Cognitive Linguistics and EFL

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Introduction

Described in its literal meaning, the term *linguistics* can simply be applied and defined as the scientific study of language. This involves the different ways and dimensions through the help of which the use of language as sound and as well as language is used in relation to the terms that comprise the crux of a language, the pronunciations of the words that are commonly used in a language and the dialects that are applied in the language (Bergen and Zinken, 2008). At the same time the science also highlights and studies the cultural contexts and influences that develop on a certain language over the passage of time and the ways through which a language undergoes the different stages of evolution at different phases of time.

Over the passage of time, the science and entire study of linguistics has undergone various stages that has played a pivotal role in exploring novel avenues and frontiers that have enhanced the level of understanding and concept building through which linguistics can either be applied and used in different dimensions (Geeraerts, 2007). One of such vital breakthroughs was achieved during the 20th century when Ferdinand de Saussure presented his theory on structural linguistics that played an important role in distinguishing between the idea and application of the terms language and parole.

According to the theory, parole is the specific and defined way through which speech is uttered, whereas, language is the entire system of principles and discipline that dominate the way that govern the abstract phenomenon of linguistics and the way in which it is applied in different contexts and meanings. The next vital transition and development in the field of linguistics came in the form of theoretical linguistics, a theory formulated by modern day linguistics professor Noam Chomsky in which he distinguishes and helps us understand the difference between the ideas of competence and performance (Grady and Coulson, 1999). Competence is the inherent capacity of the language and performance defines the way in which the language is used.

The work of Chomsky is considered to be a turning point in the field and influences the science of linguistics since it helped in exploring new dimensions through the help of which greater frontiers in the field of linguistics can be studied and analyzed in greater detail. One of such examples can be provided in the form of Chomsky's work that he did in the development of his theory of generative linguistics (Silverman, 2011). This later led to the emergence of research work and theories such as psycholinguistics. This particular field of study highlights and is based on the works that explore the representation and the functionality of a language in the mind.

The area of study is closely related to the field of neurolinguistics which goes into further depth of the ways through which the processing of language takes place in the different parts of the human brain and the ways through which language is acquired and learnt through the processes of coordination that take place in the human brain. It was predominantly because of these efforts and the ways through which the field and science of

linguistics has evolved in recent times that has provided initiatives and expanded the scope of research potentials in this field on the whole (Silverman, 2011).

Cognitive Linguistics

With the development and application of core science concepts in linguistics an extension that has gained immense momentum in recent times is cognitive linguistics (Fauconnier, 1997). The details and different dynamics of this form of linguistics will be discussed from various perspectives during the entire course of this discussion. However, as an overview it is important to state here that with the help and usage of concepts that were highlighted by cognitive linguistics formulated by George Lakoff completely turned the dimensions of linguistics from a pre-defined set of rules followed as told by a grammar template to the conceptual function of the human mind that interprets, coordinates and processes information being provided through the medium of a language in an individualistic manner (Schmidt, 1996).

Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics

In order to get into further details and dynamics of cognitive linguistics and the ways in which it is applied in different settings for teaching or learning a language, it is important to have a proper understanding regarding this linguistic extension. The terminology of cognitive linguistics first emerged in the 1970s and was coined by George Lakoff. At that time the entire science of linguistics and conceptual application was going through a tough phase with serious disagreements emerging top linguistic experts regarding the ways through which the study was being developed and used.

Hence, it will not be inaccurate to state that the core reason behind the emergence of cognitive linguistics was out of the dissatisfaction regarding the formal tone and methodology that was being practiced and implemented in the different dynamics of linguistics at that time (Evans and Green, 2006). Many proficient and experts of this field of study began to think upon aspects through which they diversify and add further dimensions to the system and approach through which the entire science behind the formation of a language is formed. In their opinion, simply restricting the scope of linguistics to the use of phonetics, semantics and

grammatical rules and procedures will do no good in expanding and adding greater horizons to the science on the whole (Kristenasan, 2008).

Therefore, it became more or less inevitable to integrate the concept of the ways through which linguistics can be explained with a more scientific approach. Cognitive linguistics has been overwhelmingly been influenced by different cognitive theories and researches such as cognitive psychology and Gestalt psychology (Rohrer, 2005). Thus, in a nutshell it can be said that the concept and application behind the incorporation and application of the different concepts regarding the use of cognitive linguistics is based on the fact that the language is dependent and forms a major part of the overall human cognition process which includes human perception and categorization (Turner, 2003).

Level of Interaction

In addition to this, cognitive linguistics is also based on the fact that language and its learning approaches among individuals changes from time to time and this is mainly dependent on their level of interaction as well as the environment that they are provided with. Once we are done with the basics and definition of cognitive linguistics it is now important into further tiers of this form of linguistics so that its application in teaching English as a foreign language can be analyzed and evaluated on an effective scale and manner. (Tomasello, 2003)

Main Branches of Cognitive Linguistics

The domain of cognitive linguistics can be categorized into two main branches, cognitive semantics and cognitive grammar. Even though the nature of study that is applied in both these categories and branches are different in many ways, it is their domains of inquiry which are closely interrelated to each other (Taylor, 2002). The nature of cognitive semantics is closely related to the programming and moulding of the human mind regarding the learning of a language as it is with the linguistic semantics of a language. This is further sub-divided into four main categories that help in further characterizing the entire field and branch of cognitive semantics. These include the following:

- Conceptual structuring of the language

- Semantic and conceptual structuring
- Representation of semantics in encyclopedia
- Semantic construction and conceptualization

Cognitive Lexical Semantic Approach

Apart from these four one of the concepts that is also important and needs to be mentioned here is of cognitive lexical semantics approach. The notion is based on the fact that lexical items are based on conceptual categories. A word represents a category of distinct related meaning. According to the concepts established by Lakoff regarding cognitive linguistics he said that a lexical item represents a kind of specific category. Hence, the meanings of words are stored in the lexicon memory as highly complex and structured categories of meanings (Croft, 2004).

On the other hand cognitive grammar is mainly concerned and related with the modelling of the different grammatical rules and regulations that can be applied in providing a better and more comprehensive meaning to the words and language on the whole (Patricia, 2007). However, the principles and procedures through which cognitive grammar operates is based on the nature of meaning that is derived from the semantics. Therefore, it can be said with great accuracy that meaning occupies a central position in cognitive linguistics and grammar.

Based on the assumptions that are made by cognitive semantics and the meaning that it derives is then used for the construction and modelling of different grammatical rules and regulations (Grace, 2009). In addition to this it is also important to state here that like cognitive semantics, the branch of grammar can also be sub-divided into two further branches. These include the symbolic thesis and usage-based thesis. The symbolic thesis is based on the opinion that the core component of grammar is based on form meaning-pairing or in layman's terms can simply be said to be a symbolic unit.

All different forms that are used in linguistics ranging from single words to phrases and idioms have a certain meaning that they carry and intent to project (Lakeoff, 1987). This is known as the particular meaning that these words carry. Hence, the symbolic thesis notion

of cognitive grammar is mainly based and relies on providing proper meaning and context to which words, phrases and all other different forms of linguistics are applied and used in. on the flip side the usage based thesis model is based on the characterization of language in the ways in which it understood and spoken, and at the same time also analyses and understands the different dynamics in which the use of language is applied (Abbott, 2000). One of the ways through which the application behind the concept of usage based thesis model can be fully understood is to relate it with the fact that with the help of this model the complexity of any language can easily be understood as well as predicted.

English as Foreign Language (EFL)

The term is more or less self-explanatory since it is applied to students who want to study and learn English but have different native languages. Since English has for long been a widely known, learned and understood language of the world students from different native languages and countries intend to enrol in different English learning classes and sessions through which they can easily learn the dynamics and fundamentals of this language in an effective manner. Keeping in mind the growing popularity and scope of English language in today's world English language teaching has evolved into two major sections of study and learning.

Firstly, it is for people who intend to live in a country where English is a dominant language and widely understood and spoken by the population and the other half comprises of people who do not want to go for this option (Bigelow and Schwartz, 2010). The term EFL or English as Foreign Language is broadly applied in circumstances when non-English speaking students are taught and are acquainted with the different dynamics and aspects of the language. The study of English as foreign language can either occur in the student's home country in which he can be taught with the language as part of the curriculum that has been provided to him by his university or in an Anglophone country with the help and guidance provided by an educational tourist (Johansson and Martin, 2000).

Even though with time the concept and innovations that have taken place in the overall visage of education has changed things substantially for students who want to enrol and study different languages under different circumstances, learning a new language has

never been easy for anyone, and getting proficient in English language is no exception to this rule. There are a number of problems and complications that students have to face when they try to enrol in different English language courses and programs in order to develop a better future for themselves.

Contrastive Analysis

One of the key issues that students usually have to face when it comes to learning English as a foreign language is because of the contrastive analysis approach (Troyna, 2005). This approach basically defines the linguistic differences between the language that they are trying to learn and their native language. For example for a person whose native language is either French or German, learning English will definitely be easy as compared to someone who has Chinese as his native language.

Classroom Participation

In addition to this some of the other problems that students usually encounter in getting or learning a new language especially English is in the form of getting proficiency and complete grip on the ways through which different words and their meaning is applied along with the pronunciation of the different words that are applied in everyday situations and incidents. At the same time another prominent area where they may feel neglected and marginalized is in the manner through which they are either influenced or fail to emerge from their own cultural shell. A prominent example in this context can be stated of Chinese students who enroll in different English learning classes and courses.

A common characteristic that has been observed here is that Chinese students unlike American or British students do not give much weightage to class participation and interaction with the teacher on different topics and issues coming up in class, but are very careful and conscious in noting down each and every point that has been mentioned by the professor during the class. However, it is also important to state here that with the passage of time there are various ways through the help of which such complications that are normally faced by students learning English as a foreign language can be handled and resolved in a professional and learning friendly manner. One of the ways and initiatives that needs to be

mentioned here for its commendable nature has been introduced by Guardian Teacher Network.

Guardian Teacher Network

The network is known to introduce resources and provide quality help and guidance to students who may be going through a tough time regarding the ways that can help them in getting proper grip over the language and understand its functional as well as linguistic dynamics in an effective manner. A famous resource introduced by Guardian Teacher Network was I the form of the Big Grammar Book comprising of 101 photocopiable worksheets that provide students with a basic overview and working for strengthening their grip on the grammatical principles and fundamentals of the language (Troyna, 2005).

Moreover, the books and other resources cover all necessary aspects and dynamics of the language whether it is tenses, idioms and the way they are applied, comparative and superlative degrees, use of speech and the way it is used in sentence structuring, all of these aspects are covered in proper and effective ways in such guidance providing material. Other prominent and breakthrough work that has been done in this context is of Matt Purland, the creator of the online resource Englishbanana.com (Troyna, 2005).

The way in which this entire resource and its different chapters have been created is truly commendable. He starts with the different ways and complications that he went through when he was trying to prepare this book and the ways through which they can easily overcome their difficulties regarding the understanding and application of linguistic concepts and potentials in the language. It offers a proper foundation course which is very helpful for students beginning things from scratch so that they can start with the basic pronunciation of words and how they are used.

Cognitive Linguistics and English as Foreign Language (EFL)

Once we are done with the development of a comprehensive approach regarding the dynamics of cognitive linguistics and the usage of English as a foreign language, it is now important to have an understanding regarding the ways through which both these variables

are connected and related to each other. Moreover, it is significant to understand and analyse the different ways through the help of which the science of cognitive linguistics can be applied and used for students who intend to learn this language even if they are from a different native background.

It is important to mention here in this context that for a student who enrols in any course or program of English learning must be taught with and educated with all necessary dimensions and aspects that are important in terms of developing a proper and strong approach towards learning the language in an effective manner (Klassen, 1993). He must be provided and enlightened with all lexical as well as grammatical ideas regarding the ways through which they can have a proper understanding about how the language has evolved and developed with time along with the changes that are taking place in it even in contemporary times.

One of the key benefits that the incorporation of cognitive linguistics has provided in the learning and understanding of English language for foreign students is that it has made the entire language and has filled its different linguistic dynamics with meanings. With the help of cognitive linguistics new learners looking forward to learn and get trained in this language do not only get to know the grammatical dimensions and aspects of the language, but are also able to understand the use and application of these linguistic principles from a conceptualized perspective (Johansson and Martin, 2000).

This includes the usage of different terms and words used in a language in a subjective manner so that students learning English as a foreign language can understand the meaning of what they intend to speak within a particular cultural context and surrounding that they are in. The learning of any new language these days does not involve in ratifying the aspects and fundamentals of grammar and their usage, nor is it about memorizing tons of new words, their pronunciation and their respective meaning.

The entire science behind the linguistic formation contributing to the development of a learning approach for any language takes many things into account these days (Jackendoff, 1997). Ranging from the lexical to grammatical formation of words and the use of words as phonetics to the cultural influences and situation based communication in a language, all

comprise different segments and components that are integrated in the domain of cognitive linguistics and the ways through which it influences in providing a proper guide to students learning English as a foreign language.

In addition to this the integration of cognitive linguistics has also enabled and explored new frontiers in terms of expanding the scope of learning for students who learn English as a foreign language through the inclusion of ways that help in the development and processing of languages within the human brain and the science working behind it. Hence, the student who is learning this new language will have greater opportunities as well as exposure to the ways in which they can develop a stronger approach towards learning the language effectively with the help and application of principles introduced by cognitive linguistics (Jackendoff, 1997).

Application of Cognitive Linguistics in EFL

There are many theories and numerous research works that have been done regarding the ways in which cognitive linguistics can be applied and used in teaching students with a new language especially English, however, during the scope of this discussion we will only be looking at two prominent approaches and methods that are employed in the form of cognitive linguistics that can help us understand the ways in which the process has been helpful for students who learn English as a foreign language. One of the approaches that are applied in this process is known as the Syntactic Level (Egbert, 2001).

In this level that involves cognitive linguistics the different meanings of a single word and their respective application in different set of situations is studied and analyzed. The core area of understanding that is studied in this particular level of approach development and understanding about cognitive linguistics is based on the different ways in which various linguistic constructions can systematically be related to each other. And secondly, it is applied in conditions that answer the question about the existence of a particular grammar or linguistic construction in a particular language (Goldberg, 2004). These are some of the areas that will be discussed during this phase. In addition to this the different ways in which these approaches affect the overall application of cognitive linguistics will also be highlighted here.

Construction Grammar

First and foremost, it is important to state here that construction grammar takes into account all the fundamental and necessary principles and aspects that are required and are considered to be mandatory for effective and proper sentence structuring. The nature of grammatical principles applied does create sentences that are well-structured, orderly and intend to provide a proper sense and meaning to the context and information that the sentence intends to project and create upon the reader (Goldberg, 2004).

The sense of any sentence is in turn dependent on the usage of different figures and components of speech and article making such as lexicons, metaphorical arrangement and a proper connection between the different notions and ideas that the sentence intends to project on the whole. At the same time, it is also important to state here that the proper and effective usage of construction grammar points provides students with a greater exposure and opportunity through which they can easily look into the insights behind the rudimentary structuring of the sentence and how the different elements of the sentence interact with each other even if they are apparently not connected with each (Murray, 2013).

Talking about the second approach regarding the existence or construction and its existence in a particular language requires shedding light and understanding a few more concepts through the help of which this particular aspect of sentence construction grammar can be understood (Boers, 2000). These involve discourse requirements, grammar principles and their respective categorization along with similar influencing factors and components.

Another example that can be used for understanding this effectively is *Pat gave and gave but Chris just took and took*, *She could steal but she could not rob*, *Tigers only kill at night*, *Why would they give this creep a low prison term!? He murdered!* The sentence provides us with a proper and comprehensible manifestation of the fact that the discourse position being described in the sentence is not necessary if the central subject or character of the sentence has not been mentioned or described (Murray, 2013).

These are some of the techniques and methods that are normally employed when the phenomenon of cognitive linguistics is applied in different situational settings and sentence construction and their respective grammatical corrections.

Methods Employed in Cognitive Linguistics for EFL

Some of the prominent methods and training processes that are applied in helping students develop proper cognitive linguistic skills and especially those learning English as foreign language needs to be mentioned here. In this section we will have a look at some of these methods and also have a look at the advantages and effectiveness of each of these methods. One of the ways through which this is done with the help of cognitive linguistics is by employing the methodology of audio and videographic analysis (Langlaker, 1991).

The methodology is particularly helpful and significant in terms of helping students in making use of their cognitive abilities and expertise to the maximum. These include the vocal dynamics of the speaker, facial expressions and gestures that are used by people in the video and the direction of gaze. All these agents and techniques used in this methodology are helpful in an effective way since they help the listener who is not very well versed in speaking or writing English language with the opportunity through which he can easily register these expressions and gestures in his mind and can associate them with the nature of delivery that was used for the particular usage of certain expressions sentences.

In addition to this they are also considered as a positive move in order to enforce and reinforce the different expressions and gestures that students learning English may have learned or heard before, but were unable to relate it with any practical situation. For all such means the use of audio and videography is considered particularly effective. However, one key limitation that can be accounted for the usage of this method is the fact that it bombards the new person trying to develop a grip on the fundamentals of a language with a high dose of information in the form of multiple body gestures, kinesics, tonal and volume fluctuations as well as others (Langacker, 1991). This may become too hectic for the individual as he may not be in a mental position to digest all of them at once. Hence, the technique can therefore be said to be extremely effective once students are successfully done with the initial learning and training stages of learning the language rather than in their early stages.

Role of Experiments

Another prominent methodology that is commonly applied and used in the learning process for students learning English is in the form of performing a series of experiments. These experimental methods help in the development of models that can help in linguistic cognition as well as cognitive psychology within individuals (Radden, 2007). One of the common ways and methods that are employed in performing these experiments comprise of providing each individual with stimuli or set of instructions.

All these instructions are provided with a single cognitive factor and the nature of response that they have regarding the provided stimuli are recorded. Many of the experiments that are carried out under the influence and banner of experimental approach range from time responses ranging from milliseconds to even months and this is precisely one of the reasons due to which this approach is considered to be effective. With the scope and liberty of time range that it provides the nature of responses and the feedback regarding it can be recorded and responded in an extremely effective manner.

Furthermore, during this entire period of experimental methodology conduction there are various other factors that can be studied and analyzed through the help of which the approach of a student towards the planning and execution of the provided stimuli can very properly be recorded. Furthermore, another area where experimental methodology can be termed as highly successful is that the stimuli can be altered and programmed in a manner through which it can easily evoke linguistic responses. Hence, the conduction of linguistic cognition becomes more or less inevitable in this condition and the nature of response in such a situation can very easily be recorded and streamlined accordingly as per the nature of response that the methodology needs to fulfil (Antovic, 2007).

However, the adverse effects of this form of methodology cannot be marginalized at the same time. One such areas where the impact of this methodology is very easily visible is in the form that the conclusion of this methodology is based on the linguistic behaviour that is demonstrated across a set of individuals and does not take into account the slight characteristics that linguistic cognition may have in individuals. This basically implies that

the methodology does not take into account the qualities of an individual but rather assess them on the basis of their group presence and strength (Radden, 2007).

Accommodating Differences between Individuals

Since learning a new language is not something that everyone can do at the same pace, because of key differences between their learning expertise and abilities, it will be considered unfair if each of them is considered to be present in the same category doing the same test. Hence, on the whole it can be said that the different methodologies that are applied in the domain of cognitive linguistics for increasing the proficiency of individuals learning a particular language have their respective limitations as well as their effective qualities.

Each of the methodologies intends to highlight and explore new areas and frontiers through which they can introduce greater conveniences in terms of helping students learn and study English language with greater effectiveness and easiness, however, it needs to be stated here that the before applying or considering any one methodology to be completely correct or perfect, it is important that the findings that have been obtained through the conduction of such researches properly studied and analysed before they can be applied on a greater level (Patkowski, 2005).

Conclusion

On the basis of the ideas and notions that have been presented, described and explained in the different phases of the discussion it can be deduced and understood that cognitive linguistics plays a pivotal role in the grammatical construction and comprehension about the different dynamics and aspects that are required for gaining proficiency in any language. In the context of learning English for foreign language students these processes have come as a handy practice that they can very easily implement in their daily study and learning activities.

Firstly they are helpful in increasing the level of motivation among students for studying various language materials and resources through which they can easily understand and gain a grip on the fundamentals and aspects of learning and gaining proficiency in the

language that they want to study. Furthermore, with the help of cognitive linguistics theory the usage of resources and grammatical construction can be applied in an effective and organized manner that can help them in resolving their complications in a hassle free manner.

Also, with the developments that have taken place in the domain of linguistics on the whole have further expanded the scope of liberties for students that help them in relating their understanding about English language on a practical scale through integrating concepts that help them in enhancing their coordination and the different areas of the brain that are involved in the entire process that can help them in finding the reasons and the tricks of enhancing their learning potentials as well as the urge of learning more about the language they want to learn.

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