EVIDENCE FOR FRAMES FROM HUMAN LANGUAGE

Sebastian Löbner
(University of Düsseldorf)

One of the major assumptions on which the work of the local research unit is based is Barsalou's conjecture that the structure of the mental representations used in the human cognitive system is that of frames. A frame in Barsalou's sense is a structure that assembles and coordinates informa-tion about objects to be represented as a recursive network of attributes with values specified (more or less specifically) and constraints that relate the attributes and their values to each other. One central point of the notion of frame employed in Barsalou's theory is the functional character of the attributes involved: rather than representing arbitrary relations between nodes of the frame, they assign unique values to nodes, e.g. a unique shape, colour, price, origin, name, purpose etc. to the object to be described.

If Barsalou's conjecture is correct, it is to be expected that language, as one of the most promi-nent productions of the human mind, reflects the structural organization of human cognition. In order to investigate this aspect of the conjecture, we will take a look at language from the tradi-tional perspectives of form and content:

- Do linguistic forms, from sounds to grammatical sentences provide evidence that they are based upon, and combined into, units that can be considered frames of a certain constrained constitution? This is what is to be expected if it is frames and recursive combinations there-of that the human mind is able to operate on.

As to linguistic content,

- Can propositions, or more generally, linguistic meanings, as they are presumably repre¬sented in the mind, be considered to have the structure of Barsalou frames?

- Is there evidence in the lexica of human languages that shows that the human cognitive system, to the extent that its contents can be verbalized, actually works with frame-like representations?