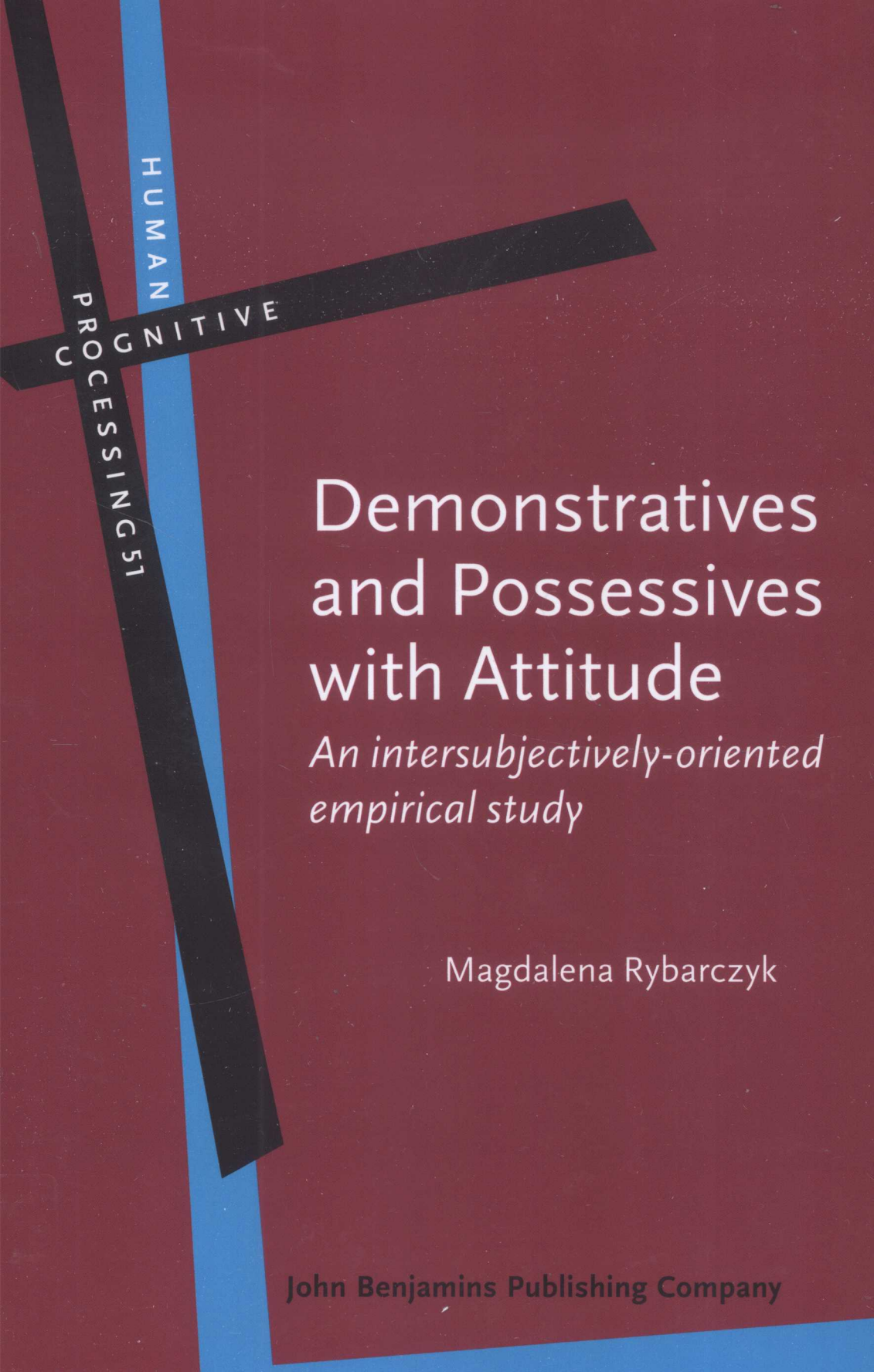

Demonstratives and Possessives with Attitude

An intersubjectively-oriented empirical study

Magdalena Rybarczyk

John Benjamins Publishing Company

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To Dorota

Acknowledgements

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This study is embedded in the theory of Cognitive Grammar developed by Ronald W. Langacker. I would like to express my appreciation for Professor Langacker, who kindly read an earlier version of this book and gave me encouragement to carry on with my work.

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List of abbreviations

ADJ	adjective
C	conceptualizer
CDS	current discourse space
D	dominion
DAT	dative case
DEM	demonstrative
F	focus of attention
G	ground
GEN	genitive case
H	hearer
ICM	idealized cognitive model
INT	interrogative
IS	immediate scope
MS	maximal scope
N	noun
NP	noun phrase
OS	onstage region
POSS	possessive
PROX	region of proximity
R	reference point
REFL	reflexive
S	speaker
T	target

Preface

As a blonde shuffles through a newspaper,
an obituary attracts her attention. It reads:
Loving mom, wife, daughter, sister, friend, neighbor
and colleague, passed away suddenly on Monday, August 4, 2011.
The blonde breaks down in tears. 'What a tragedy' – she gasps –
'to lose so many good women all at once…'

Reflecting on the humorous effect of the joke quoted above may well serve as a point of departure for the present book. A simple observation that *mom, wife, daughter, sister, friend, neighbor,* and *colleague* can all simultaneously describe the same person raises questions about the relation of language to reality. It is a fundamentally misguided notion that a given element, such as a lexical item, has a single linguistic meaning and corresponds to a single entity in the real world. A linguistic item is often used to mean a number of things. Conversely, one and the same entity is often referred to by means of different expressions on different occasions of speech. Different wordings correlate with semantic differences even though they may be used to indicate the same "objective element" or "state of affairs" (Tuggy 1980, 1981; Langacker 1987). Why would the speaker choose a variety of referring expressions to direct his addressee's attention to one and the same entity? The main function of referring expressions is often seen as that of identifying a referent, but this is only one aspect of it. The choice of a referring expression is frequently influenced not only by *what* speakers wish to refer to, but also by *how* this entity appears to them, how it connects with speech participants, how it is evaluated and categorized with respect to the specific communicative act. Judging by her reaction, the blonde of the joke believes that each of the relational nouns in the obituary corresponds to a different individual. The fact that her naivety amuses us to the point of laughter testifies to our unconscious excellence in resolving reference in the context of use.

The true point of departure for this book is indeed an observation of the dynamic reference to a particular entity in contextualized language. The dynamicity manifests itself in the use of various nominal referring expressions to point to the same individual or thing on different occasions and for different purposes. The kind of referring expressions that are of interest to the present study are exemplified in (1).

(1) *Dorota* 'Dorota', *moja Dorota* 'my Dorota', *ta Dorota* 'this Dorota', *ta twoja Dorota* '[this] your Dorota', *nasza Dorota* 'our Dorota'

The nominal phrases in (1) are semantically non-equivalent even though they all contain the same proper name and describe the same referent individual. They differ in how this individual is mentally accessed. As closed-class forms, demonstrative and possessive determiners shape conceptual structure rather than conceptual content (see Talmy 2006). A distinctive contribution of cognitive grammar (as developed by Langacker 1987, 1991, and his followers) is to approach this structure as meaningful and thus treat grammatical elements as forms that symbolize meanings. The term that is used in cognitive linguistics for different ways of structuring a particular situation is "construal" (see e.g. Langacker 1995a). Cognitive linguists, most notably Langacker (1987, 1991) and Talmy (1978), have proposed a number of classification schemes for construal phenomena. The present research makes use of aspects of construal such as "subjectivity", "vantage point", or "scanning" (Langacker e.g. 1985, 1995a). As observed by Verhagen, "these notions capture aspects of conceptualization that cannot be sufficiently analyzed in terms of properties of the object of conceptualization, but, in one way or another, necessarily involve a subject of conceptualization", i.e. the speaker and the hearer (2007:48). Recent studies have shown an increasing acknowledgement of the correlation between the speaker's stance (epistemic or emotional) and his choice of words and constructions (Fillmore 1990; Verhagen 2005; Dancygier and Sweetser 2005), as well as of a growing awareness of the intersubjective aspects of verbal communication (Sinha 1999; Zlatev et al. 2008).

The aim of the present study, which is embedded in the theory of cognitive grammar, is to offer an empirical analysis of the factors determining some referential choices in discourse, and to inquire into certain interrelations between nominal determination and the intrinsically relational nature of the human species. The focus is on demonstrative and possessive determiners. These elements have already been extensively studied and characterized in great detail. However, to my knowledge, the analyses so far have missed out at least some of the possibilities that these elements offer to online meaning construction. My approach will be to address the question of 'How can nominal determiners help us express attitudes and manage interpersonal relations in discourse?'.

The presentation builds from fundamentals: Chapter 1 introduces the descriptive framework, explicating cognitive linguistic models of cognitive structure and abilities and the cognitive theory of meaning. As a theory in which syntactic phenomena are subject to a semantic explanation, cognitive grammar constitutes the best framework for an exploration in the area of "subtle semantics" such as the one undertaken in the present book. The theoretical introduction is selective, tailored

specifically to the purposes of the present study. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to demonstratives and possessives respectively. In each chapter, I first review some theoretical constructs that one must invoke in order to give a credible and satisfying account of the data under analysis. In order to introduce the tools of analysis I often rely on English, which is the standard reference language of linguistic investigations and thus has the advantage of being thoroughly studied and accessible to most researchers. My own analyses, however, focus on Polish, whose linguistic conventions of referent identification provide a good background for illustrating certain points. The analyses of some mini-dialogues drawn mainly from family interactions exemplify the central role of the interactive context in communication and provide opportunities to identify some referential mechanisms that can be exploited to reflect and to shape the perception of ourselves and the interpersonal relations we engage in. The application of these referential mechanisms is ultimately investigated in an extended case study in Chapter 4. The proposed characterization of some discourse functions of demonstratives and possessives is tested and elaborated in the context of naturally occurring discourse pertaining to an important event in Polish history. In Chapter 5, the corpus-illustrated analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 and the corpus-driven approach in Chapter 4 are integrated with findings from exploratory experimental studies. Finally, Chapter 6 offers some concluding thoughts and a look to future research as well as methodological considerations regarding empirical methods for intersubjectively-oriented linguistic studies. A methodological discussion seems particularly relevant in the context of recent developments in cognitive linguistics. Recent writings within the discipline stress the importance of relying on empirical methods in linguistic investigations and list numerous benefits of applying complementary research methodologies (see Sandra 2009; Matlock and Winter 2013; Gonzales-Marquez et al. 2007). At the same time, social aspects of language gain more attention and authors emphasize the need to address the human ability to *share* and to perform *joint actions* from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Intersubjectivity is a phenomenon that currently dominates discussions concerning human social cognitive abilities and their manifestations in language. On the one hand, the recent social trend in cognitive linguistics is characterized by a growing body of empirical studies. On the other hand, it is evident in the abundance of work on the subject of intersubjectivity and the shared mind (see Sinha 1999; Zlatev et al. 2008; Sambre 2012). The present book is one suggestion of how the two may come closer together.

This work is concerned with questions that need to be asked in an interdisciplinary framework. I believe the features and specific functions of the closed-class forms under analysis here can be adequately conceived of only if one takes into account the socially and interpersonally interactive nature of linguistic communication.

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Therefore, although I claim no expertise in Cognitive Sociolinguistics, I make an attempt to include Langacker's construal operations in the investigations of discourse and to highlight their link with some psychological, sociological, and philosophical ideas about a *share-able* reality that is mediated through language.[1] Paying more attention to the social aspects of language requires that we revise and develop methods of linguistic analysis. My socio-cognitive study of deictic elements in Polish provides a good basis for a general reflection on both the advantages and disadvantages of selected empirical approaches and may inspire others to tailor the methods of linguistic analysis to specific research questions focused on the human capacity for intersubjectivity. On the most general level, I offer this work as a practical bridge between empirical work and theoretical statements addressing the centrality of intersubjectivity in communication. My interest is not description but explanation. I propose a corpus-driven approach in interaction with findings from experimental studies. My specific aim is to investigate implicit interpersonal relations evoked by the use of Polish demonstrative and possessive determiners in specific interactive circumstances and at the same time to make methodological advances towards a clearer usage-based direction of cognitive linguistic queries. The general significance of my work lies in offering an account of linguistic phenomena that are grounded in general cognitive processes of referent identification and referent tracking and that clearly have a social and interpersonal bearing. I hope that the implications for the analysis of other languages and for linguistic theory in general will be evident.

1. The need for Cognitive Linguistics to expand in these directions has been stressed by many linguists, see inter alia, Sinha 1999; Croft and Cruse 2004; Hart 2010.

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