Leonard Talmy

Toward a Cognitive Semantics, Volume I, Concept Structuring Systems

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565 pages

Reviewed by
Pavel Straňák

Leonard Talmy sums up his work in the field of semantics (which he identifies with cognitive linguistics) in the last 30 years.[1] Though it may seem redundant, he uses the attribute 'cognitive' in connection with 'semantics' to emphasize the concern for the conceptual structures as they are formed in a person's mind and also his phenomenological approach. The book Toward a Cognitive Semantics consists of two volumes. In the volume under review the idea of general concept-structuring systems in language and of their relationships to other perception systems is put forward, whereupon the analyzes of three such systems are provided. The volume is divided into four parts: Foundations of Conceptual Structuring in Language, Configurational Structure, Attention, Force and Causation.

The first part, Foundations of Conceptual Structuring in Language, consists of only one chapter: The Relation of Grammar to Cognition. It creates the foundation for the book by establishing the basic distinction of grammatical and lexical subsystems of language as representing two kinds of concepts. The nature of concepts represented by grammar and their organisation principles constitute the core of this chapter. Finally the grammar as the conceptual structuring of language system is compared to that of other cognitive systems (e.g. visual perception or reasoning).

Part 2 covers the schematic system of configurational structure. That is, the system of space and time delineation that closed-class forms can specify. This includes deictics, aspect and tense markers, number markers, and other classes, the concepts these specify and the entities they ascribe the properties to. This part concentrates on two schematic categories within the configurational system, namely Fictive Motion in Language and "Ception"[2] in Chapter 2 and How Language Structures Space in Chapter 3.[3]

Chapter 2 treats the concept of "fictive motion". This concept applies to obvious cases like "The mountain range goes from Canada to Mexico." or "The bakery is across the street from the bank." as well as more arguable ones, where the emanation path, like in "The sun is shining into the cave." is also considered fictive. The fictivity theory is also applied to metaphors and compared to Lakoff and Johnson's approach (p. 168).

Chapter 3 concentrates on the structuring of space by language. Mainly the space-related prepositions and the properties of terms like "across", "along", "behind", etc. are discussed as well as the concepts these can be applied to and relevance of various factors (such as shape, magnitude or symmetry) for choosing the expression.

Part 3, Attention, covers the schematic system of attention, specifically "The Windowing of Attention in Language", "Figure and Ground in Language", and "Structures that Relate Events" in chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

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[1]Most of the chapters are revised and augmented versions of previously published articles.

[2]'Ception' means conception and/or perception

[3]Some concepts of space and time are covered in Volume II, which, however, is not subject to this review.

Chapter 4 elaborates on what portions of an event are explicitly mentioned and in which type of event frames and how does omitting or mentioning of participants of situations influence the meaning of a sentence.

Chapter 5 introduces the concepts of Figure (F) and Ground (G) as "two fundamental cognitive functions, . . . performed by the concept that needs anchoring, . . . (and the one) that does the anchoring". The properties of F and G are examined in case they represent single objects or events relating to each other. Finally the system is compared to Fillmore's roles.

Chapter 6 elaborates on the representations of a Figure event relating to Ground event. In case of both F and G being events, they are represented by main and subordinating clause of a complex sentence. This chapter examines the kinds of relations involved and the lexical and syntactic structures used to express them.

The last part of the volume, Force and Causation, consists of two chapters. The first one, chapter 7, analyzes the concept of force as a generalization of the traditional notion of "causative": ". . . it analyzes 'causing' into finer primitives and sets it naturally within a framework that includes 'letting', 'hindering', 'helping', and still further notions not normally considered in the same context. The last chapter, The Semantics of Causation, is a treatment of linguistic causation in general. The causative situations are thoroughly analyzed to see what is a linguistic causation and what is not, and concepts like agens, purpose and intention are examined.

Talmy's view of language system and its relations to other cognitive systems is remarkably complex and detailed. In our opinion this book would be a valuable resource for anyone interested in cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics or semantics. Chapters 5 and 6 could prove interesting for anyone with interest in syntax. The introduction and the first part, Foundations of Conceptual Structuring in Language, could prove valuable also for the philosophers of language. For instance the author's view of concept[4] is rather unorthodox, but definitely worth consideration.

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[4]". . . conceptual content is understood to encompass not just ideational content but any experiential content, including affect and perception." (page 4)

@inproceedings{Talmy2000TowardAC, title={Toward a cognitive semantics, Vol. 1: Concept structuring systems.}, author={Leonard Talmy}, year={2000} }. Leonard Talmy. Published 2000. Computer Science. Equalizing and air separation tank structure for accommodating separation of air from a liquid heat carrier flowing through a cooling system for an internal combustion engine cooling space. A pair of separation chambers are provided in series connection with one another and one above the other, both having separate vents opening to an air chamber space arranged thereabove. The upper separation chamb Toward a Cognitive Semantics book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. In this two-volume set, Talmy approaches the question of how ... Start by marking "Toward a Cognitive Semantics: Volume 1: Concept Structuring Systems" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving… Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. Other editions. Enlarge cover. Toward a Cognitive Semantics. Volume h Concept Structuring Systems. Volume Ih Typology and Process in Concept Structuring. Leonard Talmy. (State University of New York at Buffalo). Cambridge, MA: The M1T Press. (Language, speech, and communication. series), 2000, volume I: viii+495 pp, volume II: viii+565 pp; hardbound 1 Volume I, con-. sisting of an introduction and eight chapters, is "concerned with the patterns in which. and the processes by which conceptual content is organized in language" (I.2). Vol-. ume II, consisting of the identical introduction and (a different) eight chapters, presents. typologies for the structure of concepts, proceeding to on-line processing of these in. culture and narrative. Talmy's viewpoint is that "the relation between a linguistic ex