What do cognitive linguists study?

1 Linguistic encoding

Consider the following examples in the light of the discussion of example (1) in Chapter 1. Using the diagrams in Figure 1.3 as a starting point, try to draw similar diagrams that capture the path of motion involved in each example. In each case, how much of this information is explicitly encoded within the meanings of the words themselves? How much seems to depend on what you know about the world?

(1) The baby threw the rattle out of the buggy.
(2) I threw the cat out of the back door.
(3) I tore up the letter and threw it out of the window.
(4) I threw the tennis ball out of the house.
(5) I threw the flowers out of the vase.

2 Constructions

The examples below contain idiomatic constructions. If you are a non-native speaker of English, you may need to consult a native speaker or a dictionary of idioms to find out the idiomatic meaning. In the light of the discussion of example (6) in Chapter 1, try changing certain aspects of each sentence to see whether these examples pattern in the same way.

a. For instance, what happens if you change the subject of the sentence (for example, the presidential candidate in the first sentence)?
b. What happens if you change the object (for example, the towel)?
c. It’s not always possible to make a sentence passive, but what happens to the meaning here if you can?

(1) The presidential candidate threw in the towel.
(2) Before the exam, Mary got cold feet.
(3) She’s been giving me the cold shoulder lately.
(4) You are the apple of my eye.
(5) She’s banging her head against a brick wall.

d. What do your findings suggest about an individual’s knowledge of such constructions as opposed to sentences containing literal meaning?
e. Do any of these examples also have a literal meaning?

3 Word order
Take example (2) from question 2. above. Believe it or not, a sentence such as this with seven words has 5,040 mathematically possible word order permutations! Try to work out how many of these permutations result in a grammatical sentence. What do your findings suggest?

4 Concepts and conceptual domains
The examples below contain linguistic expressions that express abstract concepts. In the light of the discussion of the examples in (11) in Chapter 1, identify the relevant conceptual domain that the concept might relate to. Do these abstract concepts appear to be understood in terms of concrete physical experiences? What is the evidence for your conclusions?

(1) You’ve just given me a really good idea.
(2) How much time did you spend on this essay?
(3) He fell into a deep depression.
(4) The stock market crashed on Black Wednesday.
(5) Unfortunately, your argument lacks a solid foundation.

Now come up with other sentences which illustrate similar patterns for the following conceptual domains:

(6) THEORIES
(7) LOVE
(8) ARGUMENT
(9) ANGER
(10) KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING

5 Conceptual domains, continued
Consider the following sentences. What sort of experiences/domains of experience are being used to describe a love relationship?

(1) This relationship is a dead-end street.
(2) Our marriage is stuck in a rut.
(3) Their marriage is on the rocks.
(4) We’re at a crossroads in our relationship.
(5) It’s been a long, bumpy ride.

6 Open-class or closed-class?

Consider the linguistic example below in the light of the discussion of examples (15)–(16) in Chapter 1. First, try to identify the open-class words/morphemes and the closed-class words/morphemes by referring to the properties described in Table 1.1. Next, come up with a set of examples in which only the closed-class words/morphemes have been altered. What kinds of differences do these changes make to the sentence? Finally, try changing the open-class words/morphemes. What kinds of differences do these changes make to the sentence?

*The supermodel was putting on her lipstick.*