Spoken language syntax and two kinds of frames

In his seminal article on Frame Semantics (1982), Charles Fillmore briefly speaks of the distinction between *cognitive frames* and *interactional frames.* Roughly speaking, the former are conceptualizations of states-of-affairs, and the like, which (among other things) organize what we talk about. The latter are conceptualizations of speech situations, interaction events, turn-taking patterns in conversations, and the like, which organize the way we talk.

The present paper is an attempt to bring these two kinds of frames together in an attempt to bring together Construction Grammar, spoken language data, and interaction. What I shall claim is roughly the following:

– Frames are an essential tool in organizing speech (both theoretically and conceptually).
– The distinction between cognitive and interactional frames is not only useful but indispensable for a proper understanding of the structure of spoken language.
– The concepts of *Frame* and *Construction* are both applicable to spoken language, and a proper understanding of speech requires both of the two.

In the following example, the speakers are obviously elaborating on the same cognitive frame (i.e. building an account of the same event or state-of-affairs). In the process, they observe conventional patterns of turn-taking, question & answer pairs, and the like, which may be accounted for in terms of interactional frames:

A: You know John, the new trainee, he, uh...
B: The one with blonde hair who wears the swe- the red sweater?
A: Yeah, he just gave Shirley a...
B: Shirley from the HR department?
A: Right, he gave her a, whaddyacallit, you know, one of those tiny rodents?
B: You mean a gerbil?
A: Right! He gave her a gerbil.

The semantic process of describing an event (or, to use Fauconnier's terminology, building a mental space) is coordinated by a cognitive frame which classifies the event as an act of giving, on the one hand. On the other, the ditransitive construction is easily found behind the seemingly twisting and winding flow of speech, adding another dimension of structuring to the communication process. Thirdly, conventions of asking and answering questions and switching between the roles of speaker and hearer constitute a different, interpersonal aspect of organization. Such conventions are the core of interactional linguistics, and they can be brought into the Construction Grammar / Frame Semantics school of thought as interactional frames.

The paper aims to show that a proper understanding of how language is organized requires taking all of these different principles or dimensions of organization into account. In the unification-based tradition, this can be achieved by using notions introduced by Charles Fillmore more than two decades ago: constructions, cognitive frames, and interactional frames.

References

Fauconnier, Gilles 1985. *Mental Spaces*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Fillmore, Charles J. 1982. Frame Semantics. In The Linguistic Society of Korea (ed.): *Linguistics in the Morning Calm.* Selected Papers from SICOL-1981. Seoul: Hanshin Publishing Company. 111–137.