

Discursive and cognitive paradigm

Cognitive linguistics (CL) refers to the branch of linguistics that interprets language in terms of the concepts, sometimes universal, sometimes specific to a particular tongue, which underlie its forms. It is thus closely associated with semantics but is distinct from psycholinguistics, which draws upon empirical findings from cognitive psychology in order to explain the mental processes that underlie the acquisition, storage, production and understanding of speech and writing.

Cognitive linguistics is characterized by adherence to three central positions. First, it denies that there is an autonomous linguistic faculty in the mind; second, it understands grammar in terms of conceptualization; and third, it claims that knowledge of language arises out of language use.

Cognitive linguists deny that the mind has any module for language-acquisition that is unique and autonomous. This stands in contrast to the stance adopted in the field of generative grammar. Although cognitive linguists do not necessarily deny that part of the human linguistic ability is innate, they deny that it is separate from the rest of cognition. They thus reject a body of opinion in cognitive science suggesting that there is evidence for the modularity of language. They argue that knowledge of linguistic phenomena — i.e., phonemes, morphemes, and syntax — is essentially conceptual in nature. However, they assert that the storage and retrieval of linguistic data is not significantly different from the storage and retrieval of other knowledge, and that use of language in understanding employs similar cognitive abilities to those used in other non-linguistic tasks.

Departing from the tradition of truth-conditional semantics, cognitive linguists view meaning in terms of conceptualization. Instead of viewing meaning in terms of models of the world, they view it in terms of mental spaces.

Finally, cognitive linguistics argues that language is both embodied and situated in a specific environment. This can be considered a moderate offshoot of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, in that language and cognition mutually influence one another, and are both embedded in the experiences and environments of its users.