

Cognitive Linguistics as a Cognitive Science

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Practitioners of cognitive linguistics take it as a given that their discipline is part of the cognitive sciences. But while they have made some inroads into this field, for example, in the areas of figurative language and, arguably, linguistic relativity, the vast bulk of their research program is connected to other cognitive sciences by a one-way street by concepts from psychology, philosophy, neuroscience and other disciplines are imported without corresponding exports from cognitive linguistics to the rest of the field.

The reasons for this one-way transfer of ideas are too numerous and diverse to list them here or go through them in a single lecture, so I will focus, in my talk, on two basic suggestions as to how the situation may be remedied: first, cognitive linguistics must become more linguistic, i.e., it must rediscover a focus on detailed linguistic analysis. Second, cognitive linguistics must become more scientific, i.e., it must not repeat the mistakes of earlier theoretical frameworks to limit itself to prescientific, introspection-based argumentation and modeling which, while they may provide useful starting points for investigation, do not produce results that can be communicated to the other cognitive sciences.

Ironically, this means that cognitive linguistics might have to become less cognitive. First, because, while cognitive linguistic analyses will, of course, be undertaken against a theoretical background, we should be more careful than previous frameworks to base conclusions about cognition directly on language. Second, because as we become more scientific in our outlook, we will have to restrict ourselves more strictly than we currently do to theoretical constructs that can be operationalized and research hypotheses that can be falsified. This will place large parts of our current models outside of the scope of a cognitive linguistic research program.