COGNITIVE-LINGUISTIC RESEARCH AT THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IN NIŠ: THEORETICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND APPLIED ASPECTS

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Vladan Pavlović, Marta Veličković

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, English Department, Niš, Serbia

Abstract. *The paper presents an overview of some of the most important research conducted by two members of the Department of English in Niš in the field of cognitive linguistics. It focuses on the variety of theoretical approaches and theoretical concepts relied on in the research, the various qualitative and quantitative methods used (including state-of-the-art strict statistical procedures), and possible applications of the results of such research in the areas of ELT and the study of language-culture interrelation. It also points to how some of those results have been applied in practical and theoretical linguistic courses at the English department in Niš. The paper is complementary to that of Figar et al. (this volume) in terms of focus on the research done in cognitive linguistics at the department.*

Key words: *ELT, cognitive grammar, applied cognitive linguistics, quantitative corpus linguistics, language-culture interrelation*

1. INTRODUCTION

From a theoretical point of view, the shift from the generative to the cognitive paradigm opened up a flurry of opportunities for more comprehensive studies of language. Free from the constraints of focusing solely on form, linguists and teachers alike were now able to consider the semantic component of meaning intertwined with the component of form. Researchers were given new tools to study the meaning of multi-word expressions (including idioms), metaphor, and also a more 'neglected' part of language: grammatical words and structures which had previously been considered to have 'no meaning at all'. In terms of ELT and EFL, foreign language learners were given an alternative to memorizing 'rules' of language use whereby the *how* of their use was unaccompanied by the *why*.

Answering this particular question led to the increasing prominence of certain concepts, approaches, topics, and methods which gained prevalence in the existing research. For example, some of the theoretical concepts of note included metaphor, semantic frames, prototype theory, mental space theory, figure/ground alignment (profiling), prominence, the principle of non-synonymy, image schemas, constructions as symbolic units, and the grammar-lexicon interface. When it comes to theoretical approaches, they included construction grammar, the recontextualizing approach to language (as opposed to generative and structuralist decontextualizing), as well as a cognitive-grammar based approach, among others. The topics that began to garner more attention included (but were not limited to) ELT in general, research in ELT addressing specific issues (such as the aforementioned study of grammatical words), syntactic constructions, and intralingual and interlingual lectal variability. The research methods of choice were questionnaires (including those with visual cues, for example those pertaining to figure/ground alignment), as well as (rigorous) statistical procedures applied to quantitative data from massive e-corpora and their qualitative evaluation in the CL framework.

With great pleasure we can note that the trends that marked these developments on a global level were closely followed by the researchers and instructors working at the Department of English. The research of two faculty members from this Department outlined in the paper is complementary to the work presented by Figar et al. also found in this volume.

2. RESEARCH PAPERS IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS – OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is structured as follows: first it presents an overview of how cognitive linguistics has been or could possibly be incorporated into ELT at departments of English; then it focuses on article instruction in the cognitive-linguistic framework in particular; it ends with cognitively-informed quantitative corpus linguistics.

2.1. Cognitive linguistics and ELT at English departments – General considerations

Pavlović (2010) examines some of the ways the various theoretical insights of cognitive linguistics can practically be applied to language teaching at English departments. Thereby, the focus is primarily on the syntactic level, especially because the possible applications of the given linguistic framework to this level do not seem to have attracted researchers' interest to the degree the issue deserves. The ways in which such theoretical insights can be applied to the lexical level are also addressed.

When it comes to the application of cognitive linguistic insights at the former level, the paper makes several important points.

First, regarding periphrastic constructions, the paper points to the importance of directing EFL students' attention to the *Principle of no synonymy*, namely the standpoint that if two or more constructions are syntactically different (no matter how much related in meaning they may be), then they must also be semantically and/or pragmatically different. This is important as it goes against the classic generative view, also taught at English departments, of paraphrastic sentences as merely being interchangeable versions of one another. For example, the difference in meaning and use of the following sentences: *We found the children undernourished* and *We found the children to be undernourished*, *He declared the meeting official* and *He declared the meeting to be official* and the like, can be said to be based on the CLOSENESS IS STRENGTH OF EFFECT metaphor (Lakoff

and Johnson 1980, 130–131). In other words, depending on whether the direct object is closer to the adjective that refers to it (as is the case in the first sentence in each of the pairs) or further apart from it (as is the case in the second sentence in each of the pairs, where the two are separated by *to be*), the meaning changes. The first sentence in the first pair can thus be claimed to involve a more *direct* relationship between the subject and object referents and to mean something along these lines: *we encountered the children in that condition.* Conversely, the second sentence in the first pair implies a more *indirect* relationship between the subject and object referents and to be paraphrasable like this: *we carried out an examination, and that examination revealed the given children's condition*. The second pair of sentences can be approached in a similar way.

The same logic can be applied to the ditransitive (*She gave me her new book*, *I offered him a drink*) and the prepositional dative constructions (*We will definitely pass the queries to the authorities*, *Novartis supplied the drug to 5,000 additional patients under the compassionate-use provision*). Namely, the former one, where the predicator and the indirect object are closer together, mostly refers to literal or metaphorical transfer situations where the agent and the recipient are in close proximity to each other, as the first pair of examples shows. On the other hand, the latter version, in which the predicator and the indirect object are further apart, refers to transfer situations where the agent must overcome some distance or exert some effort – literal or metaphorical, in order to effect the transfer, as indicated by the second pair of examples.

Secondly, cognitive linguistics always seeks to find *motivation* for why it should be possible or natural for a particular form-meaning correspondence (i.e. a construction) to exist in a language. For example, there are several reasons for the existence of the so-called "deprofiled object construction" (Goldberg 2005, 28–32), namely the one in which no object is explicitly expressed: *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!* This is the case when such an object, which is recoverable from context, does not have a prominent discourse position or when that position is occupied by a particular action. A particular action, in turn, can gain a prominent discourse position through its repetitiveness (as in the first example), through contrastive focusing (as in the second example), through its being generic (as in the third example), or when it expresses a strong affective stance, as is the case in the fourth example, as well as under other similar conditions. This combination of discourse requirements and syntactic consideration, together with other factors such as grammaticalization principles and general categorization principles, can often provide viable explanations for the existence of various constructions.

Thirdly, some cognitive approaches, such as construction grammar, argue that sentence argument structure need not always be determined by the main verb but sometimes by the syntactic construction itself, and that all syntactic constructions are meaningful. This explains how a typical intransitive verb, such as *sleep*, can integrate into the so-called *time-away* construction, as in the following example: *He's slept the afternoon away*, in which it is used transitively. Namely, it can be argued that it is the given construction, rather than the verb *sleep*, that contributes the direct object argument, thus enabling this and similar verbs to integrate into it and express its main meaning – that of somebody frivolously doing something. In that sense, we consider it to be fruitful to discuss such points with students, and especially to have them compare this particular theoretical stance with those, for example, held by structuralism or generative grammar, as raising students' theoretical awareness of the various linguistic issues they come across in their studies, and equipping

them with the ability to discuss various theoretical models and compare those models in an informed way, can increase their linguistic competence.

Eventually, the paper also addresses possible applications of cognitive linguistics to the lexical level. It does so primarily by presenting an overview of the relevant practice reference books as well as textbooks in cognitive linguistics that contain useful practical exercises, in which various lexical items, as well as idioms and multi-word verbs, are approached in view of important cognitive linguistic concepts, such as metaphor.

In conclusion, Pavlović (2010) argues that reliance on cognitive linguistics in general can potentially serve various fruitful purposes in English language teaching at English departments. First, it can increase students' motivation for studying various language teaching materials through their organization into wholes structured on the basis of the insights of the given linguistic framework, with the added benefit that such organization can also be beneficial to retention. Secondly, it can provide a meaningful context for students' acquisition of specific construction types through discussions focusing on various syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of the use of those constructions, the various metaphoric and other relations that exist between/among them, and the various communicative functions different types of constructions are used for. Thirdly, it can provide students with possible theoretically grounded explanations of the extension of meaning in (the English) language. Eventually, it can also help ELT professionals develop a critical and creative attitude towards the already existing teaching materials and towards the possible ways of the in-class presentation and use of those materials.

2.2. Article instruction in the cognitive-linguistic framework

There was a wide held belief that articles should be studied only from within the linguistic subfields of syntax and morphology, a stance taken for most grammatical words. If we were to add to that the fact that more than one of the existing 'traditional' accounts for article use could be referred to at the same time to explain the suppliance of a particular article, it is clear that the network of meaning being woven was one that exceeded, what was over time realized to be, the limited scope of a purely formal approach to language study. In that sense, in an attempt to combine the global shift in the theoretical approach to understanding language use into the field of all that was cognitive, and the need for instructions that would not only include some of the aforementioned concepts related to cognitive grammar into the methodological approach to ELT, but which would also be suited to the particular set of needs of Serbian L1 learners, the research of Veličković (2018, 2019) focused primarily on article instruction. These reasons echo the shortcomings of the previous, form-oriented era: the one-form and one-meaning correspondence, a feature not characteristic of lexical, or of grammatical words; the fact that a purely formal linguistics framework cannot account for all types of language use; and that context, among other things, needed to be taken into consideration.

Veličković (2018) attempted to illustrate the differences between the formal and the more cognitive approach by analyzing the anaphoric definite vs associative definite context. The former, at first glance, is more or less the standard, one of the most frequently used explanations of definite article suppliance which has even been documented to be the primary explanation in the Serbian linguistic environment (Veličković, 2021). It is a very formal context, one that guides ELLs to take into consideration repetition of the noun in question to the greatest extent. The 'rule' is that the definite article is used to introduce an NP, and it does so once the same NP has previously been introduced by the indefinite article in a certain body of text. That would

account for the *how*, and not at all for the *why* of it. The latter, on the other hand, makes ample use of the associative power of language, and is linked to the concept of semantic frames inter alia. It tells a different story: you need not simply look for repetition of the same form but look for associated elements as well.

Focusing on association allows us to not only include the concept of semantic frames in any instruction aimed at L2 article suppliance, but it also works in combination with a shift in focus/attention and discourse prominence to help convey the intended meaning more fully. Additionally, merely repeating the same N or NP does little for creating new mental spaces, a theoretical concept that helps us to understand speaker intent and contextualized meaning, akin to that of a discourse space. In order for referential relations to be established, mental contact needs to be established with the referent in question, a conclusion also echoed in the work of Langacker (1991) and a whole decade later by Epstein (2001). The mental contact in question provides the referent with special status within a particular space.

The data elicitation method in this research were think-aloud protocols (Bowles 2010). They were selected in an attempt to go beyond mere language production, as many of the processes of language learning are not readily observable. The respondents were asked to directly verbally recall their decision-making process regarding article suppliance, in an effort to obtain data on the respondents' cognitive processes underlying the performance of the task.[1] The respondents were recorded over a period of a few weeks completing a fill-in-the-blanks exercise. The results indicated that they did not perform better in anaphoric definite contexts than they did in associative definite contexts, which led the author to believe that this is a promising field for further study. Even in anaphoric definite contexts, the respondents resorted to association to explain their process, by linking referents through of-prepositional phrases to other referents either in the broader or immediate context: "the battery of my car, not any car" (respondent A09). The respondents also showed instances of relying on (discourse) prominence to account for definite article use as in "but it's not any money, but the money you found on the street" (respondent B06). The author also concluded that the elements needed to account for L2 article suppliance, or the definite article in particular, such as shifts in point of view as well as context, were understood by the respondents and could be incorporated into the EFL classroom by means of linguistically-informed instruction.

It seemed like a practical solution to consider whether Serbian L1 learners of English knew more about article use other than its use in the anaphoric context in order to be able to set the stage for introducing alternative, cognitive grammar-based means of instruction. The associative context relies on both the speaker and listener being able to, at the same time, have access to implicit or explicit knowledge of the world around them. It is this knowledge that by far exceeds any formal characteristics of phrases and clauses and enables the establishment of referential relations. It is even more suited to instruction because the associative context is mentioned in several volumes that this particular group of learners has recourse to. However, it is very rarely used in practice, and the opportunity presented itself for introducing, implementing, and verifying the potential that certain cognitive grammar-related concepts could have in practice, i.e. to take the first tentative steps towards including applied cognitive linguistics and the Department of English. The

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[1] Think aloud protocols have a rich history of use in both SLA and non-SLA fields (including psychology) and are used to indicate what participants do (not) notice.

suitability of the associative context, to reiterate, lies in particular in its application as a possible means of introducing semantic frames, prototype theory, mental space theory inter alia into the EFL classroom.

Veličković (2019) also attempted to introduce figure/ground alignment into article instruction as part of EFL teaching at the tertiary level. It is interesting to note that prominence, as a related concept, dates back from the mid-twentieth century and was later, implicitly, molded into the concept of P-sets which relied on previous discourse, the immediate or physical context as well as on entities evoked through association. Thus, the foundations were laid for implementing figure/ground alignment or profiling (Langacker 1991).

Veličković (2019) decided on visual representations of contextualized situations wherein the figure would visibly be separated from the ground. This kind of visual representation was accompanied by textual information expounding upon it, or explaining it. Figure/ground alignment was used to present the content of short sentences containing definite noun phrases, which provided a suitable context within which to select the appropriate referent. This type of visual representation also required that the ELLs be made explicitly aware of the importance of determining a reference point, which is key to the process of grounding (identifying and recognizing, explicitly when it comes to language instruction, the perspective from which we view a particular scene). Ultimately the aim was to determine whether the instruction process whereby Serbian L1 learners are taught about article suppliance could in this way be facilitated.

To elicit data, Veličković resorted to using two questionnaires. One was meant to provide a benchmark for article suppliance in the studied population of Serbian L1 English L2 learners and consisted of a set of fill-in-the-blank exercises which required the use of the definite, indefinite or zero article. The examples included in the questionnaire were designed by the author herself and were based on the existing rules of article suppliance that could be found in the referent grammar books used by this particular population. Since the existing framework for teaching article suppliance relies heavily on the type of noun used to introduce the referent ([±count] inter alia), each rule for article suppliance was illustrated by at least three examples each of which included a countable singular, countable plural, or uncountable noun from the same or related semantic field (such as *shelf, chairs* and *furniture*). The second questionnaire was designed by the author herself and included the aforementioned visual representations of figure/ground alignments. It consisted of a set of illustrations prepared in the style of comic book illustrations. They consisted of five sets of illustrations, each of which when viewed together made up a brief narrative, and four individual illustrations depicting a particular scene. In the former, the figure/ground alignment was found in the final illustration, and was used to point out the referent that was being sought out. The desired effect was achieved through shading, in an attempt to use darker colors and larger size to attract and focus attention on a specific element/referent and achieve visual prominence that would be reflected in discourse prominence. The illustrations which included an element which in the visual representation was prominent both in terms of color and size were accompanied by sentences which described the particular illustration, and which needed to be translated from Serbian into English. The task was organized in such a way that the referent in question was always supposed to be presented by a definite noun phrase, in an attempt to establish a connection between the aforementioned visual prominence and discourse prominence. The research results were promising in that the two sub-groups of participants that took part in the research, of higher and lower English language proficiency, scored equally well on the

translation task that was accompanied by the visual presentation of figure/ground alignment, but showed marked differences on the fill-in-the-blank test.

2.3. Cognitively-informed quantitative corpus linguistics

The papers Pavlović (2019) and (2020) are in line with: 1) the recent quantitative turn in cognitive linguistics, 2) the use of (massive) electronic corpora (as opposed to reliance on introspection, as it is dominantly the case in generative grammar), 3) the insistence of cognitive-functional approaches on exploring intralingual and interlingual lectal variability, including those aspects of it that may be culturally conditioned, 4) the recontextualizing (as opposed to generative and structuralist decontextualizing) approach to language, and, naturally, 5) the reliance on some of the well-established cognitive linguistic concepts, such as image schemas, the above-mentioned metaphor and the principles related to the grammar-lexicon interface, such as the Principle of no-synonymy, which was also mentioned above.

Pavlović (2020) studies the English *too ADJ to V* construction (e.g., *He was still too shy to ask her out*). It is a scalar construction in which the presence of *too*, a booster-type degree modifier, specifies a high degree of the attribute that the *ADJ* element expresses. This is construed as having a *preventive* effect on the situation expressed by the *V*-element. More specifically, it implies a force-dynamic relation based on the image schema of blockage established between the attribute expressed by the *ADJ*-element and the event expressed by the *V*-element. That relation of prevention/blockage can be: (i) "natural", when something can physically and objectively be, for example, *too big to fit into place* or *too small to be visible*, and (ii) culturally influenced, when the choice of the *ADJ-V* pair may be seen as culturally filtered or culturally based.

The paper thus aims to explore instances of what may be considered culturally influenced co-attracted collexemes in the *ADJ* and *V* slots in the given construction in three regional varieties of English (American, British, and Indian English). It does on the basis of distinctive collexeme analysis of the *ADJ–V* pairs in the three regional varieties of English, applied to the data from the relevant sections of the GloWbE corpus (Davies 2013). Distinctive collexeme analysis is one of the subtypes of collostructional analysis – a family of quantitative (statistical) corpus-linguistic methods for analysing the relationships between words and the grammatical structures in which they occur. It helps establish the most distinctive and most strongly repelled *ADJ–V* pairs in the respective varieties. The thus obtained results are then interpreted in view of Hall's, Lewis's and Hofstede's models of inter-cultural and cross-cultural communication styles.

The paper demonstrates that the most distinctive and the most repelled *ADJ–V* pairs do differ across the three varieties and that this may reflect subtle differences in the underlying cultural conceptualizations. For example, the paper shows that the *ADJ–V* pairs in which the *ADJ* element denotes lack of good judgement or intelligence (*stupid*, *dumb*, *ignorant*, *blind*, e.g. *They were too stupid to survive without the government bailouts*) are statistically more significant in American rather than British and Indian English. This is in keeping with the characterization of the dominant communication style in the United States presented in the above models as the one that is typically informal, open, direct, blunt, tough, pushy, immodest, and tending towards the exaggerated. Such a communication style is in contrast with British one, which is typically low key, modest, and restrained, and in which, when people criticize, disagree or even praise, they do this obliquely (using understatement and coded speech). It is also in contrast with the typical communication style in India, which is

also characterized by reluctance to criticize and by modesty and respect. The paper establishes many other similar correlations between the data obtained through the given statistical procedure, on the one hand, and the models of typical patterns of communication in the three societies, on the other hand.

This is important as it confirms the value of systematic empirical investigation of language-culture interrelation. More specifically, the results show that the employment of a rigorous statistical method applied to empirical data from a massive corpus, the results of which are interpreted qualitatively, may indeed produce a number of insights into culturally conditioned intralingual cross-cultural lectal variability that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

A similar approach is taken in Pavlović (2019), some of the major differences between that paper and the previously discussed one being that the latter uses raw frequency data instead of rigorous statistics, two massive e-corpora instead of one, and four rather than three regional variants of English (the Hong Kong variety being the fourth one).

It makes several important points. First, it shows that reliance on massive e-corpora, such as the above-mentioned GloWbE corpus, as well as the COHA (Davies 2010) may help gain additional insight into synchronic and diachronic data related to the two construction variants which was not possible before with relatively limited e-corpora such as those used in cognitive(-functional) analyses of the given pair of constructions in previous research. Secondly, it provides evidence that a qualitative interpretation of the quantitative results obtained from the corpora by relying on a combination of linguistic and extralinguistic factors, such as: 1) the differences in the semantics of the two construction variants (based on combining relevant cognitive-linguistic insights, such as the above-mentioned concept of metaphor and the Principle of no synonymy), 2) the differences in the lexical semantics of the main verbs, and 3) extra-linguistic factors dealt with by the above-mentioned models of cross-cultural communication styles, may also yield fruitful results. Some of such results are as follows. Firstly, similarly to our treatment of the *V N2 (to be) ADJ* construction in Pavlović 2010, Pavlović 2019 puts forward the view that the *for* variant indicates a "weaker strength of effect" or a more "indirect" relation between the referents of those units (*We do not want for you to give him a hard time in any respect*) because of the greater physical distance between the *N1* and *N2* elements. In other words, this makes such examples more like pleas, in which there is attenuation of the "force" of a verb because of pragmatic reasons – the need to be more polite and not too obtrusive. This may also explain the absence of examples such as **I ordered for somebody to do something*, as direct ordering is incompatible with this variant. On the other hand, in the [-*for*] variant, the *N1* and the *N2* elements are closer to one another, which implies a "greater strength of effect" or a more "direct" relation between their referents, rendering such examples more like orders rather than pleas (*I want you to know what you should do when I push a given button*). And secondly, the paper shows that the latter variant is more frequent in American and British English than in Indian and Hong Kong English, with the verbs such as *expect* and *want* (rather than *ask*, for example), namely with the verbs that may be said to show directness and straightforwardness. This and similar conclusions also seem to support the generalized description of the communication styles in the four given regional varieties of English. Naturally, the question of whether such correlations are actually causal or not remains an exciting area of research. So do the issues related to lectal varieties in general and approaching those varieties in view of cognitive-linguistic insights and rigorous statistical procedures applied to the data from massive e-corpora.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The research outlined above is important for several reasons. Firstly, many of the theoretical and methodological insights presented above have been or will soon be applied in the courses the two authors give at all the three academic levels (MA, BA and PhD) at the Department of English in Niš. Secondly, that research has been published not only in a leading national scientific journal, but also in prominent international journals in the field. For example, Pavlović 2019 and Pavlović 2020 have been published in the *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* and the *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, respectively, both operating within John Benjamins Publishing Company. And thirdly, some of them, such as Pavlović 2010, have been cited multiple times by various authors at the global level (according to the data from Google Scholar). All this testifies to the fact that the theoretical research in the area, the reliance on state-of-the-art and other relevant methods, and the application of the results of such research primarily in ELT at the Department of English in Niš, are on the right track and may also have a promising future.

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KOGNITIVNO-LINGVISTIČKA ISTRAŽIVANJA NA DEPARTMANU ZA ANGLISTIKU U NIŠU – TEORIJSKI, METODOLOŠKI I PRIMENJENI ASPEKTI

U radu se daje pregled nekih od najznačajnijih istraživanja dva člana Departmana za anglistiku u Nišu u oblasti kognitivne lingvistike. Posebna pažnja poklanja se ukazivanju na raznolikost teorijskih pristupa i teorijskih koncepata na koje se autori oslanjaju u datim istraživanjima, upotrebi različitih kvalitativnih i kvantitativnih metoda u tim istraživanjima (uključujući i najnovije stroge statističke procedure), kao i mogućim oblicima primene tako dobijenih rezultata posebno u oblastima nastave engleskog kao stranog jezika i odnosu jezika i kulture. Pažnja se skreće i na načine na koje se rezultati datih istraživanja primenjuju u nastavi praktičnih i teorijskih lingvističkih predmeta na istom departmanu. Rad se može smatrati komplementarnim radu Stamenković i dr. u ovom broju ovog časopisa, u smislu da se oba rada bave pregledom istraživanja u oblasti kognitivne lingvistike na ovom departmanu.

Ključne reči: *podučavanje engleskog kao stranog jezika, kognitivna gramatika, primenjena kognitivna lingvistika, kvantitativna korpusna lingvistika, odnos jezika i kulture*