Reference Point Constructions, the Underspecification of Meaning, and the Conceptual Structure of Palauan *er*

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The Palauan grammatical morpheme *er* is a preposition-like word whose wide variety of uses seem unrelated to each other and whose semantic function (if any) is obscure. Reminiscent of English *of* in signifying an intrinsic relation between two entities, the meaning of *er* appears to be even more schematic and context dependent. It is argued that *er*'s basic conceptual structure, and therefore its meaning, resides in its designation of an abstract reference point construction in which its object serves as a reference point with respect to which other entities (either things or relations) are construed to be located in some kind of physical or abstract domain. Consequently, the meaning of *er* is highly schematic and underspecified. Its apparently unrelated senses are related to each other in reflecting instantiations of this construction when construed against different backgrounds in particular contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION. This paper investigates a semantic phenomenon in Palauan, a Western Austronesian language (Bender 1971) with approximately 15,000 speakers; it is spoken mainly in the Palau Islands and Guam (Grimes 1988). The data are from the standard reference grammar of Palauan by Josephs (1975), supplemented by material and insight from Josephs's more recent two-volume *Handbook of Palauan Grammar* (1997, 1999). Additional background information about lexical matters is provided by McManus (1977).[1]

Most linguists agree that meaning is determined by a combination of a language's overt lexico-grammatical resources together with various kinds of background knowledge structures (domains) and contextually inferred information (i.e., information from the speech event itself). Contextual and background knowledge play an enhanced role in meaning construction when a lexical item's conceptual content is underspecified, and thus highly schematic, as is found in the case of the Palauan grammatical morpheme *er*, a preposition-like word whose wide variety of uses seem unrelated to each other and whose semantic function is often obscure.

1. See also Flora (1974) and Georgopoulos (1985) for additional information about the structure of Palauan.

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Reminiscent of English *of* in signifying an intrinsic relation between two entities (Langacker 1992), *er*'s meaning appears to be even more schematic and context dependent. Drawing on the principles of cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991a, 1991b), I will argue that *er*'s basic conceptual content, and therefore its meaning, resides in its designation of an abstract reference point construction (cf. Langacker 1993) in which its object serves as a conceptual reference point with respect to which other entities (either things or relations) are construed to be located in some kind of physical or abstract domain. Consequently, its apparently unrelated senses and uses reflect instantiations of this construction when construed against different backgrounds in particular contexts.

In the next section I summarize the range of senses of *er* discussed in Josephs's grammars. Following a brief characterization of the general properties of the reference point construction and its theoretical underpinnings in section 3, I then show in section 4 how a reference point analysis for *er* can facilitate a unified account of the data and explain how its various senses can be related to each other semantically. Section 5 concludes the paper with a discussion of how to best represent the meaning of *er* in Palauan grammar.

2. THE TRADITIONAL ANALYSIS OF PALAUAN *ER*. In his standard 1975 grammar of Palauan, Josephs presents data that he claims show that *er* has basically two unrelated uses, as either a specifying word or a relational word (1975:84). In effect, he strongly suggests that *er* is homonymous between these two allegedly separate functions in Palauan grammar (Josephs 1975:51). This view is apparently confirmed at one point in his more recent *Handbook of Palauan Grammar* (Josephs 1997:79), although in the second volume of this work he acknowledges that "there are some linguists who do not consider such a distinction necessary" (Josephs 1999:2). It is, of course, obvious that before we can properly evaluate the merits of either point of view we must first examine how *er* functions in Palauan grammar. Once a representative range of facts concerning the use of *er* has been discussed we will return at the end of this section to the issue of how best to analyze its meaning.

In its use as a specifying word, glossed as SPEC in the data, *er* signifies that the objects of imperfective verbs are specific and singular (Josephs 1975:48, 260). A similar description of the function of *er* as a specifying word is found in Josephs (1997:74–76). Because perfective verbs in Palauan already contain definite object pronoun suffixes, the need for *er* in these constructions is obviated, and so data with perfective verbs are not relevant for this paper. Note the use of *er* in the following examples.[2]

(1) a. A ngelekek a medakt (er) a derumk.
CM child CM afraid.of SPEC CM thunder
'My child is afraid of (the) thunder.'

b. Ng soak el menga (er) a ngikel.
it my.liking DCI eat SPEC CM fish
'I like to eat (the) fish.'

These data show that the absence of *er* evokes a nonspecific reading where the child is afraid of thunder (*derumk*) in general (1a) or where a person likes to eat fish (*ngikel*) in general (1b), whereas the presence of *er* indicates that specific, definite instances of thunder and fish are meant, respectively. This specific interpretation is represented in the English transla-

tions by the use of the definite article *the*. Josephs notes that when *er* is absent "the speaker is making a general statement about something" whereas when *er* is present "the speaker is making a specific statement about some particular single occasion" (Josephs 1975:47).

In the next set of data, specifying *er* is followed by emphatic pronouns that are invariably specific in interpretation:

(2) a. Ak ulemes er ngii er a party.
I saw SPEC him REL CM party
'I saw him at the party.'

b. A beab a tilobed er ngii.
CM mouse CM came.out SPEC it
'The mouse came out of it (e.g., a hole).'

In (2) the emphatic pronoun *ngii* 'him, it' following *er* refers to a specific person (2a) or thing (2b). While emphatic pronouns typically imply contrastive emphasis in other contexts, that is not true here (cf. Josephs 1975:84–85; 1997:136–38).

The other main function of the word *er* in Palauan is its use as a so-called relational word, glossed as REL in the data. This kind of *er* expresses "various types of relationships" (Josephs 1975:51), including spatial and temporal relationships and even comparison (cf. [9] below). Josephs observes that the function of relational *er* "is really quite general—namely, to relate the noun (or noun phrase) following it to a particular action or state and thereby provide a fuller description of the circumstances surrounding that action or state" (Josephs 1999:2). Significantly, as noted above, Josephs claims that the relational use of *er* "is best considered as a different word" from its use as a specifying word (1975:51) illustrated in (1–2) above, and he also notes that relational *er* "is always followed by a noun" (1975:39).[3]

In the following paragraphs, examples containing various kinds of relational phrases with *er* are given to characterize its range of different uses, with the relevant relational phrases in each case given in boldface.[4] Where appropriate, I refer to the nominal follow-

2. Following Josephs's terminology, I use the following abbreviations for the interlinear glosses in this paper: SPEC, specifying use of *er*; REL, relational use of *er*; CM, constituent marker, for the word *a* that precedes noun and verb constituents, as discussed in Josephs (1975:44–45); DCI, dependent clause introducer, for the word *el* that introduces subordinate clauses of various types (identified by Georgopolous [1985] as a complementizer [COMP]). The DCI *el* sometimes also functions as a linking morpheme that connects constituents in certain kinds of modifying constructions (Josephs 1975:chap. 24). To simplify the presentation of the data I do not distinguish these different uses of *el* in this paper, but gloss all occurrences of *el* as DCI, because the differences are not relevant to the issues dealt with here. Standard Palauan orthography as described in Josephs's grammar is used throughout. The only exception is that Josephs uses a hook under the vowel symbol *e* to indicate a lax mid central unrounded vowel that occurs in many Palauan words, including *er*. As is true for English and certain other languages, when this vowel occurs before [r] (as in the word *er*), the resulting pronunciation of the VC sequence is essentially that of a retroflex syllabic [ɽ]. To simplify the presentation of the data I omit this distinction here, as does Georgopoulos (1985), following the final report of the Palau Orthography Committee (1972). The digraph *ch* represents the glottal stop, the letter *d* usually represents a voiced interdental fricative, and *ng* represents the velar nasal.

3. As indicated in the quotation cited earlier in this paragraph, this statement has been generalized to include noun phrases in Josephs's more recent work (1999).

4. Additional examples of different uses of relational *er* can be found throughout chapters 14 and 13 of Josephs (1975) and (1999), respectively. My choice of examples is as representative of the range of uses of *er* as possible.

ing *er* as its object under the assumption that the word behaves grammatically like a traditional preposition, and I also occasionally refer to the word itself as a preposition.

A common relational sense of *er* evokes various kinds of locational meanings, as illustrated in the following examples.

(3) a. Ak milsuub **er a skuul**.
I was.studying REL CM school
'I was studying at school.'

b. A Droteo a milengedub **er a diong**.
CM Droteo CM was.swimming REL CM stream
'Droteo was swimming in the stream.'

c. Ak mlo er a stoang el ngar **er a sidosia**.
I went REL CM store DCI exist REL CM car
'I went to the store by car.'

In (3a) *er* designates a relationship in which someone's studying is related to a place where such study typically occurs (a school). In (3b) the word relates a swimming activity with a place where that activity can be carried out (a stream). And in (3c) the second (boldfaced) phrase containing *er* evokes a particular kind of locational sense in which the means of transportation (by car) utilized by the person going to the store is accentuated (Josephs 1975:279). In each case we see how the context reinforces the locational interpretation of *er.*

Another kind of relational *er* evokes directional senses of various kinds in which the object of *er* is construed as a type of goal. The goal may be relatively concrete, as in the examples in (4) below and the first phrase containing *er* in (3c) above.

(4) a. A John a mo **er a stoang**.
CM John CM go REL CM store
'John is going to the store.'

b. A beab a tiluu **er a blsibs**.
CM mouse CM went.into REL CM hole
'The mouse went into the hole.'

Note how the directional sense of the word is reinforced by, and juxtaposes with, the directional meanings of the verbs in these examples. Alternatively, *er* may be evocative of a more abstract kind of goal in the appropriate context, as shown in the following:

(5) a. A ngalek a lmangel **er a demal**.
CM child CM is.crying REL CM father
'The child is crying for his father.'

b. A John a ulecherchur **er a oltobedechur**.
CM John CM laughed REL CM joke
'John laughed at the joke.'

c. Ak medeues **er a ngikel**.
I have.appetite/taste.for REL CM fish
'I have an appetite/taste for fish.'

In (5a) the goal of *er* is construed as a person (the child's father) toward which the child's crying is directed. Similarly, in (5b) the goal is construed as a joke toward which John's laughter is directed, and in (5c) as a particular kind of food (fish) toward which a person's appetite is directed.[5]

We next examine uses of *er* in which its object designates source senses of various kinds, as illustrated in the data in (6). As was seen in (4) above, we again find that the interpretation of *er* in a given sentence often correlates with the meaning of the verb and other clausal components, which shows how semantic information supplied by other parts of the clause typically juxtaposes with and helps specify the exact meaning of *er* in particular instances.

(6) a. A rekung a tilobed **er a blsibs**.
CM crab CM came.out REL CM hole
'A crab came out of the hole.'

b. A Toki a rirebet **er a cheldukl**.
CM Toki CM fell.off REL CM dock
'Toki fell off the dock.'

c. Ak milleng a udoud **er a Droteo**.
I borrowed CM money REL CM Droteo
'I borrowed some money from Droteo.'

d. A blai a rruul **er a kerrekar**.
CM house CM made REL CM wood
'The house is made of wood.'

The verbs in (6a) and (6b) describe actions in which their subjects, a crab and a person named Toki, respectively, are depicted as moving away from the objects of *er,* which are construed as sources or points of origin of the actions, a hole and a dock, respectively. More abstract kinds of sources are evoked by the objects of *er* in (6c) and (6d). In the former a person named Droteo is the source of borrowed money and in the latter wood is construed as the source substance from which the house was made. Josephs classifies (6d) as a miscellaneous rather than a source use of *er* (1975:297), but I think that it more likely evokes the source sense.

The data in (7) illustrate a sense of *er* in which the objects of the preposition evoke causes of various kinds.

(7) a. Ak smecher **er a tereter**.
I sick REL CM cold
'I'm sick with a cold/I've got a cold.'

b. A demal a Droteo a mlad **er a kiubio**.
CM father CM Droteo CM died REL CM heart.attack
'Droteo's father died of a heart attack.'

5. Note that even though the English translation of (5c) appears to indicate that the speaker has an appetite for fish in general, Josephs (1975:287) makes clear that in this sentence "the subject's appetite is directed towards a particular desired object or goal—namely, fish." In other words, Josephs accentuates that the object of *er* in this sentence evokes a specific or particular entity (fish).

c. A bilsengek a rirechorech **er a eolt**.
CM my.boat CM sank REL CM storm
'My boat sank in (i.e., because of) the storm.'

d. A ochik a mekekad **er a chudel**.
CM my.foot CM itchy REL CM grass
'My foot is itchy from the grass.'

In (7a) a cold is construed as the cause of someone's being sick and in (7b) the cause of the death of Droteo's father is attributed to a heart attack. In (7c) the storm is the cause of the boat's sinking and in (7d) the grass causes the itchy foot. Note how in each sentence the cause interpretation is determined, at least in part, by the meanings of other clausal components and the context. In other words, in (7a) *er* relates being sick with the notion of a cold, and in (7b) it relates a death with a heart attack. The most natural way to interpret the specifics of these (and the other) particular relationships in the relevant contexts is to attribute the states or actions as being caused by the entities functioning as the objects of the preposition.

Temporal senses of *er* are illustrated in data like the following.

(8) a. A John a mo merael **er a klukuk**.
CM John CM go leave REL CM tomorrow
'John is going to leave tomorrow.'

b. A bechik a mle smecher **er a kesus**.
CM my.wife CM was sick REL CM last.night
'My wife was sick last night.'

c. A Toki a mechiuaiu **er a elechang**.
CM Toki CM is.sleeping REL CM now
'Toki is sleeping now.'

In the sentences in (8) the word *er* relates states and/or actions of varying kinds with words specifying different times. In these contexts it is natural to interpret the objects of *er* as times when the states or actions take place. For example, John's leaving in (8a) is related by *er* to a time (tomorrow) when the leaving will take place. It should be obvious that similar descriptions hold for the other examples.[6]

As mentioned earlier, there is also a comparison sense of *er*, as exemplified in (9).

(9) a. A Droteo a mesisiich **er a Toki**.
CM Droteo CM stronger REL CM Toki
'Droteo is stronger than Toki.'

b. A ududek a mekesai **er a ududem**.
CM my.money CM insufficient REL CM your.money
'I have less money than you.'

The specific comparison sense of *er* emerges naturally from the particular context evoked by the meanings of all the clausal elements. In (9a) the strength of the person Droteo is being asserted as greater in relation to that of another person designated as the object of *er*, Toki. This relationship is naturally interpretable in terms of compari-

6. It should be apparent that for each of these temporal uses of *er* the object of the preposition could also be interpreted as a temporal location within which a given event occurs.

son. In (9b) the speaker's lack of money is related by *er* with the hearer's money. Once again, the relationship evoked is comparative in nature.

A possessive sense of *er* is illustrated in phrases like the following, in which the possessed noun belongs to the category of unpossessable nouns in Palauan. Unlike possessable nouns, which are either obligatorily or optionally marked with possessor suffixes, the possessors of unpossessable nouns can only be expressed as objects of the word *er*, as shown in the following (Josephs 1975:70):

(10) a. sidosia **er a Toki**
car REL CM Toki
'Toki's car'

b. sensei **er ngak**
teacher REL I (emphatic)
'my teacher'

In (10a) a car is related to the person Toki and in (10b) a teacher is related to the speaker, coded by the emphatic first person singular pronoun *ngak*. In the contexts these relationships are clearly possessive in nature.[7]

Josephs notes that Palauan sentences may contain multiple relational phrases with *er*, as illustrated in the following examples. Boldface is not used here.

(11) a. A John a mo er a Guam er a klukuk.
CM John CM go REL CM Guam REL CM tomorrow
'John is going to Guam tomorrow.' (DIRECTIONAL/TEMPORAL PHRASES)

b. Ak mla er a blil a Toki er a elii.
I was REL CM house CM Toki REL CM yesterday
'I was at Toki's house yesterday.' (LOCATIONAL/TEMPORAL PHRASES)

c. A John a mle er a euid el klok er a kesus.[8]
CM John CM arrived REL CM seven DCI clock REL CM yesterday
'John arrived at seven o'clock last evening.' (TEMPORAL PHRASES)

When a temporal phrase occurs in a sentence with another relational phrase, as shown in (11a,b), the temporal phrase comes after the other relational phrase (Josephs 1975:295). Example (11c) shows that in a sentence with two temporal phrases the one indicating the more general time span (yesterday) is placed last, with the more specific phrase (seven o'clock) serving to indicate the particular time within the more general time span when the event occurs.

Finally, Josephs cites several so-called "miscellaneous" uses of relational *er* that he does not attempt to further categorize, as illustrated in the following examples (Josephs 1975:297–98; 1999:36–39). I again use boldface to highlight phrases with *er*. The particular kind of sense evoked by *er* in each case is given in parentheses where appropriate.

7. See Josephs (1975:chap. 3) and Josephs (1997:chap. 3) for additional information about possession in Palauan. Unpossessable nouns include foreign borrowings and native nouns designating entities in nature that cannot be conceived of as being possessed.
8. The use of *el* in this sentence exemplifies the linking function mentioned in an earlier footnote.

(12) a. Ak ulemekedo er a Toki **er a dengua**.
I called SPEC CM Toki REL CM phone
'I called Toki on the phone.' (MEANS OF COMMUNICATION)

b. A delmerab er ngak a chelsbreber **er a becheleleu**.
CM room REL I CM painted REL CM white
'My room is painted white.' (MEDIUM OR MATERIAL USED)

c. A tede **er tir** a chiliis.
CM three REL them CM escaped
'Three of them escaped.' (PART/WHOLE RELATION)

d. Ng chetik a omelmil a Droteo **er a rrom**.
it my.dislike CM drinking CM Droteo REL CM liquor
'I dislike Droteo's drinking of liquor.'

At first glance, it is not clear from Josephs's descriptions whether these miscellaneous uses of *er* in (12) are related at all to the others we have seen.

The issue is whether the diverse uses of Palauan *er* summarized in (1–12) above are related to each other semantically, or whether Josephs is correct in suggesting that relational *er* and specifying *er* are different words (essentially homonyms) and that the variety of meanings evoked by both specifying and relational *er* are unrelated to each other.

At the beginning of this section we noted Josephs's acknowledgment in his more recent grammar of Palauan (1999) that not all linguists necessarily agree on the need to separate two distinct kinds of *er.* He goes on to suggest that for some linguists the two kinds of *er* could be related in some way: "For those linguists, there is just a single relational word *er* that has the general function of identifying any situational factor or element related to a particular action or process. In their thinking, the presence of an object noun…is no different from the presence of a noun describing place or time…, because all such elements serve equally to depict the circumstances surrounding a particular action or process" (Josephs 1999:2).

Josephs makes it clear in his Palauan grammars that he prefers the homonymy approach for *er*, however, because he thinks it is a simpler and more straightforward way of describing the data. His primary purpose is to provide detailed descriptive reference works about the language that downplay theoretical explanations of linguistic phenomena in favor of a pedagogical orientation designed to inform native speakers about their language. Consequently, he feels that maintaining the distinction between the two types of *er* is well motivated on both descriptive and pedagogical grounds (Josephs 1999:2).

My own view is that Josephs's suggestion in the above quote about how the various uses of *er* might be related to each other is on the right track, but that it needs to be more carefully refined and explicated within the context of a linguistic theory, such as cognitive grammar, that has the tools to deal in some depth with linguistic meaning. I will therefore argue that all of the different senses/uses of Palauan *er* can indeed be related to each other by analyzing *er* as designating a reference point construction, with each kind of use an instantiation of this construction when characterized across different domains and contexts. In the following section I will briefly characterize the basic properties of this construction before showing how it can be used to explain how the senses of *er* are related.

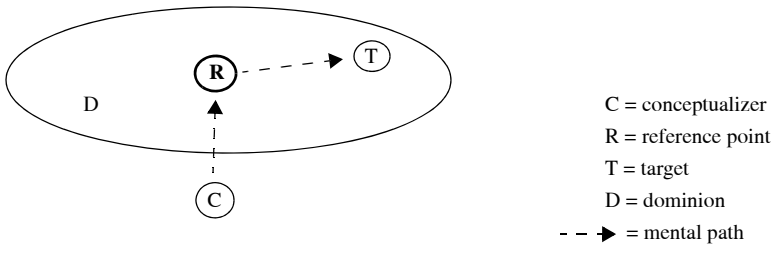
3. REFERENCE POINT CONSTRUCTIONS (LANGACKER 1993). The reference point notion follows from the basic assumptions of cognitive grammar as set forth in Langacker (1987, 1991a, 1991b), including the assumption that speakers have the ability to make extensions from a prototype and that they have the capacity for abstraction and schematization in order "to represent the commonality inherent in multiple experiences" (Langacker 1993:2). Readers should consult Langacker (1987, 1991a, 1991b) for more detailed information about cognitive grammar.

According to Langacker, the reference point phenomenon is the "ability to invoke the conception of one entity for purposes of establishing mental contact with another" (1993:5). More specifically, the reference point construction consists of a conceptualizer (C) establishing mental contact with a target entity (T) by means of another cognitively salient entity, the reference point (R), within a particular contextually determined dominion (D), identified as a "conceptual region (or the set of entities) to which a particular reference point affords direct access (i.e., the class of potential targets)" (Langacker 1993:6). Figure 1 illustrates the main aspects of the construction. The entity identified as the reference point is boldfaced for emphasis.

Langacker (1993) argues persuasively that this construction is the abstract conceptual basis for a variety of grammatical phenomena in the world's languages, including possessive constructions of various sorts, topic-like constructions, metonymy and active zones, and so forth (cf. Langacker [1993] for further details). Significantly, by their very nature as entities that afford the conceptualizer the means to mentally access a target entity, reference points are generally always individualized and specific in a given context. We will see that this fact will prove to be crucial for analyzing Palauan *er* as designating a reference point construction.

A familiar example from English will illustrate how the reference point notion works. In the possessive phrase *John's car,* the possessor *John* serves as the conceptual reference point R used by the conceptualizer C for locating the target T, *car,* within a contextually determined dominion D of potential targets, that is, entities that the possessor might conceivably own. Note in particular here the specificity of the possessor (reference point) *John*. See Langacker (1993) for additional information and justification for the reference point construction.

FIGURE 1. REFERENCE POINT CONSTRUCTION



4. HOW PALAUAN *ER* EVOKES THE REFERENCE POINT CONSTRUCTION. The basic claim of this paper is that, in all of its uses, Palauan *er* is a relational predication designating a reference point relation in which its grammatical object, or landmark (LM), is construed as a specific conceptual reference point R that is used to establish mental contact of some kind with its target T, or trajector (TR).[9] As shown in the example sentences, the target of *er* is typically construed as a process of some type, but the object of *er*, that is, the entity I propose to identify as the reference point, almost always designates a specific thing represented by a nominal. It is important to accentuate that, from the viewpoint of cognitive grammar, the status of the object of *er* as the LM of the relational predication designated by *er* establishes that this object is quite salient conceptually, because both the TR and LM of a relational predication are designated semantically by that predication and therefore are equally necessary in order to fully conceptualize the relation. Consequently, the salience of the object (LM) of *er* more than qualifies this entity as capable of being conceptualized as the reference point in a reference point construction.[10]

The apparent variety of senses of *er* seems to arise at least in part because of the differences in the contextually determined dominions within which the various relations designated by *er* are conceived to hold. Let us now examine how this works in some detail for both of the traditional senses of *er* discussed by Josephs.

Consider once again the traditional sense of *er* Josephs called specifying *er,* as illustrated in sentence (1a):

(1) a. A ngelekek a medakt (er) a derumk.
CM child CM afraid.of SPEC CM thunder
'My child is afraid of (the) thunder.'

Under the reference point analysis, the object (LM) of *er* in (1), *derumk* 'thunder', serves as a reference point with respect to which its TR (the target), the state of the child's being afraid, is mentally accessed. How might such an analysis be motivated?

According to Josephs (1975, 1997) we know independently from native speaker judgments that the object (LM) of *er* in this sentence designates a specific instance of thunder. Consequently, this specific reading of the object of *er* qualifies it as a candidate for the reference point in a reference point construction, even though there is no a priori requirement that this should be so. But in the situation coded in (1a) it is intuitively plausible that the thunder would be accorded the significant contextual salience that would qualify it as a conceptual reference point for the purpose of drawing atten-

9. In cognitive grammar relational predications (such as prepositions) are characterized as designating (i.e., profiling) a relationship between two cognitively salient entities: a trajector (TR) and a landmark (LM). The TR is typically located in some way with respect to the LM. For example, in the phrase *the book on the table,* the TR *the book* is located by means of the preposition *on* with respect to the LM, *the table.* I will use the notions TR and LM (of *er*) where appropriate to help clarify the conceptual relationships involved.

10. Note that the specific/particular status of the object of *er* in these data need not automatically accord that entity reference point status in all cases. It is conceivable that there are occasions where the object of *er* could be specific and yet not serve a reference point function. My claim here is simply that the specific/particular status of the object of *er* is sufficiently established by Josephs (1975) to warrant its analysis as a reference point for the purpose of trying to understand how the meanings of the various uses of *er* are related to each other.

tion to the target, the state of the child's fear. In other words, in using this sentence the speaker invokes a specific situation in which a particular instance of thunder serves to induce a state of fear in the speaker's child. If we accept the possibility that *er* in fact designates a reference point construction, then its use induces a specific reading of its LM, because the sanctioning reference point relation requires that the reference point (in this case the thunder) be one *particular* entity that affords mental contact with the target (here, the child's fearful reaction). When *er* is absent, the lack of a reference point relation allows for the object of the verb *medakt* 'be afraid of' to be interpreted as nonspecific. The specific reading of the LM of *er* in (1) thus follows as a natural consequence of *er*'s reference point sense, and supports the proposed analysis. A similar account could also be given for sentence (1b).[11]

The data presented earlier in (2) (repeated below) provide additional evidence for analyzing *er* as evoking a reference point construction due to the fact that specifying *er* can be followed by emphatic pronouns, which are always specific in interpretation.

(2) a. Ak ulemes er ngii er a party.
I saw SPEC him REL CM party
'I saw him at the party.'

b. A beab a tilobed er ngii.
CM mouse CM came.out SPEC it
'The mouse came out of it (e.g., a hole).'

By their very nature emphatic pronouns are highly salient with respect to their referents in a particular context and are thus good candidates for the reference point role, because reference points are invariably individualized and specific.

Given the enhanced importance accorded to the specificity of the object (LM) of specifying *er*, it is likely that this particular sense of *er* has grammaticalized in such a way as to accentuate the specific nature of the object of the preposition at the expense of the reference point relation itself, the conceptual importance of which may be backgrounded in certain instances. In (1), for example, the reference point relation still seems conceptually relevant to a certain extent, as was described above, whereas in (2) it seems much less relevant, with the specificity of the object of *er* taking center stage as the main aspect of meaning contributed by *er*.[12] But it is important to recognize that invoking a reference point analysis for specifying *er* offers a degree of explanation for *er*'s occurrence that is lacking in a purely desciptive account and allows us to relate this kind of *er* to relational *er*, to which we now turn.

11. It might be objected that I have not provided adequate independent evidence that the particular/specific status of the LM of *er* necessarily justifies identifying that entity as a reference point in a reference point construction. In fact, I have no objective proof or evidence that a specific entity occurring as the grammatical object of *er* must necessarily be accorded reference point status. The point I am making here is that invoking the theoretical idea of analyzing *er* as designating a reference point construction provides an explanation for the meaning and behavior of *er* in Palauan grammar that would otherwise remain obscure.

12. To the extent to which the specifying sense of *er* also evokes aspects of the reference point relation itself in the sentences in (2), this relation likely resides in the object (LM) of *er*, *ngii* 'him, it', serving as a conceptual reference point with respect to which the target activities of seeing someone (2a) or a mouse emerging from somewhere (2b) are mentally accessed.

It becomes apparent that the myriad senses of relational *er* identified by Josephs fall out as a natural consequence of analyzing *er* as designating a reference point construction against an array of different knowledge domains or contexts (i.e., dominions). Often the particular interpretation of the word *er* is also implicit in the lexical meaning of the verb, as indicated in the interlinear glosses. In such cases the contribution to the meaning of *er* from the nonlinguistic context is likely less pronounced than in others, though the context is usually still relevant to a considerable degree.

I will now return to the data involving relational *er* and discuss one full example for each kind of use in order to show how analyzing *er* as designating a reference point construction helps explain its meaning. The remaining examples for each sense will be summarized with respect to their particular values of R (reference point), T (target), and D (dominion).[13] I will leave it to the reader to fill in the details.

Consider again an example of the locational sense of *er*:

(3) a. Ak milsuub **er a skuul**.
I was.studying REL CM school
'I was studying at school.'

Adopting a reference point analysis, in (3a) the object (LM) of *er*, *skuul* 'school', is construed as a reference point with respect to which the TR (target), the process of studying, is located. In this context it seems clear that a particular school is meant. In general it seems natural to construe the locations where events occur as conceptually salient enough to motivate them as reference points with respect to which the events in question take place. If this is the case, then the dominion in this example is the set of potential activities doable with respect to school. The relation between school and studying is naturally construed as one in which the studying takes place *at* the school, hence we find the English translation equivalent of *er* here as 'at'.[14] The other locational examples with *er* may be analyzed along the same lines as follows:

(3) b. R = *diong* 'stream' T = Droteo's swimming activity
D = class of potential activities (e.g., swimming) to which a stream affords mental access

c. R = *sidosia* 'car' T = my going to the store
D = class of potential activities (e.g., going to the store) to which a car affords mental access

Let us now consider how the reference point analysis may be applied to the directional sense of *er* in which the object of *er* is construed as a concrete goal, as shown in (4a):

(4) a. A John a mo **er a stoang**.
CM John CM go REL CM store
'John is going to the store.'

13. I will continue to gloss *er* as REL to maintain continuity with the earlier examples.

14. It should now be apparent that the object (LM) of the relational *er* in (2a), *party* 'party', that occurs rightmost in the sentence can be analyzed as a locational reference point with respect to which the target activity of seeing someone is accessed. Within the target of this relational *er* the emphatic pronoun object of specifying *er* then serves, at least minimally, as yet another reference point with respect to which the seeing activity is located.

In (4a) the object (LM) of *er*, *stoang* 'store', is construed as a specific goal reference point with respect to which the TR (target), the directional process of John's going, is mentally accessed. Once again, just as a static location can have the conceptual salience to serve as a reference point for mentally accessing an event taking place within that location, as was discussed in (3a), a location construed as a point toward which a process is directed is also a natural kind of reference point for locating the process that is construed relative to that goal. If we make this assumption, the dominion associated with the goal reference point is likely the set of potential directional activities one can do relative to a store. The relation between the store and John's going is most naturally conveyed in English with *to*. The other example of directional *er* with a physical goal object may be analyzed as follows:

(4) b. R = *blsibs* 'hole' T = the mouse's going somewhere
D = class of potential directional activities (e.g., mouse's going) to which a hole affords mental access

Because the verb *tiluu* 'went into' in (4b) itself evokes directionality toward a goal, the context's role is likely less important here to the meaning of *er* than in other situations.

The abstract goal sense of *er* was illustrated earlier with the following example:

(5) a. A ngalek a lmangel **er a demal**.
CM child CM is.crying REL CM father
'The child is crying for his father.'

Under a reference point analysis, in (5a) the object (LM) of *er*, *demal* 'father', is construed as a reference point with respect to which the TR (target), the process of the child's crying, is mentally related (directed). The dominion is likely the set of actions or feelings one might have with respect to one's father. This reference point relation is conveyed in English with the preposition *for*. Analyses for the other more abstract goal senses of *er* discussed earlier are given below:

(5) b. R = *oltobedechur* 'joke' T = John's laughing activity
D = class of potential activities (e.g., laughing) to which a joke affords mental access

c. R = *ngikel* 'fish' T = my appetite for something
D = class of potential activities/states to which fish affords mental access

Consider again a sentence exemplifying the source sense of *er*:

(6) a. A rekung a tilobed **er a blsibs**.
CM crab CM came.out REL CM hole
'A crab came out of the hole.'

Assuming a reference point analysis, in (6a) the object (LM) of *er*, *blsibs* 'hole', is construed as a source reference point with respect to which the TR (target), the process of a crab coming out of something, is mentally accessed. As has been suggested earlier for locations and goals, the source of an activity is a plausibly natural kind of reference point that is salient enough to serve as a means of mentally locating that activity. The

dominion in this case is likely the set of actions accessible with respect to a hole. English expresses this particular relation with *out of*, due in part to the meaning of the verb in the target expression. Analyses of the other source sense data considered earlier are as follows:

(6) b. R = *cheldukl* 'dock' T = Toki's falling off something
D = class of potential activities (e.g., falling off) to which a dock affords mental access

c. R = *Droteo* 'Droteo' T = borrowing money
D = class of potential activities (e.g., borrowing money) to which *Droteo* affords mental access

d. R = *kerrekar* 'wood' T = making a house
D = class of potential activities (e.g., making a house) to which wood affords mental access

Before leaving the discussion of construing a source as a reference point we might return briefly to (1a) above and note that the object of *er* in this sentence, *derumk* 'thunder', could also be construed as a kind of source for the child's fear. As such, we see in this example an additional motivation for invoking a reference point analysis in that the specificity of the object of *er* coincides with its identification as a particular source for the fear induced by the thunder.

The cause sense of *er* was exemplified earlier with the following sentence:

(7) a. Ak smecher **er a tereter**.
I sick REL CM cold
'I'm sick with a cold/I've got a cold.'

Under a reference point analysis, in (7a) the object (LM) of *er*, *tereter* 'cold', is construed as a causal reference point with respect to which the TR (target), the state of being sick, is construed. Causes, as more abstract kinds of sources, are also natural kinds of reference points for accessing events and situations. The dominion would be the set of states/actions accessible with respect to (having) a cold. English expresses this relation with the preposition *with* or with a possessive construction using *get*. The other examples involving the cause sense of *er* that were examined earlier are analyzed as follows:

(7) b. R = *kiubio* 'heart attack' T = Droteo's father dying
D = class of potential activities (e.g., dying) to which a heart attack affords mental access

c. R = *eolt* 'storm' T = my boat sinks
D = class of potential activities (e.g., a boat sinking) to which a storm affords mental access

d. R = *chudel* 'grass' T = my foot being itchy
D = class of potential activities to which grass affords mental access

We exemplified the temporal sense of *er* with data like the following:

(8) a. A John a mo merael **er a klukuk**.
CM John CM go leave REL CM tomorrow
'John is going to leave tomorrow.'

If we invoke a reference point analysis here, the object (LM) of *er* in (8a), *klukuk* 'tomorrow', is construed as a temporal reference point with respect to which the TR (target) process, John's leaving, is construed. Particular times are also good examples of intuitively natural reference points that may be invoked in order to pinpoint when a particular activity takes place.[15] The dominion is the set of actions doable with respect to this point of time. English expresses this relation by appending the adverb *tomorrow* at the end of the sentence. Clearly, the class of potential targets for temporal reference points is large and, for the most part, context-bound, as shown in the following examples mentioned earlier:

(8) b. R = *kesus* 'last night' T = my wife gets sick
D = class of potential activities (e.g., getting sick) to which 'last night' affords mental access

c. R = *elechang* 'now' T = Toki's sleeping
D = class of potential activities (e.g., sleeping) to which 'now' affords mental access

The data we examined in (11) above give further evidence for the special salience of temporal expressions serving as natural reference points. We have seen that, in sentences with one relational phrase containing *er,* this phrase tends to occur at or near the end of the clause. Consequently, the nominal serving as the object of *er*, and thus as the reference point in a reference point construction, tends to occur near the end of the clause. Final position thus appears to be especially prominent in Palauan grammar for the location of the reference point, with its target occurring immediately before it. Josephs notes that when multiple relational phrases containing *er* occur in the same sentence, the temporal relational phrase occurs after the other phrases containing *er* (Josephs 1975:295), which suggests that temporal reference points are conceptually more salient and important than others in anchoring the scene. In (11a) (repeated below), for example, the temporal phrase invoking the time 'tomorrow' occurs clause-finally and would be interpreted as the most prominent reference point with respect to which the target, John's going to Guam, is mentally accessed. Within this target of the temporal reference point we then find a second reference point, *Guam*, which serves to further locate John's going relative to a particular goal.

(11) a. A John a mo er a Guam er a klukuk.
CM John CM go REL CM Guam REL CM tomorrow
'John is going to Guam tomorrow.' (DIRECTIONAL/TEMPORAL PHRASES)

c. A John a mle er a euid el klok er a kesus.
CM John CM arrived REL CM seven DCI clock REL CM yesterday
'John arrived at seven o'clock last evening.' (TEMPORAL PHRASES)

Note also in (11c) that, as previously observed, when two temporal phrases with *er* occur in the same sentence, the more general time expression occurs last, thereby suggesting that this general temporal expression is more important in serving to access and mentally anchor the overall conceptualization. Analyzing the objects (LMs) of *er* as

15. Recall the point made in an earlier footnote that a temporal reference point can be construed as a kind of temporal location within which the target activity takes place.

conceptual reference points seems intuitively revealing and appropriate in this case, because of the naturalness of mentally locating a particular activity, such as John's arrival in (11c), first with respect to a more general time span (yesterday) before narrowing down the event to a more specific point in time (seven o'clock). In other words, in a reference point analysis of the data the speaker/conceptualizer invokes a broad temporal perspective on the scene and then focuses in on a particular subpart of that time span and the activity occurring within that time period. In terms of attention flow this seems more natural than the alternative in which the speaker's attention would start at a specific point in time and then shift to a more general time span, followed then by a return to the more particular target activity occurring at a specific point in time.

The comparison sense of *er* was exemplified earlier by the following sentence:

(9) a. A Droteo a mesisiich **er a Toki**.
CM Droteo CM stronger REL CM Toki
'Droteo is stronger than Toki.'

Under a reference point analysis, in (9a) the object (LM) of *er*, *Toki,* is construed as a reference point that serves as a standard of comparison with respect to which the TR (target), Droteo's strength, is measured. Interpreting a standard of comparison in this way as a reference point is another intuitively natural invocation of the reference point notion, because the standard is conceptually salient and necessary in order for the comparison to be carried out. The dominion is the large set of entities (relations) that can be related or compared to Toki in some way. English expresses this particular relation with a comparative construction. Here is an analysis for the comparative sentence given above in (9b):

(9) b. R = *ududem* 'your money' T = the lack of my money
D = class of potential states (e.g., lacking money) to which your money affords mental access

The possessive sense of *er* was exemplified earlier by the following phrase:

(10) a. sidosia **er a Toki**
car REL CM Toki
'Toki's car'

Under a reference point analysis the object (LM) of *er*, *Toki,* in (10a) is construed as a reference point with respect to which the TR (target), the car, is related in some way. English expresses this relation by means of the possessive construction. As we have already seen, Langacker identifies possessive constructions as prototypical examples of the reference point construction, given that possessors are highly salient conceptually in locating an entity possessed by them. The dominion in general in (10a) is the set of entities that can be related in some way to Toki. In the context the entity in question (a car) is most naturally construed as possessed by Toki. The other possessive example cited earlier may be analyzed in a similar way, as follows:

(10) b. R = *ngak* 'I' T = teacher
D = class of potential entities possessable by me

Let us now return to the so-called miscellaneous uses of relational *er* in (12) above, those that were not further categorized by Josephs (1975:297–98). Similar examples can also be found in Josephs (1999:37–39). It should now be apparent that the relationships between the objects (LMs) of *er* and the corresponding relational TRs of *er* in these sentences are such that the LMs can be naturally construed as reference points with respect to which the TRs (targets) are conceptually located in some way. When we analyze these uses of *er* as instantiations of the reference point construction, their meanings and relationships with the other uses of *er* become clearer. The exact nature of the relationship in each case depends upon the particular contextual factors holding in each situation. Here is an analysis for (12a), repeated below:

(12) a. Ak ulemekedo er a Toki **er a dengua**.
I called SPEC CM Toki REL CM phone
'I called Toki on the phone.' (MEANS OF COMMUNICATION)

Under a reference point analysis, the object (LM) of *er* is *dengua* 'phone' and is construed as a reference point with respect to which the relational TR of *er,* the process of the speaker calling Toki, is mentally accessed. The phone in this example is another kind of natural reference point in the given context in which a phone call is being described. The dominion D is the class of potential activities (e.g., calling someone) to which a phone affords access. A summary of the reference point analysis for the other miscellaneous examples in (12) now follows.

(12) b. R = *becheleleu* 'white' T = room painted a certain color
D = class of potential activities (e.g., painting) to which the color white affords mental access

c. R = *tir* 'them' (WHOLE) T = three (PART)
D = class of potential entities with respect to which a whole group of people (them) can be partitioned in some way

d. R = *rrom* 'liquor' T = disliking Droteo's drinking something
D = class of potential activities or states (e.g., disliking something) to which liquor affords mental access

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS. We have seen that the Palauan grammatical word *er* semantically juxtaposes two entities in a clause that are related in some way, but that this relationship is highly varied from one use to the next and does not immediately appear to reflect any kind of unified semantic analysis when viewed from the traditional descriptive perspective. Consequently, the traditional analysis of these facts presented in Josephs's grammars tends to focus on the differences in the meaning of *er* from one use to another and to downplay or even ignore the possibility that they might be related in some way.

How can we appropriately characterize the meaning of *er*? A range of possibilities for representing the meanings of lexical items that either manifest multiple meanings or meanings that are difficult to relate to one another has been discussed at some length in a variety of publications, including Taylor (2003), a book-length treatment of linguistic categorization, and Tuggy (1993) and the references cited there, including

Lakoff (1970) and Quine (1960). Essentially, Tuggy notes that the meaning of a lexical item having such characteristics typically falls somewhere on a scale or continuum between the extremes of ambiguity and vagueness, with polysemy occupying a position somewhere in between. Ambiguity, typically exemplified by the English word *bank*, involves one phonological form manifesting two or more essentially unrelated meanings. Vagueness, on the other hand, represents a situation in which a particular lexical item has a fairly unified meaning across its range of uses, even though this meaning may be relatively unspecified, schematic, or abstract. A standard English example illustrating vagueness of meaning is the word *aunt*, which, as noted by Tuggy, can be used for either 'father's sister' or 'mother's sister' (Tuggy 1993:272–73).[16] A range of intermediate cases is represented by polysemy, in which a lexical item may have a fairly entrenched set of individual distinguishable meanings that are nevertheless clearly related to each other as instantiations of a higher level schematic meaning that is conceptually salient in its own right to some extent. A typical example of polysemy in English is the word *run*, whose myriad individual related senses evoke some kind of directional path in a given concrete or abstract knowledge domain. The varied senses of *run* include those exhibited by its use in such expressions as *run a race, running water, run for office, run a computer program, a run in a stocking*, and so forth.[17]

As we have seen, Josephs prefers to view the meanings of *er* as essentially ambiguous between its use as a specifying word and its relational sense. He also appears to view the individual senses of relational *er* as unrelated to each other semantically and therefore as ambiguous in their own right. If he is correct, then there is no (or at most very little) conceptual relationship between the two main senses of *er*, nor is there any relationship among the various individual uses of relational *er*. Under this view, the fact that Palauan uses the same phonological form for all of these senses of *er* is just an arbitrary, accidental fact about Palauan grammar. Consequently, in one respect Palauan *er* would be similar to the English word *bank* in having two completely unrelated meanings: a specifying sense and a relational sense, with additional unrelated subsenses, those evoking location, goal, source, cause, and so forth, subsumed under the relational sense. An alternate possibility is that *er* is vague in having a fairly unified meaning across its range of uses, but a meaning that is nevertheless highly unspecified, schematic, or abstract. Under this scenario the core abstract meaning of *er* would be something like the reference point sense proposed in this paper and would be essentially the same from one occurrence to the next, but elaborated in various ways according to the individual contexts of use. Whatever contextual differences in meaning *er* might manifest in individual instances of use would not be particularly cognitively salient or entrenched in the mind of the speaker. Finally, a third possibility is that the meaning of Palauan *er* is polysemous in having a number of individually distinguishable senses that are still related to each other as instantiations of a higher order schematic meaning that is also cognitively salient itself.

16. See Zwicky and Sadock (1975) for some standard tests for determining whether a lexical item is ambiguous or vague and the problems with such tests. See also Langacker (2000:124–28) for additional discussion of Tuggy's (1993) approach to the problem.

17. Chapters 6–9 in Taylor (2003) provide a good source of information on polysemy and the role it plays in grammatical structure.

I think that the data described in Josephs's grammars and the analysis provided in this paper lead to the general conclusion that the meaning of *er* is best characterized as greatly underspecified and highly schematic, residing primarily in its designation of a reference point relationship between two cognitively salient entities. The precise details of its meaning must usually be elaborated and supplied by some combination of background and contextual knowledge, supplemented in some instances by particular lexico-grammatical information according to the particular contexts in which it is used. Consequently, it would appear that the best overall characterization of the schematic meaning of Palauan *er* would fall somewhere toward the vagueness end of the continuum proposed by Tuggy.

More specifically, however, I conclude that Josephs is essentially right in recognizing separate specifying and relational senses of *er*, but he does not fully and explicitly recognize that these two senses are in fact semantically related to each other as abstract subschemas under the even more abstract reference point meaning described above. In this respect *er* should be regarded as polysemous in having related specifying and relational senses. The specifying sense represents a grammaticalized specialization of the more abstract reference point meaning in accentuating the aspect of this meaning that requires the object (LM) of *er* to be specific and particular in a given context. As was discussed earlier, the reference point sense might also on occasion be found in the specifying sense, but this would not always be true. The schematic relational sense, on the other hand, seems to be essentially vague and closer to the schematic reference point sense itself. Each individual occurrence of *er* sanctioned by the relational sense would then designate the various kinds of more specific reference point relations in different contexts that were discussed in earlier sections.

Before closing, it is important to accentuate the point that this analysis extends the descriptive account presented in Josephs's grammars by analyzing the various uses or senses of *er* as particular manifestations of the reference point construction in the different contexts in which it occurs. As a result, this analysis has argued that these senses of *er* are not arbitrary, as generally assumed by Josephs, but are semantically related to each other in a consistent and principled way. Consequently, the data provide additional empirical evidence for the validity of the reference point notion in cognitive grammar in a language not yet studied in this way.

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