Key topics in language science: formal versus cognitive linguistics

1 Comparing and contrasting formal versus cognitive linguistics

In Chapter 7, the following key topics were addressed:

i) the nature of language origins and its time depth;
ii) language universals;
iii) how children acquire their mother tongue;
iv) whether the mind is modular;
v) the issue of semantic universals;
vi) the nature of the relationship between language and thought, also known as linguistic relativity.

a. For each, summarise the key theoretical and empirical arguments adopted by i) formal linguists and ii) cognitive linguists.
b. Present these arguments as an annotated table. Is there any common ground?

2 Kay and Kempton’s colour naming experiment

Kay and Kempton (1984) compared English speakers with Tarahumara (Mexican Indian) speakers on naming triads of colour (blue, blue-green, green). Tarahumara has a word for ‘blue-green’, but not separate words for ‘blue’ and ‘green’. The task was to state whether the blue-green colour was closer to blue or to green. English speakers sharply distinguished blue and green, but Tarahumara speakers did not. In a subsequent study, English speakers were induced to call the intermediate colours blue-green, and the effect disappeared.

a. In light of the discussion on language and thought in Chapter 7, how might we interpret these findings in the light of the i) formal linguistics position and ii) the cognitive linguistics position?
b. What light, if any, does this finding by Kay and Kempton shed on arguments for universals, in terms of language and/or thought, as presented in Chapter 7?