

# **The importance of the lexicon and dynamic knowledge in a cognitive grammar**

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- Abstract -

In this paper I want to present some ideas about how a better understanding of the role of vocabulary in discourse could help to explain certain phenomena within a cognitive grammar. One important aspect in this respect is the role of cognitive construals. We can mention here idiomatic expressions, created by means of metaphorical and metonymical procedures, as well as certain cognitively-based constructions for new vocabulary and the use of event schemas for creative expressions concerning grammatical categories. Apparently, all these cases only deal with different stages in a grammaticalization process (cf. Heine 1993). Such facts, which show the razor-thin border between syntactic configurations and lexis are just some examples of the kind of phenomena that *construction grammar* (Langacker 1987, 1991; Goldberg 1995; Michaelis and Lambrecht 1995; Kay and Fillmore 1999; Croft 2001) helps to explain, phenomena in which the lexicon goes hand in hand with other grammatical areas. However, there are also other potentialities of vocabulary usage which could also be explored from a cognitive point of view. I will emphasize here two of these possibilities: the signalling of discourse structure and the signalling of pragmatic information.

It is assumed that different types of mental storage (short-term memory, long-term memory, episodic memory, semantic memory) are connected with different types of knowledge structures that may be required for text production and interpretation. One such structure is the overall organization of global topics that a text is about (what Van Dijk's 1980, 1985, called "thematic structure"). Other structures refer to formal schemata used to describe the overall form of a discourse (Van Dijk's "superstructures"). However, the distinctions concerning the knowledge that can be required may be of many other kinds, as Van Dijk (2002: 5) himself reminds us: representational ("knowing what") vs. procedural ("knowing how"); based on its social scope (personal, interpersonal, social,

cultural); of a referential nature (specific or particular facts vs. general events or states); using a certain ontology (real events, concrete events, abstract events, fictitious events, historic events, etc.); or based on strength (absolute vs. relative certainty). All these types of information can be signaled lexically in different ways, and the previously-mentioned memory types provide explanations for the differences in lexical information. The impossibility to separate encyclopedic information from more atomic, componential data in the study of any language's lexicon is ultimately based on the psychological nature of this kind of information, cumulatively collected in our memory structures ("the mental lexicon", cf. Taylor, 2004).

In the same way, there is interaction of long-term knowledge with communicative linguistic phenomena. We can include here knowledge about social relationships and other parameters at work in communicative situations. The differences are reflected not only in the handling of constructions but also on lexical choice. This will be shown in examples taken from several languages with different strategies for the expression of pragmatic information.

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