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Chapter 4

Frames of Reference and Molyneux's Question: Crosslinguistic Evidence

Stephen C. Levinson

4.1 What This is All About

The title of this chapter invokes a vast intellectual panorama; yet instead of vistas, I will offer only a twisting trail. The trail begins with some quite surprising cross-cultural and crosslinguistic data, which leads inevitably on into intellectual swamps and minefields—issues about how our "inner languages" converse with one another, exchanging spatial information.

To preview the data, first, languages make use of different frames of reference for spatial description. This is not merely a matter of different use of the same set of frames of reference (although that also occurs); it is also a question of *which* frames of reference they employ. For example, some languages do not employ our apparently fundamental spatial notions of *left/right/front/back* at all; instead they may, for example, employ a cardinal direction system, specifying locations in terms of *north/south/east/west* or the like.

There is a second surprising finding. The choice of a frame of reference in linguistic coding (as required by the language) correlates with preferences for the same frame of reference in nonlinguistic coding over a whole range of nonverbal tasks. In short, there is a cross-modal tendency for the same frame of reference to be employed in language tasks, recall and recognition memory tasks, inference tasks, imagistic reasoning tasks, and even unconscious gesture. This suggests that the underlying representation systems that drive all these capacities and modalities have adopted the same frame of reference.

These findings, described in section 4.2, prompt a series of theoretical ruminations in section 4.3. First, we must ask whether it even makes sense to talk of the "same" frame of reference across modalities or inner representation systems.[1] Second, we must clarify the notion "frame of reference" in language, and suggest a slight reformation of the existing distinctions. Then we can, it seems, bring some of the distinctions made in other modalities into line with the distinctions made in the study of language, so that some sense can be made of the idea of "same frame of reference" across language, nonverbal memory, mental imagery, and so on. Finally, we turn to the question Why does the same frame of reference tend to get employed across modalities or at least across distinct inner representation systems? It turns out that information in one frame of reference cannot easily be converted into another, distinct frame of reference. This has interesting implications for what is known as "Molyneux's question," the question about how and to what extent there is cross-modal transfer of spatial information.

4.2 Cross-Modal Transfer of Frame of Reference: Evidence from Tenejapan Tzeltal

To describe where something (let us dub it the "figure") is with respect to something else (let us call it the "ground") we need some way of specifying angles on the horizontal. In English we achieve this either by utilizing features or axes of the ground (as in "the boy is at the front of the truck") or by utilizing angles derived from the viewer's body coordinates (as in "the boy is to the left of the tree"). The first solution I shall call an "intrinsic frame of reference"; the second, a "relative frame of reference" (because the description is relative to the viewpoint—from the other side of the tree the boy will be seen to be to the right of the tree). The notion "frame of reference" will be explicated in section 4.3 but can be thought of as labeling distinct kinds of coordinate systems.

At first sight, and indeed on close consideration (see, for example, Clark 1973; Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976), these solutions seem inevitable, the only natural solutions for a bipedal creature with particular bodily asymmetries on our planet. But they are not. Some languages use just the first solution. Some languages use neither of these solutions; instead, they solve the problem of finding angles on the horizontal plane by utilizing fixed bearings, something like our cardinal directions north, south, east, and west. Spatial descriptions utilizing such a solution can be said to be in an "absolute" frame of reference (because the angles are not relative to a point of view, i.e., are not relative, and are also independent of properties of the ground object, i.e., are not intrinsic). A tentative typology of the three major frames of reference in language, with some indication of the range of subtypes, will be found in section 4.3. Here I wish to introduce one such absolute system, as found in a Mayan language.

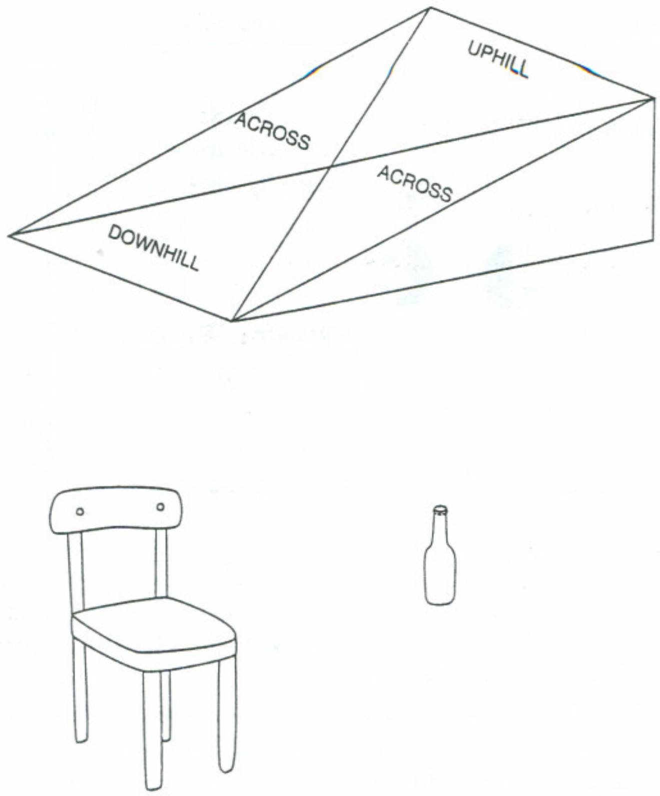
Tzeltal is a Mayan language widely spoken in Chiapas, Mexico, but the particular dialect described is spoken by at least 15,000 people in the Indian community of Tenejapa; I will therefore refer to the relevant population as Tenejapans. The results reported here are a part of an ongoing project, conducted with Penelope Brown (Brown and Levinson 1993a,b; Levinson and Brown 1994).

4.2.1 Tzeltal Absolute Linguistic Frame of Reference

Tzeltal has an elaborate intrinsic system (see Brown 1991; Levinson 1994), but it is of limited utility for spatial description because it is usually only employed to describe objects in strict contiguity. Thus for objects separated in space, another system of spatial description is required. This is in essence a cardinal direction system, although it has certain peculiarities. First, it is transparently derived from a topographic feature: Tenejapa is a large mountainous tract, with many ridges and crosscutting valleys, which nevertheless exhibits an overall tendency to fall in altitude toward the north-northwest. Hence *downhill* has come to mean (approximately) north, and *uphill* designates south. Second, the coordinate system is deficient, in that the orthogonal *across* is labeled identically in both directions (east and west); the particular direction can be specified periphrastically, by referring to landmarks. Third, there are therefore certain ambiguities in the interpretation of the relevant words. Despite this, however, the system is a true fixed-bearing system. It applies to objects on the horizontal as well as on slopes. And speakers of the language point to a specific direction for *down*, and they will continue to point to the same compass bearing when transported outside their territory. Figure 4.1 may help to make the system clear.

The three-way semantic distinction between *up*, *down*, and *across* recurs in a number of distinct lexical systems in the language. Thus there are relevant abstract nominals that describe directions, specialized concrete nominals of different roots that describe, for example, edges along the relevant directions, and motion verbs that designate ascending (i.e., going south), descending (going north), and traversing (going east or west). This linguistic ramification, together with its insistent use in spatial description, make the three-way distinction an important feature of language use.

There are many other interesting features of this system (Brown and Levinson 1993a), but the essential points to grasp are the following. First, this is the basic way to describe the relative locations of all objects separated in space on whatever scale. Thus if one wanted to pick out one of two cups on a table, one might ask for, say, the uphill one; if one wanted to describe where a boy was hiding behind a tree, one might designate, say, the north (downhill) side of the tree; if one wanted to ask where someone was going, the answer might be "ascending" (going south); and so forth. Second, linguistic specifications like our *to the left*, *to the right*, *in front*, *behind* are not available in the language; thus there is no way to encode English locutions like "pass the cup to the left," "the boy is in front of the tree," or "take the first right turn."[2] Third, the use of the system presupposes a good sense of direction; tests of this ability to keep track of directions (in effect, to dead reckon), show that Tenejapans, even



"The bottle is uphill of the chair."

waxal ta y-ajk'ol xila te limite
standing at its-uphill chair the bottle

Figure 4.1
Tenejapan Tzeltal uphill/downhill system.

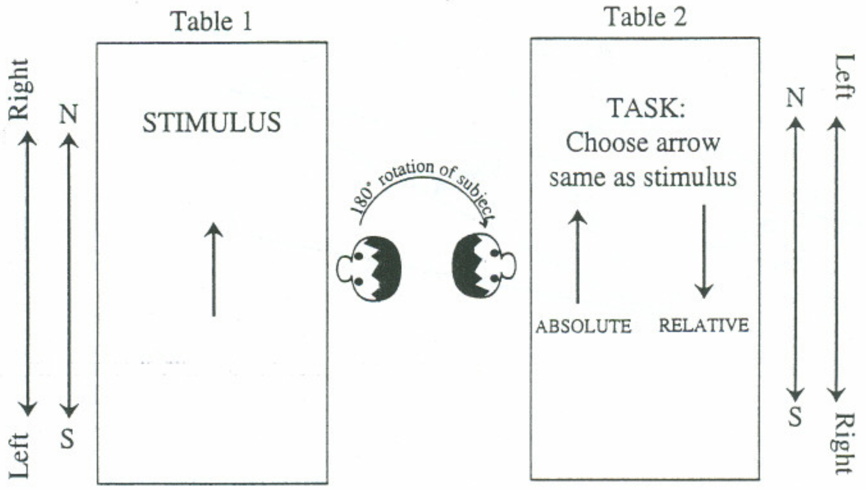


Figure 4.2
Underlying design of the experiments.

without visual access to the environment, do indeed maintain the correct bearings of various locations as they move in the environment.

In short, the Tzeltal linguistic system does not provide familiar viewer-centered locutions like "turn to the left" or "in front of the tree." All such directions and locations can be adequately coded in terms of antecedently fixed, absolute bearings. Following work on an Australian language (Haviland 1993; Levinson 1992b) where such a linguistic system demonstrably has far-reaching cognitive consequences, a series of experiments were run in Tenejapa to ascertain whether nonlinguistic coding might follow the pattern of the linguistic coding of spatial arrays.

4.2.2 Use of an Absolute Frame of Reference in Nonverbal Tasks

4.2.2.1 Memory and Inference As part of a larger comparative project, my colleagues and I have devised experimental means for revealing the underlying nonlinguistic coding of spatial arrays for memory (see Baayen and Danziger 1994). The aim is to find tasks where subjects' responses will reveal which frame of reference, intrinsic, absolute, or relative, has been employed during the task. Here we concentrate on the absolute versus relative coding of arrays. The simple underlying design behind all the experiments reported here can be illustrated as follows. A male subject, say, sees an array on a table (table 1): an arrow pointing to his right, or objectively to the north (see figure 4.2). The array is then removed, and after a delay, the subject is rotated 180 degrees to face another table (table 2). Here there are, say, two arrows, one pointing to his right and one to his left—that is, one to the north and one to the south. He is then asked to identify the arrow like the one he saw before. If he chooses the one pointing to his right (and incidentally to the south), it is clear that he coded the first arrow in terms of his own bodily coordinates, which have rotated with him. If he chooses the other arrow, pointing north (and to his left), then it is clear that he coded the original array without regard to his bodily coordinates, but with respect to some fixed bearing or environmental feature. Using the same method, we can explore a range of different psychological faculties: recognition memory (as just sketched), recall memory (by, for example, asking the subject to place an arrow so that it is the same as the one on table 1) and various kinds of inference (as sketched below).

We will describe here just three such experiments in outline form (see Brown and Levinson 1993b for further details and further experiments). They were run on at least twenty-five Tenejapan subjects (depending on the experiment) of mixed age and sex, and a Dutch comparison group of at least thirty-nine subjects of similar age/sex composition. As far as the distinction between absolute and relative linguistic coding goes, Dutch like English relies heavily of course on a *right/left/front/back* system of speaker-centered coordinates for the description of most spatial arrays. So the hypothesis entertained in all the experiments is the following simple Whorfian conjecture: the coding of spatial arrays—that is, the conceptual representations involved—in a range of nonverbal tasks should employ the same frame of reference that is dominant in the language used in verbal tasks for the same sort of arrays. Because Dutch, like English, provides a dominant relative frame of reference, we expect Dutch subjects to solve all the nonlinguistic tasks utilizing a relative frame of reference. On the other hand, because Tzeltal offers only an absolute frame of reference for the relevant arrays, we expect Tenejapan subjects to solve the nonlinguistic tasks utilizing an absolute frame of reference. Clearly it is crucial that the instructions for the experiments, or the wording used in training sessions, do not suggest one or another of the frames of reference. Instructions (in Dutch or Tzeltal) were of the kind "Point to the pattern you saw before," "Remake the array just as it was," "Remember just how it is," that is, as much devoid of spatial information as possible, and as closely matched in content as could be achieved across languages.

Recall Memory

Method The design was intended to deflect attention from memorizing direction towards memorizing order of objects in an array, although the prime motive was to tap recall memory for direction.[3] The stimuli consisted of two identical sets of four model animals (pig, cow, horse, sheep) familiar in both cultures. From the set of four, three were aligned in random order, all heading in (a randomly assigned) lateral direction on table 1. Subjects were trained to memorize the array before it was removed, then after a three-quarters of a minute delay to rebuild it "exactly as it was," first with correction for misorders on table 1, then without correction under rotation on table 2. Five main trials then proceeded, with the stimulus always presented on table 1, and the response required under rotation, and with delay, on table 2. Responses were coded as "absolute" if the direction of the recalled line of animals preserved the fixed bearings of the stimulus array, and as "relative" if the recalled line preserved egocentric *left* or *right* direction.

Results Ninety-five percent of Dutch subjects were consistent relative coders on at least four out of five trials, while 75% of Tzeltal subjects were consistent absolute coders by the same measure. The remainder failed to recall direction so consistently. For the purposes of comparison across tasks, the data have been analyzed in the following way. Each subject's performance was assigned an index on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 represents a consistent relative response pattern and 100 a consistent absolute pattern; inconsistencies between codings over trials were represented by indices in the interval. The data are displayed in the graph of figure 4.3, where subjects from each population have been grouped by 20-point intervals on the index.

As the graph makes clear, the curves for the two populations are approximately mirror images, except that Tenejapan subjects are less consistent than Dutch ones. This may be due to various factors: the unfamiliarity of the situation and the tasks, the "school"-like nature of task performed by largely unschooled subjects, or to interference from an egocentric frame of reference that is available but less dominant. Only two Tenejapan subjects were consistent relative coders (on 4 out of 5 trials). This pattern is essentially repeated across the experiments. The result appears to confirm the hypothesis that the frame of reference dominant in the language is the frame of reference most available to solve nonlinguistic tasks, like this simple recall task.

Recognition Memory

Method Five identical cards were prepared; on each there was a small green circle and a large yellow circle.[4] The trials were conducted as follows. One card was used as a stimulus in a particular orientation; the subject saw this card on table 1. The other four were arrayed on table 2 in a number of patterns so that each card was distinct by orientation (see figure 4.4). The subject saw the stimulus on table 1, which was then removed, and after a delay the subject was rotated and led over to table 2. The subject was asked to identify the card most similar to the stimulus. The eight trials

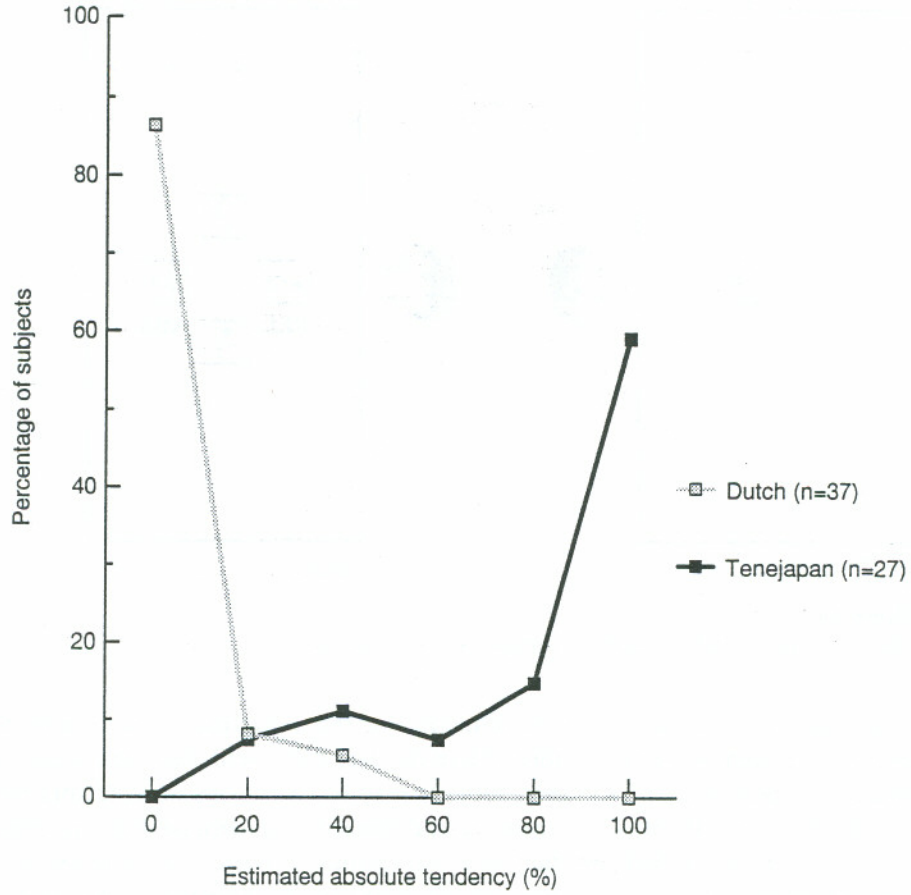


Figure 4.3
Animals recall task: direction.

were coded as indicated in figure 4.3: if the card which maintained orientation from an egocentric point of view (e.g., "small circle toward me") was selected, the response was coded as a relative response, while the card which maintained the fixed bearings of the circles ("small circle north") was coded as an absolute response. The other two cards served as controls, to indicate a basic comprehension of the task. Training was conducted first on table 1, where it was made clear that sameness of type rather than token identity was being requested.

Results We find the same basic pattern of results as in the previous task, as shown in figure 4.5. Once again, the Dutch subjects are consistently relative coders, while the

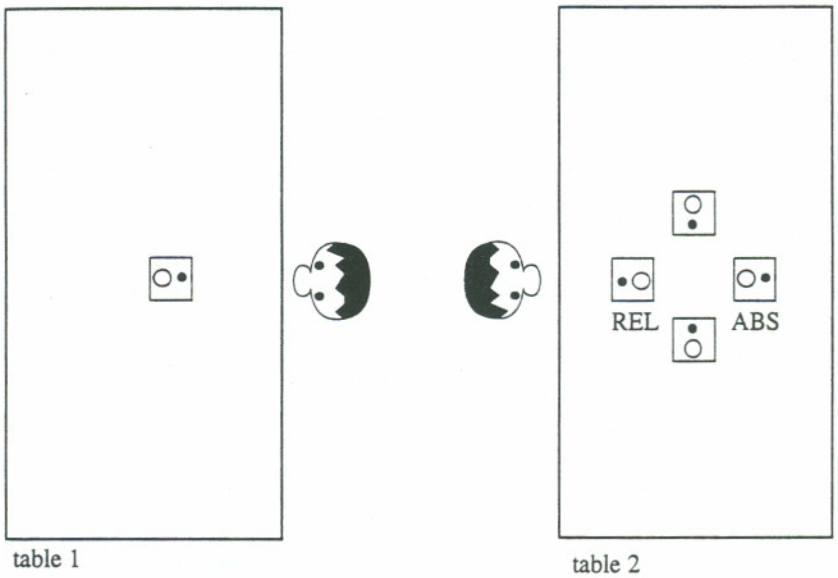


Figure 4.4
Chips recognition task: "absolute" versus "relative" solutions.

Tenejapans are less consistent. Nevertheless, of the Tenejapan subjects who performed consistently over 6 or more of 8 trials, over 80% were absolute coders. The greater inconsistency of Tenejapan subjects may be due to the same factors mentioned above, but there is also here an additional factor because this experiment tested for memory on both the transverse and sagittal (or north-south and east-west) axes. As mentioned above, the linguistic absolute axes are asymmetric: one axis has distinct labels for the two half lines north and south, while the other codes both east and west identically ("across"). If there was some effect of this linguistic coding on the conceptual coding for this nonlinguistic task, one might expect more errors or inconsistency on the east-west axis. This was indeed the case.

Transitive Inference Levelt (1984) observed that relative, as opposed to intrinsic, spatial relations support transitive and converse inferences; Levinson (1992a) noted that absolute spatial relations also support transitive and converse inferences (see also Levelt, chapter 3, this volume). This makes it possible to devise a task where, from two spatial arrays or nonverbal "premises," a third spatial array, or nonverbal "conclusion" can be drawn by transitive inference utilizing either an absolute or a relative frame of reference. The following task was designed by Eric Pederson and Bernadette Schmitt, and piloted in Tamilnadu by Pederson (1994).

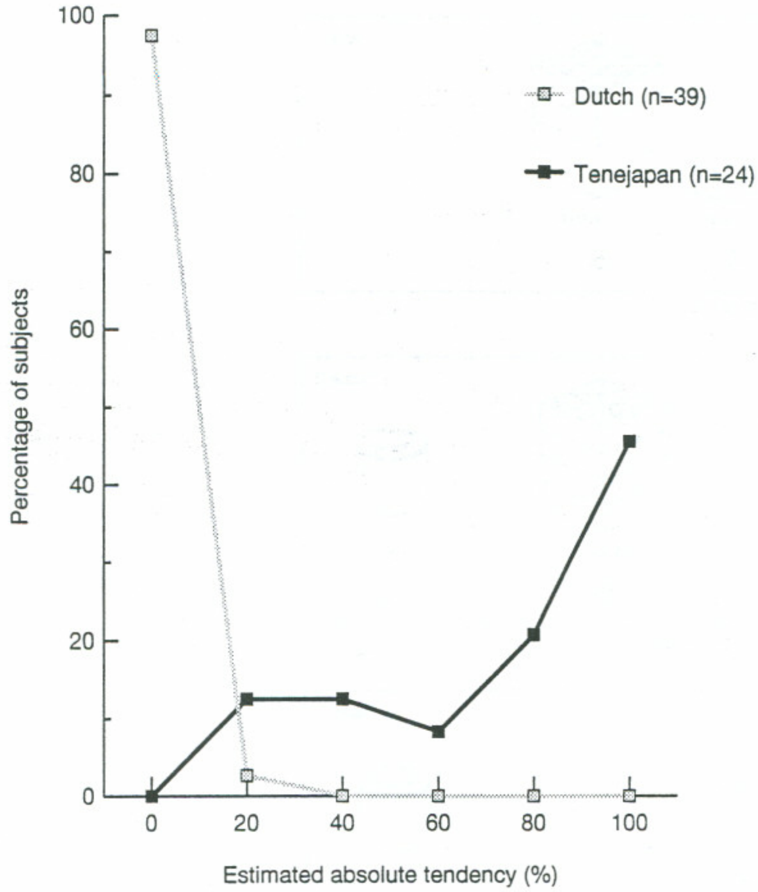


Figure 4.5
Chips recognition task.

Design Subjects see the first nonverbal "premise" on table 1, for example, a blue cone A and a yellow cube B arranged in a predetermined orientation. The top diagram in figure 4.6 illustrates one such array from the perspective of the viewer. Then subjects are rotated and see the second "premise," a red cylinder C and the yellow cube B in a predetermined orientation on table 2 (the array appearing from an egocentric point of view as, for example, in the second diagram in figure 4.6). Finally, subjects are rotated again and led back to table 1, where they are given just the blue cone A and asked to place the red cylinder C in a location consistent with the previous nonverbal "premises." For example, if a female subject, say, sees ("premise 1")

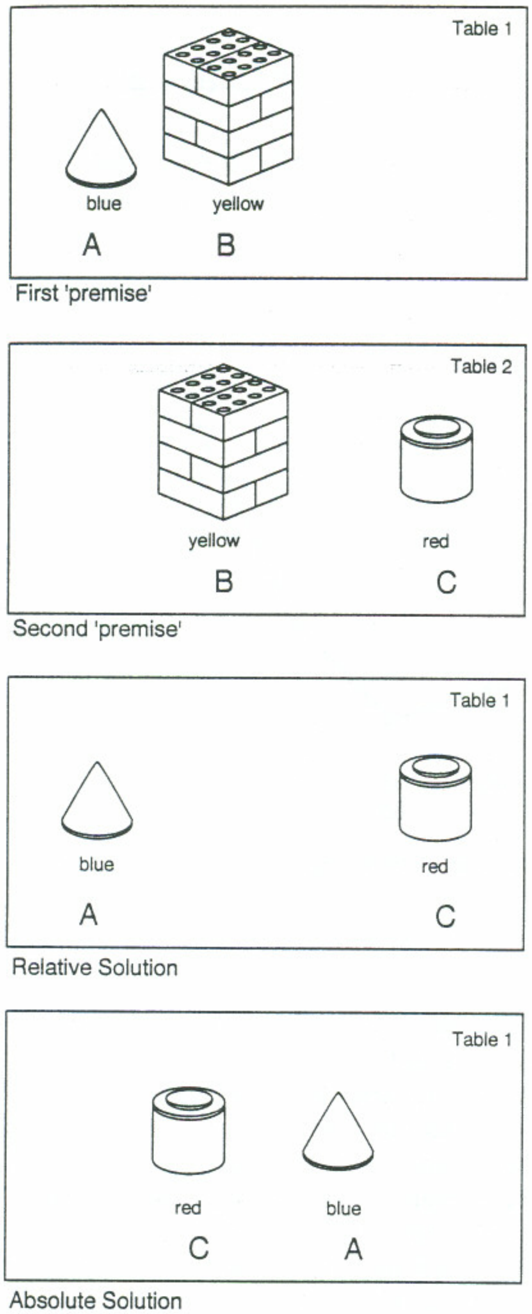


Figure 4.6
Transitive inference—the visual arrays.

the yellow cube to the right of the blue cone, then ("premise 2") the red cylinder to the right of the yellow cube, when given the blue cone, she may be expected to place the red cylinder C to the right of the blue cone A. It should be self-evident from the top two diagrams in figure 4.6, representing the arrays seen sequentially, why the third array (labeled the "relative solution") is one natural nonverbal "conclusion" from the first two visual arrays.

However, this result can only be expected if the subject codes the arrays in terms of egocentric or relative coordinates which rotate with her. If instead the subject utilizes fixed bearings or absolute coordinates, we can expect a different "conclusion"—in fact the reverse arrangement, with the red cylinder to the left of the blue cone (see the last diagram labeled "absolute solution" in figure 4.6)! To see why this is the case, consider figure 4.7, which gives a bird's-eye view of the experimental situation. If the subject does not use bodily coordinates that rotate with her, the blue cone will be, say, south of the yellow cube on table 1, and the red cylinder farther south of the yellow cube on table 2; thus the conclusion must be that the red cylinder is south of the blue cone. As the diagram makes clear, this amounts to the reverse arrangement from that produced under a coding using relative coordinates. In this case, and in half the trials, the absolute inference is somewhat more complex than a simple transitive inference (involving notions of relative distance), but in the other half of the trials the relative solution was more complex than the absolute one in just the same way.

Method Three objects distinct in shape and color were employed. Training was conducted on table 1, where it was made clear that the positions of each object relative to the other object—rather than exact locations on a particular table—was the relevant thing to remember. When transitive inferences were achieved on table 1, subjects were introduced to the rotation between the first and second premises; no correction was given unless the placement of the conclusion was on the orthogonal axis to the stimulus arrays. There were then ten trials, randomized across the transverse and sagittal axes (i.e., the arrays were either in a line across or along the line of vision).

Results The results are given in the graph in figure 4.8 Essentially, we have the same pattern of results as in the prior memory experiments: Dutch subjects are consistently relative coders, and Tenejapan subjects strongly tend to absolute coding, but more inconsistently. Of the Tenejapans who produced consistent results on at least 7 out of 10 trials, 90% were absolute coders (just two out of 25 subjects being relative coders). The reasons for the greater inconsistency of Tenejapan performance are presumably the same as in the previous experiment: unfamiliarity with any such procedure or test situation and the possible effects of the weak Absolute axis (the east-west axis lacking

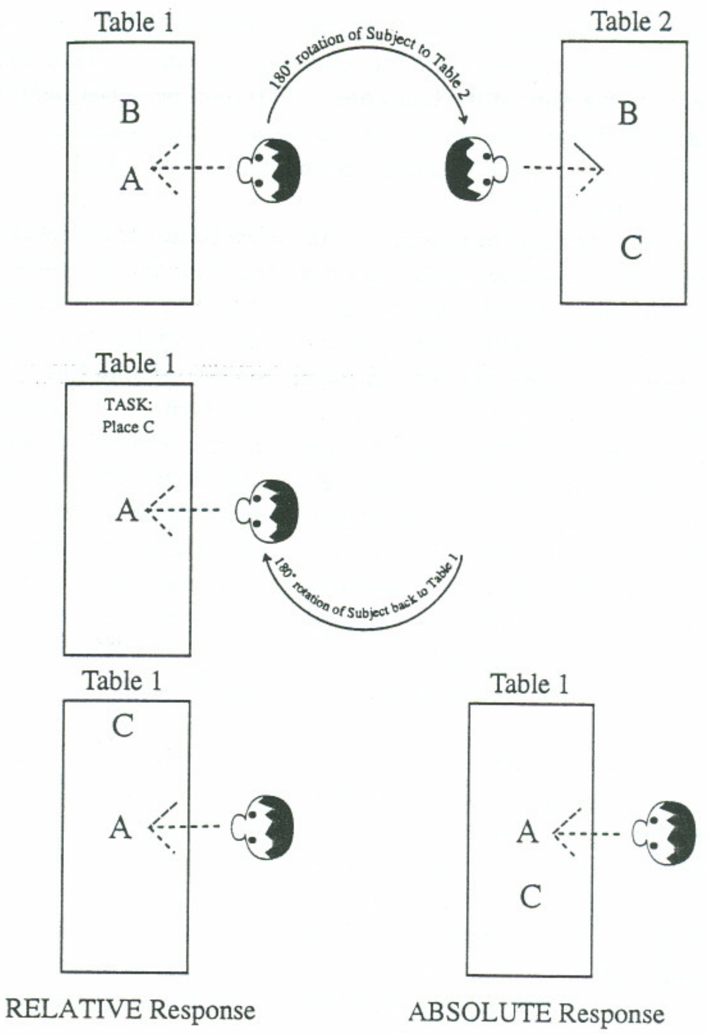


Figure 4.7
Transitive inference—bird's-eye view of experimental situation.

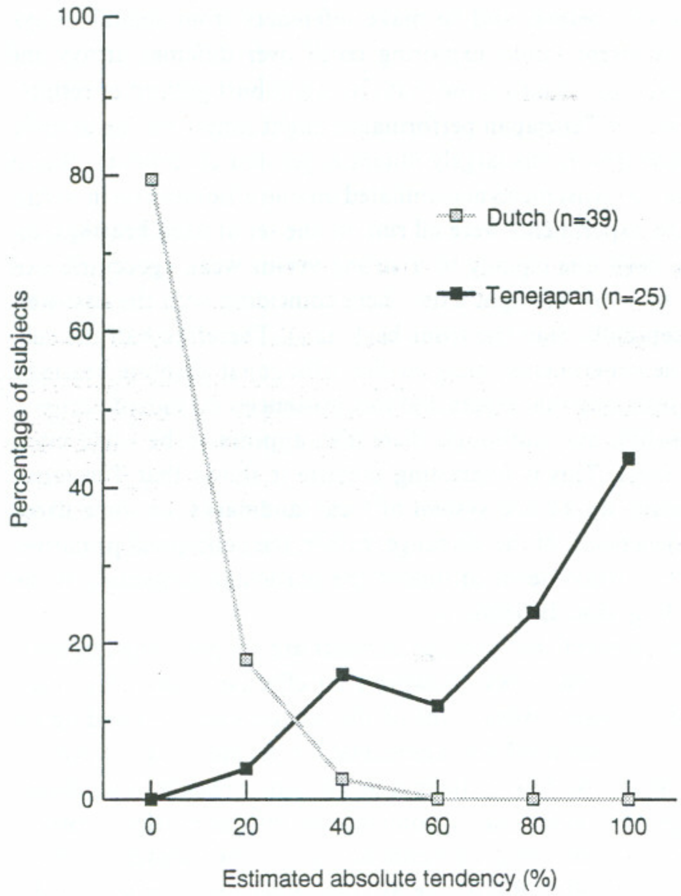


Figure 4.8
Transitive inference task

distinct linguistic labels for the half lines). Once again, Tenejapans made most errors or performed most inconsistently, on the east-west axis.

Discussion The results from these three experiments, together with others unreported here (see Brown and Levinson 1993b), all tend in the same direction. While Dutch subjects utilize a relative conceptual coding (presumably in terms of notions like *left*, *right*, *in front*, *behind*) to solve these nonverbal tasks, Tenejapan subjects predominantly use an absolute coding system. This is of course in line with the coding built into the semantics of spatial description in the two languages. The same pattern holds across different psychological faculties: the ability to recall spatial arrays, to recognize those one has seen before, and to make inferences from spatial arrays. Further experiments of different kinds, exploring recall over different arrays and inferences of different kinds, all seem to show that this is a robust pattern of results.

The relative inconsistency of Tenejapan performance might simply be due to unfamiliar materials and procedures in this largely illiterate, peasant community. But as suggested above, errors or inconsistencies accumulated on one absolute axis in particular. However, because the experiments were all run on one set of fixed bearings, the error pattern could have been due equally to a strong versus weak egocentric axis (and in fact it is known that the left-right axis—here coinciding with the east-west axis—is less robust conceptually than the front-back axis). Therefore half the subjects were recalled and the experiments rerun on the orthogonal absolute bearings. The results showed unequivocally that errors and inconsistencies do indeed accumulate on the east-west absolute axis (although there also appears to be some interference from egocentric axes). This is interesting because it shows that Tenejapan subjects are not simply using an ad hoc system of local landmarks, or some fixed-bearing system totally independent of the language; rather, the conceptual primitives used to code the nonverbal arrays seem to inherit the particular properties of the semantics of the relevant linguistic distinctions.

This raises the skeptical thought that perhaps subjects are simply using linguistic mnemonics to solve the nonverbal tasks. However, an effective delay of at least three-quarters of a minute between losing sight of the stimulus and responding on table 2 would have required constant subvocal rehearsal for the mnemonic to remain available in short-term memory. Moreover, there is no particular reason why subjects should converge on a linguistic rather than a nonlinguistic mnemonic (like crossing the fingers on the relevant hand, or using a kinesthetic memory of a gesture—which would yield uniform relative results). But above all, two other experimental results suggest the inadequacy of an account in terms of a conscious strategy of direct linguistic coding.

4.2.2.2 Visual Recall and Gesture The first of these further experiments concerns the recall of complex arrays. Subjects saw an array of between two and five objects on table 1, and had to rebuild the array under rotation on table 2. Up to five of these objects had complex asymmetries, for example, a model of a chair, a truck, a tree, a horse leaning to one side, or a shoe. The majority of Tenejapan subjects rebuilt the arrays preserving the absolute bearings of the axes of the objects. This amounts to mental rotation of the visual array (or of the viewer) on table 1 so that it is reconstructed on table 2 as it would look like from the other side. Tenejapans prove to be exceptionally good at this, preserving the metric distances and precise angles between objects. It is far from clear that this could be achieved even in principle by a linguistic coding: the precise angular orientation of each object and the metric distances between objects must surely be coded visually and must be rebuilt under visual control of the hands. This ability argues for a complex interaction between visual memory and a conceptual coding in terms of fixed bearings: an array that is visually distinct may be conceptually identical, and an array visually identical may be conceptually distinct (unlike with a system of relative coding, where what is to the left side of the visual field can be described as to the left). Thus being able to "see" that an array is conceptually identical to another in absolute terms may routinely involve mental rotation of the visual image. That a particular conceptual or linguistic system may exercise and thus enhance abilities of mental rotation has already been demonstrated for American Sign Language (ASL) by Emmorey (chapter 5, this volume). Tenejapans appear to be able to memorize a visual image of an array tagged, as it were, with the relevant fixed bearings.

There is another line of evidence that suggests that the Tenejapan absolute coding of spatial arrays is not achieved by conscious, artificial use of linguistic mnemonics. To show this, one would wish for some repetitive, unconscious nonverbal spatial behavior that can be inspected for the underlying frame of reference that drives it. There is indeed just such a form of behavior, namely, unreflective spontaneous gesture accompanying speech. Natural Tenejapan conversation can be inspected to see whether, when places or directions are referred to, gestures preserve the egocentric coordinates appropriate to the protagonist whose actions are being described, or whether the fixed bearings of those locations are preserved in the gestures. Preliminary work by Penelope Brown shows that such fixed bearings are indeed preserved in spontaneous Tenejapan gesture.[5] A pilot experiment seems to confirm this. In the experiment, a male subject, say, facing north, sees a cartoon on a small portable monitor with lateral action from east to west. The subject is then moved to another room where he retells the story as best he can to another native speaker who has not seen the cartoon. In one condition, the subject retells the story facing north; in another condition the subject retells the story facing south. Preliminary results show that at least some subjects under rotation systematically preserve the fixed bearing of the observed action (from east to west) in their gestures, rather than the direction coded in terms of left or right. (Incidentally, the reverse finding has been established for American English by McCullough 1993). Because subjects had no idea that the experimenter was interested in gesture, we can be sure that the gestures record unreflective conceptualization of the directions. Although the gestures of course accompany speech, gestures preserving the fixed bearings of the stimulus often occur without explicit mention of the cardinal directions, suggesting that the gestures reflect an underlying spatial model, at least partially independent of language.

4.2.3 Conclusion from the Tenejapan Studies

Putting all these results together, we are led to the conclusion that the frame of reference dominant in the language, whether relative or absolute, comes to bias the choice of frame of reference in various kinds of nonlinguistic conceptual representations. This correlation holds across a number of "modalities" or distinct mental representations: over codings for recall and recognition memory, over representations for spatial inference, over recall apparently involving manipulations of visual images, and over whatever kind of kinesthetic representation system drives gesture. These findings look robust and general; similar observations have previously been made for an Aboriginal Australian community that uses absolute linguistic spatial description (Haviland 1993; Levinson 1992b), and a cross-cultural survey over a dozen non-Western communities shows a strong correlation of the dominant frame of reference in the linguistic system and frames of reference utilized in nonlinguistic tasks (see Baayen and Danziger 1994).

4.3 Frames of Reference across Modalities

Thus far, we have seen that (1) not all languages use the same predominant frame of reference and (2) there is a tendency for the frame of reference predominant in a particular language to remain the predominant frame of reference across modalities, as displayed by its use in nonverbal tasks of various kinds, unconscious gesture, and so on. The results seem firm; they appear to be replicable across speech communities, but the more one thinks about the implications of these findings, the more peculiar they seem to be. First, the trend of current theory hardly prepares us for such Whorfian results: the general assumption is rather of a universal set of semantic primes (conceptual primitives involved in language), on the one hand, and the identity or homomorphism of universal conceptual structure and semantic structure, on the other. Second, ideas about modularity of mind make it seem unlikely that such cross-modal effects could occur. Third, the very idea of the same frame of reference across different modalities, or different internal representation systems specialized to different sensory modalities, seems incoherent.

In order to make sense of the results, I shall in this section attempt to show that the notion "same frame of reference across modalities" is, after all, perfectly coherent, and indeed already adumbrated across the disciplines that study the various modalities. This requires a lightning review of the notion "frame of reference" across the relevant disciplines (section 4.3.1 and 4.3.2); it also requires a reformation of the linguistic distinctions normally made (section 4.3.3). With that under our belts, we can then face up to the peculiarity, from the point of view of ideas about the modularity of mind, of this cross-modal adoption of the same frame of reference (section 4.4). Here some intrinsic properties of the different frames of reference may offer the decisive clue: if there is to be any cross-modal transfer of spatial information, we may have no choice but to fixate predominantly on just one frame of reference.

4.3.1 "Spatial Frames of Reference"

The notion of "frames of reference" is crucial to the study of spatial cognition across all the modalities and all the disciplines that study them. The idea is as old as the hills: medieval theories of space, for example, were deeply preoccupied by the puzzle raised by Aristotle, the case of the boat moored in the river. If we think about the location of an object as the place that it occupies, and the place as containing the object, then the puzzle is that if we adopt the river as frame of reference, the boat is moving, but if we adopt the bank as frame, then it is stationary (see Sorabji 1988, 187–201 for a discussion of this problem, which dominated medieval discussions of space).

But the phrase "frame of reference" and its modern interpretation originate, like so much else worthwhile, from Gestalt theories of perception in the 1920s. How, for example, do we account for illusions of motion, as when the moon skims across the clouds, except by invoking a notion of a constant perceptual window against which motion (or the perceived vertical, say) is to be judged? The Gestalt notion can be summarized as "a unit or organization of units that collectively serve to identify *a coordinate system* with respect to which certain properties of objects, including the phenomenal self, are gauged" (Rock 1992, 404; emphasis mine).[6]

In what follows, I will emphasize that distinctions between frames of reference are essentially distinctions between underlying coordinate systems and not, for example, between the objects that may invoke them. Not all will agree.[7] In a recent review, philosophers Brewer and Pears (1993) ranging over the philosophical and psychological literature, conclude that frames of reference come down to the selection of reference objects. Take the glasses on my nose—when I go from one room to another, do they change their location or not? It depends on the "frame of reference"—nose or room.[8] This emphasis on the ground or relatum or reference object[9] severely underplays the importance of coordinate systems in distinguishing frames of reference, as I shall show below.[10] Humans use multiple frames of reference: I can happily say of the same assemblage (ego looking at car from side, car's front to ego's left): "the ball is in front of the car" and "the ball is to the left of the car," without thinking that the ball has changed its place. In fact, much of the psychological literature is concerned with ambiguities of this kind. I will therefore insist on the emphasis on coordinate systems rather than on the objects or "units" on which such coordinates may have their origin.

4.3.2 "Frames of Reference" across Modalities and the Disciplines that Study Them

If we are to make sense of the notion "same frame of reference" across different modalities, or inner representation systems, it will be essential to see how the various distinctions between the frames of reference proposed by different disciplines can be ultimately brought into line. This is no trivial undertaking, because there are a host of such distinctions, and each of them has been variously construed, both within and across the many disciplines (such as philosophy, the brain sciences, psychology, and linguistics) that explicitly employ the notion "frames of reference." A serious review of these different conceptions would take us very far afield. On the other hand, some sketch is essential, and I will briefly survey the various distinctions in table 4.1, with some different construals distinguished by the letters *a*, *b*, *c*.[11]

First, then, "relative" versus "absolute" space. Newton's distinction between absolute and relative space has played an important role in ideas about frames of refer-

Table 4.1
Spatial Frames of Reference: Some Distinctions in the Literature

"Relative" versus "absolute":
(*philosophy, brain sciences, linguistics*)
a. Space as relations between objects versus abstract void
b. Egocentric versus allocentric
c. Directions: Relations between objects versus fixed bearings
"Egocentric" versus "allocentric"
(*developmental and behavioral psychology, brain sciences*)
a. Body-centered versus environment-centered (Note many ego centers: retina, shoulder, etc.)
b. Subjective (subject-centered) versus objective
"Viewer-centered" versus "object-centered" or **"$2\frac{1}{2}$-D sketch" versus "3-D models"**
(*vision theory, imagery debate in psychology*)
"Orientation-bound" versus "orientation-free"
(*visual perception, imagery debate in psychology*)
"Deictic" versus "intrinsic"
(*linguistics*)
a. Speaker-centric versus non-speaker-centric
b. Centered on speaker or addressee versus thing
c. Ternary versus binary spatial relations
"Viewer-centered" versus "object-centered" versus "environment-centered"
(*psycholinguistics*)
= "gaze tour" versus "body tour" perspectives
=?"survey perspective" versus "route perspective"

ence, in part through the celebrated correspondence between his champion Clarke and Leibniz, who held a strictly relative view.[12] For Newton, absolute space is an abstract, infinite, immovable, three-dimensional box with origin at the center of the universe, while relative space is conceived of as specified by relations between objects. Psychologically, Newton claimed, we are inclined to relative notions: "Relative space is some moveable dimension or measure of the absolute spaces, which our senses determine by its position to bodies ... and so instead of absolute places and motions, we use relative ones" (quoted in Jammer 1954, 97–98). Despite fundamental differences in philosophical position, most succeeding thinkers in philosophy and psychology have assumed the psychological primacy of relative space—space anchored to the places occupied by physical objects and their relations to one another—in our mental life. A notable exception is Kant, who came to believe that notions of absolute space are a fundamental intuition, although grounded in our physical experience, that is, in the use of our body to define the egocentric coordinates through which we deal with space (Kant 1768; see also Van Cleve and Frederick 1991). O'Keefe and Nadel (1978; see also O'Keefe 1993 and chapter 7, this volume) have tried to preserve this Kantian view as essential to the understanding of the neural implementation of our spatial capacities, but by and large psychologists have considered notions of "absolute" space irrelevant to theories of the naive spatial reasoning underlying language (see Clark 1973; Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976, 380). (Absolute notions of space may, however, be related to cognitive maps of the environment—discussed under the rubric of "allocentric" frames of reference below.)

Early on, the distinction between relative and absolute space acquired certain additional associations; for example, relative space became associated with egocentric coordinate systems, and absolute space with non-egocentric ones (despite Kant 1768),[13] so that this distinction is often confused with the egocentric versus allocentric distinction (discussed below). Another interpretation of the relative versus absolute distinction, in relating relativistic space to egocentric space, goes on to emphasize the different ways coordinate systems are constructed in relative versus absolute spatial conceptions: "Ordinary languages are designed to deal with relativistic space; with space relative to the objects that occupy it. Relativistic space provides three orthogonal coordinates, just as Newtonian space does, but *no fixed units of angle or distance are involved, nor is there any need for coordinates to extend without limit in any direction*" (Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976, 380; emphasis mine). Thus a system of fixed bearings, or cardinal directions, is opposed to the relativistic "space concept," whether egocentric or object-centered, which Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976, 395) and many other authors, like Clark (1973), Herskovits (1986) and Svorou (1994, 213), have assumed to constitute the conceptual core of human spatial thinking. But because, as we have seen, some languages use as a conceptual basis coordinate systems with fixed angles (and coordinates of indefinite extent), we need to recognize that these systems may be appropriately called "absolute" coordinate systems. Hence I have opposed relative and absolute frames of reference in language (see section 4.3.3).

Let us turn to the next distinction in table 4.1, namely, "egocentric" versus "allocentric." The distinction is of course between coordinate systems with origins within the subjective body frame of the organism, versus coordinate systems centered elsewhere (often unspecified). The distinction is often invoked in the brain sciences, where there is a large literature concerning frames of reference (see, for example, the compendium in Paillard 1991). This emphasizes the plethora of different egocentric coordinate systems required to drive all the different motor systems from saccades to arm movements (see, for example, Stein 1992), or the control of the head as a platform for our inertial guidance and visual systems (again see papers in Paillard 1991). In addition, there is a general acceptance (Paillard 1991, 471) of the need for a distinction (following Tolman 1948; O'Keefe and Nadel 1978) between egocentric and allocentric systems. O'Keefe and Nadel's demonstration that something like Tolman's mental maps are to be found in the hippocampal cells is well known.[14] O'Keefe's recent (1993) work is an attempt to relate a particular mapping system to the neuronal structures and processes. The claim is that the rat can use egocentric measurements of distance and direction toward a set of landmarks to compute a non-egocentric abstract central origo (the "centroid") and a fixed angle or "slope." Then it can keep track of its position in terms of distance from centroid and direction from slope. This is a "mental map" constructed through the rat's exploration of the environment, which gives it fixed bearings (the slope), but just for this environment. Whether this strictly meets the criteria for an objective, "absolute," allocentric system has been questioned (Campbell 1993, 76–82).[15] We certainly need to be able to distinguish mental maps of different sorts: egocentric "strip maps" (Tolman 1948), allocentric landmark-based maps with relative angles and distances between landmarks (more Leibnizian), and allocentric maps based on fixed bearings (more Newtonian).[16] But in any case, this is the sort of thing neurophysiologists have in mind when they oppose "egocentric" and "allocentric" frames of reference.[17]

Another area of work where the opposition has been used is in the study of human conceptual development. For example, Acredolo (1988) shows that, as Piaget argued, infants have indeed only egocentric frames of reference in which to record spatial memories; but contrary to Piaget (Piaget and Inhelder 1956), this phase lasts only for perhaps the first six months. Thereafter, they acquire the ability to compensate for their own rotation, so that by sixteen months they can identify, say, a window in one wall as the relevant stimulus even when entering the room (with two identical windows) from the other side. This can be thought of as the acquisition of a non-egocentric, "absolute" or "geographic" orientation or frame of reference.[18] Pick (1993, 35) points out, however, that such apparently allocentric behavior can be mimicked by egocentric mental operations, and indeed this is suggested by Acredolo's (1988, 165) observation that children learn to do such tasks by adopting the visual strategy "if you want to find it, keep your eyes on it (as you move)."

These lines of work identify the egocentric versus allocentric distinction with the opposition between body-centered and environment-centered frames of reference. But as philosophers point out (see, for example, Campbell 1993), ego is not just any old body, and there is indeed another way to construe the distinction as one between subjective and objective frames of reference. The egocentric frame of reference would then bind together various body-centered coordinate systems with an agentive subjective being, complete with body schema, distinct zones of spatial interaction (reach, peripheral vs. central vision, etc.). For example, phenomena like "phantom limbs" or proprioceptive illusions argue for the essentially subjective nature of egocentric coordinate systems.

The next distinction on our list, "viewer-centered" versus "object-centered," comes from the theory of vision, as reconstructed by Marr (1982). In Marr's well-known conceptualization, a theory of vision should take us from retinal image to visual object recognition, and that, he claimed, entails a transfer from a viewer-centered frame of reference, with incremental processing up to what he called the "$2\frac{1}{2}$-D sketch," to an object-centered frame of reference, a true 3-D model or structural description.[19] Because we can recognize an object even when foreshortened or viewed in differing lighting conditions, we must extract some abstract representation of it in terms of its volumetric properties to match this token to our mental inventory of such types. Although recent developments have challenged the role of the 3-D model within a modular theory of vision,[20] there can be little doubt that at some conceptual level such an object-centered frame of reference exists. This is further demonstrated by work on visual imagery, which seems to show that, presented with a viewer-centered perspective view of a novel object, we can mentally rotate it to obtain different perspectival "views" of it, for example, to compare it to a prototype (Shepard and Metzler 1971; Kosslyn 1980; Tye 1991, 83–86). Thus at some level, the visual or ancillary systems seem to employ two distinct reference frames, viewer-centered and object-centered.

This distinction between viewer-centered and object-centered frames of reference relates rather clearly to the linguistic distinction between deictic and intrinsic perspectives discussed below. The deictic perspective is viewer-centered, whereas the intrinsic perspective seems to use (at least in part) the same axial extraction that would be needed to compute the volumetric properties of objects for visual recognition (see Landau and Jackendoff 1993; Jackendoff, chapter 1, this volume; Landau, chapter 8, this volume; Levinson 1994). This parallel will be further reinforced by the reformation of the linguistic distinctions suggested in section 4.3.3.

This brings us to the "orientation-bound" versus "orientation-free" frames of reference.[21] The visual imagery and mental rotation literature might be thought to have little to say about frames of reference. After all, visual imagery would seem to be necessarily at most $2\frac{1}{2}$-D and thus necessarily in a viewer-centered frame of reference (even if mental rotations indicate access to a 3-D description). But recently there have been attempts to understand the relation between two kinds of shape recognition: one where shapes are recognized without regard to orientation (thus with no response curve latency associated with degrees of orientation from a familiar related stimulus), and another where shapes are recognized by apparent analog rotation to the familiar related stimulus. The Shepard and Metzler (1971) paradigm suggested that only where handedness information is present (as where enantiomorphs have to be discriminated) would mental rotation be involved, which implicitly amounts to some distinction between object-centered and viewer-centered frames of reference; that is discrimination of enantiomorphs depends on an orientation-bound perspective, while the recognition of simpler shapes may be orientation-free.[22] But some recent controversies seem to show that things are not as simple as this (Tarr and Pinker 1989; Cohen and Kubovy 1993). Just and Carpenter (1985) argue that rotation tasks in fact can be solved using four different strategies, some orientation-bound and some orientation-free.[23] Similarly, Takano (1989) suggests that there are four types of spatial information involved, classifiable by crossing *elementary* (simple) versus *conjunctive* (partitionable) forms with the distinction between *orientation-bound* and *orientation-free*. He insists that only orientation-bound forms should require mental rotation for recognition. However, Cohen and Kubovy (1993) claim that such a view makes the wrong predictions because handedness identification can be achieved without the mental rotation latency curves in special cases. In fact, I believe that despite these recent controversies, the original assumption—that only objects lacking handedness can be recognized without mental rotation—must be basically correct for logical reasons that have been clear for centuries.[24] In any case, it is clear from this literature that the study of visual recognition and mental rotation utilizes distinctions in frames of reference that can be put into correspondence with those that emerge from, for example, the study of language. Absolute and relative frames of reference in language (to be firmed up below) are both orientation-bound, while the intrinsic frame is orientation-free (Danziger 1994).

Linguists have long distinguished "deictic" versus "intrinsic" frames of reference, because of the rather obvious ambiguities of a sentence like "the boy is in front of the house" (see, for example, Leech 1969, 168; Fillmore 1971; Clark 1973). It has also been known for a while that linguistic acquisition of these two readings of terms like *in front, behind, to the side of* is in the reverse direction from the developmental sequence egocentric to allocentric (Pick 1993): *intrinsic* notions come resolutely earlier than *deictic* ones (Johnston and Slobin 1978). Sometimes a third term, *extrinsic*, is opposed, to denote, for example, the contribution of gravity to the interpretation of words like *above* or *on*. But unfortunately the term *deictic* breeds confusions. In fact there have been at least three distinct interpretations of the deictic versus intrinsic contrast, as listed in table 4.1: (1) speaker-centric versus non-speaker-centric (Levelt 1989); (2) centered on any of the speech participants versus not so centered (Levinson 1983); (3) ternary versus binary spatial relations (implicit in Levelt 1984 and chapter 3, this volume; to be adopted here). These issues will be taken up in section 4.3.3, where we will ask what distinctions in frames of reference are grammaticalized or lexicalized in different languages.

Let us turn now to the various distinctions suggested in the psychology of language. Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976), drawing on earlier linguistic work, explored the opposition between deictic and intrinsic interpretations of such utterances as "the cat is in front of the truck"; the logical properties of these two frames of reference, and their interaction, have been further clarified by Levelt (1984, 1989, and chapter 3, this volume). Carlson-Radvansky and Irwin (1993, 224) summarize the general assumption in psycholinguistics as follows:

> Three distinct classes of reference frames exist for representing the spatial relationships among objects in the world ... *viewer-centered frames*, *object-centered frames*, and *environment centered* frames of reference. In a viewer-centered frame, objects are represented in a retinocentric, head-centric or body-centric coordinate system based on the perceiver's perspective of the world. In an object-centered frame, objects are coded with respect to their intrinsic axes. In an environment-centered frame, objects are represented with respect to salient features of the environment, such as gravity or prominent visual landmarks. In order to talk about space, vertical and horizontal coordinate axes must be oriented with respect to one of these reference frames so that linguistic spatial terms such as "above" and "to the left of" can be assigned. (Emphasis added)

Notice that in this formulation frames of reference inhere in spatial perception and cognition rather than in language: *above* may simply be semantically general over the different frames of reference, not ambiguous (Carlson-Radvansky and Irwin (1993, 242).[25] Thus deictic, intrinsic, and extrinsic are merely alternative labels for the linguistic interpretations corresponding, respectively, to viewer-centered, object-centered, and environment-centered frames of reference.

There are other oppositions that psycholinguists employ, although in most cases they map onto the same triadic distinction. One particular set of distinctions, between different kinds of survey or route description, is worth unraveling because it has caused confusion. Levelt (1989, 139–144) points out that when a subject describes a complex visual pattern, the linearization of speech requires that we "chunk" the pattern into units that can be described in a linear sequence. Typically, we seem to represent 2-D or 3-D configurations through a small window, as it were, traversing the array; that is, the description of complex static arrays is converted into a description of motion through units or "chunks" of the array. Levelt (chapter 3, this volume) has examined the description of 2-D arrays, and found two strategies (1): a *gaze tour* perspective, effectively the adoption of a fixed deictic or viewer-centered perspective; and (2) a body or *driving tour*, effectively an intrinsic perspective, where a pathway is found through the array, and the direction of the path used to assign *front*, *left*, and so on from any one point (or location of the window in describing time). Because both perspectives can be thought of as egocentric, Tversky (1991; see also Taylor and Tversky in press and Tversky, chapter 12, this volume) opts to call Levelt's intrinsic perspective a "*deictic* frame of reference" or "*route* description" and his deictic perspective a "*survey* perspective."[26] Thus Tversky's "deictic" is Levelt's "intrinsic" or nondeictic perspective! This confusion is, I believe, not merely terminological but results from the failure in the literature to distinguish coordinate systems from their origins or centers (see section 4.3.3).

Finally, in psycholinguistic discussions about frames of reference, there seems to be some unclarity, or sometimes overt disagreement, at *which level*—perceptual, conceptual or linguistic—such frames of reference apply. Thus Carlson-Radvansky and Irwin (1993, 224) make the assumption that a frame of reference must be adopted within some spatial representation system, as a precondition for coordinating perception and language, whereas Levelt (1989; but see Levelt, chapter 3, this volume) has argued that a frame of reference is freely chosen in the very process of mapping from perception or spatial representation to language (see also Logan and Sadler, chapter 13, this volume). On the latter conception, frames of reference in language are peculiar to the nature of the linear, propositional representation system that underlies linguistic semantics, that is, they are different ways of conceiving the same percept in order to talk about it.[27]

The view that frames of reference in linguistic descriptions are adopted in the mapping from spatial representation or perception to language seems to suggest that the perceptions or spatial representations themselves make no use of frames of reference. But this of course is not the case: there has to be some coordinate system involved in any spatial representation of any intricacy, whether at a peripheral (sensory) level or at a central (conceptual) level. What Levelt's results (chapter 3, this volume) or Friederici and Levelt's (1990) seem to establish, is that frames of reference at the perceptual or spatial conceptual level do not necessarily determine frames of reference at the linguistic level. This is exactly what one might expect. Language is flexible and it is an instrument of communication—thus it naturally allows us, for example, to take the other person's perspective. Further, the ability to cast a description in one frame or another implies an underlying conceptual ability to handle multiple frames, and within strict limits (see below) to convert between them. In any case, we need to distinguish in discussions of frames of reference between at least three levels: (1) perceptual, (2) conceptual, and (3) linguistic; and we need to consider the possibility that we may utilize distinct frames of reference at each level (but see section 4.4).

There is much further pertinent literature in all the branches of psychology and brain science, but we must leave off here. It should already be clear that there are many, confusingly different classifications, and different construals of the same terms, not to mention many unclarities and many deep confusions in the thinking behind them. Nevertheless, there are some obvious common bases to the distinctions we have reviewed. It is clear for example, that on the appropriate construals, "egocentric" corresponds to "viewer-centered" and "$2\frac{1}{2}$-D sketch" to "deictic" frame, while "intrinsic" maps onto "object-centered" or "3-D model" frames of reference; "absolute" is related to "environment-centered"; and so forth. We should seize on these commonalities, especially because in this chapter we are concerned with making sense of the "same frame of reference" across modalities and representational systems. However, before proposing an alignment of these distinctions across the board, it is essential to deal with linguistic frames of reference, whose troubling flexibility has led to various confusions.

4.3.3 Linguistic Frames of Reference in Crosslinguistic Perspective

Cursory inspection of the linguistic literature will give the impression that the linguists have their house in order. They talk happily of topological vs. projective spatial relators (e.g., prepositions like *in* vs. *behind*), deictic versus intrinsic usages of projective prepositions, and so on (see, for example, Bierwisch 1967; Lyons 1977; Herskovits 1986; Vandeloise 1991; and psycholinguists Clark 1973; Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976). But the truth is less comforting. The analysis of spatial terms in familiar European languages remains deeply confused,[28] and those in other languages almost entirely unexplored. Thus the various alleged universals should be taken with a great pinch of salt (in fact, many of them can be directly jettisoned). One major upset is the recent finding that many languages use an "absolute" frame of reference (as illustrated in the case of Tzeltal) where European languages would use a "relative" or viewpoint-centered one (see, for example, Levinson 1992a,b; Haviland 1993). Another is that some languages, like many Australian ones, use such frames of reference to replace so-called topological notions like *in*, *on*, or *under*. A third is that familiar spatial notions like *left* and *right* and even sometimes *front* and *back* are missing from many, perhaps a third of all languages. Confident predictions and assumptions can be found in the literature that no such languages could occur (see, for example, Clark 1973; Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976; Lyons 1977, 690).

These developments call for some preliminary typology of the frames of reference that are systematically distinguished in the grammar or lexicon of different languages (with the caveat that we still know little about only a few of them). In particular, we shall focus on what we seem to need in the way of coordinate systems and associated reference points to set up a crosslinguistic typology of the relevant frames of reference. In what follows I shall confine myself to linguistic descriptions of static arrays, and I shall exclude the so-called topological notions, for which a new partial typology concerning the coding of concepts related to *in* and *on* is available (Bowerman and Pederson in prep.).[29] Moreover, I shall focus on distinctions on the horizontal plane. This is not whimsy: the perceptual cues for the vertical may not always coincide, but they overwhelmingly converge, giving us a good universal solution to one axis. But the two horizontal coordinates are up for grabs: there simply is no corresponding force like gravity on the horizontal.[30] Consequently there is no simple solution to the description of horizontal spatial patterns, and languages diverge widely in their solutions to the basic problem of how to specify angles or directions on the horizontal.

Essentially, three main frames of reference emerge from these new findings as solutions to the problem of description of horizontal spatial oppositions. They are appropriately named "intrinsic," "relative" and "absolute," even though these terms may have a somewhat different interpretation from some of the construals reviewed in the section above. Indeed, the linguistic frames of reference potentially *crosscut* many of the distinctions in the philosophical, neurophysiological, linguistic, and psychological literatures, for one very good reason. Linguistic frames of reference cannot be defined with respect to the origin of the coordinate system (in contrast to, for example, egocentric vs. allocentric). It will follow that the traditional distinction deictic versus intrinsic collapses—these are not opposed terms. All this requires some explanation.

We may start by noting the difficulties we get into by trying to make the distinction between deictic and intrinsic. Levelt (1989, 48–55) organizes and summarizes the standard assumptions in a useful way: we can cross-classify linguistic uses according to (a) whether they presume that the coordinates are centered on the speaker (*deictic*) or not (*intrinsic*); and (b) whether the *relatum* (ground) is the speaker or not. Suppose then we call the usage "deictic" just in case the coordinates are centered on the speaker, "intrinsic" otherwise. This yields, for example, the following classification of examples:

(1) The ball is in front of me.
Coordinates: **Deictic** (i.e., origin on speaker)
Relatum: Speaker

(2) The ball is in front of the tree.
Coordinates: **Deictic** (i.e., origin on speaker)
Relatum: Tree

(3) The ball is in front of the chair (at the chair's front).
Coordinates: **Intrinsic** (i.e., origin not on speaker)
Relatum: Chair

Clearly, it is the locus of the origin of the coordinates that is relevant to the traditional opposition deictic versus intrinsic, otherwise we would group (2) and (3) as both sharing a nondeictic relatum. The problem comes when we pursue this classification further:

(4) The ball is in front of you.
Coordinates: **Intrinsic** (origin on addressee, not speaker)
Relatum: Addressee

(5) The ball is to the right of the lamp, from your point of view.
Coordinates: **Intrinsic** (origin on addressee)
Relatum: Lamp

Here the distinction deictic versus intrinsic is self-evidently not the right classification, as far as frames of reference are concerned. Clearly, (1) and (4) belong together: the interpretation of the expressions is the same, with the same coordinate systems; there are just different origins—speaker and addressee, respectively (moreover, in a normal construal of "deictic," inclusive of first and second persons, both are "deictic" origins). Similarly, in another grouping, (2) and (5) should be classed together: they have the same conceptual structure, with a viewpoint (acting as the origin of the coordinate system), a relatum distinct from the viewpoint, and a referent—again the origin alternates over speaker or addressee.

We might therefore be tempted simply to alter the designations, and label (1), (2), (4), and (5) all "deictic" as opposed to (3) "intrinsic." But this would produce a further confusion.

First, it would conflate the distinct conceptual structures of our groupings (1) and (4) versus (2) and (5). Second, the conceptual structure of the coordinate systems in (1) and (4) is in fact shared with (3). "The ball is in front of the chair" presumes (on the relevant reading) an intrinsic front and uses that facet to define a search domain for the ball; but just the same holds for "the ball is in front of me/you."[31] Thus the logical structure of (1), (3), and (4) is the same: the notion "in front of" is here a *binary* spatial relation, with arguments constituted by the figure (referent) and the ground (relatum), where the projected angle is found by reference to an intrinsic or inherent facet of the ground object. In contrast, (2) and (5) have a different logical structure: "in front of" is here a ternary relation, presuming a viewpoint *V* (the origin of the coordinate system), a figure, and ground, all distinct.[32] In fact, these two kinds of spatial relation have quite different logical properties, as demonstrated elsewhere by Levelt (1984, and chapter 3, this volume), but only when distinguished and grouped in this way. Let us dub the binary relations "intrinsic," but the ternary relations "relative" (because the descriptions are always relative to a viewpoint, in contradistinction to "absolute" and "intrinsic" descriptions).

To summarize then, the proposed classification is

(1′) The ball is in front of me
Coordinates: **Intrinsic**
Origin: Speaker
Relatum: Speaker

(3′) The ball is in front of the chair (at the chair's front)
Coordinates: **Intrinsic**
Origin: Chair
Relatum: Chair

(4′) The ball is in front of you
Coordinates: **Intrinsic**
Origin: Addressee
Relatum: Addressee

(2′) The ball is in front of the tree
Coordinates: **Relative**
Origin: Speaker
Relatum: Tree

(5′) The ball is to the right of the lamp, from your point of view
Coordinates: **Relative**
Origin: Addressee
Relatum: Lamp

(6′) John noticed the ball to the right of the lamp
For John, the ball is in front of the tree.
Coordinates: **Relative**
Origin: Third person (John)
Relatum: Lamp (or Tree)

Note that use of the intrinsic system of coordinates entails that relatum (ground) and origin are constituted by the same object (the spatial relation is binary, between *F* and *G*), while use of the relative system entails that they are distinct (the relation is ternary, between F, G, and viewpoint V). Note, too, that whether the center is deictic, that is, whether the origin is speaker (or addressee), is simply irrelevant to this classification. This is obvious in the case of the grouping of (1′), (3′), and (4′) together. It is also clear that although the viewpoint in relative uses is normally speaker-centric, it may easily be addressee-centric or even centered on a third party as illustrated in (6′). Hence deictic and intrinsic are *not* opposed; instead, we need to oppose coordinate systems as intrinsic versus relative, on the one hand, and origins as deictic and non-deictic (or, alternatively, egocentric vs. allocentric), on the other. Because frames of reference are coordinate systems, it follows that in language, frames of reference cannot be distinguished according to their characteristic, but variable, origins.

I expect a measure of resistance to this reformation of the distinctions, if only because the malapropism "deictic frame of reference" has become a well-worn phrase. How, the critic will argue, can you define the frames of reference if you no longer employ the feature of deicticity to distinguish them? I will expend considerable effort in that direction in section 4.3.3.2. But first we must compare these two systems with the third system of coordinates in natural language, namely, absolute frames of reference. Let us review them together.

4.3.3.1 The Three Linguistic Frames of Reference As far as we know, and according to a suitably catholic construal, there are exactly three frames of reference grammaticalized or lexicalized in language (often, lexemes are ambiguous over two of these frames of reference, sometimes expressions will combine two frames,[33] but often each frame will have distinct lexemes associated with it).[34] Each of these three frames of reference encompasses a whole family of related but distinct semantic systems.[35] It is probably true to say that even the most closely related languages (and even dialects within them) will differ in the details of the underlying coordinate systems and their geometry, the preferential interpretation of ambiguous lexemes, the presumptive origins of the coordinates, and so on. Thus the student of language can expect that expressions glossed as, say, intrinsic *side* in two languages will differ considerably in the way in which *side* is in fact determined, how wide and how distant a search domain it specifies, and so on. With that caveat, let us proceed.

Let us first define a set of primitives necessary for the description of all systems.[36] The application of some of the primitives is sketched in figure 4.9, which illustrates three canonical exemplars from each of our three main types of system. Minimally, we need the primitives in table 4.2, the use of which we will illustrate in passing. Combinations of these primitives yield a large family of systems which may be classified in the following tripartite scheme: (1) *intrinsic frame of reference*; (2) *relative frame of reference*; and (3) *absolute frame of reference*.

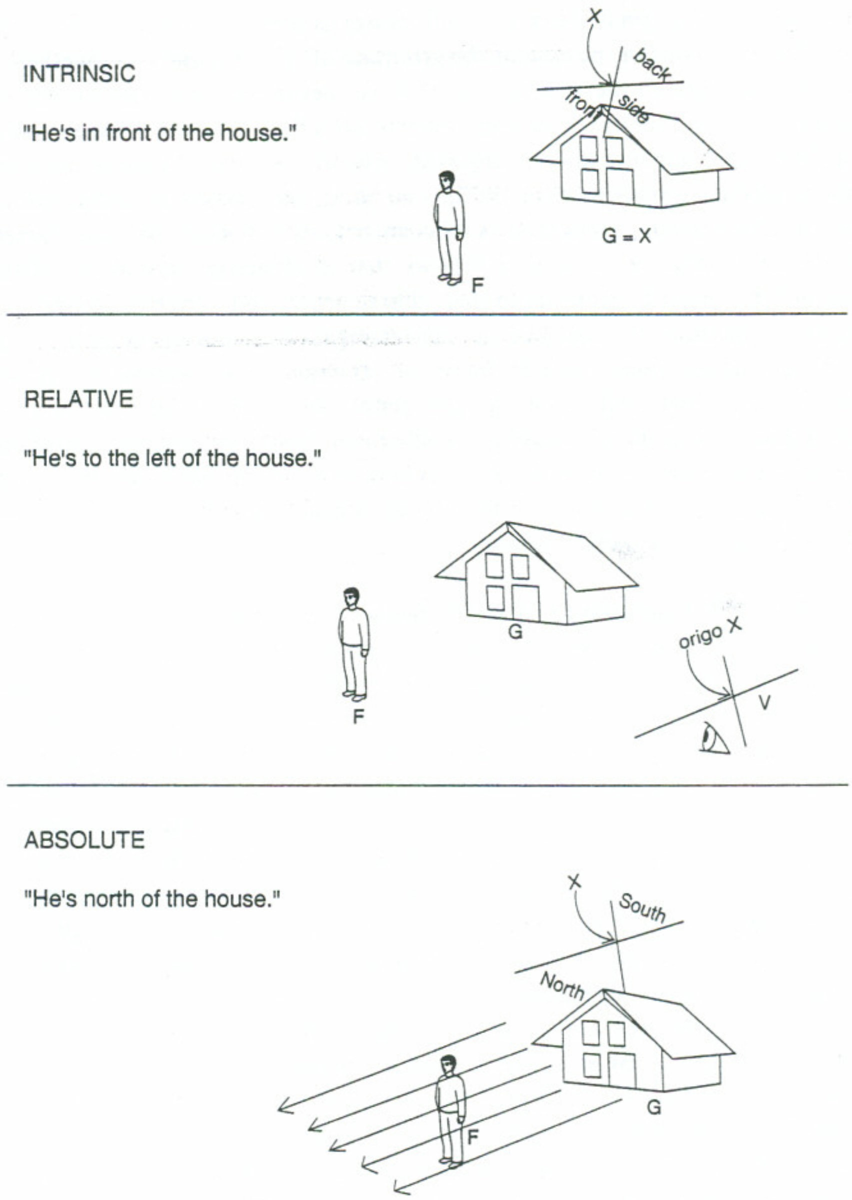


Figure 4.9
Canonical examples of the three linguistic frames of reference.

Table 4.2
Inventory of Primitives

1. System of labeled angles
Labeled arcs are specified by coordinates around origin (language-specific); such labels may or may not form a fixed armature or template of oppositions.

2. Coordinates
a. Coordinates may be polar, by rotation from a fixed x-axis, or rectangular, by specification of two or more axes;
b. One primary coordinate system C can be mapped from origin X to secondary origin X_2, by the following transformations:
- translation,
- rotation
- reflection
- (and possibly a combination)

to yield a secondary coordinate system C_2.

3. Points
F = figure or referent with center point at volumetric center F_C.
G = ground or relatum, with volumetric center G_C, and with a surrounding region R
V = viewpoint
X = origin of the coordinate system, X_2 = secondary origin
A = anchor point, to fix labeled coordinates
L = designated landmark

4. Anchoring system
A = Anchor point, for example, with G or V; in landmark systems $A = L$.
"Slope" = fixed-bearing system, yielding parallel lines across environment in each direction

Intrinsic Frame of Reference Informally, this frame of reference involves an object-centered coordinate system, where the coordinates are determined by the "inherent features," sidedness or facets of the object to be used as the ground or relatum. The phrase "inherent features," though widely used in the literature, is misleading: such "facets," as we shall call them, have to be conceptually assigned according to some algorithm, or learned on a case-by-case basis, or more often a combination of these. The procedure varies fundamentally across languages. In English, it is (apart from *top* and *bottom*, and special arrangements for humans and animals) largely functional (see, for example, the sketch in Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976, 403), so that the *front* of a TV is the side we attend to, while the *front* of a car is the facet that canonically lies in the direction of motion, and so forth. But in some languages, it is much more closely based on shape. For example, in Tzeltal the assignment of sides utilizes a volumetric analysis very similar to the object-centered analysis proposed by Marr

(1982) in the theory of vision, and function and canonical orientation is largely irrelevant (see Levinson 1994).[37] In many languages the morphology makes it clear that human or animal body (and occasionally plant) parts provide a prototype for the opposed sides: hence we talk about the "front," "backs," "sides," "lefts," and "rights" and in many languages "heads," "feet," "horns," "roots," etc.) of other objects.[38] But whatever the procedure in a particular language, it relies primarily on the conceptual properties of the object: its shape, canonical orientation, characteristic motion and use, and so on.

The attribution of such facets provides the basis for a coordinate system in one of two ways. Having found, for example, the *front*, this may be used to anchor a ready-made system of oppositions *front/back*, *sides*, and so forth.[39] Alternatively, in other languages, there may be no such fixed armature, as it were, each object having parts determined, for example, by specific shapes; in that case, finding *front* does not predict the locus of *back*, but nevertheless determines a direction from the volumetric center of the object through the *front*, which can be used for spatial description.[40] In either case, we can use the designated facet to extract an angle, or line, radiating out from the ground object, within or on which the figure object can be found (as in "the statue in front of the town hall").

The geometrical properties of such intrinsic coordinate systems vary crosslinguistically. Systems with fixed armatures of contrastive expressions generally require the angles projected to be mutually exclusive (nonoverlapping), so that in the intrinsic frame of reference (unlike the relative one) it makes no sense to say, "The cat is to the front and to the left of the truck." Systems utilizing single parts make no such constraints (cf. "The cat is in front of, and at the foot of, the chair"). In addition, the metric extent of the search domain designated (e.g., how far the cat is from the truck) can vary greatly. Some languages require figure and ground to be in contact, or visually continuous, others allow the projection of enormous search domains ("in front of the church lie the mountains, running far off to the horizon"). More often perhaps, the notion of a region, an object's penumbra, as it were, is relevant, related to its scale.[41]

More exactly An intrinsic spatial relation R is a binary spatial relation, with arguments F and G, where R typically names a part of G. The origin X of the coordinate system C is always on (the volumetric center of) G. An intrinsic relation $R(F, G)$ asserts that F lies in a search domain extending from G on the basis of an angle or line projected from the center of G, through an anchor point A (usually the named facet R), outwards for a determined distance. F and G may be any objects whatsoever (including ego), and F may be a part of G. The relation R does not support transitive inferences, nor converse inferences (see below).

Coordinates may or may not come in fixed armatures. When they do, they tend to be polar; for example, given that facet A is the *front* of a building, clockwise rotation in 90° steps will yield *side*, *back*, *side*. Here there is a set of four labeled oppositions, with one privileged facet, A. Given A, we know which facet *back* is. Because A fixes the coordinates, we call it the "anchor point." But coordinates need not be polar, or indeed part of a fixed set of oppositions; for example, given that facet B is the *entrance* of a church and G_c its volumetric center, we may derive a line BG_c (or an arc with angle determined by the width of B)—thus "at the entrance to the church" designates a search area on that line (or in that arc), with no necessary implications about the locations of other intrinsic parts, *front*, *back*, and so on. Because A determines the line, we call A once again the "anchor point."

Relative Frame of Reference This is roughly equivalent to the various notions of viewer-centered frame of reference mentioned above (e.g., Marr's "$2\frac{1}{2}$-D sketch," or the psycholinguist's "deictic"), but it is not quite the same. The relative frame of reference presupposes a "viewpoint" V (given by the location of a perceiver in any sensory modality), and a figure and ground distinct from V; it thus offers a triangulation of three points and utilizes coordinates fixed on V to assign directions to figure and ground. English "The ball is to the left of the tree" is of this kind of course. Because the perceptual basis is not necessarily visual, calling this frame of reference "viewer-centered" is potentially misleading, but perhaps innocent enough. Calling it "deictic," however, is potentially pernicious because the "viewer" need not be ego and need not be a participant in the speech event—take, for example, "Bill kicked the ball to the left of the goal." Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the deictic uses of this system are basic (prototypical), conceptually prior, and so on.

The coordinate system, centered on viewer V, seems generally to be based on the planes through the human body, giving us an *up/down*, *back/front* and *left/right* set of half lines. Such a system of coordinates can be thought of as centered on the main axis of the body and anchored by one of the body parts (e.g., chest). In that case we have polar coordinates, with quadrants counted clockwise from *front* to *right*, *back*, and *left* (Herskovits 1986). Although the position of the body of viewer V may be one criterion for anchoring the coordinates, the direction of gaze may be another, and there is no doubt that relative systems are closely hooked into visual criteria. Languages may differ in the weight given to the two criteria, for example, the extent to which occlusion plays a role in the definition of *behind*.

But this set of coordinates on V is only the basis for a full relative system; in addition, a secondary set of coordinates is usually derived by mapping (all or some of) the coordinates on V onto the relatum (ground object) G. The mapping involves a transformation which may be 180° rotation, translation (movement without rotation or reflection), or arguably reflection across the frontal transverse plane. Thus "the cat is in front of the tree" in English entails that the cat *F* is between *V* and *G* (the tree), because the primary coordinates on *V* appear to have been rotated in the mapping onto *G*, so that *G* has a "front" before which the cat sits. Hausa (Hill 1982) and many other languages *translate* rather than rotate the coordinates, so that a sentence glossing "The cat is in front of the tree" will mean what we would mean in English by "The cat is behind the tree." But English is also not so simple, for rotation will get *left* and *right* wrong. In English, "The cat is to the left of the tree" has left on the same side as *V*'s left, not rotated. In Tamil, the rotation is complete; thus just as front and back are reversed, so are left and right, so that the Tamil sentence glossed "The cat is on the left side of the tree" would (on the relevant interpretation) mean "The cat is on *V*'s right of the tree." To get the English system right, we might suppose that the coordinates on *V* should be *reflected* over the transverse plane, as if we wrote the coordinates of *V* on a sheet of acetate, flipped it over in front of *V*, and placed it on *G*. This will get *front*, *back*, *left*, and *right* at least in the correct polar sequence around the secondary origin. But it may not be the correct solution because other interpretations are possible, and indeed more plausible.[42] But the point to establish here is that a large variation of systems is definable, constituting a broad family of relative systems.

Not all languages have terms glossing *left/right*, *front/back*. Nor does the possession of such a system of oppositions guarantee the possession of a relative system. Many languages use such terms in a more or less purely intrinsic way (even when they are primarily used with deictic centers); that is, they are used as binary relations specifying the location of *F* within a domain projected from a part of *G* (as in "to my left," "in front of you," "at the animal's front," "at the house's front," etc.). The test for a relative system is (1) whether it can be used with what is culturally construed as a ground object without intrinsic parts,[43] and (2) whether there is a ternary relation with viewpoint *V* distinct from *G*, such that when *V* is rotated around the array, the description changes (see below). Now, languages that do indeed have a relative system of this kind also tend to have an intrinsic system sharing at least some of the same terms.[44] This typological implication, apart from showing the derivative and secondary nature of relative systems, also more or less guarantees the potential ambiguity of *left/right*, *front/back* systems (although they may be disambiguated syntactically, as in "to the left of the chair" vs. "at the chair's left"). Some languages that lack any such systematic relative system may nevertheless have encoded the odd isolated relative notion, as in "*F* is in my line of sight toward *G*."

That some relative systems clearly use secondary coordinates mapped from *V* to *G* suggests that these mappings are by origin a means of extending the intrinsic frame of reference to cases where it would not otherwise apply. (And this may suggest that the intrinsic system is rather fundamental in human linguistic spatial description.[45]) Through projection of coordinates from the viewpoint V, we assign pseudointrinsic facets to G, as if trees had inherent fronts, backs, and sides.[46] For some languages, this is undoubtedly the correct analysis; the facets are thus named and regions projected with the same limitations that hold for intrinsic regions.[47] Thus many relative systems can be thought of as *derived intrinsic* ones—systems that utilize relative conceptual relations to extend and supplement intrinsic ones. One particular reason to so extend intrinsic systems is their extreme limitations as regards logical inference of spatial relations from linguistic descriptions. Intrinsic descriptions support neither transitive nor converse inferences, but relative ones do (Levelt 1984, chapter 3, this volume; and see below).[48]

Although, from a perceptual point of view, a relative frame of reference seems entirely fundamental, from a linguistic point of view, it is not. In fact it is entirely dispensable. Western children learn this kind of system very late (mastering "projective" left and right only by age 11 or 12). Many languages simply do not employ this frame of reference at all,[49] or only in marginal uses of "intrinsic" or "absolute" lexical items. That means such languages have no way of expressing notions like "in front/behind/to the left/right/side of the tree" as determined by the location of a "viewer" or speaker, which probably comes as a bit of a shock to psychologists, who have, on the basis of familiar languages, confidently predicted its universality (e.g., Clark 1973; Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976; Takano 1989).

More exactly A relative relator R expresses a ternary spatial relation, with arguments V, F, and G, where F and G are unrestricted as to type, except that V and G must be distinct.[50] The primary coordinate system always has its origin on V; there may be a secondary coordinate system with origin on G. Such coordinate systems are normally polar; for example, *front*, *right*, *back*, and *left* may be assigned by clockwise rotation from *front*. Coordinate systems built primarily on visual criteria may not be polar, but be defined, for example, by rectangular coordinates on the two-dimensional visual field (the retinal projection) so that *left* and *right* are defined on the horizontal or x-axis, and *front* and *back* on the vertical or y-axis (*back* has (the base of) F higher than G and/or occluded by G).

Terms that may be glossed *left* and *right* may involve no secondary coordinates, although they sometimes do (as when they have reversed application from the English usage). Terms glossed *front* and *back* normally do involve secondary coordinates (but compare the analysis in terms of vectors by O'Keefe, chapter 7, this volume). Secondary coordinates may be mapped from primary origin on V to secondary origin on G under the following transformations: rotation, translation, and (arguably) reflection.[51] Typological variations of such systems include degree to which a systematic polar system of coordinates is available, degree of use of secondary coordinates, type of mapping function (rotation, translation, reflection) for secondary coordinates, differing anchoring systems for the coordinates (e.g., body axis vs. gaze), and differing degrees to which visual criteria (like occlusion, or place in retinal field) are definitional of the terms.

Absolute Frame of Reference Among the many uses of the notion "absolute" frame of reference, one refers to the fixed direction provided by gravity (or the visual horizon under canonical orientation). Less obviously of psychological relevance, the same idea of fixed directions can be applied to the horizontal. In fact, many languages make extensive, some almost exclusive, use of such an absolute frame of reference on the horizontal. They do so by fixing arbitrary fixed bearings, "cardinal directions," corresponding one way or another to directions or arcs that can be related by the analyst to compass bearings. Speakers of such languages can then describe an array of, for example, a spoon in front of a cup, as "spoon to north/south/east/(etc.) of cup" without any reference to the viewer/speaker's location.

Such a system requires that persons maintain their orientation with respect to the fixed bearings at all times. People who speak such languages can be shown to do so—for example, they can dead reckon current location in unfamiliar territory with extraordinary accuracy, and thus point to any named location from any other (Lewis 1976; Levinson 1992b). How they do so is simply not known at the present time, but we may presume that a heightened sense of inertial navigation is regularly cross-checked with many environmental clues.[52] Indeed, many such systems are clearly abstractions and refinements from environmental gradients (mountain slopes, prevailing wind directions, river drainages, celestial azimuths, etc.).[53] These "cardinal directions" may therefore occur with fixed bearings skewed at various degrees from, and in effect unrelated to, our "north," 'south," "east," and "west." It perhaps needs emphasizing that this keeping track of fixed directions is, with appropriate socialization, not a feat restricted to certain ethnicities, races, environments, or culture types, as shown by its widespread occurrence (in perhaps a third of all human languages?) from Meso-America, to New Guinea, to Australia, to Nepal. No simple ecological determinism will explain the occurrence of such systems, which can be found alternating with, for example, relative systems, across neighboring ethnic groups in similar environments, and which occur in environments of contrastive kinds (e.g., wide open deserts and closed jungle terrain).

The conceptual ingredients for such systems are simple: the relevant linguistic expressions are binary relators, with figure and ground as arguments and a system of coordinates anchored to fixed bearings, which always have their origin on the ground. In fact, these systems are the only systems with conceptual simplicity and elegance. For example, they are the only systems that fully support transitive inferences across spatial descriptions. Intrinsic descriptions do not do so, and relative ones do so only if viewpoint V is held constant (Levelt 1984). Intrinsic systems are dogged by the multiplicity of object types, the differing degrees to which the asymmetries of objects allow the naming of facets, and the problem of "unfeatured" objects. Relative systems are dogged by the psychological difficulties involved in learning left/right distinctions, and the complexities involved in mapping secondary coordinates; often developed from intrinsic systems they display ambiguities across frames of reference (like English "in front of"). The liabilities of absolute systems are not, on the other hand, logical but psychological; they require a cognitive overhead, namely the constant background calculation of cardinal directions, together with a system of dead reckoning that will specify for any arbitrary point P which direction P is from ego's current locus (so that ego may refer to the location of P).

Absolute systems may also show ambiguities of various kinds. First, places of particular sociocultural importance may come to be designated by a cardinal direction term, like a quasi-proper name, regardless of their location with respect to G. Second, where the system is abstracted out of landscape features, the relevant expressions (e.g., "uphill" or "upstream") may either refer to places indicated by relevant local features (e.g., local hill, local stream), or to the abstracted fixed bearings, where these do not coincide. Third, some such systems may even have relative interpretations (e.g., "uphill" may imply further away in my field of vision; cf. our interpretation of "north" as top of a map).

One crucial question with respect to absolute systems is how, conceptually, the coordinate system is thought of. It may be a polar system, as in our *north/south/east/west*, where *north* is the designated anchor and *east*, *south*, *west*, found by clockwise rotation from *north*.[54] Other systems may have a primary and a secondary axis, so that, for example, a *north-south* axis is primary, but it is not clear which direction, *north* or *south*, is itself the anchor.[55] Yet other systems favor no particular primary reference point, each half axis having its own clear anchor or fixed central bearing.[56] Some systems like Tzeltal are "degenerate," in that they offer two labeled half lines (roughly, "north," "south"), but label both ends of the orthogonal with the same terms. Even more confusing, some systems may employ true abstracted cardinal directions on one axis, but landmark designations on the other, guaranteeing that the two axes do not remain orthogonal when arrays are described in widely different places. Thus on Bali, and similarly for many Austronesian systems, one axis is determined by monsoons and is a fixed, abstracted axis, but the other is determined by the location of the central mountain and thus varies continuously when one circumnavigates the island. Even where systematic cardinal systems exist, the geometry of the designated angles is variable. Thus, if we have four half lines based on orthogonal axes, the labels may describe quadrants (as in Guugu Yimithirr), or they may have narrower arcs of application on one axis than the other (as appears to be the case in Wik Mungan[57]). Even in English, though we may think of north as a point on the horizon, we also use arcs of variable extent for informal description.

More exactly An absolute relator R expresses a binary relation between F and G, asserting that F can be found in a search domain at the fixed bearing R from G. The origin X of the coordinate system is always centered on G. G may be any object whatsoever, including ego or another deictic center; F may be a part of G. The geometry of the coordinate system is linguistically/culturally variable, so that in some systems equal quadrants of 90 degrees may be projected from G, while in others something more like 45 degrees may hold for arcs on one axis, and perhaps 135 degrees on the other. The literature also reports abstract systems based on star-setting points, which will then have uneven distribution around the horizon.

Just as relative relators can be understood to map designated facets onto ground objects (thus "on the front of the tree" assigns a named part to the tree), so absolute relators may also do so. Many Australian languages have cardinal edge roots, then affixes indicating, for example, "northern edge." Some of these stems can only be analyzed as an interaction between the intrinsic facets of an object and absolute directions.

4.3.3.2 "Logical Structure" of the Three Frames of Reference We have argued that, as far as language is concerned, we must distinguish frame of reference qua coordinate system from, say, deictic center qua origin of the coordinate system. Still, the skeptical may doubt that this is either necessary or possible.

First, to underline the necessity, each of our three frames of reference may occur with or without a deictic center (or egocentric origin). Thus for the intrinsic frame, we can say, "The ball is in front of me" (deictic center); for the absolute frame we can say, "The ball is north of me"; and of course in the relative frame, we can say, "The ball is in front of the tree" (from ego's point of view). Conversely, none of the three frames need have a deictic center. Thus in the intrinsic frame one can say "in front of the chair"; in the absolute frame, "north of the chair"; and in the relative frame, "in front of the tree from Bill's point of view." This is just what we should expect given the flexible nature of linguistic reference—it follows from Hockett's (1960) design feature of displacement, or Bühler's (1934) concept of transposed deictic center.

Second, we need to show that we can in fact define the three frames of reference adequately without reference to the opposition deictic versus nondeictic center or origin. We have already hinted at plenty of distinguishing characteristics for each of the three frames. But to collect them together, let us first consider the logical properties. The absolute and intrinsic relators share the property that they are binary relations whereas relative relators are ternary. But absolute and intrinsic are distinguished in that absolute relators define asymmetric transitive relations (if F_1 is north of G, and F_2 is north of F_1, then F_2 is north of G), where converses can be inferred (if F is north of G, G is south of F). The same does not hold for intrinsic relators, which hardly support any spatial inferences at all without further assumptions (see Levelt 1984 and chapter 3, this volume). In this case, absolute and relative relators share logical features because relative relators support transitive and converse inferences provided that viewpoint V is held constant.

Although this is already sufficient to distinguish the three frames, we may add further distinguishing factors. Certain important properties follow from the nature of the anchoring system in each case. In the intrinsic case we can think of the named facet of the object as providing the anchor; in the relative case we can think of the viewpoint V on an observer, with the anchor being constituted by, say, the direction of the observer's front or gaze, while in the absolute case one or more of the labeled fixed bearings establishes a conceptual "slope" across the environment, thus fixing the coordinate system. From this, certain distinct properties under rotation emerge as illustrated in figure 4.10.[58] These properties have a special importance for the study of nonlinguistic conceptual coding of spatial arrays because they allow systematic experimentation (as illustrated in section 4.1; see also Levinson 1992b; Brown and Levinson 1993b; Pederson 1993, 1994; Danziger 1993).

Altogether then, we may summarize the distinctive features of each frame of reference as in table 4.3; these features are jointly certainly sufficient to establish the nature of the three frames of reference independently of reference to the nature of the origin of the coordinate system. We may conclude this discussion of the linguistic frames of reference with the following observations:

1. Languages use, it seems, just three frames of reference: absolute, intrinsic, and relative;
2. Not all languages use all frames of reference; some use predominantly one only (absolute or intrinsic; relative seems to require intrinsic); some use two (intrinsic and relative, or intrinsic and absolute), while some use all three;
3. Linguistic expressions may be specialized to a frame of reference, so we cannot assume that choice of frame of reference lies entirely outside language, for example, in spatial thinking, as some have suggested. But spatial relators may be ambiguous (or semantically general) across frames, and often are.

4.3.3.3 Realigning Frames of Reference across Disciplines and Modalities We are now at last in a position to see how our three linguistic frames of reference align with

Rotation of:

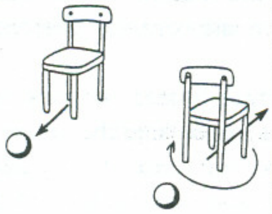
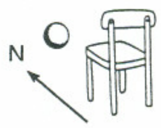
	viewer	ground object	whole array
Intrinsic "ball in front of chair" 	same description? yes	same description? no	same description? yes
Relative "ball to left of chair" 	no	yes	no
Absolute "ball to north of chair" 	yes	yes	no

Figure 4.10
Properties of the frames of reference under rotation.

Table 4.3
Summary of Properties of Different Frames of Reference

	Intrinsic	Absolute	Relative
Relation is	binary	binary	ternary
Origin on	ground	ground	viewpoint *V*
Anchored by	*A* within *G*	"slope"	*A* within *V*
Transitive?	No	Yes	Yes if *V* constant
Constant under rotation of			
whole array?	Yes	No	No
viewer?	Yes	Yes	No
ground?	No	Yes	Yes

the other distinctions in the literature arising from the consideration of other modalities (as listed in table 4.1). The motive, let us remember, is to try to make sense of the very idea of "same frame of reference" across modalities, and in particular from various kinds of nonlinguistic thinking to linguistic conceptualization.

An immediate difficulty is that, by establishing that frames of reference in language should be considered independently of the origin of the coordinate systems, we have opened up a gulf between language and the various perceptual modalities, where the origin of the coordinate system is so often fixed on some ego-center. But this mismatch is in fact just as it should be. Language is a flexible instrument of communication, designed (as it were) so that one may express other persons' points of view, take other perspectives, and so on. At the level of perception, origin and coordinate system presumably come prepackaged as a whole, but at the level of language, and perhaps more generally at the level of conception, they can vary freely and combine.

So to realign the linguistic distinctions with distinctions made across other modalities, we need to fix the origin of the coordinate system so that it coincides, or fails to coincide, with ego in each frame of reference. We may do so as follows. First, we may concede that the relative frame of reference, though not necessarily egocentric, is prototypically so. Second, we may note that the intrinsic system is typically, but not definitionally, non-egocentric. Third, and perhaps most arbitrarily, we may assign a non-egocentric origin to the absolute system. These assignments should be understood as special subcases of the uses of the linguistic frames of reference.

If we make these restrictions, then we can align the linguistic frames of reference with the other distinctions from the literature as in table 4.4.[59] Notice then that, under the restriction concerning the nature of the origin:

Table 4.4
Aligning Classifications of Frames of Reference

Intrinsic	Absolute	Relative
Origin $\neq$ ego	Origin $\neq$ ego	Origin = ego
Object-centered	Environment-centered	Viewer-centered
Intrinsic perspective		Deictic perspective
3-D model		$2\frac{1}{2}$-D sketch
Allocentric	Allocentric	Egocentric
Orientation-free	Orientation-bound	Orientation-bound

1. Intrinsic and absolute are grouped as allocentric frames of reference, as opposed to the egocentric relative system;
2. Absolute and relative are grouped as orientation-bound, as opposed to intrinsic, which is orientation-free.

This correctly captures our theoretical intuitions. In certain respects, absolute and intrinsic viewpoints are fundamentally similar—they are binary relations that are viewpoint-independent, where the origin may happen to be ego but need not be; they are allocentric systems that yield an ego-invariant picture of the "world out there." On the other hand, absolute and relative frameworks are fundamentally similar on another dimension because they both impose a larger spatial framework on an assemblage, specifying its orientation with respect to external coordinates; thus in an intrinsic framework it is impossible to distinguish enantiomorphic pairs, while in either of the orientation-bound systems it is inevitable.[60] Absolute and relative frameworks presuppose a Newtonian or Kantian spatial envelope, while the intrinsic framework is Leibnizian.

The object-centered nature of the intrinsic system hooks it up to Marr's (1982) 3-D model in the theory of vision, and the nature of the linguistic expressions involved suggests that the intrinsic framework is a generalization from the analysis of objects into their parts. A whole configuration can be seen as a single complex object, so that we can talk of the leading car in a convoy as "the head of the line." On the other hand, the viewer-centered nature of the relative framework connects it directly to the sequence of 2-D representations in the theory of vision. Thus the spatial frameworks in the perceptual systems can indeed be correlated with the linguistic frames of reference.

To summarize, I have sought to establish that there is nothing incoherent in the notion "same frame of reference" across modalities or inner representation systems. Indeed, even the existing distinctions that have been proposed can be seen in many detailed ways to correlate with the revised linguistic ones, once the special flexibility of the linguistic systems with respect to origin is taken into account. Thus it should be possible, and intellectually profitable, to formulate the distinct frames of reference in such a way that they have cross-modal application. Notice that this view conflicts with the views of some that frames of reference in language are imposed just in the mapping from perception to language via the encoding process. On the contrary, I shall presume that any and every spatial representation, whether perceptual or conceptual, must involve a frame of reference; for example, retinotopic images just are, willy nilly, in a viewer-centered frame of reference.

But at least one major problem remains. It turns out that the three distinct frames of reference are "untranslatable" from one to the other, throwing further doubt on the idea of correlations and correspondences across sensory and conceptual representational levels. Which brings us to Molyneux's question.

4.4 Molyneux's Question

In 1690 William Molyneux wrote John Locke a letter posing the following celebrated question: If a blind man, who knew by touch the difference between a cube and a sphere, had his sight restored, would he recognize the selfsame objects under his new perceptual modality or not?[61]

The question whether our spatial perception and conception is modality-specific is as alive now as then. Is there one central spatial model, to which all our input senses report, and from which instructions can be generated appropriate to the various output systems (touch, movement, language, gaze, and so on)?

There have of course been attempts to answer Molyneux directly, but the results are conflicting. On the one hand, sight-restored individuals take a while to adjust (Gregory 1987, 94–96; Valvo 1971), monkeys reared with their own limbs masked from sight have trouble relating touch to vision when the mask is finally removed (Howard 1987, 730–731), and touch and vision are attuned to different properties (e.g., the tactile sense is more attuned to weight and texture than shape; Klatsky and Lederman 1993); on the other hand, human neonates immediately extrapolate from touch to vision (Meltzoff 1993), and the neurophysiology suggests direct cross-wirings (Berthoz 1991, 81; but see also Stein 1992), so that some feel that the answer to the question is a "resounding 'yes'" (Eilan 1993, 237). More soberly, it seems that there is some innate supramodal system observable in monkeys and infants, but it may be very restricted, and sophisticated cross-modal thinking may even be dependent on language.[62]

Here I want to suggest another way to think about this old question. Put simply, we may ask whether the same frames of reference can in principle operate across all the modalities, and if not, whether at least they can be translated into one another. What we should mean by "modality" here is an important question. In what follows I shall assume that corresponding to (some of) the different senses, and more generally to input/output systems, there are specialized "central" representational systems, for example, an imagistic system related to vision, a propositional system related to language, a kinaesthetic system related to gesture, and so on (see, for example, Levelt 1989; Jackendoff 1991). Our version of Molyneux's question then becomes two related questions:

1. Do the different representational systems natively and necessarily employ certain frames of reference?
2. If so, can representations in one frame of reference be translated (converted) into another frame of reference?

Let us discount here the self-evident fact that certain kinds of information may perhaps, in principle, be modality-specific; for example, spatial representations in an imagistic mode must, it seems, be determinate with respect to shape, while those in a propositional mode need not, and perhaps, cannot be so.[63] Similarly, the haptic-kinesthetic modality will have available direct information about weight, texture, tactile warmth, and three-dimensional shape we can only guess at from visual information (Klatsky and Lederman 1993), while the directional and inertial information from the vestibular system is of a different kind again. All this would seem to rule out a *single* supramodal spatial representation system. What hybrid monster would a representation system have to be to record such disparate information? All that concerns us here is the compatibility of *frames of reference* across modalities.

First, let us consider question 2, translatability across frames of reference. This is the easier question, and the answer to it offers an indirect answer to question 1. There is a striking, but on a moment's reflection, self-evident fact: you cannot freely convert information from one framework to another. Consider, for example, an array, with a bottle on the ground at the (intrinsic) front side of a chair. Suppose, too, that you view the array from a viewpoint such that the bottle is to the right of the chair; as it happens, the bottle is also north of the chair (see figure 4.11). Now I ask you to remember it, and suppose you "code" the scene in an intrinsic frame of reference: "bottle in front of chair," discarding other information. It is immediately obvious that, from this intrinsic description, you cannot later generate a relative description—if you were viewing the array so that you faced one side of the chair, then the bottle would be to the left of or to the right of the chair—depending on your viewpoint. So without a "coding" or specification of the locus of the viewpoint V, you cannot generate a relative description from an intrinsic description. The same holds for an absolute description. Knowing that the bottle is at the front of the chair will

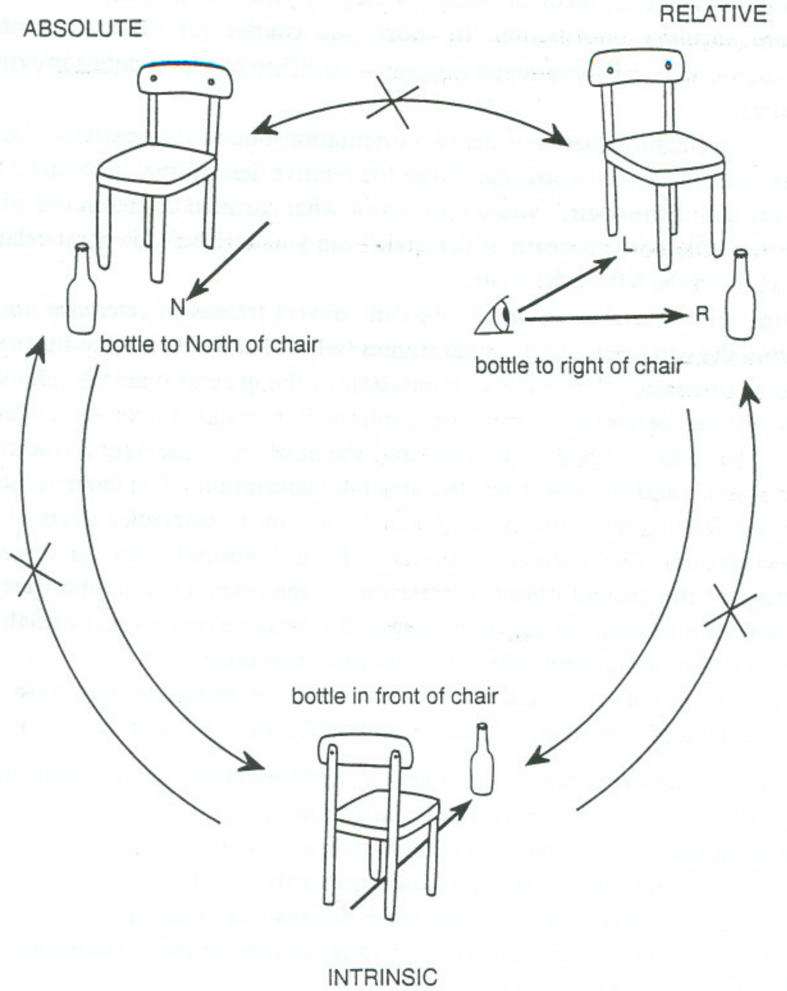


Figure 4.11
Untranslatability across frames of reference.

not tell you whether it is north or south or east or west of the chair—for that, you will need ancillary information. In short, you cannot get from an intrinsic description—an orientation-free representation—to either of the orientation-bound representations.

What about conversions between the two orientation-bound frameworks? Again, it is clear that no conversion is possible. From the relative description or coding "The bottle is to the left of the chair," you do not know what cardinal direction the bottle lies in, nor from "the bottle is north of the chair" can you derive a viewpoint-relative description like "to the left of the chair."

Indeed, the only directions in which you can convert frames of reference are, in principle, from the two orientation-bound frames (relative and absolute) to the orientation-free one (intrinsic).[64] For if the orientation of the ground object is fully specified, then you can derive an intrinsic description. For example, from the relative description "The chair is facing to my right and the bottle is to the right of the chair in the same plane," and likewise from the absolute description "The chair is facing north and the bottle to the north of the chair," you can, in principle, arrive at the intrinsic specification "The bottle is at the chair's front." Normally, though, because the orientation of the ground object is irrelevant to the orientation-bound descriptions, this remains a translation only in principle. By the same reasoning, translations in all other directions are in principle "out," that is, impossible.

This simple fact about translatability across frames of reference may have far-reaching consequences. Consider, for example, the following syllogism:

1. Frames of reference are incommensurable (i.e., a representation in one framework is not freely convertible into a representation in another);
2. Each sense utilizes its own frame(s) of reference (e.g., while vision primarily uses a viewer-centered frame, touch arguably uses primarily an object-centered frame, based on the appreciation of form through three-dimensional grasping);
3. Representations from one modality (e.g., haptic) cannot be freely translated into representations in another (e.g., visual).

The syllogism suggest, then, that the answer to Molyneux's question is no—the blind man upon seeing for the first time will not recognize by sight what he knew before by touch. More generally, we will not be able to exchange information across any internal representation systems that are not based on one and the same frame of reference.

I take this to be a counterintuitive result, a clearly false conclusion, in fact a reductio ad absurdum. We can indeed form mental images of contour shapes explored by touch alone, we can gesture about what we have seen, we can talk about, or draw, what we have felt with our fingers, and so on. Because premise 1 seems self-evidently true, we must then reject premise 2, the assumption that each sensory modality or representational system operates exclusively in its own primary, proprietary frame of reference. In short, either the frame of reference must be the same across all sensory modalities to allow the cross-modal sharing of information or each modality must allow more than one frame of reference.

Intuitively, this seems the correct conclusion. On the one hand, peripheral sensory systems may operate in proprietary frames of reference; for example, low-level vision may know only of 2-D retinotopic arrays, while otoliths are restricted to a gravitational frame of reference. But, on the other hand, at a higher level, visual processing seems to deliver 3-D analyses of objects as well as 2-D ones. Thus when we (presumably) use the visual system to imagine rotations of objects, we project from 3-D models (intrinsic) to $2\frac{1}{2}$-D (relative) ones, showing that both are available. Thus more central, more conceptual, levels of representation seem capable of adopting more than one frame of reference.

Here, then, is the first part of the answer to our puzzle. Representational systems of different kinds, specialized to different sensory modalities (like visual memory) or output systems (like gesture and language), may be capable of adopting different frames of reference. This would explain how it is that Tenejapans, or indeed Dutch subjects, can adopt the same frame of reference when utilizing different representational systems—those involved in generating gesture, those involved in tasks requiring visual memory, those involved in making spatial inferences, as well as those involved in speaking.

But to account for the facts described in section 4.2, it will not be sufficient to establish that the same frame of reference can, in principle, be used across different kinds of internal representation systems, those involved in nonverbal memory, gesture and language, and so on. To account for those facts, it will be necessary to assume that individual subjects do indeed actually utilize the same frame of reference across modalities. But now we have an explanation for this apparent fact: the untranslatability across frames of reference requires individuals to stabilize their representational systems within a limited set of frames of reference. For example, if a Tenejapan man sees an array and remembers it only in terms of a viewer-centered framework, he will not later be able to describe it—his language simply fails to provide a systematic viewer-centered frame of description. Thus the facts that (a) frameworks are not freely convertible, (b) languages may offer restricted frameworks as output, and (c) it may be desirable to describe any spatial experience whatsoever at some later point, these conspire to require that a speaker code spatial perceptions at the time of experience in whatever output frameworks the speaker's dominant language offers.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter began with some quite unexpected findings: languages can differ in the set of frames of reference they employ for spatial description. Moreover, the options in a particular language seem to dictate the use of frames of reference in nonlinguistic tasks—there seems thus to be a cross-modal tendency to fix on a dominant frame of reference. This raises a number of fundamental puzzles: What sense does it make to talk of "same frame of reference" across modalities, or psychological faculties of quite different kinds? If it does make sense, why should it be so? What light does the phenomenon throw on how spatial information is shared across the senses, across the various "input" and "output" devices?

I have tried to sketch answers to these puzzles. The answers converge in two kinds of responses to Molyneux's question "do the senses talk to one another?" The first kind of response is an empirical argument:

1. The frame of reference dominant in a given language "infiltrates" other modalities, presumably to ensure that speakers can talk about what they see, feel, and so on;
2. Therefore, other modalities have the capacity to adopt, or adapt to, other frames of reference, which suggests a yes answer to Mr. Molyneux.

The second kind of response is an a priori argument:

1. Frames of reference cannot freely "translate" into one another;
2. Therefore, if the modality most adaptive to external influences, namely, language, adopts one frame of reference, the others must follow suit;
3. To do this, all modalities must have different frames of reference available, or be able to "annotate" experiences with the necessary ancillary information, which suggests a yes answer to Mr. Molyneux.

Actually, an affirmative answer to Molyneux's question is evidently required—otherwise we could not talk about what we see. What is deeply mysterious is *how* this cross-modal transfer is achieved. The untranslatability across frames of reference greatly increases the puzzle. It is in this light that the findings with which we began—the standardization of frames of reference across modalities in line with the local language—now seem not only less surprising, but actually inevitable.

Acknowledgments

This chapter is based on results of joint research, in particular with Penelope Brown on Tzeltal, but also with many colleagues in the Cognitive Anthropology Research Group, who have collaboratively developed the research program outlined here (see also Senft 1994; Wilkins

1993; Pederson 1994; Danziger 1994; Hill 1994). I am also indebted to colleagues in the wider Psycholinguistics Institute, who have through different research programs challenged premature conclusions and emboldened others (see, for example, in this volume Bierwisch, Levelt, and Bowerman, chapters 2, 3, and 10, respectively; the debt to Levelt's pioneering work on the typology and logic of spatial relations will be particularly evident). In addition, John Lucy, Suzanne Gaskins, and Dan Slobin have been important intellectual influences; and Bernadette Schmitt and László Nagy have contributed to experimental design and analysis. The contributions, ideas, and criticisms of other participants at the conference at which this paper was given have been woven into the text; my thanks to them and the organizers of the conference. Finally, I received very helpful comments on the manuscript from Sotaro Kita, Lynn Nadel, Mary Peterson, and David Wilkins, not all of which I have been able to adequately respond to.

Notes

1. I shall use the term *modality* in a slightly special, but I think motivated, way. When psychologists talk of "cross-modal" effects, they have in mind transfer of information across sensory modalities (vision, touch, etc.). Assuming that these sensory input systems are "modules" in the Fodorean sense, we are then interested in how the output of one module, in some particular inner representation system, is related to the output of some other module, most likely in another inner representation system appropriate to another sensory faculty. Thus cross-modal effects can be assumed to occur through communication between central, but still sense-specific, representation systems, not through peripheral representation systems specialized to modular processes. But see section 4.4.

2. Although there are phrases designating left-hand and right-hand, these are body-part terms with no spatial uses, while body-part terms for *face* and *back* are used for spatial description nearly exclusively for objects in contiguity and then on the basis of an *intrinsic* assignment, not a relative one based on the speaker's viewpoint (see Levinson 1994).

3. The design of this experiment was much improved by Bernadette Schmitt.

4. The design of this experiment is by Eric Pederson and Bernadette Schmitt, building on an earlier design described in Levinson 1992b.

5. The phenomenon of fixed bearings in gesture was first noticed for an Australian Aboriginal group by Haviland (1993), who subsequently demonstrated the existence of the same phenomenon in Zinacantan, a neighboring community to Tenejapa.

6. Rock (1992) is here commenting on Asch and Witkin 1948, which built directly on the Gestalt notions. See also Rock (1990).

7. One kind of disagreement is voiced by Paillard (1991, 471): "Spatial frameworks are incorporated in our perceptual and motor experiences. They are not however to be confused with the *system of coordinates* which abstractly represent them" (emphasis). But this is terminological; for our purposes we wish precisely to abstract out the properties of frames of reference, so that we can consider how they apply across different perceptual or conceptual systems.

8. "When places are individuated by their spatial relation to certain objects, a crucial part of what we need to know is what those objects are. As the term 'frame of reference' is commonly used, these objects would be said to provide the frame of reference" (Brewer and Pears 1993, 25).

9. I shall use the opposition *figure* versus *ground* for the object to be located versus the object with respect to which it is to be located, respectively, after Talmy 1983. This opposition is identical to *theme* versus *relatum*, *referent* versus *relatum*, *trajector* versus *landmark*, and various other terminologies.

10. Brewer and Pears (1993, 26) consider the role of coordinate systems, but what they have to say only increases our puzzlement: "Two events are represented as being in the same spatial position if and only if they are assigned the same co-ordinates. Specifying a frame of reference would have to do with specifying how co-ordinates are to be assigned to events in the world on the basis of their spatial relations to certain objects. These objects provide the frame of reference." This fails to recognize that two distinct systems of coordinates over the same objects can describe the same place.

11. There are many good sketches of parts of this intellectual terrain (see, for example, Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976; Jammer 1954; O'Keefe and Nadel 1978), but none of it all.

12. Some notion of absolute space was already presupposed by Descartes's introduction of coordinate systems, as Einstein (1954, xiv) pointed out.

13. This association was in part due to the British empiricists like Berkeley whose solipsism made egocentric relative space the basis for all our spatial ideas. See O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 14–16.

14. Much behavioral experimentation on rats in mazes has led to classifications of behavior parallel to the notions of frame of reference. O'Keefe and Nadel's 1978 classification, for example, is in terms of body position responses (cf. egocentric frames of reference), cue responses (a kind of allocentric response to an environmental gradient), and place responses (involving allocentric mental maps). Work on infant behavior similarly relates behavioral response types to frames of reference, usually egocentric versus allocentric (or geographic—see Pick 1988, 147–156).

15. See also Brewer and Pears (1993, 29), who argue that allocentric behavior can always be mimicked through egocentric computations: "Perhaps language ... provides the only conclusive macroscopic evidence for genuine allocentricity."

16. These distinctions are seldom properly made in the literature on mental maps in humans. Students of animal behavior, though, have noted that maps consisting of relative angles and distances between landmarks have quite different computational properties to maps with fixed bearings: in the former, but not the latter, each time landmarks are added to the map, the database increases exponentially (see, for example, McNaughton, Chen, and Markus 1990). Despite that, most rat studies fail to distinguish between these two kinds of allocentricity, relative and absolute.

17. Paillard (1991, 471–472) has a broader notion of "frames of reference" than most brain scientists (and closer to psychological ideas); he proposes that there are four such frames subserving visually guided action, all organized around the geocentric vertical: (1) a body frame, presuming upright posture for action; (2) an object frame, presumably similar to Marr's (1982) object-centered system; (3) a world frame, a Euclidean space inclusive of both body and object; and (4) a retinal frame, feeding the object and world frames. He even provides a rough neural "wiring diagram" (p. 473).

18. The age at which this switch to the non-egocentric takes place seems highly task-dependent. See Acredolo (1988), who gives sixteen months as an end point; see also Pick (1993), for a route-finding task, where the process has hardly begun by sixteen months.

19. This leap from a perspective image, or worse, a silhouette, is possible (Marr argued) only by assuming that objects can be analyzed into geometrical volumes of a specific kind (generalized cones); hence 3-D models must be of this kind, where principal axes are identified.

20. Others have suggested that what we store is a $2\frac{1}{2}$-D image coupled with the ability to mentally rotate it (Tarr and Pinker 1989), thus giving our apparent ability to rotate mental images (Shepard and Metzler 1971) some evolutionary raison d'être. Yet others suggest that object recognition is achieved via a set of $2\frac{1}{2}$-D images from different orientations (Bülthoff 1991), while some (Rock, Wheeler, and Tudor 1989) suggest we have none of these powers.

21. See Danziger 1994 for possible connections to linguistic distinctions; I am grateful to Eve Danziger for putting me in touch with this work.

22. As Kant 1768 made clear, objects differing in handedness (enantiomorphs or "incongruent counterparts" in Kant's terminology), cannot be distinguished in an object-centered (or intrinsic) frame of reference, but only in an external coordinate system. See Van Cleve and Frederick 1991, and, for the relevance to Tzeltal, Levinson and Brown 1994.

23. For example, the cube comparisons test can be solved by (1) rotation using viewer-centered coordinates; (2) rotation around an object-centered axis imaged with viewer-centered coordinates; (3) rotation of the perspective point around the object; or (4) purely object-centered comparisons.

24. Thus Cohen and Kubovy (1993, 379) display deep confusion about frames of reference: they suggest that one can have orientation-free representations of handedness information in an orientation-free frame of reference by utilizing the notion "clockwise." But as Kant (1768) showed, and generations of philosophers since have agreed (see Van Cleve and Frederick 1991), the notion "clockwise" presupposes an external orientation.

25. Carlson-Radvansky and Irwin's view would seem to be subtly different from Levelt's (1989); see below in text.

26. The equation is Tversky's; actually, her survey perspective in some cases (e.g., outside the context of maps) may also relate to a more abstract "absolute" spatial framework where both viewer and landmarks are embedded in a larger frame of reference.

27. The conceptual system is abstract over different perceptual clues, as shown by the fact that astronauts can happily talk about, say, "above and to the left" where one perceptual clue for the vertical (namely gravity) is missing (Friederici and Levelt 1990). Levelt (1989, 154–155) concludes that the spatial representation itself does not determine the linguistic description: "There is ... substantial freedom in putting the perceived structure, which is spatially represented, into one or another propositional format."

28. For example, there is no convincing explanation of the English deictic use of "front," "back," "left," "right": we say, "The cat in front of the tree," as if the tree was an interlocutor facing us, but when we say, "The cat is to the left of the tree," we do not (as, for example, in

Tamil) mean the cat is to the tree's left, therefore to our right. The reason for this explanatory gap is that the facts have always been underdescribed, the requisite coordinate systems not being properly spelled out even in the most recent works.

29. The so-called topological prepositions or relators have a complex relation to frames of reference. First, note that frames of reference are here defined in terms of coordinate systems, and many "topological" relators express no angular or coordinate information, for example, *at* or *near*. However, others do involve the vertical absolute dimension and often intrinsic features, or axial properties, of landmark objects. Thus proper analysis of the "topological" notions involves partitioning their features between noncoordinate spatial information and features of information distributed between the frames of reference mentioned below in the text. Thus English *in* as in "the money in the piggy bank" is an intrinsic notion based on properties of the ground object; *under* as in "the dust under the rug" compounds intrinsic (under surface, bottom) and absolute (vertical) information, and so forth.

30. Except in some places, like the Torres Straits, where the trade winds roar through westward and spatial descriptions can be in terms of "leeward" and "windward." Or where the earth drops away in one direction, as on the edges of mountain ranges, gravity can be naturally imported into the horizontal plane.

31. The reader may feel that the notion of "front" is different for chairs and persons (and so of course it is), and in particular that "in front of me" is somehow more abstract than "in front of the chair." But notice that we could have said "at my feet" or "at the foot of the chair"—here "feet" or "foot" clearly means something different in each case, but shares the notion of an intrinsic part of the relatum object.

32. The importance of the distinction between binary and ternary spatial relators was pointed out by Herrmann 1990.

33. For example, the Australian language Guugu Yimithirr has (derived) lexemes meaning "north side of," "south side of," and so on, which combine both intrinsic and absolute frames of reference in a single word. Less exotically, English *on* as in "the cup on the table" would seem to combine absolute (vertical) information with topological information (contact) and intrinsic information (supporting planar surface).

34. This point is important. Some psychologists have been tempted to presume, because of the ambiguity of English spatial expressions such as "in front," that frames of reference are imposed on language by a spatial interpretation, rather than being distinguished semantically (see, for example, Carlson-Radvansky and Irwin 1993).

35. We know one way in which this tripartite typology may be incomplete: some languages use conventionalized landmark systems that in practice grade into absolute systems, although there are reasons for thinking that landmark systems and fixed-bearing systems are distinct conceptual types.

36. I am indebted to many discussions with colleagues (especially Balthasar Bickel, Eric Pederson, and David Wilkins) over the details of this scheme, although they would not necessarily agree with this particular version.

37. Thus the "face" of a stone may be the bottom surface hidden in the soil, as long as it meets the necessary axial and shape conditions.

38. We tend to think of human prototypes as inevitably the source of such prototype parts, but such anthropomorphism may be ethnocentric; for example, in Mayan languages plant parts figure in human body-part descriptions (see Laughlin 1975; Levinson 1994).

39. Thus Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976, 401), thinking of English speakers: "People tend to treat objects as six-sided. If an object has both an intrinsic top and bottom, and an intrinsic front and back, the remaining two sides are intrinsically left and right." Incidentally, the possession of "intrinsic left/right" is perhaps an indication that such systems are not exclusively object-centered (because left and right cannot ultimately be distinguished without an external frame of reference).

40. For a nice contrast between two apparently similar Meso-American systems, one of which is armature-based and the other based on the location of individual facets, see MacLaury (1989) on Zapotec, and Levinson (1994) on Tzeltal.

41. Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976) suggest that the notion of intrinsic region may be linked to perceptual contiguity within 10 degrees of visual arc (p. 91), but that the conceptual counterpart to this perceptual notion of region combines perceptual information with functional information about the region drawn from social or physical interaction (pp. 387–388).

42. It may be that *left* and *right* are centered on *V*, while *front* and *back* are indeed rotated and have their origin on *G*. Evidence for that analysis comes from various quarters. First, some languages like Japanese allow both the English- and Hausa-style interpretations of *front*, while maintaining *left* and *right* always the same, suggesting that there are two distinct subsystems involved. Second, English "left" and "right" are not clearly centered on *G* because something can be to the left of *G* but not in the same plane at all (e.g., "the mountain to the left of the tree"), while English "front" and "back" can be centered on *G*, so that it is odd to say of a cat near me that it is "in front of a distant tree." Above all, there is no contradiction in "the cat is to the front and to the left of the tree." An alternative analysis of English would have the coordinates fixed firmly on *V*, and give "*F* is in front of the tree" an interpretation along the lines "*F* is between *V* and *G*" ("behind" glossing "*G* is between *V* and *F*"). My own guess is that English is semantically general over these alternative interpretations.

43. Note that, for example, we think of a tree as unfeatured on the horizontal dimension, so that it lacks an intrinsic front, while some Nilotic cultures make the assumption that a tree has a front, away from the way it leans.

44. But some languages encode relative concepts based directly on visual occlusion or the absence of it; these do not have intrinsic counterparts (as S. Kita has pointed out to me).

45. As shown by the intrinsic system's priority in acquisition (Johnston and Slobin 1978). On the other hand, some languages hardly utilize an intrinsic frame of reference at all (see, for example, Levinson 1992b on an Australian language).

46. I owe the germ of this idea to Eric Pederson.

47. This does not seem, once again, the right analysis for English *left*/*right*, because *F* and *G* need not be in the same plane at all (as in "the tree to the left of the rising moon"), and intuitively, "to the left of the ball" does not ascribe a left facet to the ball.

48. Although transitivity and converseness in relative descriptions hold only on the presumption that V is constant.

49. Conversely, other languages like Tamil use it in more far-reaching ways.

50. F may be a part of G, as in "the bark on the left (side) of the tree."

51. Rotation will have *front* toward V, and clockwise (looking down on G) from *front*: *right*, *back*, *left* (as in Tamil). Translation will have *back* toward V, and clockwise from *back*: *left*, *front*, *right* (as in Hausa). Reflection will have *front* toward V, but clockwise from *front*: *left*, *back*, *right* (as in English, on one analysis). The rotation and translation cases clearly involve secondary polar coordinates on G. The reflection cases can be reanalyzed as defined by horizontal and vertical coordinates on the retinal projection, or can be thought of (as seems correct for English) as the superimposition of two systems, the *left/right* terms involving only primary coordinates on V, and the *front/back* terms involving rotated secondary coordinates on G.

52. Environmental clues will not explain how some people can exercise such heightened dead reckoning abilities outside familiar territory. I presume that such people have been socialized to constantly compute direction as a background task, by inertial navigation with constant checks with visual information and other sensory information (e.g., sensing wind direction). But see Baker (1989), who believes in faint human magnetoreception.

53. Note that none of these environmental gradients can provide the cognitive basis of abstracted systems. Once the community has fixed a direction, it remains in that direction regardless of fluctuations in local landfall, drainage, wind source, equinox, and so on, or even removal of the subject from the local environment. Thus the environmental sources of such systems may explain their origins but do not generally explain how they are used, or how the cardinal directions are psychologically "fixed."

54. Our current polar system is due no doubt to the introduction of the compass in medieval times. Before, maps typically had east at the top, hence the expression "orient oneself," showing that our use of polar coordinates is older than the compass.

55. Warlpiri may be a case in point. Although such a system may be based on a solar compass, solstitial variation makes it necessary to abstract an equinoctial bisection of the seasonal movement of the sun along the horizon; it is therefore less confusing to fix the system by reference to a mentally constituted orthogonal.

56. Guugu Yimithirr would be a case in points because there are no elicitable associations of sequence or priority between cardinal directions.

57. See Peter Sutton's (1992) description of the Wik Mungan system (another Aboriginal language of Cape York).

58. I am grateful to David Wilkins, and other colleagues, for helping me to systematize these observations.

59. Table 4.4 owes much to the work of Eve Danziger (see especially Danziger 1994).

60. See Van Cleve and Frederick 1991 for discussion of this Kantian point. For the cross-cultural implications and a working out of the place of absolute systems in all this, see Danziger 1994.

61. First discussed in Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding* (book 2, ix, 8), Molyneux's question was brought back into philosophical discussion by Gareth Evans (1985: Ch. 13), and many of the papers in Eilan, McCarthy, and Brewer 1993 explicitly address it.

62. See, for example, Ettlinger 1987, 174: "language serves as a cross-modal bridge"; Dennett 1991, 194–199.

63. The issue may be less clear than it at first seems; see Tye 1991, 5–9.

64. The possibility of getting from a relative representation to an intrinsic one may help to explain the apparent inconsistency between our findings here and Levelt's (chapter 3, this volume). In Levelt's task, subjects who made ellipses always presupposed an underlying uniform spatial frame of reference, even when their spatial descriptions varied between relative and intrinsic, thus suggesting that frames of reference might reside in the mapping from spatial representation to language rather than in the spatial representation itself. But, as Levelt acknowledges, the data are compatible with an analysis whereby the spatial representation is itself in a relative frame of reference and the mapping is optionally to an intrinsic or relative description. The mapping from relative to intrinsic is one of the two mappings, in principle possible between frames of reference, as here described, whereas a mapping from intrinsic spatial representation to linguistic relative representation would be in principle impossible. This would seem to explain all the data that we currently have in hand.

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