

A Non-linear Cognitive Grammar and a Multi-level Theory of Language

What happens, in contemporary cognitive linguistics, to the general conceptual questions in linguistics, such as: Are there word classes, and are they different from syntactic functions? Are there open classes and closed classes in lexicology? Is lexical and morphological organization different from grammatical organization? Are grammar and semantics one and the same instance? How do we analyze constituency – that is, syntactic structure – in grammar, if not by spontaneous school grammar and un-theorized linear concatenations of NPs, VPs, and the rest? Is the word ‘syntax’ meaningful at all? Is grammar entirely linear, or is it relevant to analyze it in terms of structural, case-like nodes? What is a ‘construction’, a form-meaning pairing? What do we think ‘semantics’ is, or is about: frames, categories, schemas, domains, mental spaces, perspectives, attention patterns, enunciation, speaker-hearer relations, speech acts, etc. – all at once? and how does language connect to thinking? (Is ‘thinking’ and ‘semantics’ cognitively the same thing?)

Certain developments in ‘continental’ linguistics, such as E. Benveniste’s work on subjectivity in language (Benveniste 1966), L. Tesnière’s work on grammar (Tesnière 1966), R. Jakobson’s wide-ranging explorations (Jakobson 1990), Y. Lotman’s semiotics (Lotman 1990), and even F. de Saussure’s socio-linguistic and semiological ideas (Saussure 1972) are still worthy of reconsideration, in particular if cognitive linguistics is to be strongly related to studies of gesture, distributed cognition, social and sign-borne communication, as intended in the new paradigm of cognitive semiotics (cf. Author et alii, 2007 -). Such a ‘continental’ opening would in fact invite contemporary work on meaning and mind, still in a linguistic framework, and maintaining a commitment to cognitive realism.

In this presentation, the multi-level architecture of canonical instances in linguistic organization of meaning will be discussed, and the problematic status of the notion of syntactic structure in a cognitive framework will be particularly highlighted. A new view of constituency – stemmatics – will be presented and exemplified. Stemmatic constituency is non-linear and built on series of semantically informed integration nodes with variable linearization. Consequences for both discourse analysis and language computation will be specified.

References:

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