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THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF ICONIC PRINCIPLES IN PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH

W artykule omówiona i wykazana zostaje stosowność zastosowania narzędzi językoznawstwa kognitywnego w nauczaniu języka obcego. Autor przybliży podstawowe założenia teorii kognitywnej i wykazuje ich szczególną relewancję w praktyce nauczania gramatyki. W ujęciu kognitywnym natura języka nie ma charakteru arbitralnego, lecz ujawnia się w postaci struktur semantycznie motywowanych. Pozwala to uzasadniać i wyjaśniać zjawiska składniowe za pomocą schematycznych zasad ikoniczności oraz metafory pojęciowej.

1. What is pedagogical grammar?

Pedagogical grammar may be regarded as a description of linguistic constructions aimed at the foreign language learner. Its purpose is to raise foreign language consciousness in the learning process, which cannot be accomplished by the rote learning of grammar rules. The “consciousness raising”¹ may be successfully achieved by offering: “explanations that are at once succinct, readily comprehensible, and intuitively plausible – as to why the foreign language should be as it is. Explanations constitute a powerful promoter of insight, and without insight, learning can scarcely progress beyond rote memorization”².

¹ Ellis, Rod. 2001. *Form-Focused Instruction and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.

² John R. Taylor. 2008. Some pedagogical implications of cognitive linguistics. In: Gitte Kristiansen. Michel Achard. Rene Dirven. Francisco J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibanez (eds.) *Cognitive Approaches to Pedagogical Grammar. Applications of Cognitive Linguistics 9*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 38.

Regrettably, Krashen and his acolytes may entertain some doubts on the matter at hand insofar as his theory of language acquisition seems to be the source of an unbridgeable gap between conscious learning and unconscious acquisition. The former “has only a very limited role to play. In fact, conscious learning will only come to fruition in those rare circumstances in which a learner has the time and the incentive to ‘focus on form.’ Crucially, it is claimed that the conscious application of a learned rule cannot cause learning to ‘turn into’ acquisition”³. And since pedagogical grammar relies on raising the learner’s consciousness of foreign language structures, its significance seems to disappear into thin air. Fortunately enough, his theoretical constructs have been questioned, specifically his claim that learning does not result in acquisition. Ellis⁴ provides plenty of empirical evidence for the learner’s “consciousness raising” by directing his attention to matters of form.

Cognitive Linguistics offers a promising basis for language instruction and pedagogical grammar in terms of “consciousness raising”, explanations, and providing motivations for linguistic constructions. First and foremost, language is not an independent and autonomous faculty, but an intrinsic part of cognition⁵. This means that pedagogical grammar has the potential to draw upon cognitive processing theories, such as, for instance, *dual coding theory*⁶, which holds that associating mental images with thought processing facilitates recall⁷. Secondly, there seems to be no mysterious innate language acquisition device or faculty:

Instead, acquisition is markedly influenced throughout early childhood and beyond by quantity and quality of input. Frequency of encounter is key – if a language user encounters a linguistic unit often enough, it eventually becomes a standard item in the learner’s linguistic inventory. Concomitant

³ John R. Taylor. 2008. 40.

⁴ Ellis, Rod. 2001. *Form-Focused Instruction and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁵ Langacker, Ronald W. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

⁶ Paivio, Alan. 1986. *Mental Representations: A Dual Coding Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Frank Boers and Seth Lindstromberg. 2006. Cognitive linguistic applications in second or foreign language instruction: rationale, proposals, and evaluation. In: Gitte Kristiansen. Michel Achard. Rene Dirven. Francisco J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibanez (eds.) *Cognitive Linguistics: Current Applications and Future Perspectives. Applications of Cognitive Linguistics 1*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

with such learning is the formation in the mind of an over-arching schema, which can be said to 'sanction' its instantiations⁸.

Thus pedagogical grammar becomes specifically usage-based and the frequency of particular grammatical constructions, instantiating schemas, has a considerable influence on language acquisition. Thirdly, language acquisition does not consist in acquiring vocabulary separately from grammar. Cognitive linguistics does away with the grammar-lexis dichotomy. "Lexicon and grammar form a gradation consisting solely in assemblies of symbolic structures"⁹. This gradation is a cline in the complexity of linguistic structures from simple lower-level structures, such as morphemes, to higher-level structures, such as texts. Fourthly, language is conceived as an ecological system in which meaningful linguistic constructions occupy ecological niches, or nodes in complex semantic networks. Their meanings are defined relative to proximate constructions and the system at large in such a way that the emergence of a new construction affects other constructions. The traditional distinction between ideal, 'dictionary' meaning and pragmatic meaning is a fallacy. "Put simply, words and other constructions in the mental lexicon carry many more associations (ranging from the culturally shared to the idiosyncratic) than earlier theory allowed"¹⁰. Fifthly, imaginative abilities, such as metaphor and metonymy, which are pervasive in everyday thought and language, play a special role in providing linguistic motivations for words and linguistic constructions. And finally, meaning is a matter of conceptualisation, that is, different speakers can construe a particular scene differently. Construals are operations that help select the appropriate structural possibility among various alternatives. In principle, construals very often differ across different languages and learners should be aware of such linguistic variations in construal. All the above-mentioned points are the areas of linguistic motivation to be exploited by language teachers.

2. Where there is motivation, there is explanation

The basic task of cognitive linguists is to search for linguistic motivations and explanations for form-meaning links in language:

⁸ Frank Boers and Seth Lindstromberg. 2006. 306.

⁹ Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: OUP. 5.

¹⁰ Frank Boers and Seth Lindstromberg. 2006. 307.

Any finding that portions of natural language are motivated rather than arbitrary should be taken as a cordial invitation for educational linguists to investigate the pedagogical potential of presenting linguistic phenomena as motivated in contexts of second or foreign language learning¹¹.

Advancing the idea that large portions of language are motivated and thus explainable is particularly beneficial for learners as it may improve comprehension, retention and recall, and enhance cultural awareness and positive affect.

According to Radden and Panther¹² (2004), a process of linguistic motivation involves 1) *meaning-meaning links*, 2) *form-form links*, and 3) *form-meaning links*. Langacker¹³ describes a symbolic structure of language as bipolar, that is, consisting of its semantic pole (conceptualisation equated with meaning) and phonological pole (form as not only sounds but also orthographic representations). Most of the cognitive linguistics research has focused on meaning-meaning relations, that is to say in Langacker's terms, on the semantic poles of symbolic assemblies. This includes studies of meaning extensions (polysemy) from a prototypical sense to less central or more peripheral senses of a linguistic construction via metaphor and metonymy or image-schemas. A good case in point is the study of highly polysemous prepositions by Tyler and Evans¹⁴, or the study of phrasal verb particles and its pedagogical implications in Rudzka-Ostyn¹⁵, where a particular particle does not have a single, fixed meaning, but rather an array of meanings related in principled ways to its prototypical sense. The acquisition of verb + particle constructions is enhanced by the realization that the choice of particle is motivated rather than arbitrary. Boers¹⁶ compares the senses of the near-synonyms *under* and *below*, using Langacker's terms of the trajector and the landmark. He starts with defining the prototypical meanings of these prepositions, showing that the core spatial sense of *under* involves contact between the trajector and the

¹¹ Frank Boers and Seth Lindstromberg. 2006. 309.

¹² Radden, Günter, and Klaus-Uwe Panther (eds.) 2004. Introduction: reflections on motivation. In: *Studies in Linguistic Motivation. Cognitive Linguistics Research 28*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

¹³ Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. 15.

¹⁴ Tyler, Andrea, and Vyvyan Evans. 2003. *The Semantics of English Prepositions: Spatial, Embodied Meaning and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵ Rudzka-Ostyn, Brygida. 2003. *Word Power: Phrasal Verbs and Compounds. A Cognitive Approach*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

¹⁶ Boers, Frank. 1996. *Spatial Prepositions and Metaphor: A Cognitive Semantic Journey along the up-down and the front-back Dimensions*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

landmark while the core spatial sense of *below* indicates a relation of distance between the two. The contact image schema metaphor provides a basis for interpersonal relations, whereby these relations are conceived in terms of physical contact relations, for example:

- a) *Are you still in touch with any of your old school friends? No, Jane and I never kept in touch after college.*
- b) *I'm still in contact with her - we write a couple of times a year.*
- c) *There isn't enough contact between teachers and parents¹⁷.*

In consequence, “*under* is a likely candidate to describe hierarchical interpersonal relationships involving interaction (e.g. *She served under Clinton*), while *below* is not (e.g. **She served below Clinton**)¹⁸. Moreover, the above examples are coherent with the CONTROL IS UP; LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN orientational metaphor (e.g. *He is under my control*)¹⁹. In fact, prepositions seem to function iconically (as examples of word-order iconicity governed by the more general principle of iconic proximity, which seems to be metaphorically motivated) in relator constructions, where “a relator can be defined as a free or bound morpheme that has basically two syntagmatic slots, or relata, in its semantic-syntactic structure, such that the relator defines a specific semantic-syntactic relation between the two relata”²⁰. I will discuss metaphorically motivated instances of iconicity below.

Furthermore, another type of fashionable cognitive semantics research has concentrated on idiomatic constructions, which have traditionally been considered as non-decomposable and semantically arbitrary. Contrary to the traditional view, cognitive linguists have approached idioms as instantiations of overarching conceptual metaphors or conceptual metonymies. In other respects, conceptual metaphor theory has also been applied to the analysis of conventional metaphorical linguistic expressions in a wide range of text genres of various specialised target domains, such as economics, medicine, politics, or architecture.

Form-form links seem to take us into uncharted territory where very little research has been carried out so far at the phonological poles of symbolic assemblies. The phenomena waiting to be inspected may include rhyme, alliteration, repetition, assonance and consonance. These phenomena motivate

¹⁷ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>. Accessed: 5.4.10

¹⁸ Boers and Lindstromberg 2006. 310.

¹⁹ Kovecses, Zoltan. 2002. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford. OUP. 36.

²⁰ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. In: Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens (eds.) *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Oxford. OUP. 411.

our precise lexical choice and preference for one lexical item over another in a great many of compound and multiword constructions, such as reduplications, for instance, *namby-pamby*, *helter-skelter*, *willy-nilly* (with assonance prevailing), *bow-wow*, which seems to be motivated both iconically (onomatopoeically) and phonologically, or *toy boy*, which is a good example of assonance and rhyme and consequently it is the rhyme that made it popular among language users. **Toy girl** would be rather boring by comparison. Other examples are primarily pertinent to the phenomenon of consonance, e.g. *publish or perish*, or are motivated by rhyme, as in *drunk as a skunk*²¹.

Form-meaning links pertain to relationships between the phonological and the semantic poles of symbolic assemblies. This is where iconicity along with its motivational force comes into play in its strongest form. In fact, iconicity is often contrasted with arbitrariness, in Peirce's terms, iconic is contrasted with symbolic²². Within the context of pedagogical grammar, and not only, these iconicity-driven motivations help provide answers to the questions of why certain linguistic constructions have a particular meaning or why certain meanings are conveyed by means of a particular form.

3. Iconic motivation

The last 30 years have seen a paradigm shift from the focus on arbitrary syntax to the focus on semantically motivated syntax. Dwight Bolinger²³ (1977) claims that even a slight change in a sentence will adjust the sentence's meaning. John Haiman²⁴ emphasizes the role of the iconicity of a sentence in 'diagramming' its meaning. Ronald Langacker²⁵ views grammar as "simply the structuring and symbolization of semantic content." Lakoff²⁶ points to the conceptual system underlying syntax, claiming that "regularities of linguistic form cannot be explained in formal terms alone."

²¹ Boers and Lindstromberg. 2006.

²² Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 394.

²³ Bolinger, Dwight. 1997. *Meaning and Form*. London: Longman.

²⁴ Haiman, John (ed). 1985. *Iconicity in Syntax*. (Typological Studies in Language 6) Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

²⁵ Langacker, Ronald W. 1987. 12.

²⁶ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press. 138.

3.1. What is iconicity?

The evidence for semantically motivated syntax/form is also supported by an iconicity relationship between *form* and *real-world reference*, or between *form* and *meaning*. The notion of iconicity means that there is some similarity between a *form* of language and what it stands for. This is a very crude definition to begin with. In general, Van Langendonck²⁷ characterizes iconicity as “something in the form of a sign reflect[ing: ZK] something in the world (normally through a mental operation)”. But, as a matter of fact, iconicity should be reconsidered as a more refined and direct relationship between *form* and *meaning* rather than an indirect relationship between *form* and its *reference*. In cognitive linguistics *meaning* is understood in terms of conceptualisation, in Langacker’s terms, everywhere throughout his works on grammar, *meaning* is equated with conceptualisation. Cognitive linguists “do not claim to make statements about the real world of objects [...], but deal with the categories and cognitive models we have about the real world, [...]”²⁸. This means that the iconicity relationship holds between *form* and *meaning as conceptualisation*.

Philosophers throughout the ages have studied the phenomenon of iconicity. The stoics went particularly far in this, claiming that first words in language imitated nature by means of onomatopoeia or articulatory mimesis. In his Cratylus dialogue, Plato distinguished between natural words, such as onomatopoeic expressions, where the relationship between *form* and *meaning* is determined by nature, and conventional words, where this relationship is based on agreement in a given speech community. In the 19th century, this naïve notion of iconicity, which basically boiled down to onomatopoeia and sound-symbolism was rejected. In the 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure claimed that most of linguistic signs are linked to what they signify in a conventional way and there is nothing “X-like” about a sign “X” in any language. On the one hand, de Saussure seems to totally subscribe to the principle of arbitrariness, but on the other hand, he is also known to have introduced the concept of motivation to describe some of compound expressions like the French word “dix-neuf.” While its components taken separately are arbitrary, the meaning of the compound as a whole is relatively motivated. Saussure’s motivation is redolent of Peirce’s

²⁷ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 395.

²⁸ Ungerer, Friedrich, Hans-Jörg Schmid. 1996. *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*. London and New York: Longman. 252.

concept of *diagrammatic iconicity*. Peirce, a 19th century American philosopher, does not confine his notion of iconicity to sound-symbolism, instead he “extends the notion of icon to cover similarities between the structure of language and the structure of the world”²⁹.

3.1.1. Peirce’s notion of iconicity

Peirce introduces the trichotomy of signs, distinguishing among *indices*, *icons*, and *symbols*. He defines “an Icon [as] a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not”³⁰. Thus anything can be an icon providing it bears any resemblance to some object and it is a sign for that object. More importantly, within the confines of iconic signs, Peirce identifies three subcategories: *image*, *metaphor*, and *diagram*.

The *image* is a prototypical icon. “It is a simple sign that resembles its referent by virtue of sensory characteristics. These may be visual, as in a photograph, a statue, or a painting, but they may also be auditory, as in program music, that is, music that renders feelings or perceptions”³¹. In language, onomatopoeic expressions are best examples of imagic iconicity. Unfortunately, many linguists consider them as a marginal phenomenon. Certainly enough onomatopoeic expressions differ across languages, but this is because they are phonologically integrated in the linguistic system of a given language. The dog barks ‘woof-woof’ or ‘bow-wow’ in English, ‘waf-waf’ in Dutch, ‘wau-wau’ in German, and ‘hau-hau’ in Polish. Moreover, they also get integrated morphosyntactically and “the more onomatopoeic words get integrated in the linguistic system, the more they become symbolic and the more they lose their iconic value”³². The noun ‘cuckoo’ can be turned into its plural form of ‘cuckoos’, or it can be converted to the verb and inflected as in ‘cuckooed.’ Some words functioning primarily as interjections can also be converted to verbs and used as verbs, i.e., ‘boo’ in ‘booed’ or ‘booing’, ‘hush’ in ‘hushed’, ‘hushing’, or in ‘hush up’, ‘yuck’, ‘vroom’, etc.

²⁹ Ungerer, Friedrich, Hans-Jorg Schmid. 1996. 251.

³⁰ Peirce, Charles Sanders. [1931] 1974. *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2.247.

³¹ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 397–398.

³² Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 402.

A *metaphor*, “in Peirce’s view, brings out the representative character of a sign by representing a parallelism in something else; for example, a lion may represent a (brave) man”³³. This parallelism is viewed in terms of a set of systematic correspondences between the conceptual elements and relations of the source domain and the conceptual elements and relations of the target domain. I will discuss the importance of metaphor in providing meaning to *form* in more detail below.

In Peirce’s view, *diagrammatic icons* are “those which represent the relations ... of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts”³⁴. In other words, there is little or no resemblance between the individual signs and the individual referents in the real and/or conceptual world. There is little or no resemblance between individual signs and their referents because these signs are mostly symbolic, but the way they are arranged or structured may be iconic nevertheless. The similarity lies between a systematic arrangement of signs, that is, their structure or grammar and a specific arrangement of referents on the conceptual level. “More specifically, the constellation of the object and of its diagram is similar” and finally “there is a cline from an almost pure image, for instance, a photo (with a resemblance between individual referents and individual signs) and a ‘pure’ diagram, where there is no such resemblance, for instance, a technical diagram, a scheme, or a Gestalt ...”³⁵

According to Langacker (2007: 15), “like lexicon, with which it forms a gradation, grammar reduces to form-meaning pairings”³⁶. These pairings reflect the trichotomy of linguistic signs (indices, icon, symbols), which hardly ever occur in their pure form. They usually appear as an extraordinary amalgam of the three sorts. Indexical are in fact symbols, onomatopoeic expressions tend to behave like symbols, and symbols may be iconically structured (diagrams).

Iconicity is found on all the three levels of linguistic structure: phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. On the phonological level, or to be more precise, on the phonic level, we find acoustic images,

³³ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 398.

³⁴ Peirce, Charles Sanders. [1931] 1974. 2.277.

³⁵ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 398.

³⁶ Langacker, Ronald W. 2008a. The relevance of Cognitive Grammar for language pedagogy. In: Gitte Kristiansen. Michel Achard. Rene Dirven. Francisco J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibanez (eds.) *Cognitive Approaches to Pedagogical Grammar. Applications of Cognitive Linguistics 9*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

such as onomatopoeic expressions (discussed above). According to Van Langendonck, “[i]t is sometimes argued, [...], that the sound [i] expresses smallness while [o] and [u] are related to big sizes. In certain expressions, this appears to be justified; note English *a wee little bit*”³⁷.

3.1.2. Iconic principles

The discussion of structural similarities should take us to both morphological and syntactic levels, or to the morphosyntactic level, in general. Here we find the three principles of diagrammatic iconicity in language: *iconic sequencing*, *iconic proximity*, and the *iconic quantity* of linguistic material³⁸. The principle of iconic sequencing is crudely defined as “a similarity relation between the sequence of linguistic elements and the sequence of the respective event categories”³⁹. Alternatively, we may also refer to it as a similarity relation just between temporal events and the linear ordering of elements in a linguistic structure. The principle of iconic distance reflects the idea that elements which “belong together conceptually tend to be put together linguistically”⁴⁰ and, the other way round, if the elements do not belong together conceptually, they are put at a distance. And finally, the principle of iconic quantity, whereby we tend to associate more form with more meaning and less form with less meaning. All three principles define the relationship between *form* and *meaning*. Interestingly enough this relationship is metaphorically motivated.

4. Iconic quantity

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal book, “*Metaphors We Live By*”, are right to say that our speaking takes place in time. It has a temporal character. We naturally conceptualise time in terms of space, i.e. “our speaking takes *place* in time”, therefore we tend to conceptualise linguistic form metaphorically in terms of space. “Our writing system reinforces this conceptualisation. Writing a sentence down allows us to conceptualise it even more readily as a spatial object with words in a linear order. Thus our spatial concepts naturally apply to linguistic expressions”⁴¹.

³⁷ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 403.

³⁸ Ungerer, Friedrich, Hans-Jorg Schmid. 1996. 251.

³⁹ Ungerer, Friedrich, Hans-Jorg Schmid. 1996. 253.

⁴⁰ Dirven, Rene, Marjolijn Verspoor. 1998. *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 10.

⁴¹ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 126.

Consequently linguistic *form* is conceptualised in terms of space and that is why we may apply certain spatial metaphors directly to the form of a sentence. One of them is Reddy's CONDUIT metaphor⁴², which motivates a spatial relationship between *form* and *meaning*. In this complex metaphor, MEANINGS ARE OBJECTS/SUBSTANCES, LINGUISTIC FORMS ARE CONTAINERS, and COMMUNICATION IS SENDING. The language user puts meanings, that is objects, into linguistic forms, that is containers, and sends them along a conduit to the hearer who takes the meanings (objects) out of the forms (containers). More precisely, the spatial relationship is defined by LINGUISTIC FORMS ARE CONTAINERS and their meanings are the *content* of those containers. When those containers are small, we expect their contents to be small. When those containers are large, we associate them with more contents. With the CONDUIT metaphor in mind, we make the following generalisation: MORE OF FORM IS MORE OF MEANING as derived from the larger the container, the more of objects or substance it is expected to contain. And conversely, LESS OF FORM IS LESS OF MEANING. This generalisation underlies and metaphorically motivates the iconic principle of quantity. For example, the lengthening of the vowel in *that's a looong story* indicates the concept of an extremely long story.

The *iconic quantity* reveals itself mostly in semantic markedness. Given the fact that iconicity pertains to the relationship between *form* and *meaning as conceptualisation*, that is, the relationship between the linguistic level and the conceptual level, rather than the relationship between *form* and *reference* (discussed above), what is meant by 'more meaning' at the conceptual level is simply the complexity of meaning/conceptualisation, and similarly what is meant by 'more form' at the linguistic level is the complexity of a linguistic construction. Thus we finally get the expectation: The more (marked) complex the form of a linguistic construction, the more (marked) complex the meaning/conceptualisation will be. For example, the plural noun *tables* is marked and thus more complex than the singular *table*.

In order to refine the concept of semantic markedness, we need to adduce the notion of a 'prototypical speaker' as a canonical person forming a conceptual reference point:

⁴² Reddy, Michael. 1979. The Conduit Metaphor. In: Ortony, A. (ed). *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: CUP.

As a human being, the speaker has certain biological, psychological (perceptual), and cultural properties that can be called prototypical. These prototypical properties are reflected in language as unmarked semantic categories and tend to be acquired first by children. A case in point is the spatial prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at*. Essentially, *in* refers to three dimensions (a container), *on* to two (a surface), and *at* may refer to any single dimension. Although *in* is logically the most complex, experientially it is the most “normal” case: the prototypical speaker is a container and lives in a three-dimensional space; in turn, surfaces are more important in daily life than points: for instance, as a rule we walk on a surface. Therefore, *in* is the unmarked and most frequent preposition and is acquired first; then comes *on*, and finally *at*. Logically, we would expect the reverse order, [...]”⁴³

More examples include binary oppositions, such as agent/patient, topic/comment, subject/object, positive/negative, etc., where agent, topic, subject emerge as semantically unmarked. Egocentrically, what is ‘positive’ will be semantically unmarked in relation to ‘negative’, e.g., *happy* vs. *unhappy*, or *it is raining* vs. *it is not raining*. The prototypical speaker considers himself as an agent rather than a patient, so the concept of agent is salient and unmarked. Morphologically, iconicity motivates, up to a point, the inflectional endings of nouns, verbs, and adjectives in the markedness relations between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’.

Nouns are usually characterised by such features as *number*, *definiteness*, *humanness*, and *gender*. As far as number is concerned, the unmarked singular usually consists of one morpheme and has zero form whereas the marked plural has usually one more morpheme. “From an experiential perspective, the singular is semantically unmarked since the prototypical speaker is a single person, not a chorus. Also, it is easier to perceive or, more generally, to deal with one object at a time than with several”⁴⁴. With respect to definiteness, Langendonck asserts that the feature ‘definite’ remains unmarked with regard to ‘indefinite’. He props up his assertion by the fact that the definite article occurs when the referent is presupposed to exist and appears to be unique for both the speaker and the hearer. He adds that in inherently definite proper nouns and personal pronouns, the definiteness is not marked by an overt morpheme. With regard to humanness, anthropocentrically, this feature is unmarked in relation to non-humanness. Thus, for example, names of places (cities, villages, countries), exhibiting some human characteristics often via conceptual metaphor or metonymy, have no article

⁴³ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 401.

⁴⁴ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 403.

as zero article forms are used for 'human' in certain constructions. Similarly personal proper names usually have no articles, even if they are sometimes used in reference to inanimate nouns, such as cars, houses, or guns. Finally, as far as gender is concerned, the prototypical speaker in most cultures is a man, thus masculine gender still remains unmarked. Some traces of marked feminine gender are found in feminine titles, such as *baron* vs. *baroness*, *duke* vs. *duchess*, *prince* vs. *princess*, etc., where the suffix '-ess' functions as a feminine marker.

Considering verbs and their features such as tense, aspect, and mood, the present tense is obviously unmarked in relation to the past as, by definition, the prototypical speaker speaks in the present. Most languages have a zero form for the present and an overt form for the past. "As for mood, it can safely be stated that the speech act time is also the most real time. Potential or unreal events are rendered by potentialis and irrealis, which show a more marked form than the present or even the past indicative. Consider French *je travaill-er-ais* 'I would work'"⁴⁵.

With regard to adjectives, the iconic quantity is found in the expression of the degree of comparison. As a rule "in a number of languages, the comparative is more marked than the positive degree and often the superlative is more marked than the comparative"⁴⁶.

5. Iconic proximity

Moving on from morphological to syntactic constructions, we can see now how diagrammatic iconicity emerges as proximity iconicity, also referred to as iconicity of distance or closeness. The iconic principle of distance/closeness consists in putting together these linguistic elements, which belong together conceptually, and conversely, putting those linguistic elements at a distance, which do not belong together conceptually. Put differently, in Langendonck's terms, "elements that occur closely together and form a unity in experience will tend to be related to each other by the prototypical speaker on the content level as well. Conversely, what is separated will be seen as unrelated conceptually"⁴⁷. Thus syntactic constructions often reflect conceptual distance or closeness. In actual fact, the iconic proximity principle seems to be motivated metaphorically, where the

⁴⁵ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 404.

⁴⁶ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 404.

⁴⁷ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 405.

distance or closeness between linguistic elements corresponds to the conceptual distance between the meanings they evoke. In particular, Lakoff's CLOSENESS IS STRENGTH OF EFFECT metaphor is translatable into the effect that syntax has in many linguistic constructions.

The CLOSENESS IS STRENGTH OF EFFECT metaphor may reveal itself in purely semantic terms, as in describing relationships: *Mira is one of my closest friends*⁴⁸, where 'Mira is one of my friends *who has the strongest effect on me*', or as in expressing the concepts of similarity or difference:

- a) *The youngest boys are so close in age they look like twins.*
- b) *Both children bear a very close resemblance to their father.*
- c) *He came second in the race, but it was very close*⁴⁹.

However, this metaphor basically provides motivation for syntactic constructions. It applies to the relationship between *form* and *meaning* in the following way: "If the meaning of form A affects the meaning of form B, then, the CLOSER from A is to form B, the STRONGER will be the EFFECT of the meaning of A on the meaning of B"⁵⁰. This principle accounts for a slight change in the meaning of ditransitive sentence patterns when the order of objects has been reversed. Normally, in these constructions, the indirect object is put before the direct, as in *Romeo sent his girlfriend a valentine card*. Recall the unmarked feature of *humanness* discussed above, or refer to the indexical principle of anthropocentricity⁵¹. The motivation for putting the indirect object first and the direct object second is that the former literally or metaphorically and often metonymically (e.g., names of institutions) refers to a human referent and the latter to an inanimate one, as in the example above. In accordance with the iconic principle of proximity and the underlying CLOSENESS IS STRENGTH OF EFFECT metaphor, the sequence reversal of the objects in *Romeo sent a valentine card to his girlfriend* results in a subtle meaning change. In *Romeo sent his girlfriend a valentine card*, the linguistic (formal) closeness between *sent* and *his girlfriend* implies that she must have received the valentine card, while the greater linguistic distance between the verb and the indirect object realized by a prepositional phrase, and, in a sense, a violation of the anthropocentricity principle, in *Romeo sent a valentine card to his girlfriend*, opens the door to some slight doubt as to whether she ever received the card.

⁴⁸ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=14349&dict=CALD&topic=family-relations-in-general>. Accessed: 7.4.10.

⁴⁹ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=14352&dict=CALD>. Accessed: 7.4.10.

⁵⁰ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 129.

⁵¹ Dirven, Rene, Marjolijn Verspoor. 1998. 6–7.

Exactly the same principle and metaphor can be found at work in *I taught Harry Greek* and *I taught Greek to Harry*⁵². In the former sentence, the verb and the indirect object are closer and this might result in the suggestion that he indeed learned what was taught him. The teaching had an actual effect on Harry. In the latter, the greater linguistic distance between the verb and the direct object leaves the meaning a bit unclear as to whether he truly learned what was taught him.

Another examples of the iconic proximity can be found in verb complement constructions. As a rule, a distinction is made between direct experience, as in *I hear him sing(ing)*, and indirect experience, as in *I hear that he sings/is singing*⁵³. Consider the linguistic distance between the main clause verb *hear* and the complement clause verb in these two sentences. In the former, the smaller distance implies more direct perception. Note also that only one event is referred to. The second verb is untensed and there is only one proposition with only one tense and one modality. In the latter, the greater distance implies indirect experience. In fact, two events are referred to and they are iconically represented by two propositions that can also differ in terms of tense and modality, as in *I hear that he sang/was singing*. According to Langacker⁵⁴, the conjunction *that* has a distancing effect even in pairs like *She knows that he likes her* vs. *She knows he likes her*. The same phenomena of direct and indirect experience are found in *I found the chair comfortable* and *I found that the chair was comfortable* respectively⁵⁵. The former points to the fact that I found out that the chair was comfortable by, for instance, sitting on it. The latter hints at the possibility that I may have learned it from somebody else. In these examples, the syntax of a sentence is semantically motivated. In causative constructions, for example, we can notice a continuum from direct to indirect causation. Compare Lakoff's examples of *Sam killed Harry* and *Sam caused Harry to die*⁵⁶. In the first sentence, the causation is direct and can be considered as a single event, implying a unity of action, place, and time. In the second sentence, we have two separate events as indicated by two verbs expressing the cause and the effect respectively, and most probably no unity of place and time. Thus the

⁵² Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 130.

⁵³ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 406.

⁵⁴ Langacker, Ronald W. 1991. *Foundations of cognitive grammar. Vol. 2, Descriptive application*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

⁵⁵ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 130.

⁵⁶ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 131.

causal link is weaker than in *Sam killed Harry*. In *Sam brought it about that Harry died*, the link is still weaker, for example, *Sam brought it about on Saturday that Harry died on Sunday*. “The principle at work is this: The CLOSER the form indicating CAUSATION is to the form indicating the EFFECT, the STRONGER the causal link is”⁵⁷. In *Sam killed Harry*, there is only one verb indicating both cause and effect. In *Sam caused Harry to die*, there are two separate verbs, one for the causation, and one for the effect. In *Sam brought it about that Harry died*, there are two separate clauses for the cause and the effect and the linguistic distance between the verbs in these two clauses is the greatest. In this respect, you might also compare the causative use of *make/have somebody do something* with the causative use of *get somebody to do* in terms of the linguistic distance between the verbs in respective constructions and see how this distance reflects the strength of causation.

Moreover, the principle of iconic proximity can be seen at work in more complex syntactic structures:

- a) *I helped him make sure he arrived on time safely.*
- b) *I helped him to make sure he arrived on time safely.*
- c) *I helped him in order to make sure he arrived on time safely.*

Consider the linguistic distance between *him* and the following verb in the sentences above. In sentence a), *him* and *make* are put closely together and they constitute a complement clause, where *him* is its subject and *make* is its predicator. The overall sentence contains one complement, that is to say, the non-finite clause with the overt subject *him*. *Him* and *make* belong together linguistically in forming one subordinate clause and they belong together conceptually. In b), the linguistic distance between *him* and *make* grows in such a way that the sentence becomes ambiguous. On one interpretation, as in the example above, they belong together conceptually as the subject and predicator in the same complement clause and the overall meaning of b) is close to that of a) with a slight difference in the strength of effect. Notice the distance between the main clause verb *helped* and the complement clause verb *make* both in a) and b). In a), the distance is minimal and we can expect that *helped* has a stronger causative force and indicates greater commitment on the part of the speaker. On the second interpretation, b) can be considered as the sentence with the main clause verb containing two complements, the first complement *him* and the non-finite clause with the covert subject *to make sure he arrived on time safely*, where the subject is in fact controlled by the main clause subject. Put simply,

⁵⁷ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 131.

sentence b) roughly means that 'I helped him because I wanted to make sure he arrived safely on time' (the sentence contains two complements), whereas, on the first interpretation, b) means that 'I helped him because I wanted him to make sure he arrived safely on time' (the sentence contains one complement). In consequence, on the second interpretation, the meaning of b) is close to the meaning of c), which is as unambiguous and clear as the meaning of a), with yet again a slight difference in the strength of effect. Consider the linguistic distance between the main clause verb *helped* and the complement clause verb *make* both in b) and c). In b), the distance is smaller and we can expect that *helped* has a stronger causative force and indicates greater involvement on the part of the speaker than in c). Finally, we can use c), *I helped him in order to make sure he arrived on time safely*, in order to disambiguate b), *I helped him to make sure he arrived on time safely*, with a resulting slight difference in the strength of effect. In accordance with the iconic principle of proximity, by putting *him* at some distance from *make*, we make *him* directly available as the first complement of the main clause verb *helped* (*helped* wins) and *in order to make sure he arrived on time safely* as its second complement, which is the non-finite clause of purpose with the subject controlled by the main clause subject 'I'. Iconically, *him* has been precluded from becoming the overt subject of the complement clause, and consequently it functions the complement of *helped* with the resulting sentence structure (two complements). Put simply again, sentence c) means that 'I helped him because I wanted to make sure he arrived safely on time', 'I' being the overt subject in the main clause and the covert subject in the complement clause (*I helped him in order to make sure he arrived on time safely*). All in all, we can observe a cline in the strength of the effect the main clause verb has in the sentences above, starting from unambiguous sentence a), through sentence b) with its two meanings, the first close to the meaning of a), the second close to the meaning c), and finishing with unambiguous c). In the three sentences, we observe a gradual weakening of the strength of the effect of the main clause verb from a) to c), with the semantic parallelism between 1) the iconically-motivated semantic difference between a) and the first meaning of b) and 2) the iconically-motivated semantic difference between the second meaning of b) and the meaning of c). Thus we can claim that the ambiguity of b) consists in having two meanings, the first close to the meaning of a), and the second close to the meaning of c). The semantic closeness (but by no means sameness!) of b) to a) parallels the semantic closeness of b) to c):

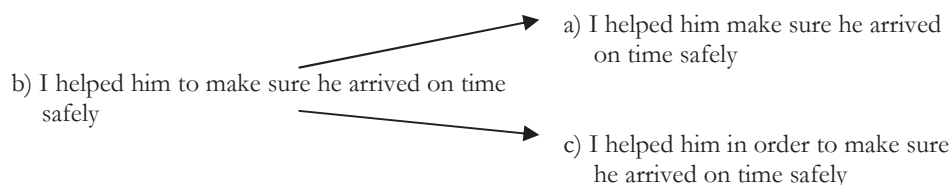


Figure 1. The iconically motivated semantic parallelism

There are hundreds of examples of the iconic proximity in language, showing how the syntax of a sentence gets affected by an underlying conceptual metaphor. In addition to the above examples, consider more Lakoff's examples:

- a) *Mary thinks he won't leave until tomorrow.*
 b) *Mary does n't think he'll leave until tomorrow.*

In sentence b), *n't* refers to *leave* and “logically negates *leave* rather than *think*. This sentence has roughly the same meaning as [a]: ZK] except that in the [second: ZK] sentence, where the negative is FURTHER AWAY from *leave*, it has a WEAKER negative force. In the [first: ZK] sentence, where the negative is CLOSER, the force of negation is STRONGER”⁵⁸. Yet again the underlying conceptual metaphor at work is CLOSENESS IS STRENGTH OF EFFECT. Sentence b) express a more tentative attitude of the speaker, achieved by the rule called *negative transportation*, where the negative has been placed directly before the main clause verb.

Finally, the principle of iconic distance is also found to influence prepositional phrase complements. “By definition, prepositional objects show a greater physical distance with the verb than direct objects. This seems to correspond with greater conceptual distance. Consider the famous pair of examples in:

- a) *He smeared the wall with paint.*
 b) *He smeared paint on the wall.*

In the so-called holistic reading of a), the whole wall is painted whereas this is normally not the case in b), where a ‘partial’ reading is most likely”⁵⁹. The greater strength of effect in a) is achieved by means of placing the direct object *wall* closer to the verb than in b), where it is put at a distance and separated from the verb by a preposition.

⁵⁸ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. 129.

⁵⁹ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 407.

6. Iconic sequencing

The last iconic principle to be discussed briefly is *iconic sequencing*. Greenberg specifies it as follows: “The order of elements in language parallels that in physical experience or the order of knowledge”⁶⁰. Dirven and Verspoor formulate it as: “a phenomenon of both temporal events and the linear arrangement of elements in a linguistic construction”⁶¹. Ungerer and Schmid refer to it as “a similarity relation between the sequence of linguistic elements and the sequence of the respective event categories”⁶², considering it as the relationship between *form* and *meaning as conceptualization* rather than the relationship just between *form* and *referent*. Almost by definition, events take place in time. When considering word order, for example, we can see that it often mirrors the sequencing of events in time. There is a trace of the principle of *iconic proximity* at work here since the temporal ordering of events implies their *closeness in time*. Thus the closer the events are to each other in time, the closer they are placed linguistically. The classic examples include:

- a) *veni, vidi, vici*
- b) *eye it, try it, buy it*
- c) *She married and got pregnant*
- d) *Bill painted the white door green*

Obviously, temporal conjunctions, such as *before* or *after*, can undo the iconic sequencing. As a matter of fact, the temporal ordering of events is not very often represented iconically in discourse. According to Langacker⁶³, quoted in Langendonck, the speaker may choose to scan backwards mentally through conceived time, as in the following passage:

Professor Muddle died last night at the age of 75. He suffered from an inflamed ego for several years prior to his death. He taught theoretical basket weaving for almost four decades at MIT. He received his Ph.D. from that institution in 1948⁶⁴.

⁶⁰ Joseph H. Greenberg. 1966. Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements. In: Joseph H. Greenberg (ed). *Universals of Language*. London: MIT Press. 103.

⁶¹ Dirven, Rene, Marjolijn Verspoor. 1998. 8.

⁶² Ungerer, Friedrich, Hans-Jörg Schmid. 1996. 253.

⁶³ Langacker, Ronald W. 1991. 502.

⁶⁴ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 408.

Another subtype of *iconic sequencing* is based on the concept egocentricity, or *closeness to the speaker*. “What is nearest to the speaker in a literal (physical) or in a metaphorical sense is mentioned first, especially again in asyndetic or in fixed coordinate structures” (Langendonck 2007: 408). Some of the examples involve: *now and then, now or never, sooner or later, here and there, this and that, come and go*, etc. The motivation for the above sequencing evidently derives from the speaker’s vantage point. Whatever is moving towards the speaker and whatever is closer to the speaker is mentioned first or before what is moving away from the speaker. Recall also the examples of metaphorical closeness to the prototypical speaker above (*number, definiteness, humanness, and gender*).

Finally, *iconic sequencing* as motivated by the *iconic closeness in content*, among other motivating factors, can be found in the ordering of modifiers before the head noun. Langendonck refers to this sub-principle as *relative adjacency*, whereby “the modifiers that are closest to the head in content are generally placed closest to it as well”⁶⁵. Analyse the following, modified here, examples based on Radden and quoted in Ungerer and Schmid⁶⁶:

- a) the five famous delicious little Italian pepperoni pizzas
- b) *the little Italian delicious famous pepperoni five pizzas
- c) *the famous pepperoni five delicious Italian little pizzas
- d) *the little pepperoni five delicious famous Italian pizzas

Only the first sentence follows the *iconic closeness in content* sub-principle and consequently is grammatically correct and acceptable, whereas the examples from b) to c) are not. Generally speaking, *qualifying adjectives* seem to be conceptually closer to the noun than *quantifying adjectives* or *modifiers*. Moreover, *absolute objective qualities* like *pepperoni*, indicating an essential component or substance of pizza, and *Italian*, denoting its origin, are closest to the noun. On the other hand, *relative objective qualities* like *little* are placed further away from the noun. And still further are expressed *subjective qualities* like *delicious* and *famous*. Furthest away are *quantifying adjectives* and finally is placed the *determiner*, as its only function is to single out the referent. Put quite schematically, we can also say that the sequencing of modifiers ranges from the most specific modifier placed immediately before the noun to the most general modifier placed at the furthest distance from the noun. Put in a pedagogical perspective, learners do not necessarily have to memorize the order of adjectives as it is presented, for instance, in Evan’s *FCE Use of*

⁶⁵ Van Langendonck, Willy. 2007. 408.

⁶⁶ Ungerer, Friedrich, Hans-Jorg Schmid. 1996. 251.

English 2 and similar course books, where they are expected to learn the sequence by rote. And the sequence is presented as follows: opinion, size, age, shape, colour, origin, material, used for/be about and finally the head noun. Instead, they should logically follow the schematic rule for sequencing adjectives before the noun.

7. Conclusion

Iconicity equals motivation. If language is to a large extent motivated rather than arbitrary, then foreign language learners are more likely to be exposed to more insightful learning, which should be enhanced by plausible explanations. The problem is that not all explicated motivations are always very likely to facilitate learning. Sometimes they are quite straightforward, or even seemingly simplistic at times as it is often the case of iconically and metaphorically motivated syntax, but at other times they may appear to learners as far-fetched as it is often the case of polysemy. Thus both iconic and metaphorical motivation should be presented in learner-friendly ways and appropriately adapted to the target audience.

The question is how far we can go in presenting syntax as iconically and metaphorically motivated. Or, in more general terms, “how far can, and should, one go in offering semantic explanations for the grammar of a language?”⁶⁷ Taylor, quoting Wierzbicka⁶⁸, claims that although there would always be some trace of arbitrariness in syntax, “a residue of arbitrary syntactic phenomena would merely betray the linguist’s failure to come up with the appropriate semantic generalization”⁶⁹. Taylor feels inclined to sympathize with such an uncompromising attitude as far as any research programme is concerned. But we need to be aware of specific pedagogical grammar constraints, such as the accessibility of theoretical explanations to the unsophisticated reader. Too much theory may have an adverse effect on the acquisition of language.

The purpose of a pedagogical grammar is to raise foreign language consciousness, that is, to:

promote the learner’s insight into the foreign language system. In essence, promoting insight means reducing the perceived arbitrariness of the foreign language system. A person perceives something as arbitrary if he can see no

⁶⁷ John R. Taylor. 2008. 57.

⁶⁸ Wierzbicka, Anna. 1988. *The Semantics of Grammar*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

⁶⁹ John R. Taylor. 2008. 57.

reason why it should be as it is. For this reason, it is not enough to merely inform the learner that a particular element belongs to a given formal category and not to another, and thus behaves in this way rather than that, or to state that such-and-such an expression is grammatically correct while other wordings are grammatically incorrect. Rather, we need to explain to the learner why the foreign language should be as it is⁷⁰.

Consciousness raising can be achieved by presenting grammatical constructions on a par with lexical items. Learners need to bear in mind that constructions are more schematic than words and have the potential to function as “overarching templates sanctioning a greater variety of lexically elaborated instantiations”⁷¹. Further, constructions should be presented as usage-based. Like words, they can be schematised and elaborated. Their use and meaning can be more or less prototypical. Learners need to be aware of the fact that if a new construction occurs, an overarching schema then sanctions it. Thus the explanation of the prototypical use and meaning of each target construction (e.g. a modal verb, tense, aspect, etc) should precede showing how other usages develop from the prototype. The strategy of going from typical to special is certainly not new in teaching grammar. The presentation of peripheral usages, not as exceptions to the rule, but as iconically and metaphorically motivated constructions, or as motivated extensions from the prototype, is obviously novel and challenging.

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⁷⁰ John R. Taylor. 2008. 57.

⁷¹ Boers and Lindstromberg 2006. 329.

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