Cognitive Grammar II: constructions

1 Phrase structure

Consider the following phrases:

(1) post the letters in the morning
(2) fond of chocolate
(3) the demolition of Tommy’s cat tree

a. In each case, begin by bracketing phrases within phrases.
b. Then, for each phrase identify the profile determinant.
c. Work out which are the autonomous and dependent elements.
d. Explain what elaborates what.
e. Finally, in the light of your findings, comment on the status of the prepositions in these examples.

2 Word structure: stems and affixes

Consider the following complex words:

(1) tickled
(2) undress
(3) boorish
(4) transmit
(5) astronaut

Recall the properties of prototypical stems and affixes summarised in Table 23.2.

a. In the light of these properties, identify stems and affixes in these complex words.
b. Identify the profile determinant.
c. Establish which are the autonomous and dependent units.
d. Explain what elaborates what.
e. Finally, how does Langacker’s (1987: 359) observation that ‘the stem/affix distinction may not always be clear-cut’ relate to these examples?

3 Word structure: compound nouns

In Chapter 23, we saw that it is not possible to identify the head in some compounds (such as puppy dog), which are described in terms of apposition. Consider the following examples of compound nouns:

(1) boyfriend
(2) bluebottle
(3) angel face
(4) fighter pilot

a. In each case, state whether the compound represents a case of apposition or whether it is possible to identify a head or profile determinant.
b. If the latter, what type of valence relation holds between the two elements? Explain how you reached your conclusions.

4 Autonomy and dependence: embedded clauses

Consider the following examples of embedded clauses drawn from Chapter 23:

(1) Monica thought [that Tommy was difficult to handle].
(2) [That Tommy was difficult to handle] was a well-known fact.
(3) the idea [that Tommy was difficult to handle]
(4) the cat claws [that she clipped]
(5) Tommy could make [Monica seethe].
(6) Monica wanted [Tommy to be happy].
(7) [Seething over a cat like Tommy] was not unusual.
(8) [Shrugging her shoulders], she got on with her day.
(9) [Feted by adoring cat breeders], Tommy carried on washing himself.

a. For each example, establish the autonomous and dependent units in these constructions.
b. Explain what elaborates what.

5 Marked coding: the passive construction

While most verbs can be coded in active voice, only a subset of transitive verbs can be passivised. In light of this, consider the following examples:

(1) Tommy was admired (by cat lovers everywhere).
(2) Tommy was tickled mercilessly (by Monica).
(3) The truth about their relationship was known (by Monica).
(4) Jimmy was resembled (by Tommy).

a. Rank these examples in terms of their acceptability.
b. What kind of pattern emerges from your findings?
c. How might this be accounted for in Cognitive Grammar?