

Cognitive Phonology: Implications of an Emergentist Model

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The present talk outlines the main theoretical tools of “Cognitive Phonology” (CP) – i.e. the phonological part of Cognitive Linguistics (CL).

Being a non-derivational and non-modular framework, CP does not work with assumptions such as the Underlying Representation, ordered rules, etc. Instead, domain-general cognitive mechanisms such as schematization, categorization, and networks are used. Moreover, non-phonological information freely appears alongside phonological information. CP follows the overall Emergentist paradigm – i.e. grammar is gradually built as a result of the interaction between our general cognition and the data, which means there is no domain-specific module in the mind that generates grammar and the development of grammar is the result of categorization and network-building in the lexicon. Thus, there is no clear-cut distinction between grammar and lexicon.

Since CP is an Emergentist model, it does not include any predetermined linguistic units such as distinctive features, phonemes, or morphemes. However, it does not necessarily exclude them either and they could emerge as abstractions over abstractions.

Following the Embodied assumption of CL (i.e. perception/cognition non-distinction) the relationship to phonetics in CP falls under the umbrella of the “grounded” approach (as opposed to the phonetics-free perspective).

The notation used in this talk is from Nessel (2008) – a model which is mainly based on Langacker’s (1987) Cognitive Grammar. This model works with schemas and categorizing relationships, namely extension and instantiation, that connect schemas in various ways, and form networks based on semantic/phonological similarities. Notably, Nessel (2008) introduces the concept of the “second-order schema” which is a useful tool for describing source-oriented generalizations and thus morphophonological alternations.

The data in this talk is from the Azerbaijani language – a Turkic language spoken mainly in north-western Iran and Azerbaijan.

Langacker, Ronald W. 1987. Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Nessel, Tore. 2008. Abstract Phonology in a Concrete Model: Cognitive Linguistics and the Morphology-Phonology Interface. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110208368>