A Review of the Cognitive Linguistics Approach to Teaching the EFL/EIL Vocabulary

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Abstract
This paper reviews the Cognitive Linguistics (CL) approach to teaching the vocabulary of English as a foreign/international language in the light of Vyvyan Evans’s “protean” approach to meaning and some related insights from work on meaning as a “continuum” (e.g. Radden, 2002; Dirven, 2002). The main objective is to show that the CL-inspired approach is not in line with recent findings in Cognitive Semantics. Rather, it is simply based on the Lakoff-Johnson tradition, whereby the focus is on the conceptual motivation underlying idiomatic expressions and basic word polysemy. The study demonstrates that applying this tradition to L2 vocabulary instruction is inadequate due to the contextual variability and complexity of word meaning. However, the CL-inspired methodology can be more useful than indicated in the literature if supplemented by constructivist strategies that aim at training learners to appreciate contextual meaning. The availability of language corpora can facilitate the preparation of material demonstrating different uses of targeted words.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, L2 vocabulary instruction, meaning as a continuum, protean approach to meaning.

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Introduction
In the late 1990s, studies began to appear in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) proposing the use of insights from Cognitive Linguistics (CL), and in particular from Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), for teaching the vocabulary of English as a foreign/international language (EFL/EIL). CMT emerged out of Reddy’s (1979) essay “The conduit metaphor” in which he showed that metaphor (cross-domain mapping) is not only a rhetorical device, but also an important part of the way we think and express our thoughts. CMT developed this finding, uncovering complete systems of conceptual structures that reflect speakers’ conceptualisation and organisation of their physical and socio-cultural surroundings and underlying much of their everyday language use (see, for example, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987). The earliest studies that considered the use of a CL-inspired approach in L2 vocabulary instruction focused on this type of motivation which is referred to in the literature as extra-linguistic motivation. Boers & Demecheleer (1998), for example, examined the possibility of teaching the polysemy of prepositions through conceptual structures. However, Boers & Lindstromberg (2008), in their edited book in which they collected a number of empirical studies on the application of CMT to L2 vocabulary instruction, broadened the scope of CL methodology by introducing two other types of motivation: intra-linguistic and historical. This study highlights the positives of teaching vocabulary as motivated. However, it shows that the CL-inspired approach is inadequate in the sense that it is rooted in CMT and is, therefore, likely to be limited in focus to teaching fixed expressions and basic word polysemy. In the light of recent work on the complexity and variability of meaning (e.g. Radden, 2000; 2002; Evans, 2010; 2013), it can be shown that adopting a CL-inspired methodology would fail in at least two respects: (i) exposing learners to the authentic use of vocabulary, whereby words have contextual meanings that can be slightly different or more complex than their basic polysemous senses and (ii) providing the information embedded in a meaning or its extensions, considering that meaning is the product of a complex system of knowledge structures (conceptual, social, cultural, linguistic, etc.) that integrate in different ways in different contexts. However, the presentation of form-meaning/meaning-meaning relationship as non-arbitrary can be more useful than indicated in the literature if supplemented by constructivist strategies to train learners to think of meaning as variable and to be able to appreciate its contextual interpretations. This, however, would involve teaching learners to view conceptual structures as placing restrictions on the meanings a word can take on, not as playing a motivating role (see Evans, 2013).

The study is structured as follows. The CL-inspired approach to teaching vocabulary is first introduced, explaining the way it complements earlier approaches and highlighting the positives of teaching vocabulary as motivated. The negatives of adopting such a methodology are then pinpointed in the light of Vyvyan Evans’s protean approach to meaning and some related insights from work on meaning as a continuum. These frameworks were chosen because they fill gaps in the standard Lakoff-Johnson view and, at the same time, complement each other as follows. While Evans incorporates contextual meaning into his protean approach to meaning, Taylor, Dirven and Radden, among others, place possible word meanings on a continuum to point out the existence of fuzzy, complex contextual instances that cannot be explained in a straightforward manner. The different meanings that a word can take on (be they conventional or contextual) are placed in Evans’s (2015) unified account of polysemy, using example sentences of the verb to see obtained from the British National Corpus (BNC) (available from www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk). The study concludes with a summary of the points discussed and recommends broadening the scope of the CL-inspired approach by taking into account the complex and protean nature of
meaning. The examples of the verb *to see* are used to demonstrate the usefulness of language corpora in this regard.

**The CL Approach to Teaching the EFL/EIL Vocabulary**

The CL-inspired approach to teaching vocabulary complements earlier approaches by adding a conceptual dimension to their teachings. Earlier approaches started as attempts to establish a world version for the English vocabulary but ended up focusing on basic (or core) words and expressions (see, for example, West, 1953; Willis, 1990; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), claiming that such items are culturally neutral and communicatively adequate to meet learners’ needs (see, e.g.: Quirk, 1982; Stubbs, 1986; Nation & Waring, 1997). Figure (1) sketches the developmental stages of the pre-cognitive era of teaching the EFL/EIL vocabulary.

![Figure 1. The development of the pre-cognitive approaches to teaching the EFL/EIL vocabulary](image)

The development of the pre-cognitive era, as represented by Figure (1), can be likened to a vocabulary learning continuum, with basic words and expressions on the two ends of the continuum and lexical relations, such as polysemy, synonymy, antonymy and collocation, in an intermediate position. The intermediate stage adds a syntagmatic dimension to word lists and the end stage adds a pragmatic one. The two dimensions were added as attempts to eliminate L1 transfer/interference.

The emergence of the CL-inspired approach may be seen as a response to the observation that learners’ non-native like use of English can be motivated by the metaphorical structure of L1. For example, Low (1988) wrote that:

> there is the question of transfer due to partial overlap in metaphoric structure in the first and target languages. For example, in both Chinese and English, *anger* can be described in terms of an explosion. It can also be described in terms of a fire, except that Chinese exploits the metaphor far less than English - one cannot, for example, talk of something ‘kindling’ one’s anger in Chinese. Only in English, however, is anger standardly described as an animal, a storm, or a wave. In the absence of empirical evidence, it is hard to show whether this mismatch ever causes serious problems, but one might expect that Chinese learners would tend to prefer to use the explosion and fire metaphors at the expense of others. (P.136)

Hence, introducing CL to the field of vocabulary instruction may be seen as an attempt to expose EFL/EIL learners to the conceptual system underlying the use of the language by its native speakers. This involves showing that form-meaning/meaning-meaning relationship is motivated in a systematic way. The focus on meaning-meaning relationship, however, cannot be seen as an attempt to cross the boundaries of Basic English, or incorporating the semantic richness of words into vocabulary instruction. As demonstrated below, adopting the CL-inspired methodology for teaching polysemy simply represents a shift of focus from teaching basic words and expressions...
to teaching basic conceptual structures (i.e. structures that can show the connection between the conventional senses of a word but cannot account for their variable or complex contextual meanings).

**Teaching Vocabulary as Motivated**

As mentioned above, CL-inspired applied linguists concern themselves with investigating the usefulness of three types of motivation for teaching the EFL/EIL vocabulary: extra-linguistic, intra-linguistic and historical. However, the first type, extra-linguistic motivation, seems to have received the most attention.

**Extra-linguistic motivation**

This type of motivation is based on CMT’s view that linguistic items form radially structured categories (i.e. categories that radiate out from a basic concept). Extensions from the basic concept are motivated by conceptual structures such as metaphors and metonymies (within-domain mapping) (Taylor, [1989]1995; Geeraerts, 1992). This is a matter of viewing more abstract concepts as structured in terms of more concrete ones. The most important motivating conceptual structures explored in CMT are referred to as “image schemas” – skeletal structures like CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, LINK, CONTACT, SUPPORT, UP-DOWN, NEAR-FAR that emerge from repeated instances of bodily experience. These structures are considered to be the bases on which speakers build networks of meanings (be they concrete or abstract). The meanings associated with prepositions present a clear case of the way in which image schemas underlie meaning. For example, the spatial and metaphorical prepositional meanings of *in* in the following two sentences can both be explained as structured in terms of the CONTAINER image schema: *He is in class* and *She is in love*.

Extra-linguistic motivation is considered to be beneficial for teaching meaning-meaning relationship. It involves (i) trying to make learners aware of the basic, or prototypical, sense of a word and (ii) showing how additional senses are extended from this central sense in a systematic way via conceptual structures, as represented by Figure (2).

![Figurative extensions core/literal meaning](image)

**Figure 2. Meaning-meaning connections within the CL approach to teaching vocabulary**

This methodology proved to be particularly useful for teaching prepositional meanings. Boers and Demecheleer (1998), for instance, showed that guessing the meaning of a figurative use of a preposition like *beyond* (e.g. *This theory is beyond me*) is more likely in the context of a reading comprehension task if students had previously been presented with a definition of the core spatial sense from which the metaphorical sense extends; namely, the one that emphasizes that *beyond*
implies some distance between the trajectory (the object) and the landmark, a feature that may be taught in terms of the metaphor ABSTRACT INACCESSIBILITY IS DISTANCE. Boers (2000) also reported on the success of an experiment in which he taught two groups of phrasal and prepositional verbs (such as find out and turn out as opposed to look it up and show up) on the basis of the two conceptual metaphors VISIBLE IS OUT AND UP and INVISIBLE IS IN AND DOWN. Similarly, Condon (2008) showed that using image schemas for teaching the particles of phrasal verbs can clarify the meaning of verbs and, therefore, facilitate their learning. A case in point is the use of the CONTAINER image schema which ‘may allow the link between the more abstract uses and the more literal uses of a particle to become more obvious. For example, the learner might benefit from an account of why leaving a container renders an entity that stays inside imperceptible (rather than perceptible). It also allows the learner to distinguish between the seemingly opposing meanings of go out and come out in sentences such as the lights went out and the sun came out’ (Condon, 2008, p. 152). Teaching figurative expressions in terms of conceptual structure can also facilitate their learning. For example, learners might find it easy to learn expressions like He has gone straight, He is on the straight and narrow path, He is deviant and She has strayed as generated from the PATH image schema on the basis of the following conceptual metaphors: WALKING ON THE PATH IS BEING MORAL and DIVERGING FROM THE PATH IS BEING IMMORAL. Some figurative expressions can be effectively taught through metonymy. For example, expressions like She got a big mouth and She has a good ear for music can be easily learnt if presented as motivated by the following metonymies in which the body part stands for its function: MOUTH FOR SPEAKING and EAR FOR LISTENING. Beréndi, Csábi & Kövecses (2008) explored teaching words and expressions on the basis of this kind of metaphorical and metonymic motivations and found it to be beneficial at least for short-term retention of items.

**Intra-linguistic motivation**

Intra-linguistic motivation is based on a limited number of observations related to the existence of cases in which the meaning of an item is motivated by its form and vice versa. One example of this type of motivation is: words ending with /æp/ (clap, tap, rap, and slap) have similar denotations related to a specific sound produced by a movement of very short duration. Another example is: words beginning with /sp/, such as spasm, spew, spit, spite, splat, spleen, spoil and spurn, have negative connotations (see Radden & Panther, 2004). For Boers & Lindstromberg (2008, p. 23), exposing learners to such form-meaning/meaning-form connections might help them to remember both the form and the meaning of words and apply this knowledge to newly encountered words of the same type. For example, a learner who learnt the above-mentioned connections might be able to see, in analogy with the already existing vocabulary, that spam has a negative connotation, and that flap denotes a movement of very short duration which may cause a short, punctual sound.

**Historical motivation**

Historical motivation is very similar to etymological searches as it involves the following: (i) identifying cognates and loanwords, (ii) noting changes in form or meaning undergone by words over time and (iii) breaking words down into meaningful affixes and roots. The idea of identifying cognates and loan words is to prompt learners toward relating the semantic and phonological poles of L2 constructions to the semantic and phonological poles of corresponding L1 constructions, which will make it easier for them to learn the items. The other two types will work as mnemonics which will contribute to a long-term retention of items. Under this type,
Boers & Lindstromberg (2008) discussed teaching idioms in relation to their original source domains. They showed, for example, how figurative idioms like *Showing someone the ropes* and *He jumped the gun* can be effectively taught in relation to their original source domains; namely, ‘sailing’ for the former idiom and ‘sports’ for the latter (the scenario of an athlete in a running contest setting off before the starting pistol has been fired).

Teaching vocabulary items in relation to the knowledge structures associated with them (be they historical, intra-linguistic or extra-linguistic) might well make learning vocabulary meaningful and, therefore, facilitate at least the short-term retention of newly learnt items. The question, however, is whether adopting a CL-inspired approach can really help learners to reach native-like mastery of vocabulary. This is a complex question that requires answers related to the long-term retention of vocabulary taught through motivation and to the semantic scope that can be covered by adopting this strategy. The former point may be discussed in the light of the findings of Beréndi, Csábi & Kövecses’s (2008) study of the long-term effects of using conceptual metaphors (CMs) in grouping idioms. In this study, the scholars used pre-tests and post-tests on experimental and control students. In addition, they conducted a questionnaire on experimental students in order to inquire whether they found the strategy useful. As is the case in all experimental studies on the use of CL in L2 vocabulary instruction, experimental students outperformed control students in the tests. However, the questionnaire yielded different findings, as reported below:

> experimental students did not remember much of the instruction in which idioms were grouped under CMs; they only remembered that “the items were grouped”. Neither did they indicate that they used the strategy of grouping vocabulary according to underlying metaphor themes when learning new vocabulary in the course of their studies. Instead, one participant noted that she remembered that many English phrases resembled Hungarian “proverbs”, and that recognizing this was the major benefit of the instruction. (Beréndi, Csábi & Kövecses, 2008, p. 79)

With respect to long-term retention, this means that (i) grouping L2 items was more beneficial for learning L2 vocabulary than the figurative thought and (ii) learners found it easy to learn the new vocabulary they could connect to their existing knowledge structures; they did not even notice that they are dealing with a new system of knowledge structures. The latter point confirms the fact that intra-linguistic and historical motivations can have better effects on long-term retention of vocabulary than extra-linguistic motivation if the learners’ first language and English have similarities or are related. To go back to extra-linguistic motivation, the difficulty of teaching/learning vocabulary through this type of motivation rests on the fact that conceptual structures like metonymies and metaphors are language-specific and are, therefore, subject to negotiation from the learners’ first language perspective, as suggested by the above-mentioned lines from Low (1988). More importantly, conceptual structures cannot give learners access to all the possible meanings of a word, but only to simple, basic ones. Put differently, a word meaning is so variable and complex it cannot be adequately taught through stable, simple conceptual structures, as shown below.

**Extra-Linguistic Motivation and the Protean Nature of Meaning**

The examples of extra-linguistic motivation discussed above demonstrate that the way vocabulary is taught through extra-linguistic motivation involves viewing conceptual structures as reflecting a stable form-meaning/meaning-meaning relationship. Such a methodology fails to take into account the protean nature of meaning. Evans explains this nature on the ground that
linguistic and conceptual structures, which can be seen as stable structures, have the potential to combine in different ways to express a non-finite range of experiences. Evans (2007) wrote:

We are continually using language to express unique meanings, about unique states of affairs and relationships, in unique ways. While language has a range of ‘ready made’ schemas, or linguistic units which can be combined to express a representative range of scenarios we may wish to refer to and describe, these necessarily underdetermine the mutability of human experience. (p. 8)

The root of Evans’s position is that meaning (be it literal or figurative) is an interpretation that language users form on the basis of the words used in an utterance and the way these words are combined. Put differently, meaning to Evans is the outcome of the activation of the relevant knowledge structure(s) (conceptual, social, cultural, linguistic, historical, etc.) associated with the words forming an utterance. This involves viewing conceptual structures as working in conjunction with other types of knowledge structures in the process of understanding a meaning. For example, understanding the meaning of a sentence like Christmas is approaching (us) is not simply the result of understanding Christmas as a “temporal event” via the MOVING TIME metaphor. For Evans, a full interpretation of the meaning of this sentence involves combining the MOVING TIME metaphor with other knowledge structures related to the nature and status of Christmas as a religious event, and to the way in which this festival is enacted and celebrated (Evans, 2013, p.102). Hence, activated conceptual structures play the role of restricting (rather than determining) the meanings of the words composing the utterance (Evans, 2007; 2013). In most cases, the linguistic context plays a vital role in shaping these meanings. Incorporating this fact into the study of meaning, Evans (2015) provided a unified account of polysemy that distinguishes between contextual and conventional word meanings. The following section considers Evans’s account of polysemous phenomena and, where necessary, it integrates this account with the view of meaning as a continuum. The study, which uses examples from BNC, yielded important observations on the limitation of an approach to teaching L2 vocabulary, like the CL-inspired approach, where meaning is dealt with as representing a stable form—meaning/meaning relationship.

Types of Polysemous Phenomena
Evans (2015) identified three types of polysemous phenomena: lexical polysemy, conceptual polysemy and inter-lexical polysemy. The phenomena are illustrated in this section by examples of the verb to see selected from BNC. As suggested above, teaching this verb in a CL-inspired class involves presenting to learners a radial category, consisting of the basic sense ‘to perceive physically’ and figurative extensions motivated by the KNOWING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor. In this way, figurative extensions should express the meaning ‘to perceive mentally’. However, as shown below, the use of the verb, or its polysemy, cannot be fully captured by such a clear-cut organization of the category.

Lexical polysemy
Lexical polysemy refers to examples where a single lexical item has multiple, distinct (but related) context-independent meanings (i.e. conventional meanings). This is the type of polysemy that the CL-inspired approach focuses on, showing that figurative meanings are extended from the literal sense via conceptual structures. However, the approach leaves out the questions of fuzziness and category membership (see, for example, Rosch, 1975; Taylor, [1989]1995). Put differently, if the CL-inspired approach deals with word meaning as a radial
category, then it should incorporate such questions into the presentation of meaning. It has long been noted that meaning should not be dealt with as either literal or figurative. Taylor ([1989]1995), Radden (2000; 2002) and Dirven (2002), among others, depict the meanings associated with a word as forming a literalness-metonymy-metaphor continuum. The continuum consists of prototypical cases of the phenomena and less-than-prototypical cases that have fuzzy boundaries. Consider, for example, the use of *to see* in the sentences in (1). In each of the sentences, the verb has a fuzzy, or less-than-prototypical, meaning.

(1) a. C98 1538 *Looking at Martha, he could see that she was distressed.*

b. A6B 1881 *Yet he saw the danger in making these communities an ideal, as he turned an anthropological eye on Christianity and perceived that such examples seem to offer no solution to industrial urban and suburban existence — the way most people live.*

Note that *to see* in the sentences in (1) has the same linguistic property as the expressions of the form *see + wh-complement* studied in Grady & Johnson (2002) (e.g. *Oh, I see what you wanted*). Grady & Johnson treat such expressions as amenable to “interpretational overlap” (i.e. as amenable to literal and figurative interpretations), considering that they contain a polysemous verb as well as a complement which can be analysed as either a free relative clause denoting an object, or as an embedded interrogative clause denoting a proposition or a piece of knowledge. However, Radden (2000; 2002) treats such expressions of *to see* as cases that occupy intermediate positions on the meaning continuum. The instance in (1a) fits within the type of intermediate cases he refers to as *partial metonymy*. Partially metonymic instances of *to see* are cases in which SEE stands for the literal and figurative concepts SEE and KNOW. In simple words, they are temporal events in which seeing leads to knowing. Clearly, seeing in (1a) refers to what one comes to believe on the basis of what they have seen (i.e. the interpretation ‘becoming aware by seeing’). As for (1b), it fits within another type of intermediate cases that Radden refers to as *metonymy-based-metaphor* – instances in which the source (SEE) and target (KNOW) blend into one simultaneous event. The sentence in (1b) may be dealt with in the same way that Radden dealt with *I see the solution*:

> in *I see the solution*, I may at the same time both mentally visualize the solution to a problem and know it. It is, therefore, no contradiction to speak of seeing things in my mind’s eye. As a rule, however, we think of “seeing” and “knowing” as occurring at successive stages. (Radden, 2000, p. 99)

The fuzzy examples of *to see* considered above demonstrate the possibility for related literal and figurative members of a category to be co-present in an utterance. A framework that is based on teaching lexical polysemy as a radially structured category is incomplete without incorporating such fuzzy cases. All learners need to know is that literal and figurative members of a category can blend. Failure to draw learners’ attention to such a phenomenon may affect their full understanding of complex meanings.

**Conceptual polysemy**

Conceptual polysemy concerns examples where a single lexical item obtains slightly distinct readings in different contexts of use. Consider the example sentences in (2) below.

(2) a. AYK 851 *Look out of the window; there’s always something good to see, whether it is the early morning sunshine, the flowers in the garden or the birds in the trees.*

b. AC4 2252 *Well — we saw your last interview.*
c. HHW 881 I want to see the development of a European central bank emerging from the European monetary institute, in stage two, beyond 1996.

d. B0U 75 Would you like to see a doctor?

e. ACB 409 She’ll be pleased to see you.

Clearly, although to see in the sentences in (2) is used literally, yet, only in (2a) it means ‘to perceive physically’. In each of the other examples, the verb means something slightly different. In (2b) it means ‘to watch’, in (2c) ‘to witness’, in (2d) ‘to visit’ and in (2e) ‘to meet’. Similarly, although to see in the example sentences in (3) below is used figuratively (‘to perceive mentally’), yet, in (3a) it means ‘to understand’ and in (3b) ‘to think’.

(3) a. FU2 181 It was impossible to make Malm see that one might love the moor, enjoy walking, have become accustomed to the cold.

b. HH9 1071 I don’t see that going to the pictures is any worse than getting drunk.

The appreciation of such contextual differences is vital to understanding the use of the word. Learners need to be trained to construct such differences or at least to learn meaning with the idea that it is context-dependent. This involves dealing with conceptual structures as a guide to the possible meanings of a word. An approach to teaching vocabulary that limits itself to the contribution of conceptual structures to meaning is likely to focus on prototypical meanings and extensions. This may result in the underdevelopment of the skill of understanding contextual meanings on the part of learners. To avoid this, vocabulary teaching materials should move from prototypical to less-than-prototypical examples of literal and figurative uses of a word. The availability of language corpora would certainly facilitate the preparation of such materials.

**Inter-lexical polysemy**

Inter-lexical polysemy concerns non-prototypical polysemy, or semantic relatedness across two or more lexical forms. That is, it relates to distinct lexical items that appear to have broadly similar readings. The fact that related lexical items have similar meanings implies that they have semantic differences. Take as an example the verbs to see and to look. Although both verbs mean ‘to perceive physically’ and ‘to perceive mentally’, yet, they have different readings in the sense that to see encodes a casual event whereas to look encodes an intentional one, as demonstrated by the sentences in (4) below.

(4) a. ADK 295 I looked down and saw a giant freshwater prawn almost a foot long.

b. B0U 1752 Now as I looked at the tree I saw that the great things had been there all the time but I had mistaken them for the background.

An adequate teaching of the polysemy of such semantically related verbs requires focusing on their similarities and differences. For example, should this example of inter-lexical polysemy be the focus in a CL-inspired class, teaching the polysemy of to see and to look in terms of a conceptual metaphor connecting physical perception and mental perception (i.e. KNOWING IS SEEING) will be inadequate as it will not cover the different readings the verbs have. To bridge this gap, the question of conceptual structure integration needs to be incorporated into the teaching of the items. That is, learners need to be shown that the different readings of to see and to look arise from the fact that KNOWING IS SEEING integrates with the causal-action construction in the case of to see. In the case of to look, however, it integrates with the intentional-action construction. Incorporating conceptual structure integration into the teaching
of inter-lexical polysemy can be very effective as it can show learners the semantic differences between related lexical items in a meaningful way. In fact, conceptual structure integration has always received attention in CL, albeit not in relation to the differences between semantically related words. CMT, for instance, showed that more than one conceptual structure can underlie the use of a concept. For example, the LIFE AS A JOURNEY metaphor is not dealt with as the only structure underlying such expressions about LIFE as We have a long way to go and She took the first step in the direction of her career goals. Rather, the expressions are shown to be the outcome of the integration of the above metaphor, whereby the concept of LIFE is understood in terms of the concept of JOURNEY with the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schema (see, e.g.: Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987). The CL-inspired approach has completely neglected the question of conceptual structure integration despite its importance to the study of meaning.

This section examined the different types of polysemy, highlighting the different roles played by conceptual and linguistic structures in shaping word meaning. The purpose was to demonstrate that meaning is too complex and variable to be taught through exposing learners to the conceptual link between basic literal and figurative members of a category.

**Conclusion**

This paper reviewed the CL-inspired approach to teaching the EFL/EIL vocabulary. In the light of the above discussion, it can be said that this approach has taken a very simplistic view on meaning, neglecting important findings and advances in Cognitive Semantics related to the protean and complex nature of meaning. The study engaged Evans’s protean approach to meaning and some related views on meaning as a continuum (for more complex views on the complexity of figurative meaning, see, for example, Ruiz de Mendoza and Galera’s (2012) model of metaphoric and metonymic complexes and Barnden’s (2010) view on meaning as a non-linear continuum). The examples examined led to the conclusion that the CL-inspired approach is similar to its predecessors in that it focuses on meanings that can be considered to be basic on the ground that they are extensions motivated by basic conceptual structures. Such a strategy might be useful for beginners. However, intermediate and advanced learners must be trained to figure out how contextual meanings are different from basic or conventional meanings (be they literal or figurative). In fact, Boers (1999) stressed the point that the cognitive linguistic technique needs to be used as a complementary approach to teaching vocabulary, and not as the sole approach. This study draws attention to the need to complement this approach by equipping learners with constructivist strategies that will enable them to appreciate the contextual variability and complexity of meaning. Training learners to analyse the conceptual and contextual components of word meaning may provide learners with a better chance to reach native-like mastery of L2 vocabulary. This, however, requires exposing learners to a representative sample of the use of targeted lexical items. Language corpora can be very useful in this regard.

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Dr. Ghsoon Reda has a PhD in Linguistics from Leicester University (UK). Her research interests include: English Language Teaching, Cognitive Semantics and Syntax–Semantics interface on which she published in academic journals, including the prestigious ELT Journal and the Journal of Cognitive Science.
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