Cognitive Linguistics: An Approach to the Study of Language and Thought

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to simplify and comprehend what Cognitive Linguistics deals. It helps the learners, students of linguistics and teachers of ELT understand the characteristics and phenomena of Cognitive Linguistics, providing a succinct overview of Cognitive Linguistics. It is an interdisciplinary branch of linguistics and a cluster of overlapping approaches to the study of language as a mental phenomenon. Linguistics basically focuses on the sounds, words, grammar rules and rules of a language consisting of phonology (the sound system), morphology (the structure of words), syntax (the arrangement of words into sentences) and semantics (meanings). Cognitive linguistics is an integrated model - a collection of comprehensive investigations of a wide range of cognitive and linguistic phenomena.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Cognitive Approaches to Grammar, Cognitive Semantics, Symbolic Thesis, Usage-Based Thesis

Introduction

In the recent times, Cognitive Linguistics has developed into one of the most dynamic and attractive frameworks within theoretical and descriptive linguistics. The present paper provides a succinct overview of Cognitive Linguistics.

Cognitive linguistics is regarded as an interdisciplinary branch of linguistics with a combination of knowledge and investigation adopting from cognitive psychology, neuropsychology and linguistics. It is a modern school of linguistic thought that originally emerged in the early 1970s out of dissatisfaction; and it is a cluster of overlapping approaches to the study of language as a mental phenomenon.

Cognitive Linguistics is a method to deal with the study of natural language that began in the late 70s and early 80s in the work of George Lakoff, Ron Langacker, and Len Talmy. It is emphasizing on language as an instrument for arranging, handling, and passing on information (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007).

Language is a particular human cognitive capability yet the intellectual processes answerable for the storage and recovery of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge are fundamentally the alike. Cognitive linguistics incorporates various extensively viable hypothetical ways to deal with linguistic importance and structure sharing a typical premise: the thought that language is a central part of cognition and it mirrors the relationship of social, psychological, and informative elements which must be perceived with regards to a sensible perspective on conceptualization and mental processing.

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In the views of Evans and Green (2006) Cognitive linguistics is a relatively new school of linguistics, and one of the most innovative and exciting approaches to the study of language and thought that has emerged within the modern field of interdisciplinary study known as cognitive science.

Language and Linguistics

Aristotle defines, "A language is a structured system of communication used by humans. Languages consist of spoken sounds in spoken languages or written elements in written languages. Language is a speech sound produced by human beings in order to express their ideas, emotions, thoughts, desires and feelings". "Language is the inherent capability of the native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences" (Chomsky); and Encyclopedia Britannica gives its definition as, "Language is a system of conventional or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of social groups and participants in its culture, communicate".

On the other hand, Linguistics is the methodical investigation of language. It includes a study of language structure, language importance, and language in setting, just as an investigation of the cultural, social, historical, and political components that impact language. Linguists conventionally investigate human language by noticing the connection between sound and meaning.

Stern (1983) defines Linguistics as 'the science of language' or 'the systematic study of language'. Linguistics is a theoretical science, designed to account for the phenomena of language; and the central purpose of linguistics is the development of theories on aspects of language and a general theory of language. Changes in language teaching-learning process mirror the improvement of linguistic theories.

As the science of language, Linguistics takes account of the sounds, words, grammar rules and rules of a language consisting of phonology, the sound system, morphology, the structure of words, syntax, the arrangement of words into sentences, semantics, the methods in which sounds and meanings are connected, and the lexicon, or intellectual dictionary of words.

Language and Cognition

Before studying Cognitive Linguistics, one should know the interactive functions and involvement of language and cognition in thinking. It is assumed that language is just used for communication of completed thoughts. There developed a general hypothesis that language and cognition are two separate but closely interacting mechanisms. Language accumulates cultural wisdom; cognition develops mental representations modeling surrounding world and adapts cultural knowledge to concrete circumstances of

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life. Language is acquired from surrounding language "ready-made". Cognition is developed from experience.

Cognition includes all conscious and unconscious processes by which knowledge is accumulated, such as perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, and reasoning. Put differently, cognition is a state or experience of knowing that can be distinguished from an experience of feeling or willing (Britannica). According to Chomsky (1995), there is a difference between language and cognition; these two abilities are separate and independent. But, Cognitive linguistics emphasizes a single mechanism for both (Croft and Cruse, 2004).

It is accepted that psyche is a piece of brain's work; and the psyche is tentatively defined as a mixture of three main cognitive components: sensitivity, memory, and awareness. Language is made by mind, yet, when articulated, words reappear to the mind, where they are perceived. The cycle from the psyche to the language and afterward from the language to the mind, is recursive, in that the language created by the psyche returns to the psyche once again.

Assumptions and Commitments

The assumptions and commitments put up cognitive linguistics a unique enterprise. Cognitive linguists extensively shared two key commitments: the 'Generalisation Commitment' and the 'Cognitive Commitment'. These two commitments underlie the direction and approach espoused by practising cognitive linguists; and the assumptions and methodologies used in the two major branches of the cognitive linguistics enterprise are cognitive semantics and cognitive approaches to grammar.

Cognitive linguistics is illustrated as an "enterprise" or a "movement" since it is not a particular theory. To a certain extent, it is an approach assuming a common set of guiding principles, assumptions and viewpoints. The cognitive linguistics enterprise, according to George Lakoff (1990), is described by these two key commitments. The 'Generalisation Commitment' is a commitment to the characterisation of general principles that are liable for all characteristics of human language; and the Cognitive Commitment is a commitment to giving a characterisation of general standards for language that agrees with what is known about the psyche and mind from different controls.

Cognitive linguistics, a modern school of linguistic is the study of language is frequently isolated into particular regions, for example, phonology (sound), semantics (word and sentence meaning), pragmatics (discourse context), morphology (word structure) grammar or syntax (sentence structure), etc. The Generalisation Commitment prompts the quest for standards of language structure that hold across all parts of language. In a connected way, the Cognitive Commitment indicates the view that standards of

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linguistic construction ought to reflect what is thought about human cognition from different controls, especially the other cognitive sciences (philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence and neuroscience).

Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics considers linguistic meaning to be as an expression of conceptual structure: the nature and association of psychological representation in the entirety of its lavishness and variety, and this is the thing that makes it a particular way to deal with linguistic meaning.

Cognitive semantics is certainly not an integrated theory. It addresses a way to deal with the investigation of psyche and its connection with epitomized insight and culture. It continues by utilizing language as a key methodological instrument for revealing conceptual organisation and structure. As indicated by Leonard Talmy (2000), cognitive semantics is a study on conceptual content and its association in language.

Cognitive semantics instigated as an effect opposed to formal theories of meaning obtaining from 20th century methodical way of thinking and objectivism; however the guiding principles embraced inside cognitive semantics open up a scope of phenomena for direct exploration that rises above the primary purpose of takeoff for research in cognitive semantics.

Here are four guiding principles that collectively characterise the collection of approaches that fall within cognitive semantics (as indicated by Evans and Green, 2006):

- Conceptual structure is embodied.

- Semantic structure is conceptual structure.

- Meaning representation is encyclopaedic.

- Meaning-construction is conceptualisation.

Conceptual structure is embodied: A primary concern for cognitive semanticists is the nature of the connection between conceptual structure and the outside world of experience perceived by the senses. As such, cognitive semanticists set out to explore the nature of human communication with and consciousness of the outside world, and to put up a hypothesis of conceptual structure; it agrees with the manners by which we experience the world. One idea that has emerged in an attempt to explain the nature of conceptual organisation on the basis of contact with the bodily world is the epitomized cognition thesis.

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Semantic Structure is Conceptual Structure: This principle declares that language alludes to concepts in the psyche of the speaker as opposed to objects in the outside world. All in all, semantic structure (the meanings traditionally connected with words and other linguistic units) can be associated with concepts. These usual meanings associated with words are linguistic concepts or lexical concepts: the traditional form that conceptual structure requires in order to be encoded in language.

Nonetheless, the claim that semantic structure can be compared with conceptual structure does not imply that the two are indistinguishable. All things being equal, cognitive semanticists argue that the implications related with words, for instance, form just a subset of potential concepts. All things considered, we have a lot of musings, thoughts and sentiments than we can traditionally encode in language. Notwithstanding, as Langacker (1987) calls attention to, there is no English word that expectedly encodes this concept (at any rate not in the non-expert jargon of ordinary language). It follows that the arrangement of lexical ideas is just a subset of the whole arrangement of ideas in the psyche of the speaker.

Meaning Representation is Encyclopaedic: The third focal principle of cognitive semantics is that semantic structure is typically encyclopaedic. This implies that words do not address conveniently bundled groups of significance, however, act as 'points of access' to vast repositories of knowledge relating to a particular concept or conceptual domain (Langacker, 1987). This idea is demonstrated taking the concept BACHELOR as an example. Undoubtedly, in addition to the fact that we know that particular sorts of unmarried grown-up guys would not typically be depicted as bachelors; moreover, we have cultural awareness with respect to the demeanour related with stereotypical bachelors. It is 'encyclopaedic' awareness of this type letting us to decipher this generally opposing sentence such as:

'Your husband is a true bachelor! Andrea, be cautious.'

Here Andrea's husband (a married man) is described as a bachelor; it seems to be conflicting. Conversely, our society regards that cultural stereotype of bachelors are sexual predators; so we understand the expression of the sentence (Your husband is a true bachelor! Andrea, be cautious.); and it is also a caution to Andrea regarding her husband's loyalty. Therefore, it explains that the meanings related with words frequently draw upon complex and sophisticated bodies of knowledge.

Meaning construction is conceptualization: the fourth principle of cognitive semantics indicates that language itself does not encode meaning. Alternatively, words (and other linguistic units) are just 'prompts' for the building of meaning. As per this view, meaning is built at the conceptual level: meaning development is likened with conceptualization, a a powerful cycle whereby linguistic units act as prompts

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for a range of conceptual operations and the enlistment of background knowledge. Basing on this view that meaning is a course of action instead of a discrete 'thing' that can be bundled by language. Meaning development draws upon encyclopaedic knowledge, and entails inferencing methodologies connecting to various parts of conceptual structure, organization and packaging (Sweetser, 1999).

Cognitive Approaches to Grammar

Cognitive Grammar is the name of a specific cognitive theory of grammar which Ronald Langacker (1987) developed. Cognitive approaches to grammar are an assortment of approaches amalgamated by theoretical assumptions opposed to a single unified theory. Contrasting to cognitive semantics, cognitive approaches to grammar focus directly upon the linguistic structure. Moreover, because *the symbolic thesis*, focal to all cognitive approaches to grammar, entails that sound, meaning and grammar are inextricably linked; and the statements that comprise the theories apply, in principle, to all these aspects of language.

As it is observed that cognitive linguistics is a collection of approaches opposed to a single unified framework, this is particularly evident in the cognitive approaches to the study of grammar. After all, cognitive linguists, emphasizing on grammatical change, attempted to elucidate the process of grammaticalisation, whereby open-class elements steadily transform into closed-class elements. All these trails of investigation are combined by certain shared assumptions. Here are the two central guiding assumptions of a cognitive approach to grammar:

- *The symbolic thesis*

- *The usage-based thesis*

The symbolic thesis: *the symbolic thesis,* the first guiding assumption holds that the primary unit of grammar is a form-meaning pairing or symbolic unit; it is called a 'symbolic assembly' in Langacker's Cognitive Grammar framework or a 'construction' in construction grammar approaches. According to Langacker, the symbolic unit consists of two poles such as, a semantic pole (meaning) and a phonological pole (sound). The thought that language has a basically symbolic function and that the primary unit of grammar is the symbolic unit has its origins in Saussure's hypothesis of language. As indicated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the 'father of modern linguistics', language is a symbolic framework wherein the linguistic expression (sign) comprises of a planning between a concept (signified) and an acoustic signal (signifier), where both signified and signifier are mental entities. The cognitive model assumes the thought of the Saussurean symbol, in which the semantic pole represents to the 'signified' and the phonological pole to the 'signifier'.

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For example, the idea RAT is the semantic pole of a symbolic unit. The phonological pole is the speaker's awareness of the string of speech sounds, representing to the concept *RAT*, such as: /ræt/, (IPA) symbols given by the International Phonetic Alphabet.

The 'phonological' pole should therefore be understood in different manners, based on the means of communication. The espousal of the symbolic thesis has a significant consequence for a model of grammar; as it is the basic unit and the symbolic unit, meaning attains focal status in the cognitive model.

From a cognitive viewpoint, the study of grammar is regarded as the analysis of the complete range of units making up a language from the lexical to the grammatical. For instance, the grammatical structure of a sentence is paired with its own (schematic) meaning in the similar manner that words like *RAT* correspond to pairings of form and (content) meaning. For example, observe the following sentences:

(a) Katharine amuses John. (Active voice)

(b) John is amused by Katharine. (Passive voice)

Sentence (b) is the passive construction in which the PATIENT is placed in subject position (before the verb). The sentence is also marked with a passive verb string, here *is amused*. The generalised form of the passive construction is illustrated as:

(c) PATIENT 'passive verb string' *by* AGENT

Here the meaning is emphasised on the PATIENT (John) opposed to the AGENT (Katharine). The thought that grammatical components are intrinsically meaningful is a significant theme in cognitive approaches to grammar.

The Usage-Based Thesis: The second guiding assumption of the cognitive approach to grammar is *the usage-based thesis*; it holds that the psychological grammar of the speaker (awareness of language) is shaped by the thought of symbolic units from positioned occurrences of language use. A significant result of embracing the usage-based thesis is that there is no principled distinction between awareness of language and utilization of language, since knowledge rises up out of utilization. From this point of view, knowledge of language is knowledge of how language is utilized.

Conclusion

Cognitive linguistics is considered an interdisciplinary branch of linguistics adopting from cognitive psychology and neuropsychology. It is a method to deal with the study of natural language specifically focusing on language as an instrument for arranging, handling, and passing on information (Geeraerts and

Cuyckens, 2007). Cognitive linguistics is a relatively new school of linguistics, and one of the most innovative and exciting approaches to the study of language and thought (Evans and Green, 2006). Linguistics fundamentally focuses on the sounds, words, grammar rules and rules of a language consisting of phonology (the sound system), morphology (the structure of words), syntax (the arrangement of words into sentences) and semantics (meanings).

The two central commitments of the cognitive linguistics enterprise: the 'Generalisation Commitment' and the 'Cognitive Commitment' have given rise to an integrated approach to linguistic and conceptual organization. Therefore, Cognitive linguistics adopted the integrated model which is a collection of detailed investigations of a wide range of cognitive and linguistic phenomena. This has been particularly evident in cognitive semantics and cognitive approaches to grammar.

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