



## FOUNDATION THEORIES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the pivotal role of the linguistic sign in bridging language and cognition, emphasizing its function as a mechanism for activating conceptual structures within the human mind. Grounded in the principles of cognitive linguistics, the study examines how meanings encoded in linguistic signs serve as access points to individual and collective conceptual frameworks across diverse cultural and historical contexts. Employing methodological tools such as metaphor analysis, frame semantics, and mental space theory, cognitive linguistics reveals the dynamic organization of concepts and their semantic domains. Central to this approach is the recognition of human cognition as fundamentally nonverbal and mediated by a universal semiotic code, with concepts functioning as core cognitive units. The paper highlights the interdisciplinary nature of cognitive linguistics, underscoring its contributions to understanding the interrelations between language, thought, and culture, and its implications for fields such as artificial intelligence, anthropology, and language education.*

**Keywords:** *linguistic sign, cognitive linguistics, conceptual framework, metaphor and metonymy, frame semantics, mental spaces, semantic domain.*

Cognitive linguistics (derived from the Latin *cognito*, meaning "knowledge") emerged from cognitive science—the field that examines how humans acquire, gather, and utilize information. Cognitive linguistics emerged after a two-decade quest to find a solution to the crisis in worldwide linguistics. Although linguists had earlier focused mainly on language as a product of linguistic activity, it has now become essential to examine the language "within us," the language held in the human brain that facilitates acquiring, processing, and storing information. Cognitive linguistics, as a unique area within Russian linguistics, appeared in the 1980s, shaped by the cognitive theories of American scholars George Lakoff, Charles Fillmore, Ronald Wayne Langacker, and Wallace Chafe. The subsequent phase in the evolution of the connection between language and thought was psycholinguistics, which examined the mechanisms of speech creation and understanding, the acquisition of language as a system of symbols retained in the human brain, and the interplay between



the language system and its application and operation (American psycholinguists Charles Osgood, Thomas Sebeok, and Joseph Greenberg, along with Russian linguists Alexei Alexeevich Leontiev, Ilya Naumovich Gorelov, Alexandra Alexandrovna Zalevskaya, and Yuri Nikolaevich Karaulov).

Cognitive linguistics focuses on language in use. Its focus is on the features of acquiring and processing information through linguistic symbols. Numerous researchers contend that a particular cognitive approach is nonexistent. Cognitive scientists use the method of linguistic experimentation, common in traditional linguistics, the method of component analysis developed by generative linguistics, and turn to methods developed in psychology (for example, the method of association experiments). Cognitive linguistics returns to a crucial problem: the relationship between language and thought. This problem was addressed by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Alexander Afanasyevich Potebnya, and Ivan Alexandrovich Baudouin de Courtenay. But in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, this problem was revived. Cognitive linguistics addresses the relationship between language and thought using the latest advances in comparative linguistics, structuralism, psychology, logic, and other disciplines. Cognitive linguistics studies language as a cognitive mechanism that plays a role in encoding and transforming information.

Linguistic cognitive research is based on the assumption that :

- 1) consciousness structures and language structures mutually influence each other;
- 2) the meaning structure of a linguistic sign reflects the structure of knowledge representation;
- 3) every linguistic sign can clarify extensive layers of knowledge.

The linguistic sign constitutes a fundamental instrument for investigating the complex relationship between speech and cognitive processes. It functions as a pivotal mechanism—often metaphorically described as a “golden key”—that unlocks deeper layers of conceptual comprehension. Analogous to a switch, the linguistic sign activates specific concepts within human consciousness, fully engaging them and initiating their integration into the cognitive process. A central tenet of cognitive methodology posits that through the analysis of the meanings embedded in linguistic signs, one can access the conceptual frameworks of individuals and groups, thereby revealing what was significant or marginalized across different historical and cultural contexts. Building upon this theoretical foundation, cognitive linguistics has developed methodological approaches that facilitate the identification of distinctive patterns in national and group cognition, as well as the diverse spectrum of individual and authorial conceptualizations.



Human cognition operates primarily in a nonverbal mode, mediated through a universal semiotic system or “subject code.” This code underlies the representation and comprehension of ideas, serving as a foundational structure for shared cognitive processes. Within this framework, the concept emerges as a universal cognitive unit and a key element of human awareness.

Cognitive linguistics endeavors to elucidate the semantic core of concepts, to identify their conceptual attributes, and to map the various substantive layers that constitute a concept’s semantic field. Ultimately, linguacognitive inquiry aims to reconstruct the conceptual domain specific to a given language and to characterize the distinctive cognitive patterns that shape a particular linguistic community’s worldview.

The linguistic sign serves as a pivotal tool in unraveling the intricate interplay between language and cognition, providing critical insight into the mechanisms underlying speech and thought processes. Often conceptualized metaphorically as a “golden key,” the linguistic sign grants access to the depths of conceptual structures that govern human understanding. Functionally analogous to a cognitive switch, it activates specific mental representations or concepts within the mind, facilitating their full engagement in the cognitive process. This activation is not merely associative but constitutes a dynamic integration of linguistic form and conceptual content, reflecting the intricate relationship between language and thought.

At the core of cognitive linguistic methodology lies the principle that meanings encoded in linguistic signs serve as windows into the conceptual frameworks of individuals and collectives. Through detailed semantic and pragmatic analysis, researchers can trace how particular meanings reflect the values, priorities, and cognitive schemas of different cultural or historical groups. This enables a diachronic and cross-cultural comparison of conceptual salience, revealing phenomena such as cultural highlighting or omission—what a group chooses to emphasize or disregard in their linguistic system—thereby offering profound insights into the collective mindset and worldview.

Cognitive linguistics builds on this foundation by developing robust methodologies that allow for the systematic examination of both collective and individual cognitive models. These approaches include the analysis of metaphor and metonymy as cognitive mechanisms, the study of frame semantics, and the construction of mental spaces—all of which contribute to understanding how meaning is structured in the mind and reflected in language use. Such methods enable scholars to discern national or group-specific patterns of thought alongside the idiosyncratic conceptual frameworks of individual language users or authors.



From a cognitive perspective, human thought is fundamentally nonverbal and operates via an underlying universal semiotic or “subject code.” This cognitive code, composed of fundamental conceptual primitives and schematic structures, underlies how humans represent, process, and communicate ideas regardless of linguistic or cultural background. Within this system, the concept functions as a core cognitive unit—a building block of human awareness and reasoning, which integrates perceptual, experiential, and cultural information into coherent mental representations. Cognitive linguistics dedicates significant effort to elucidating the internal structure of concepts by uncovering their semantic cores, identifying prototypical features, and delineating the various substantive and contextual layers that comprise a concept’s semantic domain. This multidimensional analysis reveals how concepts are not static but dynamically organized within a network of relationships, including hierarchical structures and cognitive frames. Moreover, the study of semantic domains allows researchers to chart the boundaries and interactions between related concepts, deepening our understanding of linguistic categorization and meaning construction.

Ultimately, linguacognitive research aims to reconstruct the conceptual domain characteristic of a given language community, thereby offering a detailed map of its cognitive landscape. Such reconstructions illuminate the distinctive cognitive tendencies and cultural patterns that shape a community’s worldview, providing valuable insights into how language encodes human experience. This endeavor underscores the interdisciplinary nature of cognitive linguistics, bridging linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and artificial intelligence to explore the profound interconnections between language, thought, and culture.

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