

德古意特认知语言学研究丛书

MEANING IN MIND AND SOCIETY

A FUNCTIONAL CONTRIBUTION
TO THE SOCIAL TURN
IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

**心智与社会中的意义：
功能视角下认知语言学的社会转向**

Peter Harder 著

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出版说明

认知语言学是语言学的一门重要分支学科，自20世纪80年代诞生以来，受到了国际和国内学界的广泛关注。近年来，外教社陆续推出了一系列相关丛书，集中体现了国际、国内的优质研究成果。其中“国际认知语言学经典论丛”收入了Ronald Langacker、Leonard Talmy、Dirk Geeraerts等国际认知语言学领域顶尖学者的经典作品；“外教社认知语言学丛书·普及系列”、“外教社认知语言学丛书·应用系列”则体现了国内学界的最新研究成果。这些丛书因内容权威、见解独到受到了外语界的广泛好评。

在过去几十年中，中国认知语言学研究从最初萌芽到蓬勃发展，逐步走向成熟，形成了系统化、多元化的研究格局，跨学科领域的理论及应用研究都取得了长足进步。为进一步拓宽国内认知语言学研究的视野，方便国内读者查阅和借鉴相关研究成果，我们特地从德古意特出版社近年推出的相关学术图书中精选了7种，组成“德古意特认知语言学研究丛书”，引进出版。丛书汇集了Ronald Langacker、Dirk Geeraerts、René Dirven、Martin Pütz等多位国际认知语言学权威编著的力作，其中既有关于认知语言学基本理论的必读经典，也有认知语言学与语言习得、语言教学、社会语言学等领域的融合研究，视野广泛，观点新颖，方法多元，文献丰富。

相信本套丛书可帮助广大认知语言学的研习者深入了解认知语言学的理论，把握认知语言学的研究热点和发展趋势，开拓多元化的研究方法思路，进一步推动我国认知语言学研究的长远发展。

Meaning in Mind and Society

A Functional Contribution to the Social Turn
in Cognitive Linguistics

by

Peter Harder

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Contents

Introduction

1.	What this book tries to do	1
2.	A summary of the argument	5
2.1.	There is no such thing as ‘conceptual frames’ (But there’s a whole social-cognitive world)	5
2.2.	On-line vs. off-line features	8
2.3.	Social cognitive linguistics vs. analysis in terms of ‘discourses’	9
2.4.	Functional relations and adaptation	9
3.	The progression of the book	10

Chapter 1. The heartland of Cognitive Linguistics

1.	Introduction	14
2.	Conceptualization and concepts	16
3.	Frames, domains, and idealized cognitive models	22
4.	Embodiment and image schemas. From conceptual to neural patterns	29
5.	Figurative meaning	35
6.	Linguistic meaning: Polysemy, ambiguity, and abstraction	39
7.	Mental spaces	42
8.	Cognitive linguistics and cognitive grammar	47
9.	Final remarks	55

Chapter 2. From conceptual representations to social processes: aspects of the ongoing social turn

1.	Introduction	58
2.	Cognitivism and conceptualization in the sociocultural sphere	58
3.	Variation, lexical semantics and corpus linguistics	64
4.	The developmental perspective: epigenesis, joint attention and cultural learning	70
5.	Extended grounding: situational, intersubjective and cultural aspects	79

6.	Language as a population of utterances: an evolutionary synthesis	88
7.	Meaning construction	95
8.	Final remarks	101

Chapter 3: Social constructions and discourses

1.	Introduction	103
2.	The social construction of reality	105
3.	Power, habitus, marginalization and discourse: the French poststructuralists	108
4.	The analytic practice: discourse(s) analysis	114
5.	Discursive psychology	123
6.	Systemic-Functional Linguistics	126
7.	Socially based theories of meaning: overview and issues	136

Chapter 4. The foundations of a socio-cognitive synthesis: social reality as the context of cognition

1.	Introduction	138
2.	Social facts: objective and subjective, intrinsic and observer-relative properties	139
3.	Niche construction	146
4.	Individuals, collectives and the invisible hand	154
5.	Functional relations	160
6.	Mind in society: causal patterns and the individual	163
7.	Summary: the socio-cognitive world	172

Chapter 5. Meaning and flow: the relation between usage and competency

1.	Introduction	179
2.	Meaning as process input	182
3.	Presupposition and the directional nature of linguistic meaning	193
4.	The procedural nature of competencies	197
5.	Usage, competency and meaning construction	209
6.	Conceptual categories and the flow. Messy and precise semantic territories	212
7.	Summary	219

Chapter 6. Structure, function and variation

1.	Introduction: the social foundations of structure	222
2.	Usage, structure and component units	228
3.	Function-based structure	236
3.1.	Structured division of labour – and arbitrariness as a functionally motivated property	236
3.2.	Slots and constructions: coercion as construction-internal functional pressure	245
3.3.	Functional upgrading: the dynamic dimension of syntax	251
3.4.	The interdependence of the top-down and bottom-up perspectives	259
4.	Norms and variation	269
4.1.	Introduction: the interdependence of structure and variation	269
4.2.	Variation and the linguistic ‘system’	271
4.3.	The role of norms	277
4.4.	Norms and individual competency	282
4.5.	The social dynamics of linguistic variation	287
4.6.	Usage, structure and variation in an evolutionary framework: a discussion with Croft	290
5.	Summary: function-based structure and <i>langue</i> in a social cognitive linguistics	298

Chapter 7. Meaning and social reality

1.	Introduction	303
2.	The growth and structure of social constructions	307
2.1.	The bottom-up trajectory. From construals to social constructions	307
2.2.	Acceptance and efficacy: the evolutionary dynamics of social construction	310
2.3.	Habitus vs. conceptual models: do we really need mental representations?	314
2.4.	The Platonic projection: concepts as part of the niche	318
3.	The role of acceptance	326
3.1.	Beliefs as social constructions: causal power and grounding	326

3.2.	The interface between niche and flow in social construction(s)	332
3.3.	Bullshit: function and factual grounding	339
3.4.	Re-conceptualization and social reality	346
4.	Discourses analysis and social cognitive linguistics	354
4.1.	What precisely are Foucault-style discourses?	354
4.2.	How can discourses be understood in terms of a social cognitive linguistics?	358
4.3.	Where Foucault-style analysis belongs – and where it is inadequate	364
5.	Meaning in ‘hard’ social science: the case of International Relations	369
5.1.	The Copenhagen school of international relations (CIR)	369
5.2.	The need to distinguish between the niche and the flow	372
5.3.	Niche construction and the grounding of layered identity structure	374
5.4.	CIR, agency and factual grounding	379
6.	Individual conceptualization and the social constructor	383
7.	Cognitively based critical analysis – a comparative perspectivization	390
8.	Summary: Conceptualization in society	403

Chapter 8. Multi-ethnic societies: discourses vs. social cognitive linguistics

1.	Introduction	408
2.	The ethnic other: an ultra-brief historical overview	409
3.	Social construction and universal humanity	412
4.	A social cognitive analysis of the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’	415
5.	Where discourses fail: the decline and fall of the anti-racist discourse in Denmark	421
6.	Strategies based on collaborative agency: platform building and niche (re)construction	429
7.	Asymmetric communication and the pathological ‘they’: the niche for discourses	436
8.	Final remarks: why critical analysis needs functional relations and collaborative agency	438

Chapter 9: Summary and perspectives	443
References	463
Index	505

Meaning in Mind and Society. A Functional Contribution to the Social Turn in Cognitive Linguistics

Introduction

1. What this book tries to do

This book was undertaken with two purposes in mind, one academic and one 'civic'.

The academic purpose is to describe and contribute to the process whereby cognitive linguistics is expanding to include the social side of language and meaning. This development is one aspect of an even broader intellectual challenge for the 21st century: cognitive science successfully integrated a number of disciplines, including linguistics, in an umbrella discipline to study the human mind – but the very success of that endeavour has now carried it from a beginning where cognition was viewed as an autonomous domain (the 'brain in the vat') into the study of cognitive processes in society. Since there is no umbrella 'social science' – no 'soc-sci' that expanding 'cog-sci' can team up with – there is no easy blueprint for how to take this step. No matter what one's preferred approach may be, however, it will have to take the role of language into consideration – which makes it an exciting challenge for a language person.

Even more important than the academic motivation, however, is the civic purpose. Recently, a prominent spokesperson for 'critical Muslims' in Denmark opened a debate on immigration by saying 'everything begins with language' – and went on to argue that divisive ways of speaking were at the root of the problems. Cognitive linguists would tend to disagree with this statement, pointing instead to cognitive models in the mind. Most ordinary people (and politicians) would ignore both and point to social realities as they see them. The academic community can offer no obvious way of making these different perspectives cohere. The book tries to achieve its academic purpose in such a way that it can address this gap.

The specific focus of this book is expressed in the word *functional*. As I use the term, cf. also Harder (1996), it refers to relations between a dynamic object of description and the context – more specifically the type

of pattern in which feedback from the environment helps to shape, promote or undermine their continuing role. I try to show that a full understanding of meanings must include an account of such functional relations. This includes feedback from all relevant factors, including intersubjective understanding and non-mental aspects of the way the world works. In order to understand what for instance *security* means, ongoing feedback across the whole spectrum, from the individual experience of being under threat up to international relations, needs to be part of the framework.

The lengthy subtitle expresses the trajectory that the account follows: the subject is Cognitive Linguistics (= CL); it describes the ongoing development in CL that I describe as the ‘social turn’ – and it suggests that a functional approach can add an essential dimension to it.

The topic of meaning in society has become increasingly focal for many interconnected reasons – in linguistics, in cultural studies, in organization theory and management studies, and last but not least in politics, where professional operators in the form of spin doctors have proliferated in the last decade. It is becoming more and more important that those of us whose fields involve meaning equip students as well as we can to understand and engage with social processes of meaning creation and proliferation.

The problem is not that nothing is being done: there is a plethora of different approaches on offer, and Cognitive Linguistics has done its share – e.g. Chilton (1996, 2004); Lakoff (2004, 2006, 2008); Kristiansen and Dirven (2008). However, the book is based on the conviction that both the academic and the civic issue have a shared and unsolved problem in the present intellectual landscape, in that there is no clear answer to the question: how does the analyst manage to get a full and integrated picture of cognitive and social aspects of the topic of ‘meaning in society’?

The words ‘full and integrated’ are crucial in relation to the academic analyst’s civic obligations: if you go solely for those specific aspects that constitute your special interests (personally as well as professionally) and leave the rest to others, the field will be a prey to competing factions. This may be okay or inevitable from an academic point of view; active research never deals with more than a small part of the truth anyway. But the warring half truths on the academic side tend to team up with warring interests in society – leaving the field as a free-for-all.

This prevents the academic community from serving civil society as well as it should – as illustrated by the ethnic issue discussed in chapter 8.

An important factor is the influential academic approach that takes ‘discourses’ as the fundamental object of description. In this approach, the free-for-all has the final word: the world consists of a cauldron of ongoing processes of meaning creation that are caused by, and simultaneously caus-

ing, other social processes of the same kind. Since the distinguishing feature of this heterogeneous collection of approaches is that it operates with the plural form *discourses*, I use the plural attributively to avoid confusion with the uncontroversial non-count singular: a *discourses* approach is something much more specific and problematic than a *discourse* approach.

From an individual perspective, the 'discourses perspective' has the attraction that it allows you to be the founder and sole proprietor of your own local processes of meaning creation. Significantly, however, it is also attractive to power holders who want to make sure that such processes work so as to promote their interests. The claim that meaning is detached from all foundations beyond the immediate process was originally put forward by critical intellectuals, who wanted to tear the mask from established interests parading as ultimate reality. Now it has become common property, which means that those who have more power use it more effectively. The civic position does not stand much of a chance if the winner takes it all, also when it comes to meaning in society. That makes it worth while looking for a different approach.

The book tries to show that a social cognitive linguistics can serve the civic purposes I have described, and make the academic and the civic agenda go hand in hand. Two basic features of the CL approach are essential arguments for thinking so.

First of all, as pointed out by Geeraerts (2003b, 2007), CL is inherently oriented towards recontextualization. What created and continues to unite the whole CL enterprise is the movement of going behind language to set it in a wider cognitive context. What I call 'the social turn' can be understood as a new operation of the same kind: language-and-conceptualization needs to be set in the wider context of 'meaning-in-society'¹.

Secondly, in the context of CL, the issue of foundations has been recast in terms of *grounding*, which is an attractive way of thinking about the relation between a focal object of description and the context in which it belongs. In classic CL, the central form of grounding is *bodily* grounding (cf. Johnson 1992). This dimension retains its crucial role, but in a social cognitive linguistics, grounding also includes the anchoring of meaning in feedback from the environment, outside the individual's body. This is in keeping with the broader agenda in CL of *experiential* grounding.

Grounding contrasts on the one hand with dogmatic foundationalism, where everything is rigidly determined at some basic level, and on the other with the deconstructionist detachment of meaning from all founda-

1 This is a continuation of the agenda of Harder (1999) and Sinha (1999).

tional moorings. Where exactly between these extremes the description ends up is an empirical matter. In this, it reflects the same point as the concept of 'partial autonomy': certain facts stand on the shoulders of other facts, which means that they depend on them without being reducible to them.

The scope of the book calls for a comment. It may appear that I am trying to tell everybody in the social sciences and the humanities how to do their jobs. But the academic purpose is actually quite specific: to show, from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, how meaning as a feature of individual minds is woven into the larger fabric of meaning in society. Unfortunately I cannot address this issue without having to make a considerable number of assumptions about meaning, language, human minds and societies. While it does not quite amount to 'the universe and other related matters', it may be a little too close for comfort.

One thing I clearly owe the reader is a definition, or an account (if *definition* sounds a little too Aristotelian!), of what I understand by meaning, so that it becomes clear how that entity can be both in mind and society. As I understand it, meaning presupposes conscious experience, but only experience understood as associated with a *vehicle* counts as meaning. The most basic vehicle (cf. Sinha & Rodriguez 2008: 364–68) is a material object, such as a cup or chair – which are meaningful entities to members of communities in which they are associated with certain types of experience. In this simplest case, meaning is a side effect of the object's role in a form of life.

With the rise of signs, meanings acquire independent status in relation to their vehicles. In human languages, this status gets its most sophisticated manifestation. With the development of languages, the human form of life becomes dependent on collective recognition of meaning, and that in turn brings about a proliferation of objects whose causal powers depend on what meanings they have (thus superimposing a new level of complexity on the issue of meaning).

Of special importance in this book is the functional perspective (cf. ch. 4). In the trajectory of meaning, it begins with the functions of objects and continues via the functions of linguistic expressions to functional relations between meanings and social structures (cf. also Zlatev 2001). But the perspective extends beyond linguistic meaning to the general issue of how the functional dimension interacts with the cognitive dimension in understanding what goes on in institutional, social and political processes. Functions work at all levels, not only those that involve meaning – and the specific role of meaning needs to be understood in this larger perspective.

The functional dimension of meaning-in-society constitutes the basis of the specific contribution this book has to offer. Thus the book does not pretend to give an equal and full account of all aspects of ongoing socially oriented work in the cognitive tradition (which would also take more than one book). It aims to describe the types of development that together constitute the social turn, and show what a functional approach has to contribute to it.

To sum up: this book tries to show how cognitive linguistics is expanding from the classic version predicated on conceptualization towards a social cognitive linguistics that grounds conceptualization in its social context, and to show how a functional approach can provide the extended foundation that this development requires. In doing so, it tries to show that this will provide an approach to meaning in society that can do justice simultaneously to the embodied experience of the individual and to social reality.

For obvious reasons, the book does not try to give all the answers that one might want such an approach to provide. What it does try is to show that the approach addresses the relevant questions. Hopefully, it gives readers a glimpse of what is missing in some of the partial answers, and prevent these from turning into reductive half-truths.

2. A summary of the argument

The overall question is: how should Cognitive Linguistics (= CL) expand in order to be an adequate framework for describing meaning as part of social reality?

Some of the central parts of the answer are introduced in list form below:

2.1. There is no such thing as 'conceptual frames' (But there's a whole social-cognitive world)

A very brief summary of this book is to say that what a cognitivist sees as conceptual frames is the tip of an iceberg that constitutes the whole social universe, and a frame-based theory of meaning needs to broaden out to encompass this perspective. In order to understand cognition-in-action, a social cognitive linguistics needs an account of the social grounding of meaning – including relations between cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions. This in turn involves the following issues:

(a) First of all, it requires a *format for describing social facts* as distinct from cognitive facts: the book therefore presents and argues for such a format.

(b) A central claim about that format is that it involves various forms of *interaction between meaning in the individual mind and meaning in the environment*.

This is less trivial than it might appear at first glance. To say that there is meaning in the environment, just as there is meaning inside the mind, is one of those ideas that are sort of obvious but have not been given a clear and consensual descriptive format. Cognitive Linguistics is basically predicated on putting meaning inside the head (cf. Gärdenfors 1998: 21), and two of the authors I build on in moving into social territory also locate the essential mental elements inside the mind of the individual. Searle's (1995: 26) definition of social facts is based on a 'we-intention' inside an individual mind; and Croft (2000: 111) defines meaning as something that "occurs in the interlocutors' heads".

In contrast, I place the individual agent in an interface position between meaning emerging from within the body and meaning impinging from outside. The approach that enables me to do so is entirely unmysterious and implies no assumptions about a collective mind existing independently of individuals. Basically, it is a matter of 'levels-of-analysis'. I do not dispute what Searle and Croft are claiming – the individual level just does not capture all there is to say (as they are the first to point out in other respects).

The rationale has two steps. The first can be illustrated with the properties of a traffic jam as opposed the properties of a car. Even if a traffic jam consists entirely of cars, it has not just additional but apparently contradictory properties; thus the location of a traffic jam that starts if two lanes out of three are suddenly closed will quickly get extended *backwards* on a congested freeway, although all the cars in it separately move *forward*. And if we identify a traffic jam with the individual cars it consists of, how can it be that the traffic jam persists while individual cars escape?

This issue reflects a basic ontological point that is related to Russell's theory of types (the implications of which were central to Bateson 1980). At the basic level where the issue is the existence of assemblies with properties that differ from those of the individual instances, meaning-in-society as understood in this book includes the 'traffic jams of meaning' in the human environment, an example being a rumour that arises and proliferates accidentally: it may have to be taken seriously while it lasts, but may also disappear without a trace. But although I will occasionally refer to