, which resulted in the introduction of a dedicated level or representation (the *Interpersonal Level*) in current FDG, with a layered organization similar to that found at the semantic and syntactic levels. This allows for a consistent treatment of heads, modifiers and operators of an interpersonal nature. As an example, consider the case of interjections. As far back as 1992, Hengeveld (1992a: 41) proposed that interjections should function as heads of the utterance, therefore occupying the same position as abstract illocutions in illocutionary frames. As mentioned earlier, illocutionary frames provide argument positions for the speech participants and the propositional content¹ of the clause, which in turn entails that it is possible to classify interjections on the basis of their argument-taking properties. This is exactly what Heine (2023: 85) does in his recent monograph on interactives. An interjection like *ouch!*, for example, takes the Speaker as its only argument, whereas others like *eh?* are said to take a Speaker, Hearer and a piece of ‘text’ as argument.

It is probably fair to say then that Kees’s proposal has adumbrated the existence of an interpersonal grammar organized on the basis of principles similar to those relevant in morphosyntax and semantics. In a way, this was a natural methodological move for a functionalist approach to language study, but it is interesting to note that similar ideas have been developed in non-functional models over the past few years. In Generative Grammar, for example, the possibility of extending clause structure with dedicated syntactic positions for pragmatically salient phrases has been around since at least Chomsky (1977). However, it was probably Rizzi’s (1997) proposal to split Chomsky’s Complementizer Phrase (CP) into different functional projections that meant the beginning of a research programme on the ‘syntacticization of discourse’, under the assumption that syntactic principles are also responsible for the projection of intrasentential pragmatic functions and the illocutionary force of the clause. This so-called ‘cartographic’ approach has recently led to the postulation of a Speech Act layer responsible for interactional language (see, e.g., Haegeman 2014; Wiltschko 2021; Corr 2022; and Miyagawa 2022). Together with an interest in the properties of expressive meaning in formal

¹ Note that propositional contents are considered part of the *Representational Level* in current FDG. At the *Interpersonal Level*, they correlate with the *Communicated Content*.

semantics (Potts 2007; Gutzmann 2019), Kees's move anticipated that interpersonal meaning was amenable to formal treatment as well as an integral part of grammatical analysis and has indirectly identified an area of linguistic research in which it is possible for alternative and sometimes opposing traditions to converge and hopefully interact fruitfully.

4 Conclusion

The title of this contribution is somehow a misnomer. It is an answer to the rhetorical question we used as the title of the publication I had the pleasure to write together with Kees. Although we concluded that lexeme-specific predicate frames were not necessary in FG, Kees's work has made it clear that general frames and templates are useful and effective tools in grammatical description at all levels of analysis. Most importantly, he has done so on the basis of a careful examination of linguistic data deriving from his intensive typological work on part-of-speech systems and an understanding of language as a system of interhuman communication which has characterized the Amsterdam functionalist school over the past 50 years.

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