

语言文化书系

# Cognitive Studies in Language & Culture

认知语言文化学

常宗林  
CHANG Zonglin

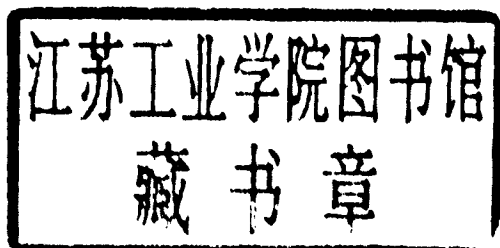
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## Preface

I became interested in the area of cognitive study in language and culture during my Ph. D. study in the School of English Studies, Nottingham University, where I was able to get access to all the possible source of information and meet some famous scholars. My interests in this area have never been doused ever since. After I got my Ph. D. and came back to China, I took up the job of conducting for the MA students a course of cognitive linguistics, which had stayed untaught on their curriculum. Teaching such an interdisciplinary course is difficult because students come to it with little background knowledge and little accessibility to the possible material and books in this area. The course I conduct, however, attracts a large number of students. Prompted by their earnest interests in this field, I started to make a sketch of a book, which attempts to construct a course that presupposes no special preparation in such a field as well as to function as an introduction to the cognitive study of languages and cultures for researchers in neighboring disciplines.

Therefore, my goal in writing this book is to make it accessible to all students who are likely to enroll in an introduction to cognitive studies. Accomplishing this goal requires, for example, explaining the basic ideas such as categorization, schema, conceptual metaphors, and mental images to the English majors. While this book is intended for postgraduates, it should also be

useful for researchers and faculty who want to see how their own fields fit into the general enterprise of cognitive study. Since its whole point is to provide an integrated introduction, I have made great effort in keeping the book relatively short and to the point, attempting to highlight the forest rather than the trees. The book is written with great enthusiasm for what theories of cognitive science have contributed to the understanding of language and culture in relation to human mental activities, but also with awareness that cognitive study still has a long way to go.

The book consists of fourteen chapters. Each chapter concludes with a summary, reader activities, and suggestions for further reading.

My great gratitude should be given to Professor Carter, my Ph. D. supervisor for his enlightening instructions at all times. My gratitude should be given to Ocean University of China for its kind sponsorship in my project. My gratitude should also be given to a number of friends and colleagues, who have offered their generous help with numerous specifics at various junctures over the course of the years. Their influence in the current project is impossible to cite fully. Dedication of the book should be given to my parents, my wife, my daughter, my brother and sisters whose affections and understanding gave me enormous spiritual support.

CHANG Zonglin

Ocean University of China

17th January, 2005

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# **Chapter 1   A Brief Overview**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The cognitive studies in language and culture have been a focal issue, in which the theory of cognitive science influences the viewpoints of most of the scholars. The cognitive studies in language are mainly achieved by means of cognitive linguistics while the cognitive studies in culture are mainly undertaken by means of cognitive anthropology.

If language is regarded from a cognitive point of view, linguistic theory emerges as an integral part of the interdisciplinary field of the cognitive science. In this respect, language is a submodule of a mental information processing system that comprises perception, categorization, abstraction processes and reasoning. Language is assumed to reflect patterns of thought and offer a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts and ideas. To study language is to study patterns of conceptualization. As a consequence, there is interaction and interdependence between human's linguistic abilities and general cognition.

## 1. 2 Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is a modern and innovative approach to the study of language and mind, and their relationship with embodied experience and culture. It is the study of how the mind works. It is a dynamic interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of the nature and origins of thought and language. It is a way of investigating language which is based on human's common experiences of the world. Cognitive linguistics seek answers to fundamental questions about the mental processes: How is it that one can learn and remember? What is the relationship between the mind and the brain? What are the properties of languages and how are they acquired? How did language evolve and how have languages changed over time? How is language organized in the brain?

Cognitive linguistics began to emerge in the 1970s and has been increasingly active since the 1980s. Ever since then, a vast amount of research has been generated under the name of cognitive linguistics. Most of the research has focused on semantics, but a significant proportion also is devoted to syntax and morphology, and there have been cognitive linguistic researches into other areas of linguistics such as language acquisition, phonology and historical linguistics.

Topics of interest for cognitive linguistics include the structural characteristics of natural language categorization (such as *prototypicality*, *metaphor*, *mental imagery*, and *cognitive models*), the functional principles of linguistic organization (such as *iconicity* and *naturalness*), the conceptual interface be-

tween syntax and semantics, the experiential and pragmatic background of language-in-use, and the relationship between language and thought.

Cognitive linguistics is a field which, by its very interdisciplinary nature, brings together elements of cognitive psychology, linguistics, computer science, neural sciences, philosophy, and anthropology. It is the study of the mind including both its structural and functional representation.

The cognitive linguistics offers a multidisciplinary study of what might be called natural intelligence. It focuses on such nature of human language as its theoretical, descriptive, behavioral, and evolutionary bases. It also serves as a window into human cognition.

Cognitive linguists seek to understand how complex cognitive activities like understanding language, solving problems, and perceiving complex scenes can be carried out in human minds. The mind, to them, is a function of the brain. Language and cognition can best be understood as a set of specialized processes and representations. Despite differences in methods of investigation, cognitive linguists have been committed to such ideas. And greater attention has also been given to the impact of evolution on thought and language.

Different from its related disciplines such as neuroscience, cognitive linguists do not work at the exact biological or chemical levels of analysis. Many of them study questions about mental processes which do not involve direct study of the brain at all. They may, for instance, do experiments to discover what children know about grammar or word meaning without working on

the underlying brain processes involved. Or they may be involved in simulating language use on computers as a way to understand how humans use language. Or they may be involved in a more philosophical inquiry into the nature of meaning and what humans could know about it. The most important way in which cognitive linguistics differs from other approaches to the study of language is that language is assumed to reflect certain fundamental properties of the human mind.

The study of cognitive linguistics is involved with two goals in mind. The first goal is to provide learners with a broad intellectual grounding in an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the mind. The second goal is to familiarize them with substantive knowledge of the relevant disciplines as well as to strengthen and deepen their understanding of the mind within a single domain. Theoretical approaches to the study of language include language acquisition, syntactic and semantic theory, phonological theory, and computational models of language. Experimental approaches to language and cognition include speech perception by adults and very young infants, the evolution of language and speech, the psychology of concepts and language understanding, the cognitive processes underlying text comprehension and reasoning, and the perceptual skills and acquisition of concepts by young children.

Crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries, the cognitive linguistics has broadened its areas of studies where more and more linguists are attempting to elucidate the ways in which language reflects the manner in which human beings perceive, categorize and conceptualize the world (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Human's basic bodily understanding of places, movement, forces, paths, objects and containers is considered as sources of information about life, love, and all other abstract concepts. Metaphors are used intuitively and unconsciously to understand the mind, emotions and all other abstract concepts. As embodied beings, metaphors help to make sense of a concept such as "mind". They privilege some understandings and exclude others (Schn, 1993). Without such conventional metaphors, it is suggested, there would be no abstract thought.

### 1.3 Cognitive poetics and cognitive anthropology

In the cognitive study of literary language, there emerged cognitive poetics, a new way of thinking about literature. Known also as cognitive stylistics, it involves the application of cognitive linguistics and psychology to literary texts. In this emerging field, particular cognitive poetic approaches are set out with such key issues and points as *figures* and *grounds*, *prototypes*, *schemata*, *mental spaces* and *conceptual metaphors* for study.

The cognitive study in culture is on the other hand mainly reflected in cognitive anthropology which expands the examination of human thinking to consider how thought works in different cultural settings. The studies of mind range from the mode in which speakers in one cultural community think to possible different modes of thinking across cultures. To view the operations of mind in particular physical and social environments has become one of its focuses. For researchers in such a field, the main method is ethnography, which requires living and interacting

with members of a culture to a sufficient extent that their social and cognitive systems become apparent. Many of them have investigated, for instance, the similarities and differences across cultures in words for colors.

#### **1.4 A brief outline of the book**

*Cognitive Studies in Language & Culture* is written for those with an interest in the areas of cognitive studies, providing an opportunity to explore current research and ideas in this field, including methodology and practice, the main theoretical frameworks employed, the nature and range of linguistic and conceptual phenomena considered and applications to areas such as schema, mental imagery, culture and cognition. The book focuses on the role that both language and culture play in human cognition. It will focus on the relation between semantic and conceptual categories and processes, especially as these are illuminated by cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies, the study of language acquisition and conceptual development, and the study of the relation of speech production and comprehension to other kinds of behavior in cultural context. In this book, the theoretical foundations of cognitive linguistics and some of its contributions to various subfields of linguistics and culture studies will be elaborated. It will expose readers to a good range of linguistic, cultural and conceptual phenomena. These include grammatical and lexical structure, organization, development, language change and variation, conceptual structure and conceptual projection. Most of the theoretical approaches in cognitive studies in language and culture are covered. It also provides a platform for those interested in pursuing researches in such fields.



## **Chapter 2   Categorization**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Categorization is one of the most fundamental and pervasive cognitive activities. It is a process of abstraction and perception, by which distinct entities are treated as equivalents (Wilson and Keil, 1999). Categorization can be found wherever there are humans, who categorize as they listen, and categorize as they talk. As a component of language, categorization affects all aspects of humans' language system. Its influence can be found, for instance, in the assignment of words to parts of speech, the interpretation of semantic features, the detection of phonological segments, and the application of syntactic rules. As speakers, whenever humans choose a register, a genre, or a rhetorical form for an argument or a speech, they make choices based on various categorizations of their goals and the relevant knowledge shared by the speaker and the listener. As listeners, they are continually trying to categorize the speaker's message in terms of sound segments, words, and logical structures.

Categorization involves the understanding of some individual entity, some particular of experience, as an instance of something conceived more abstractly that also contains other actual