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Introduction

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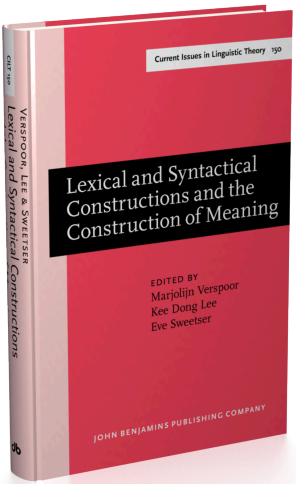

Pages xi–xii of
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Introduction

The papers published here were presented at the International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, held at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque in July 1995. 1995 might be said to mark two decades of work in some of the new directions which were mapped out in the mid-seventies, as a cognitive linguistic community began to form. It is safe to say that none of us could have foreseen, back in the seventies, how rapid the growth of that emerging community would be; far less could we have predicted the rich and varied array of scholarly work which has emanated from it. We are proud to be able to publish at least a selection from the remarkable feast of cognitive linguistics offered at the 1995 conference.

In a tradition of linguistics which does not respect traditional disciplinary boundaries - whether between linguistics and other neighboring fields, or between canonical sub-areas of linguistics, it becomes increasingly difficult to make a single classification of papers from a conference covering a broad range of topics. As editors, we have had to present these papers in a separate volume from those on discourse structure, or on psycholinguistics.

In this "grammar and lexicon" volume from the 1995 ICLC are to be found, for example, papers dealing with the focus-marking function of ASL word order (Wilbur), grammatical marking of aspects of addressee viewpoint (Floyd), and numerous analyses focusing on the cognitive aspects of viewpoint-presentation and speaker's construal. Rather than lamenting that these papers should be divided from others which deal with discourse structure and viewpoint in longer texts, or with psychological testing of semantic hypotheses, we choose to take the very difficulty of "cutting up" our field as evidence that cognitive linguistics has achieved some success in bringing together aspects of the study of language which have standardly been divided.

Work in cognitive linguistics has been characterized by attention to the ways in which language is representing not mere propositions about the world, but human experience of situations, and human perceptual and conceptual structure. The first section of this volume focuses on issues of such construal and presentation of information, including figure-ground relations, higher-level generalizations about (and relations between) image-schematic structures, and the role of syntactic constructions in informational structure.

Linguistic theories which treat grammatical constructions as meaningless are naturally unlikely to investigate the semantics and pragmatics of grammar. Freed to examine the meanings of grammatical morphemes and constructions, cognitive linguistic researchers have given us a tidal wave of new studies in this area, and in the study of grammaticalization. In sections two and three of the present volume, we find papers on cross-categorial polysemy between lexical and grammatical uses of a morpheme, on polysemy between different grammatical senses, and on the relationship between earlier lexical senses and later grammatical ones.

Issues of transitivity lie at the intersection of several areas which have recently been focal for cognitive linguistics. The study of transitivity necessarily entails exploration of the relationship between syntactic constructions which have traditionally been labelled as transitive or intransitive, and the pragmatics and semantics conveyed by such constructions. Transitivity, in this understanding of grammar, is a particularly complex and interesting area of grammatical meaning; the choice of a transitive or intransitive structure frequently involves the speaker's active construal not only of a situation's participant-role structure, but also of its causal, aspectual, and intentional structure. The final section of this volume gathers a group of studies which shed further light on questions of transitivity and argument structure.

As a whole, this collection gives new evidence of the complexity and motivation of the mapping between linguistic form and function, extends our understanding of the grammar-lexicon continuum, and offers a wealth of new directions for research on language and conceptual structure. We offer it to the community in the hope that it will stimulate yet more productive work, on topics which (we trust) will go well beyond those which can be imagined from our current cognitive vantage point. In the future, further breakdown of boundaries may bring closer together the more physical and social aspects of cognitive linguistics; work in grammatical analysis at large should, for example, continue to become more closely linked with both discourse studies and neurolinguistics. It will at any rate be a sign of success if the the editors of the 1997 ICLC papers find it even harder than we did to divide up the field into separate volumes.

We thank all those who made this volume possible, especially the participants and organizers of the 1995 ICLC, and those of the 1995 Linguistic Society of America Summer Linguistic Institute, which gave the ICLC a welcoming and stimulating setting.