

COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to present a brief introduction to Cognitive Linguistics. In day to day life the practice of cognitive linguistics is very common, however, we do not recognise it because we do not know its name. We perceive anything visually and the language of others first and then the mind forms the concept and accordingly we behave.

Cognitive Linguistics is a very recent development in the field of linguistics. Earlier, it was one of the disciplines of Psychology. It was Noam Chomsky who initiated the cognitive turn in linguistics, in his books "Syntactic Structure" (1957), and "Aspect of the Theory of Syntax" (1965). He argued that it is insufficient simply to regard a grammar as a device that generates grammatical sentences, the grammar has to exist in the minds of speakers.

The aim of this paper is to generate interest in the minds of the readers about Cognitive Linguistics. This paper also deals with the concerns of cognitive linguistics, its areas of study, its goals, and its relations with the other branches of linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

According to Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, in linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics refers to the branch of linguistics that interprets language in terms of concepts, sometimes universal, sometimes specific to a particular tongue, which underlie its forms. It is thus closely associated with semantics but is distinct from Psycholinguistics, which draws upon empirical findings from cognitive psychology in order to explain the mental processes that underlie the acquisition, storage, production and understanding of speech and writing.

Cognitive Linguistics is characterized by adherence to three central positions. First, it denies that there is an autonomous linguistic faculty in the mind; second, it understands grammar in terms of conceptualization; and third, it claims that knowledge of language arises out of language use.

Cognitive linguistics includes a variety of approaches, methodologies, and emphases, which are, however, unified by a number of common assumptions. Among these assumptions, the foremost is the belief that language forms an integral part of cognition, and that any insightful analysis of linguistic phenomena will need to be embedded in what is known about human cognitive abilities. Cognitive linguistics aims for a cognitively plausible of what it means to know a language, how languages are acquired, and how they are used.

Cognitive Linguistics is the study of the mind through language and the study of language as a cognitive function. Cognitive Linguistics has two main goals: (1) to know how cognitive mechanisms like memory, categorization, attention, and imagery are used during language

behaviour; and (2) to develop psychologically viable models of language that cover broad ranges of linguistic phenomena, including idioms and figurative languages. In other words, cognitive linguistics is the study of language based on our experience of the world and the way we perceive and conceptualize it.

EVOLUTION OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Cognitive Linguistics grew out of the works of a number of researchers active in the 1970s who were interested in the relation of language and mind, and who did not follow the prevailing tendency to explain linguistic patterns by means of appeals to structural properties internal to and specific to language. Rather than attempting to segregate syntax from the rest of language in a 'syntactic component' governed by a set of principles and elements specific to that component, the line of research followed instead was to examine the relation of language structure to things outside language: cognitive principles and mechanisms not specific to language, including principles of human categorization, pragmatic and informational principles; and functional principles in general, such as iconicity and economy.

AREAS OF STUDY

Cognitive linguistics is divided into three main areas of study:-

1. Cognitive semantics, dealing with lexical semantics, separating semantics (meaning) into meaning construction and knowledge representation.
2. Cognitive approach to grammar, dealing mainly with syntax, morphology and other traditionally more grammar oriented areas.
3. Cognitive phonetics, dealing with classification of various correspondences between morphemes and sequences.

CONCERNS OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

According to John R. Taylor the following list indicates some of the concerns of cognitive linguistics:-

- (a) Categorization: This is the process in which we need to categorize the environment in terms of edible V/s non-edible, harmful V/s non-harmful. A creature must also be able to recognize its own kind, if only in order to mate and reproduce. Categorization permeates our non-linguistic cognition.
- (b) Figure-ground organization: This is visual perception which provides the prototype for figure-ground organization.
- (c) Metaphor and 'experientialism': Metaphor reflects our ability to think of one thing in terms of something else. Lakoff and Turner claim that metaphor is much more than a literary ornament, it permeates much of our thinking, and hence our language and in this way it becomes an important strand in Cognitive Linguistics.
- (d) Conceptual archetypes: A major topic in language acquisition research has been the extent to which language builds on pre-existing conceptual structures.

- (e) Inferencing: If a snippet of information is given, we rapidly fill out the details supplying missing data, attributing unspoken motives and intentions to actors, inferring causes from effects, and predicting effects from present circumstances.

COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND COGNITIVE GRAMMAR

Cognitive grammar is a cognitive approach to language developed by Ronald Langacker, which considers the basic units of language to be symbols or conventional pairings of a semantic structure with a phonological label. Grammar consists of constraints on how these units can be combined to generate larger phrases which are also a pairing of semantics and phonology. The semantic aspects are modelled as image schemas rather than propositions, and, because of the tight binding with the label, each can invoke the other.

Cognitive approaches to grammar are theories that relate grammar to mental processes and structures in human cognition. While Noam Chomsky's theories of generative grammar are the most influential in most areas of linguistics, other theories also deal with the cognitive aspect of grammar. The approach of Noam Chomsky and his fellow grammarians is that of an autonomous mental processes operating on mental representations of different kinds of symbols that apply only within this faculty.

COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

There is a very sharp and inseparable difference between cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics. If psycholinguistics is a body, cognitive linguistics is its arms. Psycholinguistics has a very broad area which involves not only cognitive linguistics, neurolinguistics but also morphology, phonology, phonetics, syntax and semantics. Psycholinguistics covers the cognitive processes that make it possible to generate a grammatical and meaningful sentence out of vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as the processes that make it possible to understand utterances, words, texts, etc.

Cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics both deal with the relationship between language and the mind. Yet they approach the relationship from sharply different perspectives and differ in their goals, basic assumptions about the nature of language and methodologies. While cognitive linguists study how language reflects the working of the mind, psycholinguists study how the mind handles the working of language. For instance, psycholinguistics can involve studying how language abilities are affected by strokes in different areas of the brain, while cognitive linguists would be more interested in studying whether numbers of colour words in different languages affect and how speakers of these languages perceive colours.

COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND NEUROLINGUISTICS

Neurolinguistics is the study of the way the human brain processes language. It is closely related to the field of psycholinguistics, which seeks to elucidate the cognitive mechanisms of language by employing the traditional techniques of experimental psychology; today, psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic theories often inform one another, and there is much collaboration between the two fields.

Neurolinguistics is the science concerned with the human brain mechanisms underlying the comprehension, production and abstract knowledge of language, be it spoken, signed or written. As an interdisciplinary endeavour, this field straddles the borders between linguistics, cognitive science, neurobiology and computer science, among others. Neurolinguistics has highlighted the special role of that part of the human brain known as Broca's area in crucial aspects of human language, namely syntax: the component of language that involves recursion.

CONCLUSION

Thus, this brief study has shed light, to some extent, on different aspects of cognitive linguistics. It has unfolded some hidden aspects of cognitive linguistics and at the same time it also inspires the readers to research in this special field. The scope for research in this field is immense.

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