

COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC LINGUISTICS: THE MAPPING OF MEANING BY THE MIND AND EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This article explores Cognitive-Semantic Linguistics, a subfield of cognitive linguistics that emphasizes the intrinsic connection between language, thought, and human experience. Rejecting the classical view of semantics as a direct mapping of language onto objective reality, this paradigm argues that meaning is shaped by cognition, embodiment, and cultural interaction. Key theoretical foundations include Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Image Schemas, Frame Semantics, and Mental Spaces, all of which illustrate how language reflects and structures human conceptualization. The article further discusses Cognitive Grammar, highlighting how grammar itself carries semantic weight, and explores the cross-cultural dimensions of metaphor and meaning. Practical applications span language education, political discourse analysis, artificial intelligence, and literary interpretation. While the approach faces critiques for its reliance on introspection and lack of formalization, it remains a powerful interdisciplinary framework for understanding how language functions as a mirror of the mind and a product of embodied, culturally situated experience.

Key Words:

Cognitive-Semantic Linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, image schemas, frame semantics, mental spaces, conceptual blending, cognitive grammar, embodiment, linguistic meaning, cultural variation, linguistic relativity, political discourse, language acquisition, artificial intelligence, metaphor analysis.

Cognitive-Semantic Linguistics is the sub branch of cognitive linguistics whose makes use of the connection between language, thought and meaning. Opposed to the classical understanding of semantics as the issue of merely mapping words on the objective reality outside the realm of human existence, this paradigm promotes the importance of human cognition and embodied experience in forming linguistic meaning. In its most basic terms cognitive-semantic linguistics infers that language is not a receptive means of identifying reality but an energetic procedure of conceptualizing what is deeply situated in consciousness, recollection, emotion, and interpersonal communication.

In the late 20th century Cognitive-Semantic Linguistics arose as a reaction against formalist and generative accounts of language (pioneered by Noam Chomsky among others). It is based upon the wider cognitive sciences and draws its inspiration to that of George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker and Leonard Talmy. The discipline is founded on a number of fundamental assumptions:

-Language is Meaning-Centric: In contrast to the formalist view which locates the emphasis of linguistic analysis to syntax, the cognitive-semantic school, in accordance with the latter, focuses on meaning.

- Meaning is Conceptual: Words and grammatical structures are considered as projections of underlying concept structures and mind picture.

- **Embodiment Matters:** The nature of linguistic meaning is actually embodied in the way we perceive the world, in our movements and how we deal with the surrounding environment.

- **Usage-Based Modeling:** According to the Usage-Based Modeling, linguistic competence is something that is formed as it is used; the meaning is dynamic and changes under constant repetition.

Major Ideas of Cognitive-Semantic Analysis

a) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Probably the most well known contribution of cognitive semantics, CMT (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) insists that abstract concepts are comprehended using metaphorical correspondences with concrete areas. For example:

The temporal experience is codified through the use of economic metaphors as illustrated by the saying: time is money (e.g. spend time, waste time, invest time).

Such metaphorical systems go beyond being rhetorical devices in that they are cognitive carried mechanisms of how we reason about the world.

b) Image Schemas

The image schema is a recurring sensorimotor dynamic pattern which furnishes a structure base to meaning (Johnson, 1987). Examples include: He or she is in love, out of danger (e.g., CONTAINER schema); PATH schema (E.g. suffer, come to an end)

These schemas create links between the body experience and abstract thinking, which are the elements of the semantic structure.

c) The Frame Semantics

Frame semantics introduced by Charles Fillmore assumes the meanings of words are also interpreted relative to organized background knowledge or frames. To give an example, the word buy provides an instance of a commercial transaction frame of a buyer, seller, goods, and payment. The meanings of words arouse encyclopedic concepts and not discrete dictionary definitions.

d) Mental Spaces and conceptual Blending

To explain how individuals create meaning during spoken face-to-face encounters, on telling a story, or a hypothetical situation, Gilles Fauconnier established the mental space theory. In a later conception of conceptual blending theory (with Turner) he demonstrated that two or more mental spaces can be merged to give rise to emergent meaning, a technique of developing creative analogies or new metaphors.

3. Grammar as Meaning The Cognitive Grammar Approach

The Cognitive Grammar by Ronald Langacker opposes the absoluteness of lexicon and syntax. Rather, he considers grammar as a system that is always symbolic with grammatical structure carrying some semantic meaning. As an example, it can be said that the difference between She broke the window and The window broke is not only syntactic but displays different conceptualizations of agency and causation.

4. Cross Lingual and Cultural Dimension

Linguistic relativity is also dealt with in cognitive-semantic linguisticsoy Ideas that various languages code and emphasise different things in experience. Nevertheless, it gives a more subdued opinion:

Universal Schemas, Cultural Variation: In some manifestations, such as many image schemas (e.g. motion, containment), there may be no cultural variation in the schema per se, but only in how it is lexicalized and extended metaphorically.

Metaphor Systems: The positive values held in cultures are frequently evocative of metaphor rather than literal use. As an example, the saying of the argument being war is quite common in the English speaking culture, where other societies may think of argument as a dance or a negotiation.

5. Applications and Interfaculty Perspectives

a) Linguistic Education and English Learning

The knowledge of metaphor and bodily schemas supports second language acquisition by unveiling some concealed ideas behind seemingly unattached statements.

b) Political framing and Discourse

Metaphors have been analyzed in order to reveal ideological packaging of political language, and to demonstrate the influence of conflicting conceptual frameworks (e.g. nation as family) on policy arguments and mass attitudes.

c) NLP, Artificial Intelligence

Cognitive linguistics-inspired semantic models are also affecting the processing of meaning in AI systems especially in predicting metaphors, idioms and non literal language.

d) Interpretation in literature and poetry

Cognitive semantics fills in the gaps of literary criticism, as it provides us with mechanisms of examining conceptual metaphors, plot development and body images in literary works.

6. Critics and Critiques

Although it is a very appealing approach, cognitive-semantic linguistics still has several impediments:

Empirical Testing: Empirical testing: Critics have produced the argument that the cognitive-semantic claims can hardly be empirically tested and are often based on introspection or linguistic intuition.

Deficiency of Formal Rigour: As a rule, compared to generative models, cognitive linguistics might feel less formalized, which restricts its accuracy in computer modelling.

Metaphor Overreach: Please see Esbjorn-Hargens above. The prevalence of metaphor in the cognitive analysis is sometimes dangerous: we can seem to overgeneralize or inflate the use of the metaphor so that everything seems metaphorical.

Cognitive-Semantic Linguistics is a paradigm change in view of language as a window of the human mind. Combining psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, and anthropology, it does not present meaning as a permanent referential construct but rather as dynamic articulation of embodiment, conceptualization and culture. In sharp contrast with the notion of language as code, language as viewed in this perspective is an animated thought artifact influenced by experience, elaborated by culture, and the most important element in human understanding.

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