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THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: This article explores the development of cognitive linguistics, its theoretical foundations, major concepts, and significance in understanding the relationship between language and human thought. Particular attention is given to key concepts such as conceptualization, categorization, conceptual metaphor, and the linguistic worldview. The article also examines how language reflects human knowledge, experience, and the ways in which people perceive and interpret the world around them.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, language, thought, concept, conceptual metaphor, categorization.

In modern linguistics, language is no longer viewed simply as a collection of grammatical rules and vocabulary. Instead, it is increasingly understood as a complex system closely connected to human cognition. From this perspective, cognitive linguistics has emerged as an important field that explores the relationship between language, thought, knowledge, and human perception of reality.

Cognitive linguistics developed during the second half of the twentieth century alongside the growth of cognitive science. Researchers in this field examine language in connection with the mental processes involved in understanding and interpreting the world. Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a way of expressing and sharing human experiences, memories, and knowledge.

The term cognitive comes from the Latin word cognitio, meaning knowledge, understanding, or the process of knowing. Cognitive linguistics is concerned with how language is connected to the knowledge and conceptual structures represented in the human mind.

The development of this field has been strongly influenced by the work of scholars such as George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker, Leonard Talmy, and Charles Fillmore. Their research has contributed to a broader understanding of language as a system shaped by human experience, perception, and conceptualization.

One of the central assumptions of cognitive linguistics is that language cannot be fully understood independently of human cognition. People perceive the world through their senses, process information mentally, and organize their experiences into concepts. Language plays an important role in expressing these concepts and communicating them to others.

While traditional approaches to linguistics often focus on phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar, cognitive linguistics also examines the meanings and mental structures underlying linguistic expressions. It seeks to explain not only how language is organized but also how people use it to make sense of their experiences.

Cognitive linguistics is based on several important concepts, including conceptualization, categorization, frames, and conceptual metaphor.

Concepts are mental representations of objects, events, experiences, or abstract ideas. They include the knowledge and associations that people develop through personal experience and interaction with the world. For example, the concept of homeland involves

more than a geographical place. It may also evoke memories of family, one's native language, cultural traditions, national history, and a sense of belonging.

Categorization is the process of grouping objects and experiences according to shared characteristics. For instance, apples, pears, and peaches are classified as fruits. This process helps people organize information and understand the world more efficiently. A frame is a structured set of knowledge associated with a particular situation or activity. For example, the concept of education may involve teachers, students, lessons, knowledge, assessment, and educational institutions. These elements are interconnected and help people understand what typically happens in an educational setting. A conceptual metaphor occurs when people understand one concept in terms of another. A common example is the metaphor TIME IS MONEY. Expressions such as “save time,” “spend time,” and “waste time” reflect the tendency to understand time as a valuable resource. Such expressions show how metaphor influences everyday language and thought.

One of the central concerns of cognitive linguistics is the relationship between language and human thought. Language allows people to express their ideas, organize their knowledge, and communicate their experiences. At the same time, their experiences and understanding of the world influence the meanings they associate with words and expressions. For example, Uzbek expressions such as ko‘ngil (heart, inner feelings, or emotional disposition), or-nomus (honor and personal dignity), mehr-oqibat (affection, compassion, and mutual care), and hashar (collective voluntary work) carry meanings that extend beyond their direct translations. Understanding these expressions often requires familiarity with Uzbek cultural values, traditions, and social relationships.

These examples demonstrate that language reflects not only the physical world but also the cultural and emotional experiences of its speakers. Words and expressions can carry associations shaped by history, traditions, and shared social practices. However, the relationship between language and thought should not be understood as one-sided. Human thinking does not depend entirely on language. Mental imagery, emotions, perception, and other cognitive processes also contribute to the way people understand reality. Cognitive linguistics therefore examines language as an important part of a broader system of human cognition.

The linguistic worldview refers to the ways in which a language represents, categorizes, and gives meaning to the world. It reflects patterns of understanding that develop through a community's history, cultural traditions, environment, and shared experiences. Every language contains features that reflect the lives and experiences of its speakers. As a result, different languages may classify certain aspects of reality differently or express similar ideas through distinct meanings and associations.

For example, Uzbek has specific kinship terms such as aka (older brother), uka (younger brother), opa (older sister), and singil (younger sister). These words distinguish relationships according to both age and gender. Their use illustrates how a language organizes and expresses social relationships through its vocabulary.

Studying the linguistic worldview helps researchers identify connections between language and culture. It also provides insights into how communities interpret their experiences and how cultural perspectives are reflected in linguistic expressions. Comparing different languages can reveal both shared patterns of human cognition and culturally specific ways of understanding the world.

Cognitive linguistics is valuable not only as a theoretical field but also in several practical areas.

First, it can contribute to foreign language teaching. When learners understand how words relate to concepts, contexts, and everyday experiences, they may develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary. Rather than memorizing isolated words, learners can explore the relationships between meanings and the situations in which expressions are used.

Second, cognitive linguistics plays an important role in translation studies. A word or expression may lose part of its cultural or metaphorical meaning when translated literally into another language. Translators therefore need to consider not only dictionary definitions but also the concepts, associations, and cultural experiences conveyed by the original expression.

Third, cognitive approaches are useful in discourse analysis, advertising, media studies, and political communication. Metaphors and other conceptual devices can influence how people interpret events, evaluate ideas, and understand social issues. Analyzing these linguistic choices helps researchers explain how meaning is constructed and communicated.

Finally, cognitive linguistics can contribute to lexicography, terminology research, and natural language processing. A better understanding of how people organize and interpret meaning can support the development of dictionaries, language-learning materials, and language technologies.

Cognitive linguistics is an important branch of modern linguistics that examines language in relation to human cognition, thought, knowledge, and experience. Concepts such as categorization, frames, conceptual metaphor, and the linguistic worldview provide useful tools for understanding how people organize information and interpret the world through language.

The cognitive approach goes beyond the grammatical and lexical features of language by exploring the mental processes and cultural experiences associated with linguistic meaning. It is particularly valuable for studying culturally significant expressions and concepts in Uzbek, where words often reflect shared traditions, social relationships, and national values.

In conclusion, cognitive linguistics offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and thought. Its findings can contribute to linguistic research, language teaching, translation, and the analysis of cultural meaning. By examining how people use language to make sense of their experiences, this field helps explain both the universal aspects of human cognition and the distinctive ways in which different communities understand the world.

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