ENG423A:
Current Issues in Linguistics

COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Cognitive Linguistics

In everything that the human mind does, it is in the process of making sense of the world around.

Some of these meaning making processes are mediated by language.

Cognitive Linguistics is an attempt to explore the intersection between the linguistic and conceptual systems that subserve linguistically mediated meaning making processes.

Cognitive Linguistics

According to Cognitive Linguists, Linguistic theory is the theory of linguistically mediated meaning making.

Cognitive Linguistics is not a single theory of language but a cluster of broadly compatible approaches which see language as embedded in the human cognitive capacities.

Cognitive Linguistics

Linguistic theory as a theory of **conceptual architecture underlying language**

Representational and mapping issues
- Conceptual architecture
- Linguistic architecture
- Mappings across the two

Language production and understanding embedded in the context of use

A re-contextualisation of linguistic theory

Language: a window to the mind
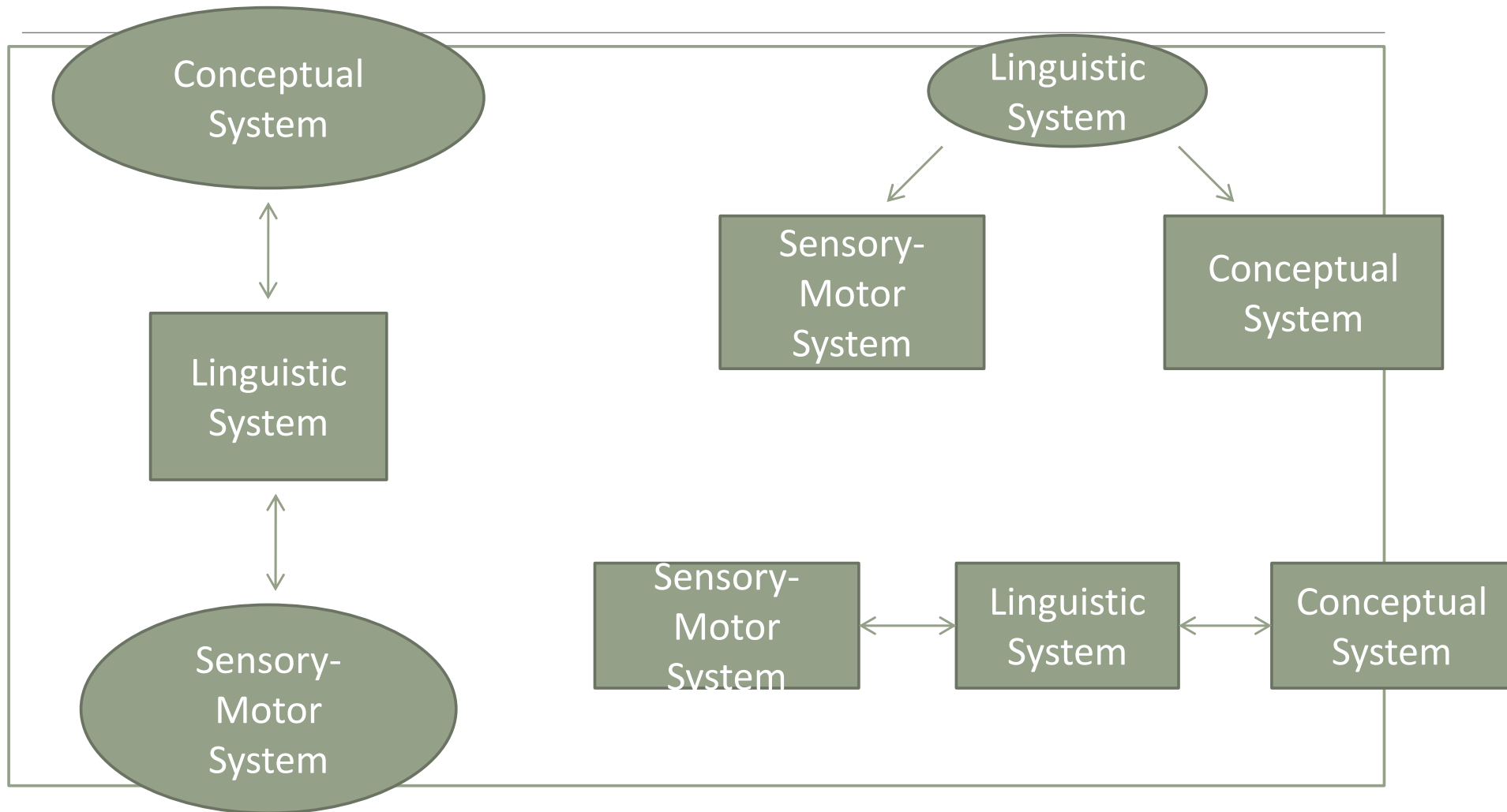
Language reflects patterns of thought.

Therefore, to study language from this perspective is to study patterns of **conceptualization.**

Language offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts.

An important way in which cognitive linguistics differs from other familiar approaches to the study of language:

Language is assumed to reflect certain fundamental properties and design features of the human mind.

Three coarse-grained characterizations of a possible grammar

The five questions revisited…

What constitutes conceptual knowledge subserving language?
- ◦ Linguistic and conceptual representations and their mappings

How does conceptual knowledge arise in the mind?
- ◦ Perceptual grounding and abstraction leading to categorization, no steady states

How is conceptual knowledge put to use?
- ◦ Usage embedded conceptual and linguistic representations and the mappings between the two
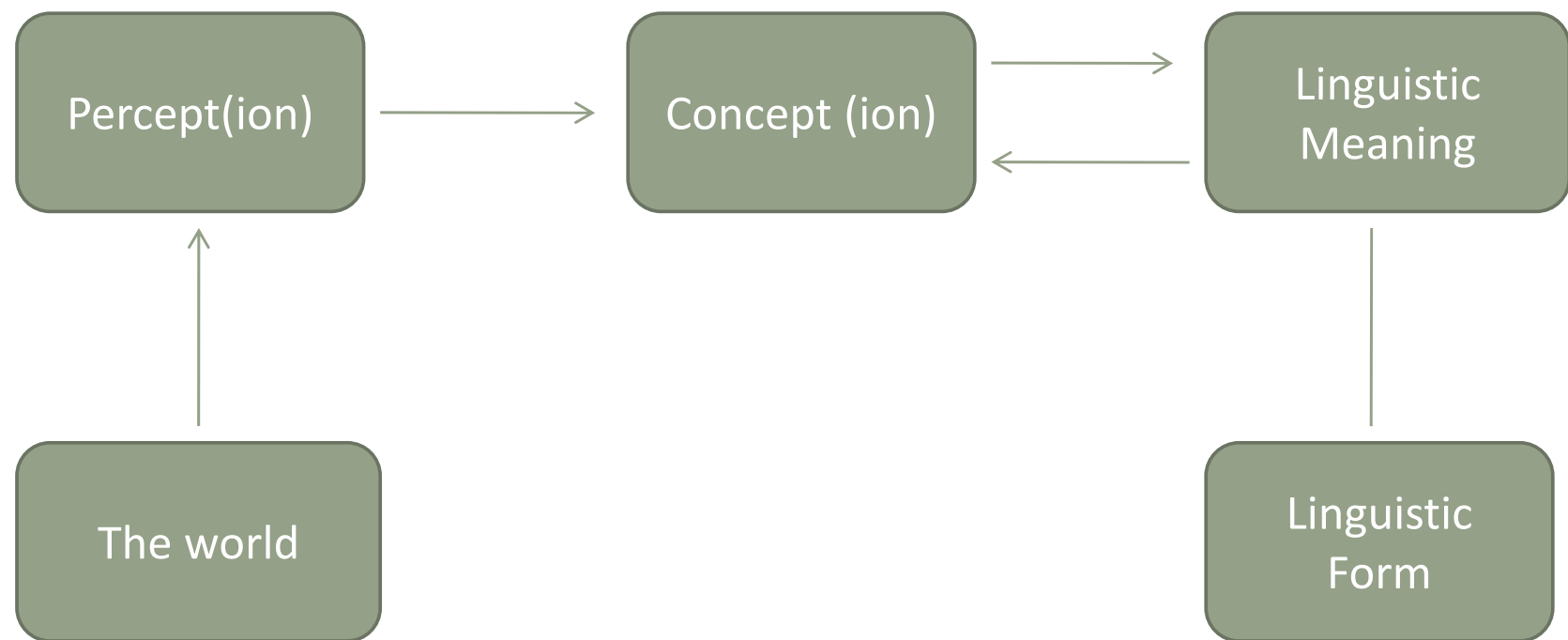
What are the neurobiological correlates of this knowledge?
- ◦ Distributed cerebral anatomy rather than localization

How did it evolve in the species?
- ◦ An evolutionary adaptation

Perceptual Grounding

Language acquisition

Cognitive Linguistics would have to develop an amodular (as against modular) theory of language acquisition with the following assumptions:

1) Language acquisition involves mechanisms and constraints that are not specific to language, and

2) If there do exist constraints on learning that are restricted to language acquisition, these will draw on general ''cognitive processing mechanisms'' in the cognitive systems other than the linguistic.

   Whether these predictions are borne out or not is a matter of empirical investigations.

CgL assumptions about language

1. Meaning is primary to syntax, and determines it: *Semanticised grammar*

2. Meaning is conceptualisation: *Cognitive semantics*

3. Semantic/cognitive structures are perceptually grounded: *Grounded semantics/cognition*

4. Semantics/cognition is embodied: *Experiential embodiment*

5. Meaning is image-schematic: *Modality-independent operations*

6. Meaning is perspectival: *construal effects and perspective*

7. Meaning shows prototype effects: *Dynamic semantics*

The assumptions

1)The primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis: if the primary function of language is categorization, of which linguistic categorization is only a subset, then meaning making must be the primary linguistic phenomenon.

2) If language is a system for the categorization of the world, there is no need to postulate a structural level of linguistic meaning that is different from the level where the mind interacts with linguistic forms.

3) Meaning is grounded in perceptual experience. Conceptualization is an abstraction based on perceptual experience and resulting in categorization.

Experientialism and embodiment

4) The experientialist position of Cognitive Linguistics vis-a-vis human knowledge emphasizes the view that the human cognitive potential is determined by our organic embodiment and by our individual and collective experiences.

Meaning is grounded in terms of choosing from a finite number of semantically autonomous source domains coming from our biological capacities – all meaning comes from things we do with our bodies. (spatial metaphor for love, fictive motion)

Universals of conceptual structure and conceptual content are to be defined in terms of experiential grounding and embodiment.

Image-schematic meanings

5) Meaning is image schematic rather than propositional.

Image-schemas are cross-modality patterns of meaning-making.

Both conceptual structure and conceptual content are abstracted in terms of pre-linguistic schemas which cut across cognitive domains.

Spatial cognition of *on*: book on the table, picture on the wall, water on the floor, fly on the roof, ring on the finger, movie on the TV etc – progressive schematisation of a spatial relation.

Constructional schemas: Linguistic expressions are construction-schematic.

E.g., What is the fly doing in my soup?

Construal and perspective

6) The perspectival nature of linguistic meaning implies that the world is not objectively reflected in language.

The categorization function of language imposes a structure on the world rather than just mirroring objective reality.

Prototypicality

7) Categorization is not by criterial features but by prototyping.

Concepts (or meanings) are regions rather than categories
  ◦ Women, fire and dangerous things

Family resemblances: Members bear similarities without having properties in common that define a category

Centrality: Some members as better exemplars than others

Membership gradience: At least some categories have degrees of membership and no clear boundaries.

Eleanor Rosch's work

Relativism as well as Universalism

Relativism as enshrined in *construal effects and perspective,* and *prototype effects*

Universalism as enshrined in *experiential embodiment* and *image-schematic meanings*

A recontextualisation

As we saw in our exploration of Generative Linguistics, *Decontextualization* appears to be a fundamental underlying characteristic of the development of grammatical theory in twentieth century.

Cognitive Linguistics stands for a *recontextualizing* tendency.

Context of utterance is of importance, and so are the cognitive processes at work in defining the epistemic landscape of a linguistic expression.

Why decontextualisation?

a. With the basic dichotomy of competence and performance, the study of language is focused on internalized knowledge of language divorced from the usage context (language *not designed for use*).

b. To examine the invariant core of language structure, linguistic analysis is delinked from the context which is likely to take the focus away from invariant core to individual variation.

 c. With the focus on formal rule systems, linguistics turns away form the cognitive context at work in meaning making in language.

Why decontextualisation?

Cognitive Linguistics rejects all three.

a) Usage-embedded language design – re-establishes the link between competence and performance.

b) The invariant core is conceptual rather than linguistic – universals are stated in terms of conceptual operations.

c) Operations are schematic rather than linguistic rule-based – schematic operations which invoke construal and perspective.

What CgL studies

1. Structural characteristics of linguistic categorization: language imposes categorisation on experience.

a)   Prototypicality

b)   Logical Polysemy

c)   Bifurcation of conceptual structure and conceptual content

d)   Lexical and constructional schemas,

e)   Embodiment and metaphorical transference

What CgL studies

2.Interface between syntax and semantics (as explored by Cognitive Grammar and Construction Grammar) – semantics is conceptualisation.

3. The experiential and pragmatic background of language-in-use – language is usage embedded.

4. Relationship between language and thought, including questions about linguistic relativism and conceptual universalism – universals are conceptual rather than linguistic (a question that could not be posed in GG).