Recontextualizing Grammar: Underlying trends in thirty years of Cognitive Linguistics

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1. Cognitive Linguistics: radial set or schematic network?

Cognitive Linguistics is a success: from the relatively marginal position that it originally occupied in the linguistic landscape, it has developed into one of the mainstream trends in current linguistics. A search on the strings “cognitive linguistics” and “cognitive grammar”, in contrast with “generative linguistics” and “generative grammar” in the LLBA bibliography, broken down over four periods of five years starting in 1988, yields the figures presented in Table 1. Although the search terms could be extended to get a more complete picture, the present figures already indicate with sufficient force that Cognitive Linguistics seems to be overtaking the generativist enterprise in terms of scholarly productivity and appeal.

This conspicuous success raises the question whether there is a common denominator in the expansion of Cognitive Linguistics? A cursory inspection would seem to suggest that the internal evolution of Cognitive Linguistics is of the radial network type (to put the matter in an appropriate terminology). A number of core ideas – like grammatical construal, prototypicality, radial networks, ICMs, conceptual integration, constructions – are pursued and developed rather independently of each other, to the extent that each of them constitutes a mini research programme of its own. But what is it that keeps these separate approaches together – if anything?

Table 1. The presence of Cognitive Linguistics and Generative Grammar in the LLBA from 1998 to 2007 (figures as of October 15, 2007)

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In Geeraerts 2006a, written as an introduction to a collection of basic readings in Cognitive Linguistics, two principles of cohesion were mentioned. On the one hand, the central concepts of Cognitive Linguistics are mutually related because they derive from a common set of underlying fundamentals: the principle that language is all about meaning, in the broadest possible sense, in combination with four specific assumptions about the nature of linguistic meaning – that meaning is flexible and dynamic, that it is encyclopedic and non-autonomous, that it is based on usage and experience, and that it is perspectival in nature. On the other hand, repeating a point originally formulated in Geeraerts (2003), it was suggested that the various strands of Cognitive Linguistics belong together because they exhibit various ways of recontextualizing the study of language. In this sense (once again applying the models of categorization developed in Cognitive Linguistics), we can not only say that the various branches of Cognitive Linguistics constitute a radial network, but also that there is a schematic commonality over and above the radial structure.

In the present paper, the recontextualizing nature of Cognitive Linguistics is further analyzed: the paper will present the different parts of the recontextualization in more detail, and it will show that the internal development of the framework and the chronological steps in the gradual elaboration of the radial set structure are guided by the recontextualization programme.

This analysis will lead to a brief consideration of a further question that arises from the success of Cognitive Linguistics: to what extent is the manifest success of Cognitive Linguistics also a threat? Under which conditions could the very wealth of the research undermine the unity of the approach? Or conversely, would the conceptual unity that we may discern if we look at the evolution of Cognitive Linguistics be sufficient to maintain its success?

As a practical introductory remark, it should be noted that the present paper is a highly synthetic one that assumes familiarity with the basic concepts of Cognitive Linguistics. The purpose is to reveal an underlying but largely unheeded pattern in the rich variety of approaches in Cognitive Linguistics, not to present these approaches as such. Discovering such a pattern, to the extent that it is successful, will be important for the decision how to further elaborate Cognitive Linguistics. But it also serves a more immediate, didactic purpose: it may help to introduce the full breadth of research in Cognitive Linguistics within a synthetic and systematic framework.
2. Decontextualization and recontextualization in 20th century linguistics

If we are interested in what drives the development of Cognitive Linguistics and keeps its various branches together, we may start by trying to determine what distinguishes Cognitive Linguistics from other approaches in modern linguistics. How does Cognitive Linguistics fit into the development of theoretical linguistics? An answer to that question requires an insight into the basic lines of evolution of modern linguistics. So, if we were to present the history of 20th century linguistics in a nutshell, what would be the main lines of its development? Would it at all be possible to synthesize a century of theoretical development into a few pages? The following pages will try to identify some of the main lines in the development of 20th century linguistics, arguing that this development is characterized by a succession of a decontextualising and a recontextualizing movement.

Obviously, there is a price to pay for the attempt to cover such a vast domain. For one thing, we will be able to focus only on the mainstream developments in the international scene of linguistics, disregarding local traditions, isolated individual achievements, avant-gardes and rearguards. For another, a historiographical programme of this type basically takes the form of a logical reconstruction: can we retrospectively find a perspective that brings order into the apparent chaos? To what extent does the development lend itself to a rational reconstruction, where the different steps in the development are interpreted as an elaboration of a basic research question? Such a rational reconstruction implies that hardly any attention can be given to the actual biographical factors and the sociological interactions. Also, the analysis presented here does not claim to be the only possible one. We will take our starting-point in the differences between the Saussurean dichotomy of langue and parole and the Chomskyan dichotomy of competence and performance, but that does not rule out the possibility that the story could be told with a different point of departure and from a different point of view.

2.1. Gaps in the system: Saussure and Chomsky

The Saussurean dichotomy between langue and parole creates an internally divided grammar, a conception of language with, so to speak, a hole in the middle. On the one hand, langue is defined as a social system, a set of collective conventions, a common code shared by a community:
Mais qu’est-ce que la langue? . . . C’est à la fois un produit social de la faculté du langage et un ensemble de conventions nécessaires, adoptées par le corps social pour permettre l’exercice de cette faculté chez les individus [But what is language? . . . It is at the same time a social product of the language faculty and a collection of necessary conventions adopted by a community to allow individuals to use that faculty] (1976: 25).

On the other hand, parole is an individual, psychological activity that consists of producing specific combinations from the elements that are present in the code:

La parole est au contraire un acte individuel de volonté et d’intelligence, dans lequel il convient de distinguer 1) les combinaisons par lesquelles le sujet parlant utilise le code de la langue en vue d’exprimer sa pensée personnelle 2) le mécanisme psycho-physique qui lui permet d’extérioriser ces combinaisons [Speech on the other hand is a deliberate and intelligent individual act, in which we can distinguish, first, the combinations by means of which the individual subject uses the code of the language to express his personal thought, and second, the psycho-physical mechanism that allows him to exteriorize those combinations] (1967: 30).

When langue and parole are defined in this way, there is a gap between both: what is the mediating factor that bridges the distance between the social and the psychological, between the community and the individual, between the system and the application of the system, between the code and the actual use of the code?

The Chomskyan distinction between competence and performance formulates the fundamental answer to this question: the missing link between the social code and the individual usage is the individual’s knowledge of the code. Performance is basically equivalent with parole, but competence interiorizes the notion of linguistic system: competence is the internal grammar of the language user, the knowledge that the language user has of the linguistic system and that he puts to use in actual performance.

Remarkably, however, Chomsky introduces a new gap into the system. Rather than the trichotomy that one might expect, he restricts his conception of language to a new dichotomy: the social aspects of language are largely ignored. In comparison with a ternary distinction distinguishing between langue, competence, and parole/performance (between social system, individual knowledge of the system, and actual use of the system), the binary distinction between competence and performance creates a new empty slot, leaving the social aspects of language largely out of sight.

Figure 1 schematically summarizes the Saussurean and the Chomskyan positions, highlighting the systematic relationship between both. The ques-
tion marks indicate those aspects of language that disappear in either of the two approaches. Relegating the social nature of language to the background, in the Chomskyan approach, correlates with a switch towards the phylogenetic universality of language. The Chomskyan emphasis on the genetic nature of natural language links up rationally with his apparent lack of interest for language as a social semiotic. Where, in particular, does the individual knowledge of the language come from? If the source of linguistic knowledge is not social, what else can it be than an innate and universal endowment? If the language is not learned through acculturation in a linguistic community (given that a language is not primarily a social code), what other source could there be for linguistic knowledge except genetics?

2.2. The decontextualization of grammar

The link between the Chomskyan genetic perspective and the absence of any fundamental interest in language as a social phenomenon engenders a stepping-stone development, leading by an internal logic to an isolation of the grammar. Let us go through the argument in the form of the following chain of (deliberately succinct and somewhat simplistic) propositions.

First, if natural language is not primarily social, it has to be genetic. This is the basic proposition that was described in the previous paragraph. The relationship could of course be construed in the other direction as well. As presented above, the Chomskyan predilection for a genetic per-
spective in linguistics follows from his lack of interest for the social side of language. But in actual historical fact, Chomsky’s preference for a genetic conception of language probably grew more from his discussion with behaviorist learning theory (Skinner in particular) than from a confrontation with Saussure. Because the amazing ability of young children to acquire language cannot be explained on the basis of a stimulus-response theory – so the argument goes – an innate knowledge of language has to be assumed. But if one of the major features of language is its genetic nature, then of course the social aspects of language are epiphenomenal. Regardless of the direction in which the link is construed, however, the effects are clear.

Second, if natural language is primarily a genetic entity, semantics or the lexicon cannot be part of the core of language (or the core business of linguistics). Meanings constitute the variable, contextual, cultural aspects of language par excellence. Because social interaction, the exchange of ideas, changing conceptions of the world are primarily mediated through the meaning of linguistic expressions, it is unlikely that the genetic aspects of language will be found in the realm of meaning. Further, if the lexicon is the main repository of linguistically encoded meaning, studying the lexicon is of secondary importance. Here as before, though, it should be pointed out that the actual historical development is less straightforward than the reconstruction might suggest. The desemanticization of the grammar did not happen at once (nor was it absolute, for that matter). Triggered by the introduction of meaning in the “standard model” of generative grammar (Chomsky 1965), the “Linguistic Wars” (see Harris 1995) of the late 1960s that opposed Generative Semantics and Interpretive Semantics basically involved the demarcation of grammar with regard to semantics. The answer that Chomsky ultimately favoured implied a restrictive stance with regard to the introduction of meaning into the grammar, but this position was certainly not reached in one step; it was prepared by severe debates in the generativist community.

Third, if semantics or the lexicon cannot be part of the core of linguistics, linguistics will focus on formal rule systems. The preference for formal syntax that characterizes generative grammar follows from the fact that generative grammar links up with cognitive science as it originated in the late 1950s and the 1960s, which sees knowledge as a set of internal symbolic representations, and mental processing as internal symbol manipulation. The Chomskyan emphasis on the formal syntax fits in with the symbol manipulation paradigm that was dominant in cognitive
science. But it also follows by elimination from generative grammar’s
genetic orientation: formality is required to restrict the impact of meaning,
and studying syntax (or more generally, the rule-based aspects of lan-
guage) correlates with the diminished interest in the lexicon. It should be
added that the focus on rules is not only determined by a negative attitude
with regard to meanings, but also by a focus on the infinity of language:
language as an infinite set of sentences requires a rule system that can gen-
erate an infinity of entities. (At this point, an additional undercurrent in
the history of 20th century linguistics crops up: the relationship between
linguistics and logic. Chomsky, in fact, got the inspiration for his concep-
tion of linguistic rule systems from the architecture of logical proof theory.
This is not a line to be pursued here, though.)
Finally, if linguistics focuses on formal rule systems, the application of
the rule systems in actual usage is relatively uninteresting. If the rules
define the grammar, it is hard to see what added value could be derived
from studying the way in which the rules are actually put to use. The study
of performance, in other words, is just as secondary as research into the
lexicon.
This chain of consequences leads to a decontextualisation of the gram-
mar. It embodies a restrictive strategy that separates the autonomous
grammatical module from different forms of context. Without further
consideration of the interrelationship between the various aspects of the
decontextualising drift, the main effects can be summarized as follows.
First, through the basic Chomskyan shift from langue to competence,
linguistics is separated from the social context of language as a social
code. Second, through the focus on the genetic aspects of the language,
linguistics is separated from the cognitive context that shows up in the
semantic side of the language. Third, through the focus on formal rule
systems, linguistics is separated from the situational context of actual
language use. And fourth, these two last features tend to favour the study
of formal syntactic rules over the study of the lexicon.

2.3. Trends towards recontextualization

In terms of the subdisciplines covered by linguistics, this means that the
core of linguistics in Chomskyan terms disfavours the study of language
in its social context, any model of language in which semantics or the
lexicon is at the heart of the grammar, and the investigation of language
in actual usage. This does not mean, however, that these areas of research,
which would be considered peripheral from the generativist point of view, were totally non-existent in the heyday of generative grammar. In fact, the generativist era witnessed the birth of approaches that autonomously developed the aspects that were rejected or downplayed by generative grammar. A brief overview may suffice to establish that the period from the late 1960s to the 1980s constitutes a crucial period for the development of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and semantics: if we look at what would now be considered foundational publications for the approaches in question, we see that they are situated precisely in the period from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s. (If the main factors that were dispelled by generative grammar are meaning, the lexicon, language use, and the social context of language, then the approaches mentioned here cover three out of four factors. Lexicology, in fact, did not boom as a separate discipline in the way the other three did.)

Sociolinguistics in its present form (including the sociology of language, the ethnography of speaking, and sociohistorical linguistics, next to sociolinguistics in the narrow, Labovian sense) came into existence with works such as Labov (1972), Haugen (1966), Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968), Gumperz and Dell Hymes (1972).

Pragmatics as a separate discipline started off in the wake of Grice (1975) and Austin (1962). In seminal works such as Stalnaker (1974) or Gazdar (1979), a Gricean, logically inspired form of pragmatics saw the light, focusing on questions of presupposition, conversational implicature, and contextual interpretation. In the same period, Searle (1969) developed Austin’s approach into speech act theory. Somewhat later, a broader type of discourse linguistics and conversational analysis was introduced by Coulthard (1977), Gumperz (1982), Brown and Yule (1983), or Tannen (1984), to name just a few of the early works.

Semantics received a major impetus through the development of formal semantics, as in Montague (1974), Partee (1979), Dowty (1979). Building on the achievements of formal logic, formal semantics is a type of meaning-based grammar, but the conception of meaning that lies at the basis of formal semantics is restricted to the referential, truth-theoretical aspects of meaning. (In this sense, it is a more or less restricted form of semantics. Later developments like Cognitive Linguistics will take a less restrictive approach to meaning, as we will see.)

In short, the decontextualising, autonomist attitude of generative grammar was to some extent compensated by the development of disciplines that explore the aspects of language that are relegated to the background.
by generative grammar. The works quoted above are indicative of the
initial stages in the development of these disciplines: anyone familiar with
the history of contemporary linguistics will recognize that each of them
flourished afterwards. With the exception of formal semantics (specifically
in its association with categorial grammar), these approaches are not
models of the grammar, if we think of the grammar as the description of
the internal structure of the language. As separate disciplines (or, at best,
as separate “modules” in a modular conception of language) sociolinguis-
tics and pragmatics developed alongside grammatical theory rather than
interacting with it intensively. This suggests that the recuperation of the
contextual aspects rejected by generative grammar can be carried one
step further, if the study of context does not take the form of a set of
separate disciplines but if context features are introduced into the heart
of the grammar. This is exactly what is happening in a number of more
recent trends in linguistics.

From roughly 1980 onwards, a number of developments in linguistics
appear to link the grammar more closely to the contextual aspects that
were severed by generative theorizing. The peripheral aspects – meaning,
the lexicon, language use, the social context of language – that were being
developed largely separately and autonomously, are now being linked up
more narrowly with the grammar itself. The following overview of the
relevant tendencies will again be brief and schematic. Its main purpose is
to point out the existence of the trends, not to describe them in much
detail. This also means, for instance, that no attention will be paid to the
overlap that may exist between different tendencies.

The reintroduction of the lexicon into the grammar is probably the
most widespread of the tendencies to be mentioned here; it is, in fact,
relatively clear within generative grammar itself. This lexicalist tendency
in grammatical theory is triggered by the recognition that describing
grammatical rules appears to imply describing the lexical sets that the
rules apply to. Reversing the descriptive perspective then leads to a
description of the valency of the lexical items (i.e. the structures that an
item can appear in). The lexicalist tendency appears in various forms in
the more formal approaches to grammar: one may think of the projections
and theta-roles of generative grammar, of the central role of the lexicon in
Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan 2001), and of the lexically driven
grammar developed in the framework of Head-driven Phrase Structure
Grammar (Sag, Wasow and Bender 2003). Hudson’s Word Grammar
(1991) is a functionally oriented type of lexical grammar.
Approaches that give meaning a major, if not dominant, role in linguistics were not restricted to formal semantics. As we mentioned already, within generative grammar, the Generative Semantics movement had to give way to the supremacy of the semantically restricted Chomskyan approach. But parallel to generative grammar, a cluster of functionalist approaches to grammatical description gave pride of place to meaning. This holds true for Functional Grammar as defined by Dik (1989), for the functional-typological approaches developed by Givon (1979), and for Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (1994), to mention only the most important representatives.

Typically, these approaches take a broad view of meaning, i.e. they include pragmatics: in all forms of functional linguistics, discursive and interactional communicative functions are seen as essential features of natural language. For instance, a number of functionalist approaches try to find (potentially universal) discourse motivations for grammatical constructs. Discourse is then no longer the mere application of grammatical rules, but the grammatical rules themselves are motivated by the discourse functions that the grammar has to fulfill. The existence of passives in a given language, for instance, is explained as a topicalization mechanism: grammars contain passives because topicalizing direct objects is a useful function in discourse. Seminal publications within this approach include Givon (1979), Hopper and Thompson (1980), Hopper (1987).

The communicative aspect inherent in this family of functional approaches also means that the social aspects of language are explicitly recognized. If language is primarily seen as an instrument for communicative interaction, a social conception of language is automatically implied. Within the group of functionalist frameworks, Systemic Functional Linguistics is the one that most distinctly follows up on this social conception of language. Thinking about language in social, interactional terms suggests that the systemic descriptive and theoretical framework might be particularly suited for socially oriented types of linguistic investigation. In practice, this shows up in the many studies in Systemic Functional Linguistics that are geared towards the analysis of text and discourse from a social perspective (see e.g. Eggins 1994; Thomson 1994). Not surprisingly, the methodology of Systemic Functional Linguistics has also been embraced by Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995). At the same time, this social perspective in Systemic Functional Linguistics seems to be restricted primarily to the study of text types and register differences, without a lot of attention for language-internal variation of a lectal or sociolinguistic kind.
3. Cognitive Linguistics as a recontextualizing approach

It is not difficult to establish that the four elements of context that we mentioned earlier (meaning, the lexicon, discourse and use, and the social context) receive particular attention in Cognitive Linguistics.

Meaning – Cognitive Linguistics constitutes an outspoken attempt to give meaning a central position in the architecture of the grammar. The basic vocabulary of the cognitive framework involves semantics: the notion of prototype, schematic network, conceptual metaphor, metonymy, conceptual integration, idealized cognitive models, frames, and all sorts of construal mechanisms are semantic notions. Crucially, these semantic concepts involve a contextualized view of semantics. There are several ways of making that clear.

To begin with, if we compare Cognitive Linguistics with formal semantics, it is obvious that the conception of meaning that lies at the basis of the cognitive approach is not restricted to a referential, truth-functional type of meaning. Linguistic structures are thought to express conceptualizations, i.e. conceptualization is central for linguistic structure – and conceptualization goes further than mere reference. It involves imagery in the broadest sense of the word: ways of making sense, of imposing meaning.

Further, if we come down from this very general level and look more closely into the semantic concepts in question, we can see that they systematically refer to various contextualized forms of meaning. Cognitive Linguistics embodies a fully contextualized conception of meaning in that its central semantic concepts describe different ways in which the conceptualizations that are expressed in the language have an experiential basis: the type of relevant context is different for various central concepts.

Prototypicality effects and the various aspects of categorial polysemy, including conceptual mechanisms like metonymy and metaphor, derive from the fact that new knowledge is constituted against the background of existing cognitive and linguistic categories: existing categories provide a context for the development of new nuances and extended meanings.

Frames in the Fillmorean sense, Idealized Cognitive Models, and mental spaces in the sense of conceptual integration theory (a.k.a. blending) represent the idea that linguistically relevant knowledge is structured knowledge of the world: language has to be seen in the context of encyclopedic cognition, and not as an autonomous realm of the mind.

Mechanisms of grammatical construal like figure/ground perspectivization implement the idea that linguistic meaning has to be studied in corre-
lation with general cognitive mechanisms, like the gestalt features of knowledge in the case of figure/ground alignment.

The neural theory of language developed by Lakoff shows that the embodied nature of language is not only considered in a psychological sense (focusing on individual experience in a phenomenological sense), but also in the most literal sense possible: the neural embodiment of the mind in the brain constitutes the material context of natural language semantics.

**Lexicon** – From very early on, treating grammatical categories according to the model provided by the lexicon was a natural thing to do in Cognitive Linguistics: if meaning description is the focus of Cognitive Linguistics, and if the models for the description of meaning were primarily developed in the realm of lexical semantics, it is no surprise to find that notions of prototypicality and polysemy were applied to grammatical categories. But it is only with the rise of Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001; Langacker 2005) that the lexicalization of the grammar becomes outspoken, because it is only at that point that the lexicon begins to play a role on the form side of the grammatical description.

There are two aspects to be mentioned. First, the concept of a construction introduces lexical material into the notion of a grammatical entity. Constructions of the “let alone” type (Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor 1988) constitute combinations of specific words and abstract patterns. Second, while not all constructions need be of this mixed type (e.g. the ditransitive construction does not include specific lexical materials), there is no a priori dividing line between the lexically specific and the abstract patterns. Between fully lexicalized formal units (words and idioms) and patterns that can only be described in terms of abstract grammatical categories (like traditional immediate constituent analyses), there are intermediate entities at different levels of abstraction. In this sense, lexicon and grammar are integrated, as different levels of abstraction in an inventory of constructional patterns.

**Language use and discourse** – The most immediate type of discourse-related investigation in Cognitive Linguistics is the study of all kinds of pragmatic and discursive phenomena, like discourse particles and pragmatic markers (Fischer 2000), information structure (Sanders and Spooren 2007), grounding (Brisard 2002), Current Discourse Space (Langacker 2001), etc. – the references are indicative only. A recent development along these lines is the investigation of blending phenomena as on-line meaning construction, as in Coulson (2006).

However, there is a more fundamental link between Cognitive Linguistics and the study of performance: more and more, Cognitive Linguistics
conceives of itself as a usage-based approach to language. According to a number of programmatic accounts of usage-based linguistics (Bybee and Hopper 2001; Kemmer and Barlow 2000; Langacker 1999; Tomasello 2000; Verhagen and Van de Weijer 2003), the essential idea of a usage-based linguistics is the dialectic nature of the relation between language use and the language system. The grammar does not only constitute a knowledge repository to be employed in language use, but it is also itself the product of language use. The former perspective considers usage events as specific, actual instantiations of the language system. According to this view, one can gain insight into the language system by analyzing the usage events that instantiate it. This is a strong motivation for empirical research: the usage data constitute the empirical foundation from which general patterns can be abstracted. The latter perspective considers usage events as the empirical source of the system. From this point of view, usage events define and continuously redefine the language system in a dynamic way. As a result, every usage event may slightly redefine a person’s internal language system.

The consequences of such a position are both thematic and methodological. Thematically speaking, a usage-based approach fosters interest in specific topics and fields of investigation. For instance, it follows from the dialectic relationship between structure and use that the analysis of linguistic change (Bybee 2007) is a natural domain of application for any usage-based approach. Similarly, literary analysis from a cognitive point of view (Freeman 2007; Brône and Vandaele 2009) ensues naturally from an interest in language use: if the analysis of discourse is a legitimate (and, in fact, important) goal for Cognitive Linguistics, cognitive poetics is likely to emerge as the study of the very specific type of discourse represented by literary texts. This holds more generally for cognitive stylistics in its various forms (Semino and Culpeper 2002).

Further, interesting perspectives for language acquisition research open up: the usage-based approach holds the promise of answering the acquisition problem that looms large in the Chomskyan delimitation of linguistics. In the work done by Tomasello and his group (2003), an alternative is presented for the Chomskyan genetic argument. These researchers develop a model of language acquisition in which each successive stage is (co)determined by the actual knowledge and use of the child at a given stage, i.e. language acquisition is described as a series of step by step usage-based extensions of the child’s grammar. The grammar, so to speak, emerges from the child’s interactive performance.

At the same time, there are methodological consequences: you cannot
have a usage-based linguistics unless you study actual usage – as it appears in an online and elicited form in experimental settings or as it appears in its most natural form in corpora in the shape of spontaneous, non-elicited language data. We can indeed see that the interest in corpus-based and experimental studies is growing, but it would be an exaggeration to say that it has become the standard approach in Cognitive Linguistics (cf. Geeraerts 2006a; Tummers, Heylen and Geeraerts 2005).

Social context – There are four, more or less hierarchically ordered levels at which Cognitive Linguistics pays explicit attention to the social nature of language. The first level is that of language as such: the definition and the basic architecture of language are recognized as involving not just cognition, but socially and culturally situated cognition. The type of work produced from this perspective emphasizes and analyzes the way in which the emergence of language as such and the presence of specific features in a language can only be adequately conceived of if one takes into account the socially interactive nature of linguistic communication. Examples of this strand of research include Sinha (2000, 2007) on language as an epigenetic system, Zlatev (2005) on situated embodiment, Itkonen (2003) on the social nature of the linguistic system, Verhagen (2005) on the central role of intersubjectivity in language, and Harder (2003) on the socio-functional background of language.

Taking one step towards a more specific approach, the next level is that of variation among languages and cultures. This is the oldest form of a social perspective in Cognitive Linguistics: the notion of cultural model played a significant role in the emergence of the new framework. However, a tension existed between a more universalist approach and a more culturally oriented approach. A typical case in point is the discussion between Geeraerts and Grondelaers (1995) on the one hand and Kövecses (1995) on the other regarding the nature of anger is heat metaphors: while the former emphasized the culturally specific and historically contingent nature of such metaphorical patterns, the former defended a universalist, physiologically grounded position. In recent years, however, the socio-cultural perspective has been gaining ground: see Palmer (1996) and, very explicitly, Kövecses (2005). In practical terms, this type of socio-cultural investigation takes the form of a historical investigation into changing conceptualizations within a given language or culture, or of cultural and anthropological comparisons. Within the latter group, we can also place the flourishing research tradition of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural investigation into the relationship between language and thought,

The third level considers not variation between languages, but variation within languages: to what extent do the phenomena that we typically focus on in Cognitive Linguistics exhibit variation within the same linguistic community? The research conducted within this approach links up with the research traditions of sociolinguistics, dialectology, and stylistic analysis, using the same type of meticulous empirical research methods: see Kristiansen and Dirven (2008). This attempt to bring grammatical analysis and variationist research closer together cannot be disentangled from the usage-based perspective mentioned above. Usage-based and meaning-based models of grammar introduce more variation into the grammar than a rule-based approach tends to do: the language-internal or discourse-related factors that influence the use of a particular construction may be manifold, and the presence or absence of a construction is not an all-or-none matter. In the analysis of this type of variation, it often appears that the variation is co-determined by “external”, sociolinguistic factors: the variation that appears in actual usage (as attested in corpora) may be determined simultaneously by grammatical, discursive, and sociolinguistic factors. Disentangling those different factors, then, becomes one methodological endeavour: in the actual practice of a usage-based enquiry, grammatical analysis and variationist analysis will go hand in hand.

At this level, there is also a less descriptive and more critical form of Cognitive Linguistics to be mentioned – a form of analysis, in other words, that not only intends to describe but that also takes an evaluative stance. The best known example is Lakoff’s study of metaphorical models of the family exploited in a political context (1996). This work led to his practical interest in the “framing” of public issues (and to his active involvement in US political debate). Lakoff’s work, though highly visible, is not the only one in this domain. There is a growing body of research on ideology (see Dirven, Polzenhagen and Wolf 2007), and in works such as Chilton (2004), Musolff (2006), Hart and Lukes (2007), we witness an exciting convergence between “critical” Cognitive Linguistics and the older British tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The final and most specific level overlaps with the discourse related approach mentioned above: this is the level where actual conversations and communicative exchanges are analyzed from a socially interactionist point of view. In the context of socially oriented linguistics, this perspec-
tive links up with interactionist sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology rather than with variationist sociolinguistics (as was the case on the third level of analysis). In Cognitive Linguistics circles, representatives of this approach tend to take some of their inspiration from Clark (1996): see Croft (2009), and most elaborately, Tomasello (2003) on the interactionist nature of language acquisition.

Figure 2 offers a schematic representation of the reintroduction of the four crucial context factors into the grammar as conceived of by Cognitive Linguistics. The external boxes in the figure indicate the four elements as we discussed them above, and the labelled arrows represent the re-introductory movements by means of keywords.

3.2. Stages in the expansion of Cognitive Linguistics and the chronological recovery of context

The previous section demonstrates that Cognitive Linguistics indeed embodies the recontextualizing trends in contemporary linguistics in a singular way: all the aspects of recontextualization that we identified in our overview of the history of 20th century linguistics are substantially covered by Cognitive Linguistics; even more importantly, they determine core features of Cognitive Linguistics, like the importance of meaning for grammatical description and the choice for a usage-based approach. Now, if recontextualization is indeed a core feature, would it also be the case that the internal development of Cognitive Linguistics is characterized by a gradual expansion towards the various forms of recontextualization that we distinguished? Does recontextualization not only portray Cognitive
Linguistics at large, against the broad canvas of modern linguistics, but
does it also characterize its internal growth? Does the internal evolution
of Cognitive Linguistics take the form of a progressive recovery of the
various types of context?

To answer that question, we first need to have a look at the history of
Cognitive Linguistics from the point of view of the sociology of science:
if we look at it from an external point of view (not with a focus on
the development of ideas and theories, but with a focus on the people it
mobilizes, the public appeal it exerts, the organizational and institutional
entrenchment it achieves), what are the main periods in its development?
The seeds of Cognitive Linguistics were planted some thirty years ago: Len
Talmy published his “figure and ground” paper in 1975, Ron Langacker
started working on his Cognitive Grammar in 1976, and George Lakoff
published his “linguistic gestalts” article in 1977.

But the real public life and the international expansion of Cognitive
Linguistics started about ten years later. The year 1987 is an outspoken
landmark, with the publication of Lakoff’s *Women, Fire, and Dangerous
Things*, and the first volume of Langacker’s *Foundations of Cognitive
Grammar*. In 1988, Brygida Rudzka edited the seminal *Topics in Cognitive
Linguistics* volume, and in 1989, John Taylor published his *Linguistic
Categorization*, which is still one of the best readable introductions to
Cognitive Linguistics. 1989 is important in another sense as well: it is the
year that the first International Cognitive Linguistics Conference (ICLC)
took place in Duisburg, Germany. It was one of the so-called LAUD
symposia (where LAUD stands for Linguistic Agency of the University of
Duisburg) that had been organized by René Dirven since 1977 and
where some of the world’s most distinguished linguists were invited to
present their work. So in 1989, René Dirven (whose role in the inter-
national expansion of Cognitive Linguistics can hardly be underestimated)
invited Lakoff and Langacker for a “Symposium on Cognitive Linguistics”.
The Duisburg conference was of crucial importance for the institu-
tionalization and the international expansion of Cognitive Linguistics: it
was there and then that the International Cognitive Linguistics Associa-
tion was founded (the conference was accordingly rebaptized as the First
International Cognitive Linguistics Conference), that plans were made to
launch the journal *Cognitive Linguistics*, and that the monograph series
*Cognitive Linguistics Research* was announced.

The next twenty years can be roughly divided into two more periods of
ten years. The first ten years leading to the present situation – roughly, up
to 1997 – were years of international consolidation. The whole approach
demonstrated its viability on the international forum, in a number of senses: the newly founded journal was able to attract high-quality contributions, and the successful series of biannual ICLC conferences proved that there was a broad interest in the framework.

The years from, say, 1997 up to now were marked by the international institutionalization of Cognitive Linguistics; the whole framework got firmly entrenched in the international fabric of linguistic studies. This is most clear if you look at the emergence of national ICLA affiliates. These are ICLA branches defined by region or country (and occasionally by language). The first one to be founded was the Spanish Cognitive Linguistics Association (1998), whose affiliation was formally approved at the 1999 ICLC. The year 2001 saw the affiliation of the Finnish, the Polish, and the Slavic Cognitive Linguistics Associations. Further affiliates include the Russian Association of Cognitive Linguists (2004), the German Cognitive Linguistics Association (2005), the Discourse and Cognitive Linguistics Association of Korea (2005), the Association Française de Linguistique Cognitive (2005), the Japanese Cognitive Linguistics Association (2005), the Conceptual Structure, Discourse and Language Association (2005), the UK Cognitive Linguistics Association (2006), the Chinese Association for Cognitive Linguistics (2006), and Benecla, the Cognitive Linguistics association of Belgium and The Netherlands (2008).


Given this classification into three periods of more or less ten years each (a foundational one, a period of expansion, and a period of institutionalization), is there any correlation with the internal development, in terms of ideas and theoretical constructs? In very general terms, it would seem to be the case that the major steps in the recovery of context are situated in the past decade. After the foundational first decade, the second decade, up to the middle of the 1990s, focused on the basic notions of cognitive semantics: prototypes, radial networks, conceptual metaphor, image schemas, and the various aspects of Langacker’s and Talmy’s construal-based grammars.
In the third decade, however, we witness a broadening of the type of context that is deemed relevant: the majority of the publications that were mentioned above under the rubric of “lexicon”, “usage”, and “social context” are situated in the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium. The initial insight of Cognitive Linguistics is that the semantics of natural language expressions needs to be studied in a broader cognitive context: individual meanings are part of polysemous structures, of frames, of Idealized Cognitive Models – whatever structure the experiential basis of language takes. Moving beyond this initial cognitive context, the previous decade has introduced the context of use in its various forms: in the attention for the performative usage level as the dialectic basis of grammar, in the attention for the lexicon as the embodiment of abstract grammatical patterns, in the attention for the social context of language.

That the wave of types of research contextualizing grammar came after a first wave of research exploring the semantics of language also becomes clear when we have a look at the presence of certain topics in the Cognitive Linguistics Bibliography compiled by René Dirven (The Cognitive Linguistics Bibliography is made available annually as an electronic addition to the journal *Cognitive Linguistics*). Table 2 lists the frequencies of topical items in the bibliography, divided over five-year periods. The items

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<td>591</td>
<td>1093</td>
<td>1647</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>275</td>
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<td>603</td>
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<td>Semantics</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usage-based</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>394</td>
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<tr>
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<td>209</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic(s)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>240</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Nine topical items in the Cognitive Linguistics Bibliography, divided over five-year periods.
may be grouped into four groups corresponding to the four types of contextualization that we distinguished earlier: meaning and semantics under the label semantics, construction under the label construct(ion grammar), usage-based, discourse, and pragmatic(s) under the label usage, and socio-linguistic(s), social and cultural under the label social. We then calculate the proportion of each item with regard to number of articles in each period, and average over the items in each group.

If we then trace the development of the four groups over time, as is done in Figure 3, we can indeed confirm that the interest in meaning comes first in the development of Cognitive Linguistics, while the interest in constructions, in usage-based models, in the social context of language takes off later. Also, while the attention for meaning has reached a stable level since the beginning of the 1990s, the focus on the other three forms of recontextualization is still increasing. (It should be noted that, while it is straightforward to have a look at the temporal development of the lines,
we should be careful with a direct comparison of the level of the lines among each other. The figures give the proportion of articles that contain one of the topical keywords, calculated against the total number of articles in a given period. However, because different keywords may occur together within the same article, any given article may be referred to more than once at a certain point in time.)

4. Cognitive Linguistics in Context

So far, we have established two crucial things. First, thinking about Cognitive Linguistics in terms of the recontextualization of grammar adequately captures the singular position of Cognitive Linguistics in the context of contemporary linguistics. If post-Chomskyan linguistics is characterized by an emerging tendency to reintroduce into the grammar those aspects of context that were discarded as irrelevant by hardcore generativism, then Cognitive Linguistics may be seen to embody that tendency in an outspoken way. All the relevant features – meaning, the lexicon, the level of performance and language use, and the social context – are saliently present in the theoretical and descriptive apparatus of Cognitive Linguistics. And some of them, like the importance of meaning and the usage-based character of linguistics, even belong to the core beliefs of Cognitive Linguistics.

Second, thinking about Cognitive Linguistics in terms of the recontextualization of grammar not only helps to determine its external position in the context of linguistics at large, it also sheds a revealing light on the internal development of the framework. Parallel to the sociological expansion of Cognitive Linguistics as an international movement, we observe an internal expansion that is driven by the gradual recovery of context. The conceptual drift of Cognitive Linguistics (if we may use that term) seems to reside precisely in the recontextualizing movement.

It appears, in other words, that recontextualization is a common denominator that keeps together – at least conceptually speaking – the various branches of Cognitive Linguistics that are being developed in an era of massive international expansion. But if, coming back to the introduction to this article, recontextualization can indeed be seen as the schematic node overarching the radial network of cognitive approaches, does that theoretical common denominator suffice to keep Cognitive Linguistics together on a practical and sociological level? Will the centripetal force of an underlying trend be stronger than the centrifugal forces that are
inherent in a radial development, where each separate topic of interest may start to develop into a domain of investigation and a sociological network of its own?

4.1. Cognitive Linguistics as a scientific paradigm

To see more clearly why there might be a difficulty, we may have a look at what the sociology of science has to say about the lifecycle of theories. Indeed, if we see Cognitive Linguistics as a paradigm in the sense of Kuhn’s theory of science, and if we then apply a sociological perspective to the development of the paradigm, we inevitably come across one of the most intriguing questions in the sociology of science: what determines the lifecycle of scientific paradigms, (sub)disciplines and specialties? There are various lifecycle models in the sociology of science, but for the present purposes, it may suffice to have a look at the one that is presented in De Mey (1992). It distinguishes between four stages.

In the pioneering stage, the paradigm is formulated. The methodological and rhetorical justification focuses on the originality of the approach. The organization of the field is informal at most.

In the building stage, the paradigm works according to the “normal science” model described by Kuhn: the basic tenets are accepted without questioning by the adherents; research is geared towards productively showing the applicability of the approach. At the same time, an organizational structure is set up, in the form of journals and conferences.

The third stage, that of internal criticism, has a two-sided character. On the one hand, it is a period of conceptual organization: the findings that were reached somewhat disorderly during the building stage have to receive a place within the overall framework; you might say: the body of knowledge accumulated in the building stage needs to be consolidated within the theoretical fabric of the paradigm. This is typically the stage, then, in which textbooks and reference works appear.

On the other hand, the third stage is also the period in which the internal anomalies of the paradigm become apparent. The initial confirmation has been carried through massively in the building stage, so that the attention may now shift to the resistant problems. Those problems may inspire new research and new ideas within the paradigm, but they may also lead some people to question the overall approach and perhaps abandon the framework.

In the final stage, that of external criticism, the internal problems have become so important that the paradigm loses its attractiveness. Although
the existing institutional organization may ensure a prolonged existence of
the framework, it has stopped to grow, and it loses terrain with regard to
newer, more appealing alternatives.

Now, if we accept this classification, it is obvious that Cognitive
Linguistics has moved beyond the pioneering stage (the first decade) and
the building stage (the second and third decade). The current situation, at
the end of the third decade of its existence, definitely exhibits at least one
side of the third stage mentioned by De Mey: we are living in a period of
consolidation, in the form of textbooks and reference works. In fact, a
retrospective article like the present one is probably typical of this stage
in the development: one aspect of the consolidating movement is the effort
to provide clear overviews of the history of the discipline.

4.2. Cognitive Linguistics within cognitive science

If this is correct, we also need to ask the question whether the other
aspects of the third stage of development – a growing awareness of
outstanding problems, increasing tensions between potentially rival ap-
proaches, fragmentation into independent subdisciplines – are part of the
current situation in Cognitive Linguistics. If recontextualization is at the
center of Cognitive Linguistics, is there any indication that the centre
may not hold? To round off this discussion of the basic tendencies within
Cognitive Linguistics, we may try to identify a number of factors that
could either constitute a threat or a safeguard for the unity of Cognitive
Linguistics.

On the negative side, we may observe that the thematic unity of Cogni-
tive Linguistics as a recontextualizing approach to grammar is as yet
a highly schematic one, which is not accompanied by an outspoken
tendency towards theatrical unification or the development of appropriate
methods.

First, building a unified theory has never been a prominent feature of
Cognitive Linguistics. Cognitive linguists work with a number of key
notions that are motivated by general assumptions about language and
cognition, but the exact relationship between many concepts and ap-
proaches within Cognitive Linguistics is still unclear. How exactly do a
Langacker-type approach and a Talmy-type approach to grammar relate
to each other? On which points are they notational variants, on which
points are they compatible, on which points are they in opposition to
each other? And if there is an incompatibility, what kind of evidence could
decide between the two? Similar questions may be asked about Concep-
tual Metaphor Theory and a Mental Spaces approach: in some respects, the latter is an extension of the former, but could it completely replace Conceptual Metaphor Theory or not? Further, what about the different ways in which the crucial components of recontextualization (like the different forms of socially oriented Cognitive Linguistics)? In short, there are lots of theoretical issues in Cognitive Linguistics that need further clarification. Progress in Cognitive Linguistics now basically takes the form of developing and applying one or the other central concept or well established approach. Now that Cognitive Linguistics is reaching a mature age, systematic attempts at theory formation are called for.

Second, if we can agree that Cognitive Linguistics is essentially characterized by a recontextualizing “drift”, there are specific consequences with regard to the observational basis and the analytical method of linguistic research. If one takes a usage-based model of the grammar seriously, one will have to study actual language use. In terms of the observational basis of Cognitive Linguistics, this suggests a shift from introspective conceptual analysis to the study of non-elicited language use, as epitomized by corpus linguistics, and to the study of on line processes, as epitomized by experimental research. Further, if one wishes to investigate how diverse factors like meaning, structure, discourse and lectal variation interact, the sheer complexity of the phenomena calls for appropriate analytic methods, i.e. for a shift towards quantitative testing of hypotheses. The complexity of a fully recontextualized grammar requires a methodology that goes beyond the traditional reliance on introspection: disentangling the effect of the various contextual factors that enter into the constitution of actual language use requires an advanced quantitative analysis that is able to capture the multivariate nature of linguistic usage. Now, while there are various indications for such an “empirical turn” in Cognitive Linguistics, the tendency is not dominant, and explicit defenses of an empirical approach are countered by equally outspoken defenses of introspection (cf., for instance, Geeraerts 2006a and Talmy 2007). Such a “methodenstreit”, if it continues, would obviously not contribute to the unity of the framework.

In contrast with the absence of outspoken internal tendencies towards theoretical and methodological unification, there is an external factor that is likely to contribute strongly to the integrity of Cognitive Linguistics: the recontextualizing trend that we have identified as the unifying factor within the theoretical and methodological pluralism of Cognitive Linguistics is not restricted to linguistics. It is, in fact, a growing tendency within the cognitive sciences at large. In an overview article charting the
development of cognitive psychology, Wagemans (2005) characterizes the recent evolution of cognitive science with two well-chosen phrases: “downward into the brain” and “outward into the environment”. By thinking of the human mind as a machine algorithmically manipulating symbols, the traditional paradigm of cognitive science (as it arose in the 1960s) isolates the mind both from the brain and the environment. By contrast, in the contemporary developments within cognitive psychology, “intelligence became embodied again and cognition became situated in its context again” (Wagemans 2005: 359). The parallelism with Cognitive Linguistics is striking, and fits entirely into Sinha’s (2007) argument that Cognitive Linguistics is part of “second generation cognitive science”, just like generative linguistics (the culmination in the decontextualization of grammar) belonged to the cognitive revolution of the late 1950s and 1960s.

The recontextualizing tendency in cognitive science at large will undoubtedly buttress the recontextualizing drift in Cognitive Linguistics. But at the same time, the question concerning the internal cohesion of Cognitive Linguistics receives a different interpretation when we consider Cognitive Linguistics in the context of cognitive science: what is important from this perspective is not primarily internal cohesion as such, but rather the way in which Cognitive Linguistics may optimally contribute to the interdisciplinary development of a contextualized cognitive science. But that, of course, is a task for the next thirty years.

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