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Saussurean structuralism and cognitive linguistics

Elffers, E.

Publication date

2012

Document Version

Author accepted manuscript

Published in

Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Elffers, E. (2012). Saussurean structuralism and cognitive linguistics. *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage*, 34(1), 19-40.

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SAUSSUREAN STRUCTURALISM AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS¹

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Abstract

Cognitive linguistics (CL) is often regarded as a continuation of Saussurean structuralism. This paper explores the relationship between the two paradigms, focussing on the connection between semantics and views on the language-thought relationship. As it turns out, the similarity in this respect is, in fact, only partial. Saussure explicitly rejects linguistic relativism (LR); his purely differential view of meaning actually allows for only a weak variety of LR. Stronger varieties of LR are defended in CL, in agreement with a very “rich” conception of meaning, which can be shown to build on 19th century Humboldtian views rather than Saussurean structuralism. It is argued that this return to earlier approaches can be regarded as both positive (e.g. in its sensitivity to culture-related aspects of meanings) and negative (e.g. in its naïve appeal to etymology).

Keywords

Saussure, structuralism, cognitive linguistics, linguistic relativism, semantics

Résumé

La linguistique cognitive (LC) est souvent vue comme une continuation du structuralisme saussurien. Cet article explore la relation entre les deux paradigmes, en se concentrant sur les connexions entre la sémantique et les différents points de vue sur la relation entre le langage et la pensée. Il se trouve que la similitude dans ce domaine est en fait seulement partielle. Saussure rejette de façon explicite le relativisme linguistique (RL) : sa vision purement différentielle du sens admet seulement une variante très affaiblie du RL. Au contraire, la LC défend des variantes bien plus puissantes du RL, en accord avec une conception très “riche” du sens. Cette conception du sens se fonde, comme on peut le démontrer, plus sur les vues humboldtiennes du XIX^e siècle que sur le structuralisme saussurien. Nous défendrons l’idée que ce retour à des approches plus anciennes peut être considéré comme positif (par exemple dans la mesure où se trouve réaffirmé le rapport du sens à la culture, mais aussi comme négatif (par exemple dans le recours naïf à l’étymologie).

Mots clefs

Saussure, structuralisme, linguistique cognitive, relativisme linguistique, sémantique

1 I would like to thank Piet Verhoeff cordially for his translation of my text into English.

1. INTRODUCTION²

It is not unusual to regard cognitive linguistics (CL), which came to be developed from about 1980, as having descended from structuralism, the linguistic movement that was dominant in the first half of the 20th century. One of the most prominent originators of structuralism was Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), and it is his views that are considered important for cognitive linguistics. The following pronouncements are cases in point:

“Language is symbolic in nature. It makes available to the speaker [...] an open-ended set of linguistic signs or expressions, each of which associates a semantic representation of some kind with a phonological representation. I therefore embrace the spirit of classic Saussurean diagrams [...]” (Langacker 1987, p. 11; the diagram especially referred to is Saussure’s famous picture of the linguistic sign “arbre” as a combination of a phonological form and a picture of a tree).

“Cognitive grammar is [...] profoundly Saussurean in spirit.” (Taylor 1999, p. 19).

“There are some obvious links between Saussurean linguistics and the Cognitive Linguistics research program.” (Nerlich & Clarke 2007, p. 579).

In this article, I will discuss the relation between the cognitive-linguistic and the structuralistic, especially the Saussurean, approach, focusing on views on semantics, on the relation between language and cognition, and on the connection between the two. Here, we can perceive an intriguing paradox: while CL contributes substantially towards a renewed interest in *linguistic relativism* (LR), the view that differences between natural languages are closely connected with cognitive differences between their speakers, Saussure is strongly opposed to this idea.³

Cognitive linguists themselves actually regard their ideas as following naturally from Saussure’s views. In the cognitive-linguistically oriented volume *Rethinking linguistic relativism* (Gumperz and Levinson (eds) 1996, p. 4), Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) is mentioned explicitly as a source of neo-relativism. In Taylor’s standard work *Cognitive grammar* (Taylor 2002, p. 55), there is even mention of an “extreme form of linguistic relativism” in Saussure, compared with which the CL variant is moderate.

Have the cognitive linguists not read or understood Saussure well enough? Or does Saussure understand himself not very well: does his view have relativistic implications after all? Let me argue here that in a sense, both are true.

2 This article, like a more elaborate version (Elffers 2009), is based on two lectures. One was given during the workshop “Structuralism and Cognitive Linguistics”, organized as part of the Leidse Coglingdagen on 19 and 20 December, 2008. The other was given during the conference “History of Cognitive Linguistics” of the Société d’Histoire et d’Épistémologie des Sciences du Language, Paris 30 and 31 January, 2009. I thank Dirk Geeraerts and Klaas Willems for the literature to which they introduced me, and Jean-Michel Fortis for his most valuable comments on the former version of this article.

3 In most LR literature, this “close connection” is described in terms of *influencing* cognitive and cultural features by language; sometimes formulations prevail in which language is presented as *reflecting* such features. However, standpoints can hardly ever be said to be essentially different as regards the direction of the influence: from a phylogenetic perspective a language is expected to reflect cognitive-cultural features of its user community; from an ontogenetic perspective, a child is assumed to get those features instilled (also) via the mother tongue.

2. LINGUISTIC RELATIVISM: A 19TH CENTURY “DISCOVERY”

LR has many variants, but the central idea is always that *differences between natural languages are linked to cognitive differences between their speakers*.⁴ What is at stake is always *semantic* differences between languages. Phonetic differences, which naturally exist between languages, never lead to relativistic conclusions.⁵

The first necessary condition for a relativistic view is the assumption that there *are* semantic differences between languages. The second is a cognitive interpretation of those differences. Not until the 19th century were *both* conditions met, so that LR could then become a popular theme. Philosophers in earlier periods usually assumed that all people have the same concepts; given the general idea that words represent concepts, there are then no semantic differences between languages.⁶ And in so far as the existence of conceptual differences was acknowledged, as they were, especially since the 17th century, by empiricist philosophers such as Locke, they were regarded as something individual, and not related to differences between natural languages. Grammatical differences between languages were generally considered to be superficial variations on one theme, the Greek- and Latin-based universal grammar, which was seen as the reflection of the, likewise universal, structure of human thought.⁷

Unlike philosophy, translation tasks had for centuries actually confronted their practitioners with semantic language differences. Since in that context cognitive interpretation of such differences (the second necessary condition) was not at issue, this practice did not lead to LR.⁸ Likewise, early practical grammars of remote languages sometimes show an understanding of grammatical diversity that did not get through to the “official” grammarians who postulated *a priori* a universal grammar (cf. Nowak 1994).

4 Cf. Black (1969, p. 31), where it is suggested that, because of the poly-interpretability of “language”, “cognition” and “relationship”, at least 108 LR variants could be distinguished. Lakoff (1987, p. 334) even speaks of “hundreds of forms of relativism”. In addition, quite frequently, views are wrongly counted as LR, e.g. the assumption that “our thinking is linguistic” (which is consistent with a universalistic view of language and is not, therefore, about LR). Most authors minimally distinguish between *strong* and *weak relativism*. The object then is the interpretation of “relationship”, which can vary from strongly deterministic to weakly influencing. For the various LR interpretations see Elffers (1996).

5 Sound differences used to be associated with differences in character or disposition, not with cognitive differences.

6 A naïve-realistic view of science underlies the assumption of universal concepts: the concepts directly reflect “the things”. In the 17th and 18th centuries this view was still very widespread. Kant’s philosophy undermined naïve-realism, but not universalism: the schemes in terms of which we interpret reality were thought to be universal (see De Pater & Swiggers 2000, p. 163-165).

7 Roger Bacon (13th century) is the author of the famous pronouncement that the grammar of all languages is substantially the same; the differences are accidental. Cf. De Pater & Swiggers (2000, p. 95).

8 For example, a 10th century Bulgarian writer discusses problems in the translation from Greek to Bulgarian. Next to lexical problems, grammatical problems also came up for discussion: the difference between a language with and a language without articles, and gender differences (which were apparently thought to be semantically relevant) between otherwise equivalent substantives (cf. Lepschy 1998, p. 124).

Not until the 18th century were both necessary conditions met. A strongly increased interest in and knowledge of exotic languages and societies occasioned a growing understanding of semantic language differences, lexical and grammatical. In combination with the increased realization that people can conceptualize and express reality in different ways, a fertile breeding ground was developed for relativistic ideas. In practice, LR developed especially in Germany, where the interpretation of languages and cultures in terms of the nationalistically and romantically coloured notion “Volksgeist” was an important theme.⁹ The work of W. Von Humboldt (1767-1835) is at the heart of this movement.

3. FROM LANGUAGE TO THOUGHT: FOUR INTERPRETATION PATTERNS.

How were language differences interpreted cognitively in 19th century LR? For *lexical differences*, this question is relatively easy to answer. We have seen that word meanings were from early on equated with concepts. In this view, word meanings that are different from language to language correspond to conceptual differences.

What kinds of differences are involved here? The basic phenomenon is when a lexical element of language A has no counterpart in language B. This is the case when a meaning is unknown in language B or is known in principle in language B, but there, unlike in language A, does not correspond with a separate word, but has to be described. Sapir’s well-known reference to an example of the first type, “A society that has no knowledge of theosophy need have no name for it”, shows that we are dealing here with cases that, in Sapir’s words, “are of no real interest to the linguist” (Sapir 1921, p. 219). Examples of the second type are usually of greater interest linguistically and anthropologically. We might think of kinship terms; there are languages in which there is, for instance, no element corresponding to our notion “brother” – instead, there are two terms: one for “elder brother” and one for “younger brother”.

In both cases the cognitive interpretation is that the speakers of A *have the concept corresponding to the A word at their disposal, while the speakers of B do not*. In so far as the two types are interpreted differently, this means that speakers of B can only in the second case form the concept in question *in principle* with the aid of other available concepts; in the first case this does not work. I call this interpretation pattern the **lexical pattern**.

By the side of the lexical pattern, I distinguish the **grammatical pattern**, which adds a cognitive interpretation to grammatical differences. On the one hand, this pattern, from the very first LR developments in the 19th century, plays a much more important role than the lexical pattern. While the lexical pattern has a local

⁹ Knobloch (1988, p. 186) describes the change to relativistic thought instructively: “Die bloss äußere und lautliche Verschiedenheit der Sprachen, Axiom der philosophischen und allgemeinen Grammatik, wurde gewissermassen tiefergelegt und in eine Verschiedenheit der geistigen Physiognomie der Völker verwandelt. [...] Die Masse der Wörter repräsentiere den Umfang der Welt eines Volkes, der grammatische Bau der Sprache repräsentiere die Ansicht des Volkes vom Organismus des Denkens [...]”.

character (it is always concerned with specific (classes of) words), the grammatical pattern has its effects in the language as a whole, causing possible cognitive effects to be far reaching. On the other hand, cognitive effects of grammatical differences are much less evident than in the case of lexical differences. To be sure, in cases like the *theosophy* example mentioned above, the lexical pattern is obvious. With the grammatical pattern, the possibility of a cognitive interpretation depends especially on hypothetical ideas about the meaning of grammatical elements and on the role of those ideas in actual language usage.

In the 19th century, the focus of the grammatical pattern was on the grammatical differences between language *types*. Instead of universal grammar, which, on the basis of Latin, regarded inflexion as the only means to express grammatical relations, various grammatical language types were now distinguished. Thus, Humboldt distinguished, by the side of inflexional languages, agglutinative, isolating and incorporating languages. Humboldt and his followers (e.g. Steinthal (1823-1894) and Misteli (1841-1903)) did not consider these language types to be equivalent – they interpreted the grammatical differences semantically. Thus, isolating languages like Chinese, which do not have inflectional endings, were regarded as “formless”, because, it was said, they did not *in any way* express the structural-semantic information that is elsewhere expressed by inflectional endings – at a cognitive level this was said to indicate “formless” thoughts. In Steinthal’s words: “Stellt ein Volk seine Anschauungen unklar, d.h. formlos vor, so ist in seinem Selbstvorstellen, in seiner Sprache, wenig oder gar keine Form” (Steinthal 1860, p. 162).

This strongly evaluative application of the grammatical pattern is lacking in later forms of the LR. But, as will appear further on, the grammatical pattern is based, later, too, on hypothetical assumptions about the specific role of grammatical meanings in language use.

Finally, I want to distinguish two additional patterns: the **etymological pattern** and the **focal pattern**. These patterns supply extra means to establish semantic differences (lexical or grammatical); differences that can then be interpreted cognitively. Just as with the grammatical pattern, we have here semantic assumptions of a strongly hypothetical nature.

Central in the case of the etymological pattern is the notion that *the etymology of a linguistic element is present in the modern meaning*. Consequently, the French word *mouchoir*, for instance, would not be wholly synonymous with the English word *handkerchief*. In spite of the shared meaning of “piece of cloth to blow your nose in”, there would be a subtle difference in connotation, because the original meanings (“nose blower” and “cloth for the hand” respectively) would still be present in the background. Cognitively, this difference would still play a role in different conceptualizations of handkerchiefs.

What is at issue with the focal pattern is the notion that *central meanings carry over into peripheral meanings*.¹⁰ Within this pattern, for example the English

10 In Elffers (2008), I refer to this pattern as *prototypical pattern*. Retrospectively, I find this term not quite to the point, because in linguistics, the term *prototype* relates not only to kernel meanings, but also to central types of referents (for this distinction see also Geeraerts 1989, p. 64 ff. and Taylor 1999). In this latter sense, *prototype* is not relevant for LR: nobody, for example, thinks that we conceptualize chickens as redbreasts because redbreasts are prototypical birds in the referential sense.

expression *by train* would not be fully synonymous with French *par le train*. In spite of their common meaning “making use of the train”, the different, causal and instrumental, central meanings of *by* and *par* would play a role in the background. If we extrapolate this to the cognitive level, this means that speakers of English and French conceptualize the train as a source of power and as an instrument respectively.

In the 19th century, these two patterns were also current. In that period (and, as will appear further on, sometimes even now) they are often hard to keep apart, because central meanings were as a matter of course regarded as original meanings as well. A case in point is Misteli’s conclusion that the Malaysian equivalent of German *man* (French “on”), *oran*, suggests a different “Auffassung” from *man*, since its original central meaning is “people”.^{11 12}

4. SAUSSURE

The innovations originated by Saussure in linguistics involved a radical change for LR. Saussure thought little of direct extrapolations from language to thought (and to other extra-lingual domains), and most of the interpretation patterns that allow LR are inconsistent with Saussurean basic principles. Still, there are 20th century variants of LR in which Saussure’s notions of semantics play a role. But for these variants to be operative, they had to incorporate non-Saussurean elements, as I hope to show further on.

4.1. Anti-relativistic statements

Explicit comments on LR are given by Saussure in the penultimate chapter of his *Cours* (“Le témoignage de la langue en anthropologie et en préhistoire”):

“En un mot, la langue apporte-t-elle des lumières à l’anthropologie, à l’ethnographie, à la préhistoire ? On le croit très généralement ; nous pensons qu’il y a là une grande part d’illusion.” (Saussure 1972, p. 304).

Saussure then discusses some of these “illusions”. About Semitic languages, for instance, he remarks:

“Les langues sémitiques expriment le rapport de substantif déterminant à substantif déterminé [...] par la simple juxtaposition [...] Dirons-nous que ce type syntaxique révèle quelque chose de la mentalité sémitique ? L’affirmation serait bien téméraire.” (Saussure 1972, p. 311).

11 See Gabelentz (1901², p. 337). *Man* originally had the meaning “human being” as well, but lost it, says Misteli, because of the formal distinction between *man* and *Mann* that has arisen as a result of the grammaticalization of the first.

12 In classical antiquity, etymology was popular, but could not be used for our type of etymological pattern. Its purpose was to uncover “true meanings”. This was always thought to be possible in the classical languages. In other languages, a lack of “etymological transparency” could be established; those languages were regarded as being “barbaric”. Not before the end of the 18th century was etymology regarded exclusively as a historical science. See Lepschy (ed.) (1994, p. 157 and 1998, p. 210).

He concludes the chapter with the following remark with reference to the grammatical classification of languages:

“[...] *mais de ces déterminations et de ces classements on ne saurait rien conclure avec certitude en dehors du domaine proprement linguistique.*” (Saussure 1972, p. 312).

The final chapter (“Familles de langues et types linguistiques”) opens with the conclusion that “*la langue n’est pas soumise directement à l’esprit des sujets parlants*”, and finishes with a restatement of the basic idea of autonomy which runs like a thread through the book:

“*Des incursions que nous venons de faire dans les domaines limitrophes de notre science, il se dégage un enseignement tout négatif, mais d’autant plus intéressant qu’il concorde avec l’idée fondamentale de ce cours: la linguistique a pour unique et véritable objet la langue envisagée en elle-même et pour elle-même.*” (Saussure 1972, p. 317).

4.2. Anti-relativistic arguments

In the sections of the *Cours* referred to above, LR is contested most of all with arguments that emphasize the accidental and the variable aspects of linguistic properties. Thus, the Semitic juxtaposition in our above example may be the result of strong deflexion; a typically German word formation rule turns out to be occasioned by a phonological change; lexical elements can be borrowed, disappear accidentally, etc. Beside this type of purely linguistic developments, says Saussure, the ability of languages to express “the character of a people” pales into insignificance (cf. Saussure 1972, p. 311-312).¹³

If we look at the rest of the *Cours*, LR appears not to be very promising at a more fundamental level either: basic principles of Saussure’s linguistic theory block the patterns that allow LR, even where stable linguistic properties might be involved.¹⁴ Thus, Saussure makes a clear distinction between synchrony and diachrony:

13 Saussure’s strong emphasis on the *autonomy of linguistics* could in itself constitute a – not stated in so many words – anti-relativistic argument. At first sight, certainly so in the light of later and more source-faithful *Cours* editions, this seems plausible. In those editions we do not find the illustration, known from earlier editions, in which linguistic signs are presented with the aid of vertical lines that *cross* the parallel amorphous horizontal masses of sound and ideas. Instead, we find pictures in which linguistic signs form a separate layer between the sound and ideas masses. Willems’ (2005) correct conclusion that Saussure’s linguistic sign therefore “*eine eigenständige, nicht von diesen beiden Bereichen her begründbare Form von Semiosis darstellt*”, does not, however, imply anti-relativism. By some undisputed supporters of LR, too, language is greatly substantivized. Willems shows, e.g., how faithfully Saussure follows in the footsteps of Von Humboldt in this respect (Willems 2005, p. 265). Steinthal, too, saw language as an independent system (see Bakker 1988, p. 188). As long as language and cognition are not ontologically unlinked in such a way that influencing is out of the question, the possibility of LR remains.

14 Saussure’s basic principles are to be found, in part and in less elaborate form in the work of 19th century precursors, notably Whitney and Von der Gabelentz. In Elffers (2008 and 2009), I argue that Gabelentz’ rejection of certain forms of LR consequently anticipates Saussure’s.

“L’opposition entre les deux points de vue – synchronique et diachronique – est absolue et ne souffre pas de compromis.” (Saussure 1972, p. 119).

The etymological pattern, with its insistence on the interrelation of synchrony and diachrony, does not stand a chance, consequently.

The same goes for the focal pattern. Saussure strongly rejects the *nomenclature* view of language. Linguistic signs (*signes linguistiques*) do not join sounds to fully worked-out concepts. In fact, they *create* a structure in an originally amorphous conceptual body. They delimit pieces of that body (“concepts”) from one another (see note 13 for a more detailed picture). Their meaning (*valeur*) is purely *differential*; it consists in semantic oppositions that create borderlines with regard to other signs, not in an internally structured content. Notions like “kernel” and “periphery”, then, do not apply here:

“Dans tous ces cas nous surprenons donc, au lieu d’idées données d’avance, des valeurs émanant du système. Quand on dit qu’elles correspondent à des concepts, on sous-entend que ceux-ci sont purement différentiels, définis non pas positivement par leur contenu, mais négativement par leur rapports avec les autres termes du système.” (Saussure 1972, p.162).

This view of meaning also implies a holistic view of language. The borderlines differ from language to language, but all languages “cover” the same conceptual whole.¹⁵ It is therefore useless to look at one element in isolation without taking into account its relation to other elements.

“La langue est un système dont toutes les parties peuvent et doivent être considérées dans leur solidarité synchronique.” (Saussure 1972, p. 124).

So if an element of language A does not have a counterpart in language B, this does not mean that the implied content remains unexpressed, only that it is expressed elsewhere in the system in a different way. LR conclusions within the 19th century grammatical pattern are therefore equally impossible.

Even the lexical pattern is considerably weakened, because semantic contents of language A cannot be completely lacking in language B; they can at best be distributed in a different way over the linguistic signs. Lexical differences in the form of meanings in language A that are completely unknown in language B, are, consequently, out of the question. Lexical differences based on different *divisions* of the semantic field can and will occur, and it is on the basis of his rejection of the nomenclature idea that Saussure assumes that this phenomenon occurs frequently.¹⁶ Thus, he discusses several cases of different demarcations: as

15 Cf. Taylor (1999, p. 41) “Saussure [...] appears to presuppose the existence of a conceptual content which is independent of language, and which *has* to be lexicalised, some way or other”. Saussure’s holistic view, incidentally, is based on other considerations as well, notably on the view that qualities of specific language elements are often the result of interrelated changes elsewhere in the system (cf. Saussure 1972, p. 123-124).

16 Bakker (1988, p. 194) argues that in Saussure’s view it is *improbable* for two languages to isolate the same meaning. He illustrates this with one of Saussure’s own examples: “[...] so it would be purely accidental if part of such a signe, for instance the meaning of *bœuf* should correspond in any way to the meaning of any German signe, in casu *Ochs*. I find this strange:

opposed to French *mouton* we find English *sheep* but also *mutton* (the animal vs. the meat of the animal), by the side of French *louer* we find German *mieten* as well as *vermieten* (“rent” and “let (out)”), the French plural can be compared, not only with the dual form but also with the more-than-two plural form of Sanskrit. Saussure also gives a hypothetical example, which shows how strong his belief is in a constant conceptual body: if, out of the French three verbs *redouter*, *craindre* and *avoir peur*, *redouter* were to disappear, the conceptual content of this word would be transferred to the other two (Saussure 1972, p. 160-161).

It is this kind of examples that, in spite of Saussure’s anti-relativistic arguments and basic principles, have created the idea of a *Saussurean relativism*, and not altogether without justification. This specific but most central element of his semantic theory, the idea of differential meaning, has relativistic implications, via a *limited* form of the lexical pattern: every language imposes its own “mosaic structure” on the conceptual body.

4.3. Saussurean relativism as a thought experiment

On the one hand, Saussurean relativism is strong: it covers different natural languages *as a whole*, or various phases of one natural language *as a whole*, as language changes carry over into the total system.¹⁷ It is also strong because it leads to incommensurability: what is at stake is differential relations that are solely defined *within* a specific language system (cf. also Bakker 1988, p. 194).

On the other hand, Saussure’s LR variant is weak: the concepts that are the result of the incisions made by language into the conceptual body have no positive substantial content, only a negative one in the form of their delimitations from each other. For different languages to make different incisions does not, then, result in substantially different categories. The total content remains constant, just like a region of which different maps are made remains constant itself – different borders are indicated, but these do not interfere with the region itself; they only divide it into different areas. Saussure’s LR does not go beyond this type of area demarcation.

What is problematic is that Saussure’s notion of purely negatively defined (viz. through their relation to other concepts) concepts is impracticable in this extreme form. As Bakker (1988, p. 195, my transl. E. E.) shows, it is circular:

“In a minimal system, consisting of two elements, one element, say, A, is different from an element that is not A, say, Z. Should one ask what that implies, the answer has to be: A differs from Z, which in its turn is characterized by being different from A. Then the circle is round, and it does not matter, of course, how many elements there are between A and Z.”

Bakker rightly concludes that, in order for the system to work, the *signes* must really have their own positive individuality.

it cannot be accidental that there are so many points of correspondence between the two meanings?” (my transl. E. E.).

17 Saussure (1972, p. 121) compares language changes with changes in the planetary system: one planet changes in dimensions and weight and upsets the equilibrium of the whole solar system, thus causing a whole series of changes.

Now, the *signes* do possess this individuality inasmuch as they have, in addition to their *valeur*, a *signification* as well, a semantic element that plays a much less prominent part in the literature on Saussure. In contrast to the negatively and oppositionally defined *valeur*, Saussure distinguishes the *signification*, which is defined positively in terms of substantial conceptual contents: “*la contre-partie de l’image auditive*” (Saussure 1972, p. 158). Saussure compares the linguistic system to a monetary system: a five-franc piece has a relation to something dissimilar, i.e. what you can buy with it (comparable with the *signification* as a pendant of “*l’image auditive*”), as well as to similar elements of the system, e.g. a one-franc piece (comparable with the *valeur* of the *signes* among themselves). While there can never be a *valeur* identity between, e.g., *mouton* and *sheep*, there can be a *signification* identity, viz. in all cases where the terms are used to denote the animal species “sheep”. Something similar goes for the French and the Sanskrit plural: according to Saussure the *significations* are even “*le plus souvent*” identical in this case (Saussure 1972, p. 160-161).

All this means that Saussure distinguishes, in addition to meanings that represent the language-bound purely differential concepts, *independent (sub) meanings*, that represent substantial concepts. These meanings, e.g. the meaning “sheep” (understood as the animal species), are independent of the boundary markings that are different for each language. Their relevance does not automatically come with the use of the word in question (e.g. *mouton*); it varies for each actual situation.

Saussure does not elaborate on this idea. He gives no indications as to the relative cognitive impact of *valeur* and *signification*.¹⁸ For the question of whether a Saussurean relativism is imaginable and workable, this matter is important. If the *valeur* is dominant, there is for, e.g., *I see a sheep* a clear (but in itself not very strong) cognitive difference between the French and the English phrasing. If the *signification* is dominant, this difference vanishes further into the background. There is then above all *the same* meaning, which is expressed with the various conventional means that the language has available. In the background perhaps, at *valeur* level, the knowledge of the meanings that can *also* be described with the same linguistic means, may play a “co-resonating” role as well. The LR is then even weaker; only those “background” meanings may come into play.

For the time being, I am inclined to opt for a Saussure-type of interpretation in which the *signification* is dominant: the *signification* is a positive element and is directly related to what the speaker wishes to communicate in a given situation. The then specific function of the appropriate conventional linguistic means is there the central issue. Other functions that the linguistic means in question can fulfil do not at that moment play an important part.¹⁹

18 Cf. Joseph (2004, p. 67): “What is dissatisfying in Saussure’s discussion of value is that he is so insistent on its difference from meaning (= *signification*, E. E.) that he never gets to grips with their complex interrelationship. He points out that value is a part (and only a part) of meaning, but leaves to us to infer what the rest of it is. He ignores the fact that, even in his own examples, the only way we know that the value of *mouton* is different from that of *sheep* is that the former has a broader range of meanings.”

19 For a more detailed discussion about the importance of the *signification* as against that of the *valeur* see Dinneen (1967, p. 219 ff.).

Accepting *significations* as independent (sub)meanings in fact relativizes Saussure's idea of a constant and amorphous conceptual space. In a sense, it even amounts to a re-introduction of the *nomenclature* idea, as some *Cours* commentators also noticed (cf. Joseph 2004, p.66). Apart from that, too, Saussure's *a priori* idea of a constant and amorphous conceptual mass that gets a mosaic-type structure imposed on it via linguistic signs, is often deemed naïve and not very plausible.²⁰ We shall see that in fact most "Saussurean" LR variants show deviations from this idea.

4.4. "Saussurean" LR variants

Insofar as a structuralistic semantics, including implications for LR, was developed, based explicitly on Saussure's work, the source of inspiration was always the differential meaning view, with (equivalents of) *valeur* and "semantic opposition" as central concepts (the *signification* does not play a part here). Good summaries of this work can be found in Trier (1973) and Lyons (1972, 1977). The focus was often on the study of "semantic fields": clusters of semantically related words (e.g. colour terms). It is this kind of coherent areas of the lexicon in which the idea of a constant and amorphous conceptual mass with different mosaic structures imposed by different languages seems the most plausible. In the process, Saussure then had to be re-interpreted in such a way that the linguistic signs, even if purely for the sake of differentiation, still acquire some positive features. This is, in fact, what happens: meanings are always described with the aid of substantial semantic characteristics.

However, structuralistic-semantic practice deviates in fact from Saussure's principles in other respects as well. In the first place, there are also lexical features involved whose function is not just differentiating with respect to other items. It is precisely the features that appear to be essential for our concepts and which play a role in all lexicological traditions (e.g. "yellow" for *banana*, or "domestic animal" for *dog*) that do not play this differentiating part. Lyons (1977, p. 247) remarks that even with colour terms, there is more than just a clean demarcation within a diffuse continuum: there are psycho-physically central colour areas that can correspond in different languages with practically equivalent colour terminologies, while the exact area demarcations differ for each language.²¹

So in general, meanings are attributed a richer structure than the Saussurean picture suggests. The semantic field theory shows this clearly.²² Trier discusses, for

20 See e.g. Harris (1983). Joseph's (2007) suggestion that this idea was current in the second half of the 19th century, and that Saussure bases himself here directly on the work of empiricists such as Hobbes and John Stuart Mill does not seem to me to be correct. True, empiricists rejected the *nomenclature* idea in its most naïve form, emphasizing the differential basis of all knowledge (perhaps they inspired Saussure on these points), but they did not see concepts merely as bounded areas within a diffuse cognition, but as abstracting ordering schemes on the basis of qualities that are prominent in cognition through permanence and regularity.

21 Lyons here bases himself on Berlin and Kay's well-known (but also controversial) colour terms study. Lyons' (1977, p. 247) conclusion is: "It is undeniable that, in the past, structuralists have overemphasized the importance of determining the denotational boundaries of words".

22 Trier's direct source of inspiration is Saussure: "*Saussures Cours de linguistique générale wurde mir früh bekannt und wichtig. Für die Klärung des Gedankens von der Interdependenz*

example, the field consisting of German words expressing a form of knowledge or proficiency. Together, these words form a mosaic structure in the semantic field of “knowledge”; each word covers one part of the field. Trier shows the difference in demarcations between the situation in 13th century German and that in the German of the 14th century (cf. Trier 1972, p. 40-65).

In strictly Saussurean terms, what we have here would be no more than a restructuring of an unchanging conceptual domain, with at best weak LR consequences. But in fact, Trier is not arguing along Saussurean lines, thereby throwing the door open to more substantial relativistic conclusions. On the basis of the historical shift referred to, he describes a whole series of cognitive lexical changes related to social and cultural factors. He sees his investigation, consequently, as part of the *Geistesgeschichte*. That is only possible because what he in fact describes is much more than a restructuring of an unchanging domain. The domain itself changes substantially: all meanings in the first phase have moral and religious connotations and connotations related to the class society of those days; in the second phase, these connotations have disappeared and we come closer to what we now understand by *intelligence*, *technical skill* and related terms.

In short, Trier extrapolates from these variants of German along the broad and substantial variant of the *lexical pattern*, which he can do only by assuming meanings that are richer internally than Saussure’s notion of *valeur* allows.

5. COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC NEO-RELATIVISM

In the preceding pages, it has become clear that Saussure rejects LR, and that practically all interpretation patterns leading to LR are in fact impossible within a strictly Saussurean structuralistic framework. Yet, Saussure’s differential view of meaning implies a weak type of LR. Only if the Saussurean framework is enriched – as in fact happens in Saussurean structuralistic semantics – with non-Saussurean elements, can more substantial relativistic conclusions be drawn.

Against this background, we shall now have a look at cognitive-linguistic neo-relativism. CL is a very broad movement, with numerous sub-movements that are partly complementary, partly conflicting. What follows, then, is not a full picture of CL – but I shall try to establish, on the basis of the work of a number of prominent cognitive linguists, some general CL trends with regard to LR.

Unlike semantic field theoreticians, CL- linguists do not as a rule have explicit links with Saussure. As we saw in section 1, CL (and LR as developed within CL) are associated with Saussure’s view of semantics, but this does not mean that the cognitive linguists to whose work this might apply, base

der Elemente verdanke ich dem Buche viel” (Trier 1973, p. 194). The concept “Wortfeld” (“semantic field”) was developed by Ipsen (1899-1984). There were precursors already in the 19th century. The work of 19th century Egyptologist Abel, which was known to Trier, strongly emphasizes the mutual dependence of words belonging to one semantic field. Abel interprets his results, moreover, along Humboldtian lines, in terms of the ways of thinking of various peoples. Cf. Nerlich & Clarke (2000, p. 129-131).

themselves directly on Saussure. Thus, Nerlich and Clarke, in the sentence preceding their remark about “obvious links between Saussurean linguistics and the Cognitive Linguistic research program” (quoted on p. 1), remark that “Langacker informed us (pers.com.) that he was not influenced by Saussure’s work in any way and Lakoff never mentions Saussure in his published works”. How Saussurean is CL really?

5.1. Interpretation patterns in CL

As we have seen, the LR space of a semantic theory is determined by the extent to which the theory accepts the four interpretation patterns discussed. For Saussure’s theory, this appeared to be barely the case: at best a weak variant of the lexical pattern was possible.

In what follows, I shall try to show that CL applies the interpretation patterns much more generously, going beyond Trier’s “enriched” lexical pattern. This provides even more room for LR; which is not to say that this room is used by all cognitive linguists.

If we look at the *lexical pattern* first, we see that the CL approach is in fact at right angles to Saussure’s. As opposed to Saussure’s purely differential view of meaning, CL meanings are extremely rich in content, because they encompass considerably more semantic features than is usual in most theories. A case in point is the analysis of *banana* in Langacker (1987, p. 154) – while the feature “yellow” in most of the current componential analysis methods (but, as remarked: not with Saussure) is part of the semantic description of the word, this does not apply to features like “growing in bunches”, and “important for Central American economies”, which also feature in Langacker’s description. The basis for this semantic profusion, which in fact causes the difference between lexicon and encyclopaedia to become blurred or even to disappear, is that all these features co-determine the use of the word *banana*: without these features we cannot very well explain why we cannot speak of *a sprig of bananas* but can speak of *a bunch of bananas*, and why the term *banana republic* came to be used.

In the same way we find that in Fillmore’s *semantic frame theory*, cultural and religious notions are included in the “frames” of the words *Sunday*, *Monday*, that refer to, e.g., the division of the week into working days and resting days (cf. Nerlich & Clarke 2000, p. 143).

Two central assumptions are relevant to the extensive internal structure of word meanings in CL: (1) the assumption that words are polysemous: their meaning comprises a number of mutually related sub-meanings, (2) Rosch’s prototype theory, which, be it in a number of different ways, is incorporated in CL.²³ On both counts, Geeraerts’ (1989) elaborate analysis of the Dutch adjective *vers* (“fresh”) can serve as an illustration. Geeraerts distinguishes a few dozens of sub-meanings of *vers*, all of which show family resemblances. In conformity with the prototype theory, some of these (namely – said of foodstuffs – “recently produced”, “not processed”) are the

23 Rosch’s theory was incorporated into linguistics but without her notion of cue validity, which made room for semantic contrastivity (cf. Fortis 2010). Ideas related to linguistic prototype theory were anticipated in some structuralist accounts (cf. Geeraerts 1993).

kernel, the others (all kinds of nuances of “new-ness” or “optimality”, cf., e.g., *een vers paard* (“a fresh horse”)) are more and less peripheral with regard to this kernel.

It is, however, not true to say that structuralistic differential semantics has herewith been ostracised. Thus, Geeraerts, Grondelaers & Bakema elaborate – be it critically – on Trier’s semantic fields theory. Importantly, however, this approach is emphatically seen as too limited:

“Structuralist semantics insists that an adequate description of lexical items requires a description of their position within those lexical fields. On the other hand, the prototype-oriented tradition of research that developed within Cognitive Linguistics has stressed the importance of an investigation into the “internal” structure of lexical categories. [...] It insists that words cannot be described on the basis of distinctions with other words alone, but that the proper content of each word has to be studied on its own as well.” (Geeraerts, Grondelaers & Bakema 1994, p. 193, also p. 11 and p. 87).

What Geeraerts c.s. *et al.* are here formulating explicitly is what structuralist semanticists like Trier, as we have seen, also did in fact, but implicitly (see, however, note 22): not just exploring the boundaries between lexical items, but their internal structures as well. Fillmore, too, sees his frame theory as an extension of Trier’s approach, but he, too, emphasizes that more is needed to understand a word than a knowledge of “its lexical neighbours in the field”, its particular “conceptual underpinning” is also important (cf. Nerlich & Clarke 2000, p. 144).

CL semantics, which is, certainly as compared with Saussure, very “rich”, implies greatly expanded possibilities for the *lexical pattern*, and with it, it offers numerous leads for LR: the more time-, knowledge- and culture-bound features are included in the lexicon, the greater the possible lexical variation between languages becomes. There is, for instance, a greater chance of meeting with strictly language-bound meanings. Thus, Wierzbicka (2003, p. 47) claims that the English word *privacy* has no strict counterpart in other European languages. That claim rests on her assumption that the features of privacy deemed characteristic of English culture, such as “natural” and “desired by all” form part of the meaning of this word, and not of the alleged counterparts in other languages that are to be found in dictionaries.

Lexical differences can also appear as the result of the highly structured nature of word meanings. Geeraerts (1989, p. 176-177) describes, e.g., lexical-structural differences between 17th century Dutch and modern Dutch. Thus, the verb *vermanen* (“admonish”) has undergone a change in prototypical structure – whereas the sub-meaning “seriously exhort to improvement” was marginal at the time, and “tell” was the primary meaning, it is now the other way round. For *vers*, in connection with cultural changes, the sub-meaning “not salty” (which was linked up with the salting of products for storage) has been lost.

All this lexical variation is connected, in CL, with conceptual variation: more so than other linguistic approaches, CL emphasizes explicitly the close relationship or even identity of meaning and concept (see e.g. Dirven & Verspoor 1999, p. 17 ff.). The lexical pattern has thereby in fact become part of the basic principles of CL.²⁴

24 Langacker (1991, p. 98-99) does not equate concepts and semantic structure: he says that semantic structure is conceptualization shaped for linguistic purposes according to linguistic convention (he distinguishes concepts and conceptualizations).

In addition, the assumption of prototypical meanings activates the *focal pattern*. Frequently, peripheral meanings are interpreted in the light of the prototypical kernel. A clear example, at the same time an illustration of possible LR results, can be derived from Goldberg's construction grammar. The prototypical meaning of the transitive construction "Agent affects Patient" is not, in more peripheral cases like *I remember this*, literally applicable. As appears from a comparison with French, this pattern is yet assumed to work in the interpretation:

"French '*Je me souviens de ça*' does not construe the process as something that the trajector does to the landmark, rather, the agentive role of the trajector is de-emphasized through the use of a reflective." (Taylor 2002, p. 576).

From there, it is a small step to the *etymological pattern*, in which the original meaning is taken to be the "kernel". Because of the very prominent role the metaphor has acquired in CL, notably through the work of Lakoff, metaphorical meaning extension has become a central element of CL semantics. For example, in many languages there is an extensive cluster of meanings belonging to the area of "reasoning", said to be derived from meanings having to do with "travelling" (e.g. "We *came* to that conclusion", "The next *step* in his reasoning was difficult", etc.). Lakoff and others are convinced that here and elsewhere, the "source domain" carries over into the "target domain", and that the speakers of those languages conceptualize a chain of reasoning as a journey; the book title *Metaphors we live by* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) is in this respect significant.

In his discussion of Mixtec, a language in which spatial relations are verbalized in terms of body parts, Lakoff emphasizes that "it is not just a matter of using those words for our concepts, but rather a matter of systematically understanding spatial locations via conceptual relations among body parts" (Lakoff 1987, p. 313).²⁵

Just as in the 19th century, the boundary with the focal pattern is floating. A number of linguists (Langacker, among others) reject Lakoff's notion that the "target" meaning comes about through direct "mapping" *from* the "source" meaning: they rather see both meanings as synchronous, as concretizations of a more abstract scheme. Nevertheless, one meaning (the literal) is often regarded as prototypical, and the other (the metaphorical) as an "extension", so that a certain diachrony appears to have been secured again (Taylor 2002, p. 505 ff.). On the other hand, Lakoff is blamed because his metaphors are too "synchronous". Thus, Geeraerts & Grondelaers (1995) combat Lakoff's view that metaphors are always based on physical experiences: cultural-historical notions play a part as well. For example, many emotion metaphors are said in fact to go back to the ancient theory of the humours.

A good deal of attention is paid in CL to grammatical phenomena; they are analysed semantically, mainly in terms of the focal and the etymological pattern²⁶;

25 This example deviates from the general trend in Lakoff's work to regard, because of their basis in bodily feelings ("embodiment"), metaphors as universal. In his review of Lakoff (1987), Honeck (1989, p. 284) criticizes this deviation: "[...] Lakoff's usage seems to conflict with his own model. If bodily experience, surely a common human denominator, is the basis for metaphorical extension, then why should conceptual systems be radically different?"

26 The lexical pattern, too, plays a role, e.g. in the contrastive preposition analyses by Bowerman (see Dirven & Verspoor 1999, p. 159-160).

some of the examples given just now are illustrations of this. The *grammatical pattern*, in which conclusions are drawn from the simple presence or absence of grammatical elements, is less prominent in CL. One example, however, is given a central role in Lakoff (1987): in Dyirbal all nouns have one of four obligatory prefixes. The corresponding semantic categories (that do not agree with any “western” concept and so are hard to understand for westerners) are deemed fundamental for the Dyirbal cognition, in accordance with the grammatical pattern, precisely because of their grammatical status.²⁷ Lakoff emphatically adheres to the idea “that fundamental concepts tend to be grammaticized, that is, to be part of the grammar of the language. As such, they are used unconsciously, automatically and constantly. In general, grammaticized concepts are viewed as more fundamental than concepts expressed by vocabulary items.” (Lakoff 1987, p. 308).

5.2. CL views on LR: Wierzbicka and Lakoff

In spite of the strong presence of most interpretation patterns, LR is not a main theme in CL. Many CL notions show an *implicit* LR, however. Every time words and grammatical constructions, are characterized via the (encyclopaedically and culturally loaded) lexical pattern or via the focal or etymological pattern, and when this characterization deviates from their counterparts in other languages, LR conclusions are possible. Formulations with *construe as* or *conceptualize as* (cf. the above quotation from Taylor about “I remember this” vs. “*Je me souviens de ça*”) are frequent in CL. Since of all linguistic approaches, CL identifies most pregnantly meanings and concepts with each other, it is reasonable to assume that these formulations are not empty phrases. This means that many research results have to be interpreted in LR terms. Even without a clear thematization of LR, most cognitive linguists, unlike, e.g., generative grammarians, will have at least some affinity with LR ideas.

Only for few CL scholars is LR explicitly an important theme – Lakoff is one of them. In Lakoff (1987), the chapter “Whorf and Relativism” comprises a principled argument in favour of LR. On the basis of many empirical data (some of them were discussed above) and a detailed analysis of many dimensions along which LR views can differ from each other, his conclusion is: “Am I a relativist? Well, I hold views that characterize one of the hundreds of forms of relativism.” (Lakoff 1987, p. 334).

An even more important role is played by LR in the work of Wierzbicka. For her, rather than for Lakoff, LR is also the domain where her own empirical studies are conducted. Her research concerns for the greater part, though not exclusively, language and cognitive differences within Europe. Another striking aspect is the scope of her relativistic conclusions. These often go beyond pronouncements of the type “X is conceptualized by the speakers of language Z as Y”. In Wierzbicka’s

²⁷ Lakoff’s (1987) title *Women, fire, and dangerous things* refers to one of the four Dyirbal categories. Lakoff’s view of grammatical categories is in accordance with Whorf’s idea that grammar is a background system that operates with obligatory and hidden categories. Lakoff’s theory of metaphors and of linguistic framing was also put to use in his political books (and against Republicans). The use of linguistic framing for propaganda is an important issue for Lakoff (and of course directly connected with LR).

work, cognitive features are involved that are usually ascribed to individuals, but in this case to collective (speakers of a language).²⁸ In that context, the lexical and focal patterns are the chief levers to relativistic conclusions.

Much of Wierzbicka's research concerns lexical meanings, as in the *privacy* example. Another example is provided by her analyses of the different meanings of words with the sense of "happy" in various languages. According to Wierzbicka, English *happy* is special as compared with its, e.g., German and French, counterparts *glücklich* and *heureux*. *Happy* has a weaker meaning, which might be the result of "a long Anglo-Saxon tradition of not showing one's emotions" (cf. Dirven & Verspoor 1999, p. 168).

Grammatical differences, too, are accounted for in this way. Thus, Wierzbicka mentions that Russian frequently employs impersonal constructions (cf. Goddard 2003, p. 413 ff.). A mother will say to her child, not "I won't give you an ice cream", but, literally, "There won't be an ice cream for you". There are also, mirroring English constructions with "I believe/want to...", Russian constructions literally saying "It believes/ wants to...in me". Wierzbicka relates this to what she calls the "Russian fatalism". Events are conceptualized as destined this way by fate. The implicit argument follows the focal pattern: what goes for prototypical instances of impersonal constructions (no clear agent, cf. *It is raining*), is assumed to go also for non-prototypical cases.²⁹

5.3. Controversies

Within CL, there is a great deal of mutual disagreement. For the LR viewpoints developed in CL to be criticized within CL does not mean that LR has a dubious status in this approach, rather that this status is serious enough to deserve attention.

Among the critical comments, *empirical foundation* is the central point. Two types of criticism will have to be clearly distinguished there: (1) criticism of extrapolation from language to cognition, (2) criticism of the linguistic views to be extrapolated.

Ad (1). So far in this article, I have pretended extrapolation from language to cognition to be without problems. I have not problematized the four interpretation patterns *on this point*, and neither did the 19th century and many of the 20th century LR critics. Saussure found a lot to criticize in LR, but that criticism concerned the linguistic foundations of the interpretation patterns. The close links between, or even identity of meanings and concepts, language structures and cognitive structures, usually remained unchallenged. In the course of the 20th century, all this changed. It was increasingly seen as methodologically wrong to pronounce on the relationship between two subjects (language and cognition) on the basis of data

28 Cf. the *privacy* example discussed on p. 10. Anglo-Saxon reserve is said to lie at the basis of the language-specific meaning of this word. This psychologizing character of Wierzbicka's relativistic conclusions links up more with 19th century LR (but also with Whorf, cf. Goddard 2003) than with more recent variants of LR.

29 Here, and much more often with the focal pattern, we find a non-founded generalization about the meaning of a grammatical element or construction. The English meaning of the impersonal construction is extrapolated to Russian. It is exactly the *different usages* of the construction in both languages that makes a meaning difference plausible.

about only one of the two. A requirement came to be formulated for relativistic claims to be checked against language-independent cognitive evidence.

There are several reasons for not always assuming in advance a close link between language and cognition to be plausible. Concepts and thought patterns differ greatly per person or per group of speakers of the same language (just think of all those who have English as their native language in the world). While linguistic statements are made about the language that is spoken by the whole language community.³⁰ In addition, the 1:1 relation between meanings and concepts is not without problems. Even without an available word, a concept can exist, or can be learned so easily that the lack of it says very little (this has been demonstrated empirically in languages with few numerals, cf. Frank *et al.* 2008) – and with words available, the concepts need not exist; a famous example is that of the philosopher Putnam, who illustrated the difference between meaning and concept by saying that for him the same concept corresponds with *oak* and *beech* (cf. Putnam 1979).

The apprehension of the necessity of extra-language testing strongly increased in the course of the 20th century, but at the same time extrapolations without empirical testing were also continued. CL also shows this double image. On the one hand, LR claims are, specifically within CL, subjected to extensive empirical tests.³¹ On the other hand, there is much seemingly gratuitous extrapolation in CL, based upon its central premise of identity of meaning and concept. Within CL, this leads to discussion. Thus, Wierzbicka's LR conclusions with regard to the English word *privacy* are criticized by Kristiansen & Geeraerts (2007). They signal a lack of empirical evidence for the bold claim that "privacy" is a key concept in Anglo-Saxon culture, and nowhere else. Absence of a literal translation of the English term in another language is thought inconclusive: the speakers of that language can actually have the accompanying concept. Conversely, the mere *existence* of a word does not indicate a central role of the accompanying concept in the culture in question.

Ad (2). CL is by no means behind the times in the general trend in present-day linguistics to use, beside intuitive judgments by language users, other empirical evidence as well. Yet, also within CL, intuitive judgements continue to be appealed to. Especially where not very evident judgments are in question (which, as we saw in section 3, is always the case in the grammatical, the focal and the etymological patterns), this entails criticism. Thus, by no means all cognitive linguists are convinced of the effect of the etymological pattern, which, notably in Lakoff's theory of metaphors, is a central issue.³² They have strong doubts as to whether all meanings that played a part in the genesis of an expression are still current for present-day speakers. This doubt raises the call for more evidence:

30 For Sapir (1921, p. 219) this kind of differences triggered an important anti-relativistic argument: "When it comes to linguistic form, Plato walks with the Macedonian swine-herd, Confucius with the head-hunting savage of Assam". A similar remark is made by Kristiansen & Geeraerts (2007) about "a British aristocrat" vs. "a New Zealand farmer". As is well-known, Sapir developed relativistic ideas in his later work (cf. Joseph 2002).

31 Bowerman's work is a good example of this experimental approach.

32 One of the fiercest critics is Wierzbicka. Cf. Wierzbicka (1986).

“If generalized metaphors are cited as evidence for our contemporary way of conceptualizing the world, it does not suffice to identify the metaphor, but it has to be shown on independent grounds that the metaphors are not just dead ones.” (Geeraerts & Grondelaers 1995, p. 171).

Naturally, the answer to this call is also determinant for the possibility of LR consequences: what is no longer current, cannot affect cognition.

As a reaction, various empirical testing methods have been developed to determine the actuality of metaphors (cf., e.g., Taylor 2002, p. 500 ff. and Geeraerts & Grondelaers 1995, section 6). This has resulted in a multitude of criteria, but the aim is always the same: preventing that etymologically motivated conceptualizations are unjustly attributed to language users.

6. ASSESSMENT

Although CL elaborates on Saussure’s general idea of the *signe linguistique*, and though Saussure’s view of meaning implies a certain form of LR which – with Trier as transitional stage – makes itself felt in CL, total CL semantics, its LR implications included, is by no means Saussurean. All the interpretation patterns that supported LR but were rendered powerless by Saussure, return within CL and can result in substantial LR conclusions. How is this reversion to be appreciated?³³

As regards the *lexical pattern*, we may, I think, notice a positive development. We have seen that Saussure’s minimal strictly differential lexical semantics is not very plausible and in the strict sense unworkable, and has not been consistently sustained in practice. CL here amounts to a further enrichment, because all kinds of features belonging to different usage spheres are incorporated into the meaning definitions, so that the actual implementation possibilities and impossibilities can be elucidated maximally. On the one hand, the CL approach renders descriptions susceptible of a variety of relevant language (community)-bound aspects of meanings and concepts – new and subtle forms of LR thus become possible. On the other hand, prudence is called for in case of LR conclusions: it is impossible, as we saw in section 5.3, to assume without further investigation a 1:1 relation between meanings and concepts. Wierzbicka’s notion that only the Anglo-Saxon culture can lay claim to the concept “privacy” has, for example, rightly been criticized.

The re-introduction of the *etymological pattern* in, especially, metaphor studies, I regard as a relapse into an out of date 19th century historicist thought pattern that confuses origin and essence. Saussure’s strict separation between synchrony and diachrony broke through this pattern. That CL linguists take it for granted that original meanings carry over into the present is, I think, a step backwards. This step is not taken by every one, however; within CL, as we have seen, this kind of assumptions are often demanded by scholars to be tested empirically.

The *focal pattern*, impossible in Saussure because of the lack of a distinction between kernel and peripheral meanings, has returned prominently in CL. In itself, the return of this distinction does justice, I think, to the rich and complex

33 See Elffers (2009) for a more detailed evaluation.

semantic structure of lexical and grammatical elements. As an *a priori* leverage to LR conclusions such as, e.g., Goldberg's notion about the transitive construction with *remember*, the focal pattern is to my mind untenable. To indicate the two participant roles of *remember*, speakers simply use the available conventional means of their language. What these means may indicate when used in *other* constructions (e.g. an Agent or a Patient), is usually irrelevant in the *remember* construction, as I argued before, in section 4.3 with reference to the distinction *valeur-signification*.³⁴ I suggested there the possibility that these other meanings may "co-resonate". Here, too, empirical investigation should replace automatic assumptions of "conceptualizations" in conformity with the analysis in terms of kernel and periphery drawn up by the linguist.

With regard to the return of the *grammatical pattern*, too, some reservation may not come amiss. The presupposition is always that grammatical elements play a separate, important cognitive role. Precisely when, as we argued in section 4.3, we assign full value to the *signification*, this is doubtful: the meaning of these elements, pre-eminently does not belong to "what the speaker wishes to impart". He has to "take them along" as it were in the context of the structure of the language used. In how far they "co-resonate" has to be determined for each case.³⁵

These observations require more elaboration than is possible within the framework of this article, but they can perhaps, even in this format, make a contribution to the, still topical, discussion about the foundations of semantics. Furthermore, they prove once more that a look at the history of linguistics can throw new light on present-day problems.

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34 With the *lexical* pattern, this insight is strongly developed within CL. In the case of rich and polysemous structures it is generally assumed that sub-meanings or "domains" are or are not *activated* per occasion of use. Thus, for a word like *Sunday* (see p. 9), it is assumed that the religious and cultural connotations are only relevant in certain contexts.

35 Dinneen (1967, p. 218-219, see also note 19) illustrates the importance of the *signification* with examples of grammatical differences between languages. The English sentence *The man is sick* is, to his mind, semantically the equivalent of the Kwakiutl counterpart, in spite of the fact that, in conformity with the grammatical pattern, English speakers "in reality" say *The single definite man is sick at the present time*, and Kwakiutl speakers say *Definite man near him invisible sick near him visible*. The meanings of the obligatory affixes are not reckoned by Dinneen to form part of what the speaker wishes to impart; therefore, unlike what would be the case according to Lakoff (see the quotation on p. 11), there is no unbridgeable cognitive gulf between the speakers of the two languages. Cf. Lenneberg (1953) for a criticism of Whorf along similar lines.

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