

Methods in Cognitive Linguistics

Wednesday March 17th, 2010

9 a.m.–12 noon

Teacher: Elisabeth Engberg-Pedersen, Department of Scandinavian Studies and Linguistics, University of Copenhagen

Cognitive linguistics is not one theory, but a 'movement' or 'enterprise' (Evans and Green, 2006: 3) or 'an approach' (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 1) that is partly determined by its adherents' opposition to Chomskyan linguistics and truth-conditional semantics. Cognitive linguists do not see language as an autonomous cognitive faculty. They emphasize that knowledge of language emerges from language use, some to such an extent that they reject the claim that knowledge of language is anything different than the use of language in discourse. Moreover, in opposition to truth-conditional semantics some cognitive linguists tend not to distinguish linguistic meaning from conceptualization. From a truth-conditional point of view, *The glass is half full* and *The glass is half empty* are synonymous, but they clearly represent different conceptualizations, a fact that should be reflected in linguistic descriptions.

Not all cognitive linguists agree on all theoretical points. Moreover, cognitive linguists vary widely in the focus of their analyses: semantic categories such as tense and modality, word meaning (polysemy, metaphor, metonymy), morphology, syntax, anaphora, grammaticalization, etc., and they vary in their choice of methods. But as in other branches of linguistics the use of corpora has increased considerably in Cognitive Linguistics over the past few decades. The corpora may be existing corpora of large bodies of spoken or written texts composed for other purposes, or they may be corpora of texts elicited for the analysis of a specific linguistic problem.

A number of linguistic theories with a more restricted scope can be combined with some of the points of Cognitive Linguistics. This is true of, in particular, functional typology that focuses on differences and similarities between the world's languages and tries to explain the patterns in terms of how language is used for communication. It lies near at hand to seek explanations of universal patterns in cognitive faculties, but there are few absolute universals. Instead, typologists find patterns of systematic differences between languages, thereby pointing to an interesting field of research, namely the systematic interrelation of language type, language function, and conceptualization. To study this interrelation some cognitive linguists with a typological orientation elicit data from different languages by means of the same communicative task, especially narration (so-called parallel texts), and investigate the differences and similarities between the data from different languages depending.

In the section on Methods in Cognitive Linguistics I shall briefly introduce the main points of Cognitive Linguistics and demonstrate especially examples of methods used in typological cognitive linguistic research focusing on the relation between universal and language-specific semantic categories (*inter alia* Majid et al. 2007).

CROFT, WILLIAM and CRUSE, D. ALAN. 2004. Cognitive linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

EVANS, VYVYAN and GREEN, MELANIE. 2006. Cognitive linguistics: an introduction. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

MAJID, ASIFA, BOWERMAN, MELISSA, VAN STADEN, MIRIAM and BOSTER, JAMES S. 2007. The semantic categories of cutting and breaking events: a crosslinguistic perspective. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 18.133-52.