Introduction to Cognitive & Functional Linguistics

Dylan Glynn
dglynn@univ-paris8.fr
www.dsglynn.univ-paris8.fr
I will upload the slides from each class, each week
On my webpage, there is a page for Students, you need a password, it’s “student”

I will also upload the course outline and reading materials
Before we start - A small experiment

Story A
Imagine that you are a single person. A friend sets you up on a blind date. You really like this person and start dating a lot. Things were going great. But then it got even better. The relationship felt like it was the best you ever had. This continues to this day. No matter what happens, the two of you are quite happy together.

Story B
Imagine that you are a single person. A friend sets you up on a blind date. You really like this person and start dating a lot. Things were going great. But then you encountered some difficulties. The relationship did not feel the same as before. This lasted for some time. No matter how hard you two tried, the two of you were not working out.

(i) Which relationship progressed further?

(ii) Which relationship was progressing faster at the beginning?

(iii) Which relationship is progressing faster at present?

(iv) Which relationship progressed more along a straight line?

(v) In which relationship were the individuals heading in the same direction?
What is Cognitive-Functional Linguistics?

An embodied situated theory of language

A negotiated interpersonal theory of language

Or

A load of fluff by a bunch of Californian hippies and European Socialists?

Arts students trying to sound serious, or worse, scientific!

Whatever your opinion, as arguably the largest and most influential theory of language, one cannot ignore it
In this class, we will cover very broadly
the history of Cognitive and Functional Linguistics

We will consider the fundamental tenets of the theories
What is language?
What is linguistics?
The Basics-

About the only two things all linguists agree upon are

1. There are no rights or wrongs for native speakers

2. The relation between the form and the meaning is arbitrary
Two great theories about how language is possible

1. Rule-based / form-driven model

2. Usage-based / meaning-driven model

Each model is associated with theories that try to describe, predict and explain language.
Let’s begin with some revision
Symbolic System

The **form-meaning pair** and the **arbitrary nature of the sign**  
(de Saussure 1916)

Any symbol is necessarily a pairing between the sign and what the sign signifies. This is not only the basis of language, it is the basis of semiosis (symbolic communication).

Language is a special instance of semiosis, it is structured!
Structured System

Grammaticality and Acceptability
(Chomsky 1957)

Grammatical = acceptable to a native speaker

Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

The fundamental aim in the linguistic analysis of a language L is to separate the grammatical sequences which are the sentences of L from the ungrammatical sequences which are not sentences of L and to study the structure of the grammatical sequences
What is a sign?

What is signified?

What is acceptable?

What is a native speaker?
And the big question –

How does a native speaker determine acceptability of a sign-signified pair?

In other words –

Where does grammar come from?
How do language speakers know right from wrong?
How do language speakers understand each other?

Cognitive Linguistics is one theory about how this is all done...

To appreciate how Cognitive Linguistics is trying to explain this,
We need to know a little bit about the origins of the theory
Two Models of Language

There exist two fundamental models of language, two models that seek to answer the questions above.

**Rule-Based**
Language structure is based on rules
Language use is the result of people using those rules

Grammar = Symbolic Rule

**Usage-Based**
Language structure is based on use
Language use is a result of people communicating

Grammar = Usage Pattern
Four Linguistic Theories

Structuralism
(de Saussure 1916, Hjelmslev 1928, Jakobson 1933, Benveniste 1966)
+ Society / – Mind = Language is a social system
+ Rule / – Use = Structure is independent from use

Generativism
(Harris 1951, Chomsky 1957, Katz 1966, Fodor 1975)
- Society / + Mind = Language is a mental system
+ Rule / – Use = Structure is independent from use

Functionalism
+ Society / – Mind = Language is a social system
– Rule / + Use = Structure results from use

Cognitivism
– Society / + Mind = Language is a mental system
– Rule / + Use = Structure results from use
Four Theories for How We Know Grammar
Problem: How do we know right from wrong in language?

Rule-Based Model
Solution: There are rules!
Problem: Where are the rules?

Structuralism
Solution: There is a learnt structure that we use!

+ Society / – Mind = Language is a social system
+ Rule / – Use = Structure is independent from use

Problem: Where does structure originate?

Generativism
Solution: We are born with it, it’s innate!

- Society / + Mind = Language is a mental system
+ Rule / – Use = Structure is independent from use

Problem: There is not a single grammatical structure that is shared by all languages
Four Theories for How We Know Grammar

Usage-Based Model
Solution: There are no rules!
Problem: How to constraint the system? What determines right from wrong?

Functionalism
Solution: We all intend (want to say) similar things!

+ Society / − Mind = Language is a social system
  − Rule / + Use = Structure results from use

Cognitivism
Solution: We all conceptualise (think about) similar things!

− Society / + Mind = Language is a social system
  − Rule / + Use = Structure results from use
That’s a lot abstract information in one go....

sorry
What is something that is grammatically incorrect in French and English?

Everyone think of 2 examples in each language and write them down
A little history to put things in perspective...
Functional Linguistics – History

Structuralism – the study of langue
  de Saussure
  Copenhagen School - Hjelmslev
  Prague School – Jakobson

Functionalism – the study of parole
  Paris – Benveniste etc.
  London – Halliday etc.
  Moscow - Mel’čuk etc.
  Amsterdam – Dik etc.
  New York – Van Valin etc.
Cognitive Linguistics – History

Born in opposition to Generativist Linguistics in the USA

Four linguists in California in the 1970s

Fillmore – Case Grammar
Lakoff – Generative Semantics
Langacker – Space Grammar
Talmy – Cognition and Grammar

They were hated in America!
Literally...
But the Europeans loved them :)
Back to the heavy stuff....
The usage-based model

It is what is common to both Cognitive and Functional Linguistics

a nice idea, but what does it entail?
The Usage-Based Model of Language

Cognitive and Functional Linguistics
Langacker 1987, Hopper 1987

Theoretical Proposal
In contrast to Structuralism and Generativism which hold that usage (parole / performance) is based on rules (langue / competence)

Cognitive Linguists and Functional Linguistics argue that

grammar is a result of usage!
Structure is ever ‘emergent’
epiphenomenal generalisation across usage at any given time and place

but...

Analytical Implication

Given this model of language, variation is inherent to the system.
At any moment in time, each speaker has a slightly different competence

Regional and diachronic variation is inherent to the system
The system is negotiated interpersonally

The grammar of a language is merely a generalisation
across the individual competences of native speakers at a given time.
Cognitive and Functional Linguistics

Meaning (concept-function) driven Grammar


“Language is an integrated system, where everything 'conspires' to convey meaning - words, grammatical constructions, and illocutionary devices (including intonation)” (Wierzbicka 1988)

The child is hungry/ thankful; the silly tourist is hungry / thankful –

intention / conception results in communication

Leaving aside structure and convention (for the moment), it is this intention / conception that drives language and then, in turn, the emergence of its conventions
Meaning (concept-function) driven Grammar
Language form is ‘merely’ a vehicle for expression

Analytical Implication
Regularities result from “underlying” conceptual and functional structures (Bondarko 1971, Talmy 1977 etc.)

Therefore, explanations for structure must be pragmatic-semantic!

The structuring forces of language reside in the signifié
- not the significant (à la Harris 1951, Chomsky 1957 etc.)
So, we have no rules.... only usage-patterns

and

These patterns are actually a result of / driven by a process we cannot observe

Perhaps the Generativists and Structuralists were right, this is a bunch of hippy fluff!!
This is where we need to speak about Cognitive and Functional linguistics separately.

Since I’m a Cognitive Linguist, let’s begin there!
Cognitive Linguistics
Holistic (non-modular) model of language structure
(Langacker 1987, Lakoff 1987)

Theoretical Proposal

i. No meaning modules: no semantics, no pragmatics etc.

ii. No form modules: no syntax, no lexicon etc.
Holistic (Non-Modular) Model of Language Structure
Form is any form and it is always composite

Analytical Implication
It is one thing to say that the distinctions between syntax morphology and lexis are ultimately arbitrary or that these kinds of structure form continua, it is another to deal with the analytical implications of this claim...

One must always account for any form in its constructional context in other words:

All forms are always composite!
We can no longer analyse a tone, a word, a morpheme or a construction in isolation!
Holistic (non-modular) model of language structure
Meaning is encyclopaedic, that is everything we know about the world

Analytical Implication
Linguistic semantics permits truth conditional tests and the notion of necessary and sufficient conditions to establish meaning structure

If meaning includes pragmatics, all of context and socio-cultural structure (norms) is integral to the meaning that drives language

Meaning is everything we know about the world!
We can no longer restrict semantic analysis to referential, truth-based meaning
What a mess!

According to Cognitive Linguistics there are:

**No rules** – Inherently varied and dynamic system
– every speaker at every time with a slightly different competence – grammatical knowledge

**No linguistic semantics** – meanings is world knowledge
– meaning includes ‘context’ - gender, age, register – pragmatics

**No independent formal structure** – all forms inherently interdependent
– every form is composite with no independent structures like lexis, syntax, prosody
The Model

Contextualised - Learnt

Form-Meaning Pairs

Processed using general cognitive capacities

  No syntax
  No transformations
  No theta roles
  No ambiguity Tests
  No binding theory
  No dependencies

No Modules

An integrated whole, learnt and processed by very clever primates
Exercise 2. – Write down, from right to left, name these colours, in French
Homework

No reading this week.
I will put the slides on line.

But I want you all to look for and write down 2 utterances.

They can be anything.
Something someone says to you
Something you hear on the radio
Something you read on an advert in the metro
Anything!

Think about 2 things –
What does the utterance mean?
What is the motivation for the utterance?