On Manners and Circumstances*

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1. Introduction

Prototypical verbs are so-called content words that classify events (in the broad sense of eventuality, including activities and states) in more or less conventional ways. In general such event concepts are quite abstract or schematic, focusing on specific aspects or dimensions of the events they subsume. Consequently, event descriptions encoded in corresponding simple verb-argument structures are often modified in various ways, along parameters that depend on the meaning of the verb in question. Manner adverbials, instrumental adverbs and related adjunct categories are one type of linguistic means serving such an end. Thus König, in his paper *The meaning of converb constructions* (König 1995: 164), argues that the term ‘manner adverbial’ “should only be used for sentences describing two aspects or dimensions of only one event” as in (1a): You cannot stammer without (trying to) say something, stammering relates to one particular dimension of speaking, viz. articulation, which is always present in a speaking event, whether or not anything is explicitly said about that dimension.

(1) a Thanks, he said *stammering*. (König 1995: 64)
   b He earns money *by accompanying new members*. (ib.)
   c He opened the door *with his own keys*.

Similarly, sentences containing instrumental adverbials like the *by*-location in (1b) and the *with*-phrase in (1c) describe “one single action from two different angles”; but instrumentals differ from manner adverbials in that they occur only with event or action predicates that are “neutral in [their] meaning with respect to the method of performing the action in question” (König 1995: 67).
However, we are evidently also able to conceive of and speak of more complex – ‘bigger’ – events that do not fall under our lexicalised concepts and cannot be captured by a single verb-argument structure. In English a simple event description can be enriched or expanded accordingly by way of so-called free *ing*-adjuncts (in the terminology of Kortmann 1995, Behrens 1998), among other options; cf. (2).

(2) He looked at her again, still caressing her hair. (König 1995: 67)

The *ing*-phrase in (2) encodes what is traditionally termed an ‘attendant circumstance’ (or ‘accompanying circumstance’) – a term which, according to König (1995), in contrast to ‘manner’ and ‘instrumental adverbial’, should be used for cases where two independent events or actions are involved, either of which could be stopped without affecting the other, but which manifest a unity of time and place and thus also a ‘perceptual unity’ (König 1995: 67).

Obviously, caressing somebody is not part of looking at him/her and can be done independently of that activity.

The distinction between adjuncts of the manner or instrumental type on the one hand, which relate to inherent dimensions of the event described by the head-VP or main verb-argument structure, and on the other hand adjuncts introducing independent attendant circumstances on the scene seems quite clear-cut and easily applicable as presented by König (1995). The present paper aims to show that, on closer inspection, things are somewhat more complicated. Using the verb or concept ‘to stand’ as my point of departure, I shall argue that it may not be possible or even useful to draw a sharp borderline between the two types of eventive modification; and that more refined analyses are needed to account for the context sensitivity of such modification. In more general terms, my issue concerns the interplay between different components (syntax, lexical semantics, and pragmatics) in the construction of sentence meanings and, in particular, the division of labour between semantics and pragmatics.
2. How to stand

An utterance like (3) tells us something about the general posture of Thorstein’s body (upright position, feet/foot carrying his weight) and, thanks to the location argument, the location of his body (doorway), as illustrated in fig. 1 (on the next page); and it tells us that he is not moving, i.e. changing his location. But that leaves room for much variation, as shown in fig. 2a-c.

(3) Thorstein stood in the doorway.

Thus, (3) gives a rather sketchy description of the eventuality or situation it is meant to refer to; it yields a semantic representation of an event with few conditions on it – and probably also a mental picture lacking in details, depending to a certain extent on the hearer’s background knowledge, i.e. her/his knowledge of Thorstein as well as situational knowledge.

Some details are irrelevant from a semantic (truth-functional) point of view in that they do not influence the adequacy of the description given in (3) – the truth or falsity of the utterance (3) in the given situation. Others are not: thus if Thorstein is bending his knees as much as in fig. 3c, we may begin to discuss whether he isn’t rather squatting than standing; and if he is rotating on his heels or balancing on one leg as in fig. 3a, we might consider the description in (3) incomplete or somewhat misleading; likewise, if he is bending down as in fig. 3b. With figure 4, on the other hand, we have definitely left the realm of standing.

Properties or features of the latter kind are criterial in the sense that they determine – more or less fuzzily – the borderlines between different concepts or the semantic distinction between different lexical items within the same conceptual or semantic space (Gärdenfors 2000). But as a stage-level property of human beings, standing somewhere in practice involves the body as a whole, not just the legs and the upper part of the body. So all of the figures 1, 2a-c and, possibly, 3a-c may be said to illustrate different sub-types of Thorstein standing in the doorway although some of them differ only in dimensions that are not directly relevant to the concept of standing. And, lacking further explicit information, we will probably fill in the picture conjured up by the description in (3) in some more or less stereotypical manner involving both criterial and non-criterial dimensions, as in fig. 2a vs. fig. 1.
3. Filling in the picture
In English, there are at least three linguistic means of explicitly “filling in the picture” sentence-internally: free \textit{ing}-adjuncts, absolutes (small clauses with a verbal or non-verbal predicate), and absolutes “augmented by” the preposition \textit{with}.\textsuperscript{4} Thus (4) might serve as an answer to a follow-up question to (3) \textit{How did he stand / was he standing?}
Thorstein stood in the doorway [with [SC[[his arms][behind his back]]], [VPing leaning slightly forward], [SC [his legs] [wide apart]]].

In other words, the italicised adjuncts, like manner adverbials, may be said to restrict the event type denoted by the VP they are adjoined to along given dimensions, viz. the posture of different (more or less relevant) body parts. Thus (4) seems to denote a proper subset of the set of events denoted by the simple predicate-argument structure seen in (3). (In fact, as mentioned in section 2, the concept of x standing somewhere is complex, “conflating” (Talmy 2000: 27ff.) components from different conceptual domains: (a) the attitude of x’s body, in particular his/her legs, and (b) the property of x being stationary. Obviously, the information added by the specifying adjuncts in (4) concern the (a)-domain alone.)

At the same time, however, the adjuncts in (4) introduce eventualities (states) of their own: Thorstein’s arms being behind his back (or Thorstein having/holding his arms behind his back), Thorstein (or the upper part of his body) leaning forward and Thorstein’s legs being wide apart; and these eventualities may obtain independently of whether Thorstein is standing or e.g. sitting or lying and consequently should be taken to represent attendant circumstances rather than specific aspects of Thorstein’s standing in the minimal sense suggested initially (section 2). Such concomitant events (co-events, for short) are linked to the core event (‘Thorstein standing in the doorway’) by what, in the spirit of Rothstein (2003), may, be termed TSP- (Time-Space-Participant-) connectedness. They are taken to overlap the core event spatiotemporally; and the agent of the core event is understood as participating, directly or indirectly, in the co-events, as indicated by the fact that the subject of the main verb binds or controls the zero subject anaphor (PRO) of the ing-phrase (leaning …) as well as the overt possessor anaphor his occurring with the body-part descriptions his arms, his legs in the first (‘subject’) constituent of the two absolute constructions.

Summarizing the discussion above, there seem to be two alternative ways of conceiving the division of labour between the main verb (phrase) and the adjuncts in constructing the meaning of a sentence like (4):

i. We can take ‘to stand’, predicated of a human being, to have a rich, multidimensional meaning at the outset, involving not only the cri-
terial properties mentioned in section 2 (upright position, feet on ground, no change of place) but also additional non-criterial parameters pertaining to other parts of the human body than those that are relevant for the distinction between ‘to stand’ and e.g. ‘to sit’ or ‘to hang’. Under that analysis, the TSP-connected adjuncts assigning a value to these other parameters are indeed manner adjuncts that restrict the denotation of the VP to a sub-type of the ‘standing’ type of eventualities.

ii. Or we take the meaning of ‘to stand’ to involve only the criterial properties. In that case, the TSP-connected adjuncts in (4) trigger the construction of a more complex, ‘bigger’ event referent that includes the core event of standing as well as the co-events but which is not itself an element of the set of simple or minimal standing events.

As far as I can judge, the second alternative corresponds to Eckardt’s (1998) conception of complex properties of events: Having defined a summation operation on properties, $\oplus_*$, Eckardt notes that if an event $e$ has the complex property $P \oplus_* Q$, then it is neither an event of type $P$ nor an event of type $Q$. As a consequence,

$$[I]f \text{ we take a property } P \text{ of } [\text{events}], \text{ we will find that almost no event is } P. \text{ Let } P = \lambda e. \text{SING(JOHN)}, \text{ Now there may be a few singings of John, and maybe even non-atomic ones. But as soon as John does anything else in an event } e, \text{ either exclusively or as part of } e, \text{ we will immediately have } \neg \text{SING(JOHN)}(e). \text{ (Eckardt 1998:113)}$$

In other words: most events are complex and have complex properties.

4. More filling in

Now consider (5):

(5) Thorstein stood [$V_{\text{ing}}$ smiling] in the doorway [$\text{with } [\text{SC [a glass of white wine]}[\text{in his hands}]]], [VP_{\text{ing}}$ humming to himself], [SC [$\text{a content look}$][in his eyes]].

The emphasised adjuncts in (5) belong to the same syntactic categories and exhibit the same type of TSP-connectedness to the matrix clause as
those in (4); that is, they, too, describe concomitant eventualities. But (5) does not seem quite adequate as an answer to the question *How did he stand/was he standing?* We would not want to claim that the adjuncts simply specify the manner of Thorstein’s standing or that the expanded VP denotes a specific variety of the standing type of event. An analysis in accordance with the second alternative mentioned above (section 3) seems to be the only option: The adjuncts describe proper sub-events of a ‘bigger’ event that includes the standing event described by the head VP. Smiling, humming to oneself and looking content – within certain limits even having a glass of wine in one’s hands – are eventualities that may obtain independently of whether one is standing, sitting or lying etc.; but they do form a “perceptual unit” (König 1995) with eventualities of the latter kind. Thus, the co-events in (5) undoubtedly qualify as attendant/accompanying circumstances, as defined by König (1995) (see section 1). But although they do not specify ‘ways of standing’ in the strict sense, they still may be said to fill in the picture evoked by the main verb-argument structure since it is part of common knowledge that people don’t simply stand somewhere – there is always more to be said.

So what distinguishes (5) from (4) seems to be that the co-events in (5) involve other dimensions of the standing person than the spatial orientation of his body (parts) while the adjuncts in (4) are concerned with that dimension alone – in accordance with one of the components of the minimal meaning of ‘to stand’ (cf. section 2). But even so, the difference is not quite clear-cut since the eventualities described by e.g. *leaning slightly forward* and *with his arms behind his back* in (4) can also be conceived of as activities controlled by the subject, like e.g. *humming to himself* in (5). And *with a glass of wine in his hands* in (5) is a borderline case, anyway.

5. Co-event (in)dependency

As mentioned in section 1, König (1995) relates the distinction between attendant circumstance and manner to whether the concomitant eventuality can occur independently of the core event or not. The co-events in (6a-c) clearly belong to the independent type.
a. Thorstein stood in the doorway, *smiling and humming to himself*.
b. She left her office at 6 p.m., *with a splitting headache and longing for her bed*.
c. Philip followed behind, *laughing loudly and waving his hands*.

The adjuncts in (7) and (8), on the other hand, describe dependent (or contingent) co-events in as far as they carry presuppositions that are satisfied by the main verb phrase: Stammering presupposes speaking; leaning forward presupposes that the upper part of the body is in a more or less upright position at the outset; similarly, carrying something demands a certain body posture and normally also involves movement (walking, running etc.); and you cannot take something with you without changing your location.

(7) a. Thanks, he said *stammering*. (= (1))
b. Thorstein stood in the doorway, *leaning slightly forward*.

(8) a. Philip followed behind, *carrying a carved bed head*.
b. She left the office at 6 p.m., *taking a stack of files with her*.

But despite the similarity between the two sets of examples as far as the criterion of dependency is concerned, one hesitates to classify the adjuncts in (8a-b) as manner adverbials since they differ from those in (7a-b) by not pertaining to an inherent dimension of the core event, as explained in section 1; and in addition, they involve a second participant that is neither a participant of the core event nor linked to the agent of the two events.

6. Conclusion

I have tried to show that as far as the function of eventive adjuncts – adjuncts denoting properties of eventualities – is concerned, the borderline between manner specification and accompanying/attendant circumstance cannot be drawn quite as neatly as seems to be generally assumed (cf. König 1995, for instance). Rather, we observe, firstly, a cline between enriching the description of the core event along dimen-
sions that are undoubtedly inherent in the meaning of the main verb (phrase), on the one hand, and along dimensions that are evidently not part of the meaning of the verb (phrase) in question but nevertheless pragmatically given or implicated by the core event, on the other hand – as for instance what a person is thinking or feeling or doing with her/his hands while standing somewhere.

Secondly, the co-eventuality may be asymmetrically dependent on the core event in the sense that the latter satisfies some necessary condition for the former to obtain, but not vice versa; or the co-event may be independent in that respect. However the distinction between dependent and independent co-events seems to cut across the distinction between manner and attendant/accompanying circumstance.

Thirdly, concomitant events differ as to how intimately they are connected to the core event in terms of participating discourse referents i.e. whether participants of the co-event are related to participants of the core event by reference identity or some other bridging relation, including metonymy, or whether the co-event introduces additional discourse referents that are not linked to the core event in any way, as in (8). Fourthly and finally, it is not a big step from concomitant eventualities of the kind discussed in the preceding sections to accompanying circumstances in a looser sense, representing a kind of background information that is not clearly connected to the main event along dimensions other than the spatial and temporal dimensions. But in cases like that, independent sentences probably tend to be preferred to sentence-internal ing-adjuncts and absolutes; cf. (9).8

(9) a. They walked home arm in arm. The snow was falling heavily.  
   b. They walked home arm in arm, the snow falling heavily.  
   c. They walked home arm in arm, with the snow falling heavily.

We can also conclude that the distinction between manner and attendant/accompanying circumstance cannot be drawn independently of one’s theory of lexical semantics, the syntax-semantics interface and the role of pragmatics in the construction of sentence meanings.

First, we need to understand what – and how – the lexical verb and its argument(s) contribute to the sentence meaning, respectively. Thus, if we assign a very abstract minimal meaning to the verb ‘to stand’, the human subject argument will carry a heavy load in determining the
meaning of a simple verb-argument structure like (3) Thorstein stood in the doorway. Alternatively, we have to do with a specific variant of ‘to stand’ that demands an animate subject; i.e. ‘to stand’ is polysemous. At any rate, as soon as a discourse referent falling under the predicate ‘human being’ is introduced on the scene, e.g. as standing in the doorway, all aspects of human beings are implicitly present, too, and can be elaborated on within the same sentence or in the subsequent discourse: what s/he looks like, how s/he is holding her/his head, what s/he is doing with her/his hands, whether s/he is using her/his mouth, what is going on in her/his head and heart, and so forth. So even if nothing further is said explicitly, the reader/listener will know that more could be said. He or she may leave it at that in his/her interpretation or construction of a mental representation, not bothering to fill in details that are not warranted by the utterance in question or its immediate context. This will be the most adequate or sensible strategy when we have to do with dimensions that offer an unbounded set of alternative specifications like, for instance, what Thorstein may be thinking or saying (if anything) while standing in the doorway. In such cases the reader/listener will end up with a rather poor, sketchy representation – unless explicit information is added in the shape of, e.g., eventive adjuncts. For certain aspects of the described situation, however, the set of alternative specifications is more restricted at the outset and may even include a subset of normal or prototypical values, as illustrated with the “standing” case in section 2. In that case the reader/listener is more likely to construe a representation that is more specific than indicated by linguistic means; and adjuncts in such domains may have the effect of cancelling default interpretations rather than supplying un-asked-for information.

How much of all this is semantics and how much pragmatics is a matter of discussion: depending on one’s theoretical preferences one will maximise the role of one or the other. But the main challenge is how to account for the interaction of these two sources of information in a sufficiently precise and, at the same time, principled way. Compared to that task the issue discussed in this paper is of minor importance. But it could prove an adequate test case for theories trying to meet the major challenge.9

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Notes

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1. For more detailed discussions of such predicates and “method-specifying” adverbials see e.g. Pusch (1980), Sæbø (to appear),

2. In what follows, I shall use the terms ‘head-VP’ and ‘main verb-argument structure as synonyms.

3. Thus, the OED Online distinguishes the following readings (among others) of the intransitive verb ‘to stand’: “To assume or maintain an erect attitude on one’s feet (with distinction, expressed or understood, from sit, lie, kneel, etc.)” and “To remain motionless on one’s feet”.


5. It should be stressed that I use ‘concomitant events’ in a broader sense than Talmy (2000: 46), whose relation of Concomitance apparently corresponds to König’s Attendant Circumstance.


7. According to Talmy “[I]n their traditional use the verbs hold and carry formed a near-suppletive pair, differing only in that carry traditionally incorporated a Motion event while hold did not. […] Currently, though, carry in some contexts – those where motion has just occurred or is about to occur – can also be used in a locative sense: I stood at the front door carrying the box.” (Talmy 2000: 34)


9. Cf. Blutner and Zeevat (2004), Carston (2002), Genabith et al. (t.a.), Wilson and Sperber (2004); see also Eckardt (1998), Maienborn (2003), and Sæbø (t.a.) for more specific suggestions related to adjuncts.

References


