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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