COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE UNITS

Tukhtaeva Kuysin Davlatovna
Candidate in Philological Sciences, associate professor
Navoi State Pedagogical Institute

Article history:
Received: 17th April 2021
Accepted: 28th April 2021
Published: 31st May 2021

Abstract:
The article is devoted to cognitive linguistic approach to the analysis of linguistic units. As it is known, cognition as a mental process allows human to hold the existence and to perform different mental activities. In the article, we try to show the main roles of the approach in understanding and encompassing the psychological state of the cognition. According to this theory, we showed the interrelation of cognitive linguistic approach with all forms of knowing, along with memory, psycholinguistics, thinking, comprehension, motivation, and perception.

Keywords: Cognition, mental activity, knowing, thinking,

Language is the utmost essential tool and the mechanism that displays our relationship with the world or one another. There is no possibility of expressing ourselves and conveying our ideas without language. As it is generally known, there would not be any existence of human mind without cognition. Cognition as a mental process, allows human kind to hold the existence. Crucially, not any science would be brought, if human beings were out of cognitive skill, which is a deep form of mental activity. Cognition denotes an active mental activity encompassing thinking, remembering or memorizing, learning and most importantly, ability to utilize a language.

Accordingly, in the process of applying cognitive approach to learning and teaching, we mainly concentrate on the comprehension of information and concepts. However, it should be pointed out that approaching cognitively is more than just comprehension, but it is rather a deeper understanding or cognition. Cognitive approach involves recognizing the connections between concepts, break down information and reconstruct them with logical connections, then our quality understanding of material and our commonsense will likely to improve. Cognitive approach is a quite popular term in different sciences; thus, this is more peculiar to psychology, psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. Therefore, in linguistics it is purely accepted the term "cognitive linguistic approach". Several scholars immensely contributed to the development of this approach in linguistics. One of the earliest pioneers of this approach is Ronald Langacker.

As Langacker explains (2002), Cognitive linguistic approach refers to how we think deeply, explaining how we feel and behave accordingly. According to his theory, cognitive linguistic approach includes all forms of knowing, along with memory, psycholinguistics, thinking, comprehension, motivation, and perception. He also points out memory as one of the most essential components of cognitive linguistic approach.

Regarding memory in cognition, Kate McGilly (1996) argues that learners are not learning to their full potential owing to the fact that in many cases, they use rote memory procedures in the classroom. With the increased competition in the work force and jobs becoming more demanding, students need to be more prepared for higher learning and the job market with skills that evolve from cognitive theory. These skills, encompassing study skills, social skills, problem solving, and organizational skills to name a few, should be taught and integrated across the curriculum.

Cognitive linguistics has opened a great deal of approaches to the analysis of language and language units separately. One of the novel ways of analyzing language items is cognitive linguistic approach. Robert (2008), who adopts the cognitive linguistic approach to the analysis of the lexicon and its semantic organization, states that "sense is interpreted in extremely varied ways according to common devices". However, a separate unit possesses many different meanings and denotes more than a referent. From this point of view, we can make conclusions that one single word can mean a variety of meanings. A classic example for this statement can be the word- yellow.

1. The Sun is of yellow color- the word 'yellow' carries its original direct meaning -color.
2. He becomes such a yellow when he watches horror films- the word 'yellow' carries metaphorical meaning or it serves as an idiom with a color component.

While Robert assumes that the meaning of a concept is part of hierarchal architecture, Langacker (1991) asserts that meaning is encyclopedic and hierarchal. According to Robert (2008), the word uncle incorporates both the designated element and the structure of parental relations. So, it means that the person who are our relative or
relation is referred to as uncle. To counter this, any passer-by male who is older than us can be a temporary uncle to us. We use this word not to offend that unknown person.

There are other ways of analyzing the language units via cognitive linguistic approach. As an example, the language items can be analyzed according to their parts of speech or the functions they make. For instance, the word 'mean' functions in variety of ways.

1. **Mean (noun)** - a mathematical expectation, the average of something;
2. **Mean (verb)** – to convey, to signify, to refer to;
3. **Mean (adjective)** – unkind, unfair, shabby, inferior.

The examples above justify the idea that cognitive linguistic approach to the analysis of language units dives deeper into the semantic meaning and its functioning in a language. It also refers to language units as a versatile phenomenon, which means each language unit should be examined carefully.

Finkbeiner and Nicol (2003) conclude that language units must be analyzed in semantic groups. They rely on the suggestions of Grains and Redman (1986) who deeply state that “grouping words by meaning can provide greater precision in guiding students towards meaning, and in helping them to define the boundaries that separate lexical items”.

Similarly, Seal (1991) says that when words are analyzed in semantic sets, “the analysis of one item can support the inferring of another”; it can further facilitate understanding because “items that are similar in meaning can be differentiated”.

The research of Finkbeiner and Nicol (2003) supports its main purpose in analyzing and therefore, acquiring new words by setting them into semantic groups. Nevertheless, they believe that it is slower than acquiring first language (L1) words randomly.

Widyastuti (2010) analyzes the meaning of language items utilizing the cognitive linguistic analysis approach. She elucidates the componential meaning of the semantic domain of man, woman, boy, girl as humans. Hence, the word human is the common constituent; still, they are differentiated by adult, male, and female concepts. Consequently, the meaning of a separate item or word may be represented by the combinations of these assemblies. The features of human can be a man, woman, girl, boy, male female and so on. She thinks that these constituents help to distinguish among the meanings of semantically related language items in the same semantic field.

We have already mentioned that cognitive approach is a relatively universal concept which is immensely used in different sciences. In linguistics, cognitive linguistic approach is much more suitable phrase to utilize. On the linguistic flipside, many discussions have been dedicated to the connections of language and mind. A wide range of publications, many theoretical in nature, others supported by observing language(s) practiced in everyday life in different cultures, report the question of if language regulates thought – an idea that was framed most successfully by Langacker (2006). The rest of study directions explore the conceptual structure represented by certain language (lexical) items, predominantly prepositions.

Psychologists and psycholinguists have been actively and cooperatively studying the language used to describe mental representations using cognitive approach to the language analysis. The step forward to investigate not only concepts and representations but also cognitive processes such as those involved in problem solving – is a straightforward one. It sheds some light on the relationship between language and thought by offering new kinds of answers to old questions.

In other words, the long-standing question about the relationship between language and thought can be refined to encompass the following:

1. To what extent does our language use express what we think?
2. How do the language units map, and how are they chosen from our brains?
3. How do actions when solving problems affect language units?
4. How do we understand polysemic language units? How do we understand them in the discourse (spoken, written)?

Cognitive approach seeks clear answers to those questions for it is crucial for not failing in perceiving and producing language units. As cognitive linguistics is a relatively new science, the cognitive linguists (or scholars) have not reached any proper consensus for those questions. Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that cognitive linguistic approach involves incredibly deep thinking and commonsense in the analysis and therefore, in the comprehension of language items.

As Mast (2013) explains, it is a captivating prospect to use analytic results to gain insights beyond the realm of linguistics, informing other strands of research related to cognitive science. In general, the cognitive linguistic approach implements two essential assumptions: the symbolic thesis and the usage-based thesis. The consequential model assumes that a speaker’s knowledge of language or mental structure of language units arises from his or her experience of situated usage events.

Evans and Green (2006) propose the idea that there are two main types of cognitive model to the analysis of language items in cognitive linguistics: inventory-based approaches and the ‘Language Subsystem Approach’. The inventory-based approaches comprise Cognitive grammar and constructional approaches, and deal with accounting for the entire inventory of symbolic units. Moreover, these two types of model, we mentioned a number of cognitive linguistic approaches to grammaticalization which are informed in various ways by cognitive linguistic theory. They also set out several vital characteristics of a cognitive approach to the analysis of language units. The results of their study show that cognitive model represents knowledge of language in the mind of the speaker as a structured
Cognitive linguists are in unison that cognition is several mind processes which is helpful in inferring the meanings of idioms being represented. They reject the idea of merely memorizing idioms, but rather these language units are quite complicated and therefore, they should be treated differently. In other words, cognitive perception of idioms refers to firstly and predominantly, guessing and understanding the meaning. Afterwards, with the clear insights the idiom being learnt, but not memorized, is to be practiced. The main point here is that learners are anticipated to be able to use those cognitively perceived idioms in context. Cognitive Linguistics has closely been studying and analyzing this case; as a result, a new Cognitive Linguistic approach has been introduced to the world of linguistics.

In recent years idiomaticity has become as an indispensable part and target of Cognitive Linguistics. Cognitive Linguistics is a relatively young science, which was originated in the late 1970s, and closely related to Cognitive Science. The main founders of it are Ronald Langacker, Charles Fillmore, George Lakoff, and Leonard Talmy. These linguists opt for following a research line that ran counter to the explanation of linguistic patterns exclusively in terms of modular structural properties specific to language.

Unlike other scientists they alleged that there exists a cognitively motivated relation between language and a more universal human ability that comprised categorisation, interactional function, pragmatic competence, schematisation, etc. The outcomes of these assumptions lead to a significant relation between language and thought to a great extent (Evans & Green 2006). As Langlotz puts, within this broad field that Cognitive Linguistics signifies, one of the most relevant topics in terms of mental processes is the one related to the cognitive mechanisms involved in the understanding of actions and sentences (Langlotz 2006).

In general, cognitive linguistics accounts for a conceptual understanding of language and thought formed through our experience in life. In the understanding of cognition, we form thoughts about the world around us, and in turns, language refers to those thoughts about the real world. To be more precise, the language is the oral expression of our experience in life. In the understanding of cognition, we form thoughts about the world around us, and in turns, language refers to those thoughts about the real world.
of our brains. According to this viewpoint, we experience the real, objective world directly through our thoughts, where we reflect about the world. Our thoughts then form language that refers to the real world that we have reflected on. So, here it is worth saying that understanding things cognitively and intuitively overlaps each other. They are both deep form of comprehension.

Unlike the traditional views of cognition where individuals create ideas about the objective world around them, cognitive linguistics rests with a view of cognition where thoughts are formed through our embodied experiences in life. In turns, this embodied principle, introduced by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in 1945, in his work Phenomenology of Perception. Merleau-Ponty assumed that, as we have bodies, our experience of the world around us comes through our bodies, not from our thoughts with a direct connection with the world around us. Merleau-Ponty disagrees with Descartes and states that “rather than a mind and a body, man is a mind with a body, a being who can only get to the truth of things because its body is, as it were, embedded in those thing(s)” (Stolz, 2015).

In other words, as human beings, we do not gather information about the world directly through our minds, but through our bodies. Our embodied experiences shape our understanding and form interpretive cognitive structures that shape our interpretation of the world around us. So, it is vital to point out that there is a deep connection between our body and minds. Our bodies serve as preliminary step in comprehension and cognition process.

Stolz (2015) continues by arguing that “we do not think about the world from some position beyond the body or outside it, but something we ‘inhabit’ because our being is necessarily present in it and involved with it”. The way we experience the world through our bodies, then, shapes our conceptual understanding of the world around us. Given the fact that we interpret the world, not directly through our minds but rather through our bodies, it means that our conception of the world is not the actual world but a conceptual world. Our bodily experiences form our interpretive framework for the world, but the world we think about and talk about is not the objective, real world, but a conceptual world, formed by our embodied experiences in the objective world. Thus, it is impossible for humans to think a completely objective thought about the world, for as embodied creatures, we are subjects in the world, and the information we receive about the world is mediated through our bodies. The embodiment principle explains how we interpret the world around us: according to the cognitive frameworks of a conceptual world formed through our bodily experiences in the world. And as such, language refers not to the real, objective world, but to a conceptual world formed through our embodied experiences.

These processes have been often found to apply to several structures in language; among them, the use and understanding of idiomatic expressions. It is because of the reasons above that idioms are cognitively interesting, and therefore, a continuous interest in the study of them is justified, especially in relation to the processes involved and how these are understood.

Cognitive perception of idioms sheds some light into the core of idioms, that is to say, in idioms’ inferring, the constituents of an idiom could map into the domains underlying the idiomatic expressions -as idioms were now considered decomposable- and thereby, lead to the stipulated meaning (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1993; Gibbs, 1994; Glucksberg, 2001).

In addition, new models on idioms processing emerged: idioms as expressions with meanings that are stipulated arbitrarily, in other words, “idioms are understood simply by repossessing the meaning of an idiom as a whole”; this kind of model was called Direct look up model (Glucksberg, 1993).

The direct look up model in turn, comprises three diverse angles: The idioms list hypothesis (Bobrow & Bell, 1973), the lexicalisation hypothesis (Swinn & Cutler, 1979) and the direct access hypothesis (Gibbs, 1984). According to the Cognitivist view, this meaning can be retrieved through different cognitive functions and mechanisms involved in them, such as embodied experience, mental mappings, and image schematic structures that are underlying idioms’ figurations. That is to say, in the process of comprehending idioms, on one hand, we can rely on our prior knowledge and experience, on the other hand, we are to intuitively understand its meaning based on the words’ combination. This idea can be illustrated in the following example:

The main notorious character of the novel “Harry Potter” Tom Riddle is a black soul. We can intuitively infer the meaning of the idiom “black soul” through mental mapping and, consequently, it becomes clear that this idiom stands for a evil or malevolent personality. It should be mentioned that to have a better cognitive understanding of idiomatic expressions with color components one should have a solid prior knowledge of color symbolism and their meaning as well.

Cognitive perception of idiomatic expressions in Cognitive Linguistics is as intriguing as their nature and construction: idioms’ form and meaning can be considered as a puzzle, owing to some specific characteristics that these units retain, for which no recent studies have provided a comprehensive investigation.

The basic perplexing feature of idioms is one that runs against the logical structure of discourse in which “the meanings of the utterances depend on the meanings of their parts and on the syntactic relation among those parts” (Johnson-Laird, 1993). This feature colors idioms with a diverse character and depicts them as highly complex linguistic configurations. Since the vast majority of idioms with a color component reflecting the inner world of a person have both a literal and an idiomatic meaning, for instance, “to be green”, “white feather”, “black”, “a black dog», «blue”, “dark blue”, “yellow”, “black-browed” and others have only an idiomatic interpretation, such as “white-
Idioms are flexible because they can be noticeably modified if they suffer lexical substitutions, syntactic operations and semantic productivity. This depends on their degree of compositionality as, the more compositional an idiom is, the more susceptible it is to syntactic alternation. Taking into account the generally assumed non-compositionality of the idiom “white at the lips”, it is possible to state that, if their lexical constituents are modified, the idiomatic meaning is lost and it is incorrect at all. It would be a grave mistake to Idioms are not to be changed or modified at all. In conclusion, word substitution or any grammatical modification is not acceptable.

Another major problem of understanding and using idioms correctly is interpreting the core. The main reason that causes the interpretative failure is that the constituent words of the generally presumed non-compositional idioms do not constitute the idiom's meaning except in the most general of ways; that is to say, there are no interpretable relations between a substituted word and the original. The significance of the cognitive approach lies on the study of language structure as the key to prompt mental processes, and the different functions these structures can fulfill, generally, in an ideal communicative performance. As Evans & Green illuminated, "the language study stems from the assumption that language reflects patterns of thought; it means, to study patterns of conceptualization" (2006). This point of view is applicable for the detailed research of the patterns of thought involved in the process of language use. In the case of idioms with a color component, the vitality of the survey in the structural and meaningful patterns is even more perspicuous, as their complexity is not easy to deal with.

Furthermore, numerous studies have been carried out on these units and still, the researchers have not come to an agreement concerning categorization, possessing several and miscellaneous opinions about them.

Another problematic issue is concerned with the consistent treatment of idiomaticity through time, where some indiscreet equation of concepts such as metaphor and simile can be observed. Needless to say, in most cases idiomatic expressions are considered as “dead metaphors” for they were innovative at some point since they are usually coined, but then they became conventionalized in research, compared with metaphor to a great extent. Cognitive perception of idioms requires a detailed research and, of course, a careful consideration. As it is stated above, the structural complexity of idiomatic expressions, which on the one hand contains several words, but on the other a single meaning that unifies them as a unit - and a whole figurative meaning. Hence, it can be said that idioms are based on figurative and idiomatic meanings, which may be in quite a lot of forms of figuration such as metaphor, metonymy and hyperboles, among others (Wasow et al., 1994) with the first two concepts relevant to the understanding of idioms in cognitive terms.

Conceptual metaphors are, in Lakoff & Johnson’s words, “metaphorical concepts are cognitively constructed by mapping a concrete source-domain onto a more abstract target-domain” (1980), which were created in order to facilitate the access to an abstract entity. The connection can be created when there is a correspondence between two different domains – target and source- to have metaphorical inferences on a constituent (Lakoff, 1993).

Langloz presumes that Cognitive routines are events that are of a degree of entrenchment and automatization; as a consequence, provides them with the status of units. So, it turns out that idioms are cognitive routines activated by automatization, which is based on frequency and stimulus strength. Therefore, entrenchment must be seen as a gradual and dynamic process (Langlotz, 2006). Contrary to this belief, entrenchment implies the constant motivation of the idiomatic expression over time, knowledge that Langloz were not aware of: "idioms are defined as institutionalized symbolic units, the conventionally reproduced association of the literal constituents with the figurative idiomatic meaning can be directly acquired by any speaker who learns a given idiomatic expression” (Langlotz, 2006). In Cognitive linguistics researchers see and treat the concept of idiomaticity in different ways. That is to say, instead of treating multiple meanings of idiomatic expressions reflecting the inner world of a person as homonymous, cognitive linguists accept them as polysemous, which means that their meanings are distinct but interrelated to one another.

Cognitive perception of idiomaticity gives more insights into comprehending and memorizing idioms with a color component in a more efficient way. In teaching process, for example, teachers or instructors do not have to resort to word lists and memorization, for these meanings are not merely arbitrary. There is a system of teaching or coaching them to these idiomatic expressions, and once learners are given insight into the underlying metaphors, it will be easier for them to understand and remember their meanings. Langacker (2000) gave us a detailed explanation about what is happening with transitory (not entrenched) and recurrent cognitive events (entrenched cognitive routines) at the moment of structuring mental experience in understanding idioms.

According to him, in the first place, as our mind functions as a dynamical network, knowledge exists in certain connection patterns in this network. From this point entrenchment arises as strengthening of those connections by the frequent and strong activation of the neuronal network. At this level, the entrenchment leads to automatization, which implies the direct activation of the network independently of the frequency and stimulus strength. In conclusion, entrenchment is the firm establishment of a idiom’s meaning or comprehension through mental mapping or object visualization.

Langlotz (2006) and Langacker (2000) explained the process of entrenchment by analogy, using the lexicalization of the mouse-metaphor as -computer pointing-device- as an example. The early semantic extension of this metaphor was highly creative, because it derives from similarities between these two very different conceptualizations, which are mouse as a rodent vs. computer device.
After being conventionalized, mostly the lexical unit (computer device) becomes automatized. As a result, this new lexicalized unit shows the reduction of the activation-set, known as entrenched neuronal network, thus the metaphorical transfer cannot be perceived anymore, and it becomes opaque. In other words, at this stage the association between the vehicle -the literal meaning-, and the topic, or figurative meaning, is not transparent, but homonymous. This is the instance where the process of meaning extension occurs. From there, two events may happen through time: the conservation of the common ground - also known as generic space- between both elements or, the opposite, the loss of these features due to the assimilation of this relationship as normal in a given community. Owing to the attempts made to the comprehension of idioms’ nature a universal system of idioms has been created. Cognitive linguists (Kövecses 2000, Lakoff 1986) have collected idioms and created a system according to their common concepts. As an example, idiomatic expressions such as “to see red”, “white heat” and “white fury” have one mutual notion: anger. The idioms are accepted as motivated conceptually by general knowledge of the world, which requires a systematic structure that characterizes a corresponding coherent system of the idiomatic structure (Lakoff & Johnson 1999).

Chen and Lai (2013) have brought an example of fire-related idioms used to describe the emotion anger, by using FIRE as the source domain and ANGER as a target domain and the connection made between the two ANGER IS FIRE. This means that idioms can in fact be considered as motivated rather than arbitrary. Moreover, the connection between the concepts is called conceptual metaphor (Lakoff 1986) and it illustrates the connection between fire and anger. Conceptual metaphors are usually represented in capital letters (Deignan, Gabrys & Solska 1997).

According to Chen and Lai (2013) learners of the English language can develop an understanding of the meaning of idioms through the awareness and knowledge of the conceptual metaphors behind them. As it is already mentioned, this accounts for the prior knowledge, deep understanding and awareness of concepts utilized in idioms.

Contrary to these beliefs, Gibbs (2007) argues that conceptual metaphors are not fixed, but rather created by the linguists following their intuition. In other words, cognitive linguists follow their intuition to uncover language-mind links, image schemas and conceptual metaphors. Image schema is considered to be an abstract conceptual representation of the embodied experience of the everyday interaction and the observation of the world around us (Evans 2007:106).

Gibbs (2007) questions cognitive linguists’ intuition-based approach because it focuses too heavily on introspection about matters of linguistic structure and behavior, but agrees that intuition is a necessary source for constructing hypotheses and suggests caution in creating conceptual metaphors, experiments etc.

Stöver (2011) states that in order to have metaphoric understanding and not experience tension between the literal and non-literal while encountering a metaphor, learners should be made aware of metaphors (Moon 2009) and what it contains.

In other words, using conceptual metaphors while teaching figurative language is not useful if the learners have not been familiarized with the concept and how it can be used. For instance, if in the process of introducing a new idiom as “white feather” the language teacher is to pay attention closely at the word “feather”. Discussing and explaining this word is a preliminary stage of teaching the idiom. Then, the teacher should ensure that the audience fully have the mental picture of the word and continues to teach the idiom itself.

We have discussed the importance of cognition in linguistics. We shed some light on the cognitive linguistic approach to the analysis of language units which requires our most quality concentration along with commonsense and prior knowledge.

In conclusion, the terms "cognition", “cognitive approach” and “cognitive linguistic approach” refer to the active mental processes which trigger to more effective and long-lasting comprehension or memorizing of language units in linguistics. A careful study of language units separately or as a unit denotes cognitive linguistic approach. This approach analyzes a language item inside out; that is to say, versatile points of the unit is to be studied. Thus, cognitive approach is of more universal concept. Therefore, from the linguistic viewpoint, we found it more reasonable to implement the cognitive linguistic approach in our research.

LITERATURE