In Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1995), raising predicates are semantically “transparent” because they impose no restriction on their subject. Any element which can occur in the appropriate position in the subordinate clause can also occur in the main clause, as in (1) and (2):

(1) Il semble que Jean est prêt à partir           (2) Jean semble être prêt à partir

This presentation extends the scope of Langacker’s proposal and shows that a more general “conceptual raising” also provides a satisfying account of the “small clause” constructions in (3) and (4):

(3) Je croyais que Jean était parti            (4) Je croyais Jean parti

The difference between (1) and (2) primarily depends on the prominence of the main participant in the complement relation. In the unraised variant, the entire event is coded as landmark of the main relation. In the raised variant, the main participant in that event is coded as trajectory of the main relation, and thus viewed as a reference point relative to which the event in which he participates is accessed. The two variants are therefore connected by a metonymic relation. The same metonymic relation also exists between the sentential complement construction in (3) and the predicate adjective construction in (4). Just like in (2), the main participant in the complement relation in (4) raises to the main clause, and the resulting construction is also related to the sentential complement in (3) by metonymy. In this view, raising is not a lexical property of a specific class of predicates but a conceptual property (a construal operation) that allows some participant in the complement scene to be coded as a main clause participant to highlight its prominence. It may combine with transparency (a semantic property of some verbs) to produce the alternation in (1) and (2) traditionally referred to as “raising”, but it also occurs independently as in (3) and (4) with a large number of predicates.

There are two main arguments in favor of this position. First, the distribution of the constructions in (3) and (4) is determined by the same principles that govern those in (1) and (2). In each case, the participant in the event described in the complement is significantly more topical in the raised variant that in its unraised counterpart. For instance, in a study conducted in the FRANTEXT corpus of 20th century French texts, out of 98 examples of the raised variant of croire, the raised nominal is a lexical noun in only 7 cases. By contrast, it is a pronoun in 63 cases, including 38 reflexives. Secondly, the strict constraints that exist on the raised construction with different verbs highlight their individual autonomy and semantic specificity.

Treating raising as a conceptual ability has profound ramifications for our understanding of complementation. First, it forces us to reconsider the relation between raising and control. Duffley (2014) showed that the different control constructions showcase the basic human conceptual abilities of reasoning about the plausible identity of unexpressed participants in a variety of linguistic contexts. Raising also involves the basic ability of presenting the participants in specific events at various levels of prominence. Raising and control are therefore not mutually exclusive but illustrate different conceptual abilities, sometimes with the same verbs (je veux partir, Je le
veux revenu à 8 heures. Secondly, it provides a unified account of a variety of constructions not usually considered together.

References