

What is Cognitive Linguistics?

From Croft and Cruse (2004)

Hypotheses guiding the cognitive linguistics approach to language

Developed in opposition to generative syntax and truth-conditional (logical) semantics

- Language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty
- Grammar is conceptualization
- Knowledge of language emerges from language use

Language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty

- Opposes generative grammar's hypothesis that language is an autonomous, innate cognitive faculty or module, separated from non-linguistic cognitive abilities.
- Knowledge of meaning and form is conceptual structure; semantic, syntactic, morphological and phonological representation is conceptual.
- The organization and retrieval of linguistic knowledge is not significantly different from the organization and retrieval of other knowledge in the mind.
- The cognitive abilities that we apply to speaking and understanding language are not significantly different from those applied to other cognitive tasks, such as visual perception, reasoning or motor activity.

- Language is the real-time perception and production of a temporal sequence of discrete, structured symbolic units. This particular configuration of cognitive abilities is probably unique to language, but the component cognitive skills are not.
- This position does not deny that there is a significant innate component to general human cognitive abilities, and that some of those innate properties give rise to human linguistic abilities that no other species has.
- Much cognitive linguistic research has been devoted to elucidating conceptual structure and cognitive abilities as they are seen to apply to language.
- Cognitive linguists appeal to models in cognitive psychology, in particular models of memory, perception, attention and categorization, e.g. prototype and graded centrality models of categorization.

Grammar is conceptualization

- Conceptual structure cannot be reduced to a simple truth-conditional correspondence with the world.
- A major aspect of human cognitive ability is the conceptualization of the experience to be communicated (and also the conceptualization of the linguistic knowledge we possess).
- All aspects of conceptual structure are subject to construal, including the structure of categories and the organization of knowledge.
- Grammatical inflections and grammatical constructions play a major role in construing the experience to be communicated in specific ways.

Knowledge of language emerges from language use

- Categories and structures in semantics, syntax, morphology and phonology are built up from our cognition of specific utterances on specific occasions of use.
- This inductive process of abstraction and schematization does not lose the conventionalized subtleties and differences found among even highly specific grammatical constructions and word meanings.
- This hypothesis is a response to approaches in which highly general and abstract schemas and categories, sometimes assumed to be innate, are assumed to govern the organization of linguistic knowledge, and apparently idiosyncratic or anomalous patterns are relegated to the periphery.
- Cognitive linguists argue that the detailed analysis of subtle variations in syntactic behavior and semantic interpretation give rise to a different model of grammatical representation that accommodates idiosyncratic as well as highly general patterns of linguistic behavior, e.g. construction grammar.