An Overview of Main Theories in Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract: Cognitive linguistics is an emerging language discipline that studies language based on new philosophical and cognitive views and people's experience of the world and the perception and conceptualization of the world. This paper mainly introduces main theories of Cognitive Linguistics that aims to provide some reference for language beginners and help them to fully understand Cognitive Linguistics.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics; Main Theories; Categories

1 Introduction

Cognitive linguistics is a new paradigm in linguistic research, with broad and narrow meanings. Cognitive Linguistics began in the late 1970s and early 1980s in America, and its mature was the establishment of the first International Cognitive Linguistics Association in the spring of 1989 in Duisburg, Germany and the Journal of Cognitive Linguistics. Geeraerts divided the development of Cognitive Linguistics into three decades[1].

The first decade is the germination stage.The most famous masterpiece is the Metaphor We Live By by Lakoff and Johnson in this period.

The second decade was roughly between 1986 and 1995, and the status of Cognitive Linguistics as an independent school was established. The main symbol is the publication of the corner stone works in the field of cognitive linguistics.

The third decade is from around 1996 to 2006, during which the important original work was Talmy's two-volume masterpiece Toward a Cognitive Semantics (2000), whose publication has made Cognitive Semantics systematic. The most important development of the decade was the rapid expansion of Cognitive Linguistic research around the world and Cognitive Linguistics Associations have been established all over the world.

2 Main Theories

2.1 Prototype categorization

The prototype theory is a cognitive science theory developed by Eleanor Rosch in the early 1970s, with the help of other experts in the field of cognitive psychology. In Rosch's theory, people categorize items and concepts based on a prototype or ideal representation of that category. According to the prototype theory, certain features of a category have equal status, and examples that represent all or most of those features become the prototype for that category. Items that do not share the majority of these features may still belong to that category, but do not represent the prototype.

How each person applies prototype theory to categorizing concepts and language varies based on experience and cognitive development, although many individuals share similar categorizations.

Primarily, the prototype theory studies how individuals categorize and stereotype certain items in language, which help psychologists understand and study the acquisition of vocabulary, individual mental lexicons, and the development of linguistic skills in individuals. Teaching environments benefit from such research and understanding when developing curricula for students. Understanding how the mind categorizes and classifies information and how that process is affected by cognitive development, culture, and early learning experiences, aids in helping

students gain vocabulary and develop more advanced language skills.

In short, experts believe that a person's first experience with a particular stimulus later defines the prototype associated with that category of stimuli. As experiences are gained and a person is more exposed to a particular category, the prototype evolves into a central representation for that category.

2.2 Conceptual metaphor

In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain; for example, using one person's life experience to understand a different person's experience.This idea was first extensively explored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in Metaphors We Live By. Cognitive scientists often study subjects similar to conceptual metaphor under the label of "analogy."

There are two main types of conceptual domains used in conceptual metaphors: the first one is source domain - the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions; The another one is target domain - the conceptual domain that we try to understand.To know a conceptual metaphor is to know the set of mappings that applied to given source-target paring.All in all, different conceptual metaphors tend to be invoked when the speaker is trying to make a case for a certain point of view or course of action.

2.3 The affective filter hypothesis

According to Krashen one obstacle that manifests itself during language acquisition is the affective filter; that is a 'screen' that is influenced by emotional variables that can prevent learning. This hypothetical filter does not impact acquisition directly but rather prevents input from reaching the language acquisition part of the brain. According to Krashen the affective filter can be prompted by many different variables including anxiety, self-confidence, motivation and stress.

In any aspect of education it is always important to create a safe, welcoming environment in which students can learn. In language education this may be especially important since in order to take in and produce language, learners need to feel that they are able to make mistakes and take risks. This relates to directly to Krashen's hypothesis of the affective filter. Teachers are encouraged to help students to overcome affective filters by motivating students, removing stress from environments, and by improving learners' self-esteem.

2.4 The input hypothesis

This hypothesis suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners receive messages that they can understand. It is a concept also known as comprehensible input. However, Krashen also suggests that this comprehensible input should be one step beyond the learner's current language ability, represented as i + 1, in order to allow learners to continue to progress with their language development. This hypothesis highlights the importance of using the Target Language in the classroom. The goal of any language program is for learners to be able to communicate effectively. By providing as much comprehensible input as possible, especially in situations when learners are not exposed to the TL outside of the classroom, the teacher is able to create a more effective opportunity for language acquisition[2].

2.5 The figure-ground theory

Figure-ground perception refers to the tendency of the visual system to simplify a scene into the main object that we are looking at the figure and everything else that forms the background or ground. The concept of figure-ground perception is often illustrated with the classic "faces or vases" illusion, also known as the Rubin vase. Depending on whether you see the black or the white as the figure, you may see either two faces in profile, meaning you perceive the dark color as the figure, or a vase in the center, meaning you see the white color as the figure.

The concept of figure-ground perception emerged out of the field of Gestalt psychology. According to the Gestalt approach, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The term Gestalt itself comes from the German word meaning "form" or "shape".

2.6 The theory of memetics

Memetics is the study of information and culture based on an analogy with Darwinian evolution. Proponents describe memetics as an approach to evolutionary models of cultural information transfer. Memetics describes how an idea can propagate successfully, but doesn't necessarily imply a concept is factual.

The term meme was coined in Richard Dawkins'

1976 book The Selfish Gene, but Dawkins later distanced himself from the resulting field of study. The meme was conceived as a "unit of culture" which is "hosted" in the minds of one or more individuals, and which can reproduce itself in the sense of jumping from the mind of one person to the mind of another[3]. Thus what would otherwise be regarded as one individual influencing another to adopt a belief is seen as an idea-replicator reproducing itself in a new host.

2.7 Framing theory

The concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of Framing Theory is that the media focuses on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. In essence, Framing Theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning.

The theory was first put forth by Goffman under the title of Frame Analysis. He thought that people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. Goffman states that there are two distinctions within primary frameworks: natural frameworks and social frameworks. Both play the role of helping individuals interpret data. The difference between the two is functional.

Natural frameworks identify events as physical occurrences taking natural quote literally and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events. Social frameworks view events as socially driven occurrences, due to the whims, goals, and manipulations on the part of other social players. Framing is very closely to Agenda Setting Theory. Both focus on how media draws the public's eye to specific topics – setting the agenda. But Framing studies further the way in which the news is presented creates a frame for that information.

2.8 Family resemblance

Family Resemblance is a philosophical idea proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in the most well-known posthumously published book Philosophical Investigations (1953). The term is taken from Wittgenstein's metaphorical description of a type of relationship he argued was exhibited by language.

Wittgenstein's point was that things which may be thought to be connected by one essential common feature may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no one feature is common to all[4]. Games have become the paradigmatic example of a group that is related by Family Resemblances.

It features widely in Wittgenstein's later work, and the notion is introduced in the Investigations in response to questions about the general form of propositions and the essence of language. This suggests that Family Resemblance was of prime importance for Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

Since the publication of the Investigations, Family Resemblance has been discussed extensively not only in the philosophical literature, but also in works dealing with classification where the approach is described as 'polythetic', distinguishing it from the traditional approach known now as 'monothetic'. Prototype Theory is a recent development in cognitive science where this idea has also been explored.

2.9 Embodied cognition

Embodied Cognition is a growing research program in cognitive science that emphasizes the formative role the environment plays in the development of cognitive processes. The general theory contends that cognitive processes develop when a tightly coupled system emerges from real-time, goal-directed interactions between organisms and their environment; the nature of these interactions influences the formation and further specifies the nature of the developing cognitive capacities.

Since embodied accounts of cognition have been formulated in a variety of different ways in each of the sub-fields comprising cognitive science, a rich interdisciplinary research program continues to emerge. Empirical research on embodied cognition has exploded in the past 10 years.Embodied Cognition encompasses a loose-knit family of research programs in the cognitive sciences that often share a commitment to critiquing and even replacing traditional approaches to cognition and cognitive processing.

2.10 Tolerance of ambiguity

Tolerance of Ambiguity is a psychological construct that describes the relationship which individuals have with ambiguous stimuli or events. Individuals view these stimuli in a neutral and open way or

as a threat. It was first introduced in 1949 by Else Frenkel Brunswik while researching ethnocentrism in children and was perpetuated by her research of ambiguity intolerance in connection to authoritarian personality. It serves to define and measure how well an individual responds when presented with an event that results in ambiguous stimuli or situations.

In her study, she tested the notion that children who are ethnically prejudiced also tend to reject ambiguity more so than their peers. A study by Kenny and Ginsberg (1958) retested Frenkel Brunswik's original connection of ambiguity intolerance to ethnocentrism and authoritarian personality. Most of the research on this subject was completed in the two decades after the publication of The Authoritarian Personality, however the construct is still studied in psychological research today.

3 Conclusion

This paper introduces almost relevant theories in Cognitive Linguistics which would provide some reference for language beginners and help them to fully understand Cognitive Linguistics. This paper could give readers an overall visions of Cognitive Linguistics, and it is easy for newcomers to read.

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