Investigations in Cognitive Grammar

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by
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To David and Sharon

Preface

In its general outline, Cognitive Grammar (CG) has been in existence for roughly three decades. Over this span of time it has not changed in any fundamental way. It has of course been subject to refinement and elaboration. Still, its continued evolution has mostly been a matter of working out the specifics of its application to varied linguistic phenomena. In a symbolic account of grammar, the key problem is to characterize the semantic structures it incorporates and serves to express. Progress in CG has therefore come about primarily through detailed conceptual analysis in numerous domains, requiring no substantial modification of the basic descriptive framework.

Reports of this progress are scattered in many venues often not readily accessible. The need to make them easily available was accommodated by two previous volumes in this series (Langacker 1990a, 1999a) and has now resulted in a third. The present volume brings together a dozen innovative papers reflecting recent work. Although they were first written independently, and pertain to diverse topics, they have been revised and integrated to form a coherent whole. And while they deal with important grammatical problems in considerable depth and analytical detail, the presentation builds from fundamentals and introduces the background needed for comprehension.

One source of the volume's coherence is that a number of overlapping topics are examined in multiple chapters viewing them from different perspectives and in relation to one another. Among the topics covered in this fashion are grammatical constructions (their general nature, their metonymic basis, their role in grammaticization), nominal grounding (quantifiers, possessives, impersonal *it*), clausal grounding (its relation to nominal grounding, an epistemic account of tense, a systemic view of the English auxiliary), the "control cycle" (an abstract cognitive model with many linguistic manifestations), finite clauses (their internal structure and external grammar), and complex sentences (complementation, subordination, coordination). Though necessarily selective, the book thus provides a reasonably comprehensive survey of current research in CG and gives some indication of its future directions.

Publication Sources

Chapter 10. Finite complements in English
2008   *Journal of Foreign Languages* 10, 2–35.

Chapter 11. Subordination in Cognitive Grammar
2008   In Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (ed.), *Asymmetric Events*,
              137–149. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Chapter 12. The conceptual basis of coordination
To appear   In Seana Coulson (ed.), *Language in Action*. Stanford: CSLI
              Publications.

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except for some emendations made to avoid excessive redundancy. Also, biblio-
graphical entries, section numberings, and other typographical elements have
been adjusted to the Mouton style, temporary and incomplete references have
been updated, and cross-references to the original volumes have been deleted.

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**Chapter 7   The English present: Temporal coincidence vs.
                epistemic immediacy**

Chapter 8   A functional account of the English auxiliary

Chapter 9   Aspects of the grammar of finite clauses

Chapter 10   Finite complements in English

Chapter 11   Subordination in Cognitive Grammar

Chapter 12   The conceptual basis of coordination

Chapter 1
Constructions in Cognitive Grammar

1. Architecture

More than one linguistic theorist has voiced the opinion that cognitive linguists, including myself, fail to recognize the existence of grammar. That is simply false. The question is not whether grammar exists – for it does – but rather, what is it like? Cognitive Grammar (CG) diverges from standard assumptions in two fundamental respects: (i) its claim that grammar is symbolic in nature; and (ii) its focus on constructions (rather than "rules") as the primary objects of description (Langacker 1987a, 1990a, 1991, 1999a).

The first claim denies the autonomy of syntax. Crucially, though, we need to distinguish between two definitions of autonomy that have often been confused. By the first definition, syntax (and more generally, grammar) is autonomous unless it is fully predictable in terms of meaning and other independent factors. Let us call this **weak autonomy**. It implies that grammar does not just "fall out" or emerge automatically from other phenomena. Rather, it has to be specifically learned by children and explicitly described by linguists. Observe that weak autonomy says nothing about the nature of grammatical structure, bearing only on its non-predictability. The second definition says that grammar is autonomous by virtue of being distinct from both lexicon and semantics, constituting a separate level of representation whose description requires a special set of irreducible grammatical primitives. Let us call this **strong autonomy**.

All cognitive linguists accept weak autonomy. Grammar exists and has to be described as such. Only its nature and proper characterization are at issue. The basic claims of CG presuppose weak autonomy but constitute a radical alternative to strong autonomy. For one thing, CG holds that lexicon, morphology, and syntax form a continuum, divided only arbitrarily into discrete components. Moreover, it claims that lexicon and grammar are fully describable as **assemblies of symbolic structures**, where a symbolic structure is simply the pairing between a semantic structure and a phonological structure (its semantic and phonological **poles**). This has several consequences. First, grammar is not distinct from semantics, but rather incorporates semantics as one of its two poles. Second, grammatical description does not rely on special, irreducible grammatical primitives, but only on symbolic structures, each reducible to a

form-meaning pairing. Third, every construct validly posited in grammatical description has a semantic pole and is therefore meaningful (though the meanings are often quite schematic).

Like Construction Grammar, CG takes constructions, rather than "rules", to be the primary objects of grammatical description (Fillmore 1988; Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988; Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001; cf. Langacker 2005c). Grammar comprises regularities of varying degrees of generality – patterns that speakers internalize and that linguists need to discover and describe. What are these patterns like, and how can we best describe them? Three kinds of devices have commonly been employed in linguistic description: rules, filters, and schemas. These imply different kinds of relationships between specific expressions (e.g. sentences) and the patterns they manifest.

By **rules**, I mean constructive rules analogous to the phrase structure rules and transformations of classic generative syntax. What is important here is the notion that rules and expressions are quite different in nature and related only indirectly. It is only required that, through their cumulative application, some set of rules serve collectively to "construct" a given expression. Rules do not necessarily resemble the expressions they help derive. **Filters** are negative statements indicating that a particular configuration of elements is not permitted. By definition, filters are distinct from the expressions they help describe. **Schemas** bear the closest relation to expressions. They are templates for expressions, representing the abstracted commonality of sets of expressions parallel in certain respects. Schemas are thus are directly analogous to the expressions they characterize apart from their level of specificity.

In CG, grammatical patterns are represented by means of schemas. A **construction** is defined as either an expression (of any size), or else a schema abstracted from expressions to capture their commonality (at any level of specificity). Expressions and the patterns they instantiate are thus the same in their basic nature, differing only in degree of specificity. Both specific expressions and abstracted schemas are capable of being entrenched psychologically and conventionalized in a speech community, in which case they constitute established **linguistic units**. Specific expressions with the status of units are traditionally recognized as lexical items. More schematic units correspond to what is traditionally regarded as grammar. The difference, though, is a matter of degree, and in CG these form a continuum. Every construction – whether lexical or grammatical – is characterized as an assembly of symbolic structures.

CG is highly restrictive owing to the **content requirement**. The elements permitted in a linguistic description are limited to: (i) semantic, phonological, and symbolic structures that actually occur as (parts of) expressions; (ii)

schematizations of permitted structures; and (iii) categorizing relationships be-tween permitted structures. Thus the only elements ascribable to a linguistic system are those which are either part of the primary data (namely, occurring expressions), hence directly apprehended, or else emerge from the primary data by means of the basic psychological phenomena of schematization and catego-rization. Ruled out by the content requirement are such elements as filters, purely syntactic primitives (with neither semantic nor phonological content), and derivations from underlying structures.

Let us then consider what the content requirement does permit. Permitted first, as shown in Figure 1.1, are semantic structures (abbreviated S) and pho-nological structures (P). These can be of any size and any degree of internal complexity. A symbolic structure (Σ) consists in the linkage of a semantic and a phonological structure (its two poles). Symbolic structures combine with one another (in ways to be discussed) to form assemblies of symbolic structures, which can also be of any size and any degree of internal complexity. When these assemblies are specific (rather than schematic), they constitute expres-sions (E), such as words, phrases, clauses, etc.[1]
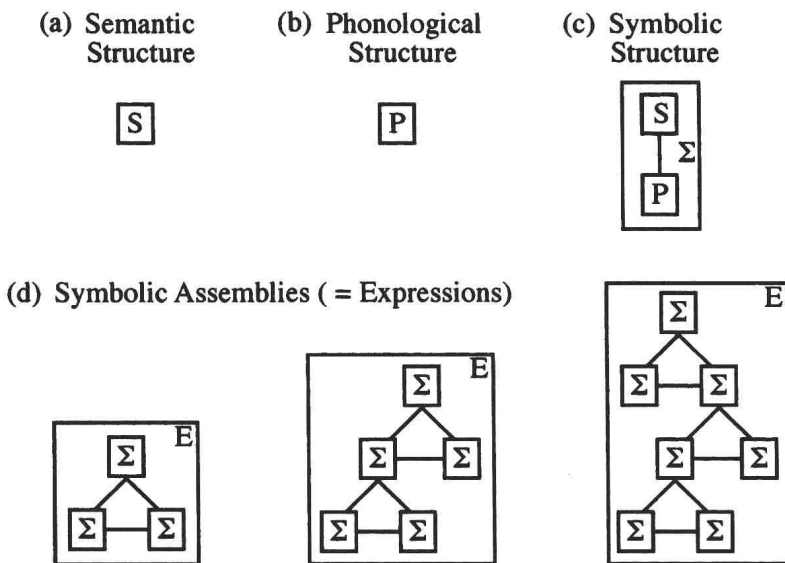

Figure 1.1

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1   When those expressions are entrenched and conventionalized, they are recognized as lexical items.

Permitted next, as shown in Figure 1.2, are schemas (Sch). Each represents the abstracted commonality observable in sets of occurring expressions, or in schemas previously extracted. Schematization can be carried to whatever level of abstraction the data supports.
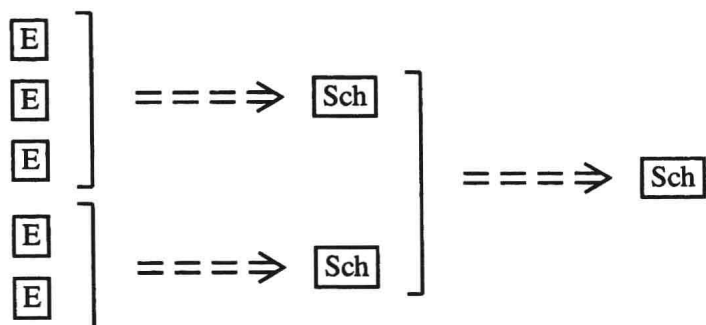

Figure 1.2

Also permitted are relationships of categorization, of which there are two basic sorts, described in Figure 1.3. One sort is the relation between a schema and more specific structures in which the schema is immanent (i.e. observable without distortion). These more specific structures thus elaborate (or instantiate) the schema. For this I use a solid arrow. A dashed arrow represents extension, implying some conflict between the categorizing structure and the one it categorizes. In this case the categorizing structure can be regarded as a prototype (at least in local terms).
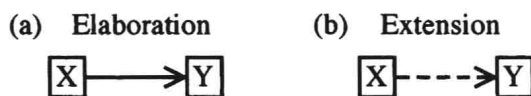

Figure 1.3

A linguistic system thus comprises vast networks of structures linked by categorizing relationships, as sketched in Figure 1.4(a). Included in such networks are specific expressions with the status of conventional units, as well as schemas representing various levels of abstraction (or schematicity). Of course, a particular expression – whether fixed or novel – is categorized simultaneously by many schemas, each corresponding to a particular facet of its structure. Collectively, the set of schemas which categorize it constitutes its structural description (i.e. its interpretation with respect to the linguistic system), as shown

in Figure 1.4(b). The expression is well-formed (or "grammatical") to the extent that these categorizations involve elaboration rather than extension.
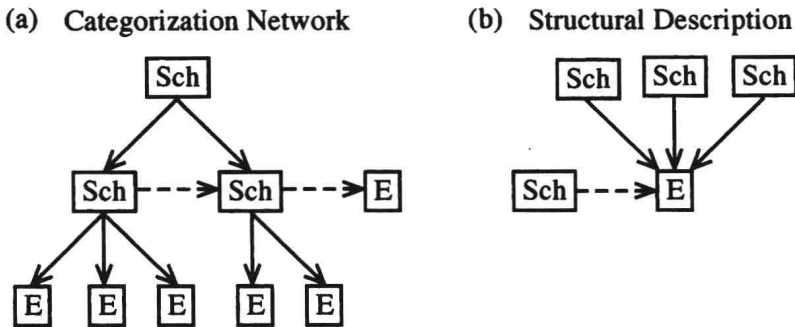

Figure 1.4

In this framework, grammatical patterns are captured by **constructional schemas**, i.e. schematic symbolic assemblies (Langacker 1987a: ch. 10, 1988a, 2000). A constructional schema describes, in schematic terms, how simpler expressions combine to form a more complex expression. It can therefore function as a template guiding the formation of new expressions, and also serves to categorize the relevant facets of such expressions, as shown in Figure 1.5.
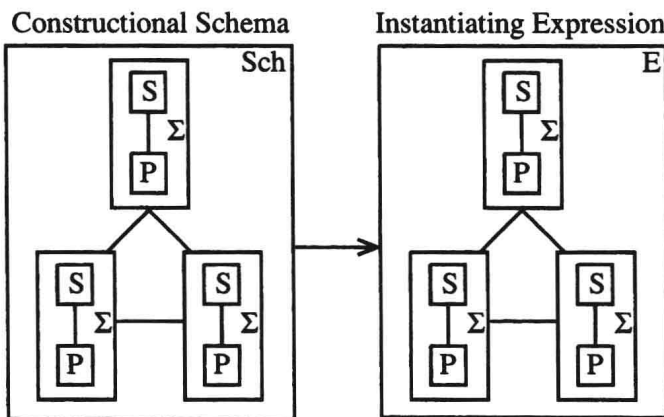

Figure 1.5

Why does grammar exist? There would be no need for grammatical patterns if a minimal symbolic structure (i.e. a morpheme) were available to symbolize every notion we might have occasion to express. That of course is not feasi-