COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS
(Semantics)

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Lakoff: Objectivism vs. Experientialism

Categories of Thought

The Mind: Mirror of external logic and transcendental reason

World

Imaginative Capacity:

\[ P(Q) = ? \]

The Mind: Cognitive models beyond atomistic thought
Processes of Categorization

Classical view:
- Categories exist in objective reality
- Categories are based only on shared properties
- Categories are “abstract containers”
- We categorize *kinds* of things or actions

Lakoff:
- We categorize *abstract entities* (which are influenced by our own apperception of reality)
Processes of categorization

Objection to the classical view (E. Rosch):

• If categories are determined only by shared properties, then no member of a category should be a better example than others

  rather, there are best examples called “prototypes”

• evaluation of categorization must take account of all specific human capacities influencing the process
Shift from classical view to prototype-based categories defined by cognitive models:

- **Paradigm change:**
  - Reason is no longer viewed as transcendental
  - Rejection of truth/reference and mind/body dichotomies
  - Reason is no longer exclusively linked to models of deductive logic (e.g. “predicate calculus” in science)
  - Emotion becomes a factor in conceptualization
  - No superordinate conceptual system (or objectively “correct” way to relate symbols to the world)
Cognitive Linguistics

- No separation of linguistic knowledge from cognition or general thinking
- Linguistic behavior is just another part of cognitive abilities which allow reasoning, learning, etc.
- Language is not a special mental faculty
- Division between formal and functional approaches to language
Cognitive Linguistics

Formal approach (e.g. generative grammar)

• Knowledge of linguistic structures forms an autonomous faculty independent of other mental processes

• This external view is complemented by the view of internal modularity

• The difference between independent, autonomous modules is one of kind

• Example: examination of syntax without reference to semantics (in the internal view)
Cognitive Linguistics

Functionalist approach

- Externally as well as internally, an explanation must cross boundaries between levels of analysis
- The difference between language and other mental processes is one of degree, not of kind
- Exploration of principles shared among a range of cognitive domains
- Account of grammatical rules impossible without considering the meaning of elements
Cognitive Linguistics

- Explanation of grammatical patterns can only be given in terms of a speaker's intended meaning in particular contexts of language use, **not** in abstract formalist principles that distinguish between linguistic levels of analysis.
- Rejection of de Saussure's abstract synchronic approach to linguistics (which ignores historical change).
Cognitive Semantics

Rejection of beliefs of objectivist semantics:

• Categories exist in objective reality ("objective reference")

• "Correspondence Theory" of truth

• A cognitive semanticist proposes that linguistic truth and falsity must be relative to a person's conceptual framework
Metaphor

• Essential to our categorization of the world and our thinking processes
• Goes beyond simile (e.g. “reading that essay was like wading through mud”) in that it transfers properties from one concept to the other.

Example:

“Movie studios love a good fight, and a bad one too. But the Oscar battles have become trench warfare and dirty tricks.”
Metaphor

Two concepts in the example:

• The target domain (the described concept), in our case the Oscar awards
• The source domain (the comparison concept), in our case the war image

alternative terminology: tenor and vehicle
Metaphor

Two traditional positions on the role of metaphor in language:

Classical view: Metaphor is just a decorative element to language, a rhetorical device outside “normal language”

• Romantic view: Metaphor is integral to language and thought as a way of experiencing the world
Metaphor in cognitive semantics

Spacial metaphors

• Happy - Up, Sad - Down (e.g. “My spirits rose,” “I'm feeling down”)

• Conscious - Up, Unconscious - Down (e.g. “She fell asleep”, “Wake up”)

based on our bodily experience