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LEONARD TALMY

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Leonard Talmy is Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, where he taught for 15 years and was Director of the Center for Cognitive Science for 14 years. He is now also a Visiting Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, where he had received his Ph.D. in Linguistics. Over his career, he taught in Hamburg, Rome, and Moscow (the latter two as a Fulbright Fellow) as well as at Stanford, Georgetown and University of California, Berkeley. He did extended research at Stanford on the Language Universals Project, at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute with language-impaired children, and at the University of California at San Diego in cognitive science at the Center for Human Information Processing. And he was the Coordinator of the Cognitive Science Program at the University of California at Berkeley for six years.

His broader research interests cover cognitive linguistics, the properties of conceptual organization, and cognitive theory. His more specific interests within linguistics center on natural-language semantics, including: typologies and universals of semantic structure; the relationship between

semantic structure and formal linguistic structures -- lexical, morphological, and syntactic; and the relation of this material to diachrony, discourse, development, impairment, culture, and evolution. Additional specializations are in American Indian and Yiddish linguistics.

He is the author of a two-volume set with MIT Press (2000): *Toward a Cognitive Semantics* -- volume 1: *Concept Structuring Systems*; volume 2: *Typology and Process in Concept Structuring*.

Previously published articles include *The Relation of Grammar to Cognition*, *Force Dynamics in Language and Cognition*, *How Language Structures Space*, *Fictive Motion in Language and 'Ception'*, *Lexicalization Patterns*, *The Representation of Spatial Structure in Spoken and Signed Languages: a Neural Model*, and *Recombination in the Evolution of Language*. He has also written the Foreword for the edited volume *Methods in Cognitive Linguistics* and the entry on *Cognitive Linguistics* for Elsevier's *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. And he is currently working on a book for MIT Press titled *The Attention System of Language*.

Virtually all his written work is available on his website, <http://linguistics.buffalo.edu/people/faculty/talmy/talmyweb/index.html> including his 1972 dissertation, his 2000 two-volume set with MIT Press and his articles published and in press since 2000.

He was the recipient of the Gutenberg Research Award for 2012 from the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany, for outstanding contributions to research in the area of linguistics. In 2011, he was honored as one of the three "Founding Fathers" of cognitive linguistics at the 10th Biannual Conference of the International Cognitive Linguistics Association. He was elected a Fellow of the Cognitive Science Society in its 2002 inaugural selection of Fellows (and had been a founding member of the Society). He is included in *Outstanding People of the 20th Century* and in *International Who's Who of Intellectuals, thirteenth edition*.

(Source: <http://linguistics.buffalo.edu/people/faculty/talmy/talmyweb/bioblurb.html>)

Revista Lingüística: Your doctoral dissertation focused on the representation of Motion events in different languages and has influenced the work of many other linguists since then. What were the motivations that led you to pursue this research?

Leonard Talmy: My Motion event typology began when I simply noticed how Spanish and English represented Motion events differently. Now, at that time, the Linguistics department favored working on American Indian languages. So, as part of my graduate student research, I went driving around looking for a Californian Indian language to analyze, and met an Atsugewi speaker with whom I worked. It turned out that that language had a third major way of representing Motion. This was a lucky accident, since this type was one of the rarer in the world. So I found a three-legged stool to base the typology on, and with this basis I could then refine the typology by looking at still other configurations that languages had, such as split systems, mixed systems, minimal systems, and so forth.

Revista Lingüística: In your opinion, what was the impact of your dissertation's findings, and of your initial work, in the formation and consolidation of Cognitive Linguistics?

Leonard Talmy: Well, I'm not a historian of Cognitive Linguistics, but my impression is that there was a gradual build-up of works, first mainly by me and George Lakoff, that provided the initial body that eventually consolidated into Cognitive Linguistics. Ron Langacker came in a bit later and further consolidated the field. I think the work of us three is the main starting impetus of the field.

Of my own work, probably the papers most influential in building up a critical mass for this new perspective on language were those involving spatial structure; figure and ground analysis; my early work on causation, which also showed up in my dissertation, and that eventually led to Force Dynamics; and of course the work on Motion event structure. Also central was a paper of mine called *The Relation of Grammar to Cognition*, which is essentially the semantics of grammar or of closed-class forms, and that I revised as the first chapter of my two-volume set.

Revista Lingüística: Taking into account Cognitive Linguistics' trajectory, how would you evaluate the area nowadays?

Leonard Talmy: Since the earliest days of Cognitive Linguistics, there has been a steady deepening in the analysis of areas it previously addressed, and a steady expansion of the areas that the methods of Cognitive Linguistics have been applied to. For example, we've seen deepening in the analysis of metaphor, blending, the cognitive basis of grammar, and schematic systems such as the ones I've worked on – configurational structure, perspective, attention, force, and cognitive state. And we've seen Cognitive Linguistic analysis extended to gesture and signed language.

A further development within Cognitive Linguistics has been increasing emphasis on empirical methods, which is great, because we need both the empirical and the theoretical sides. What counts as empirical methods includes Psycholinguistic experimentation; corpus research (especially when including a statistical analysis); videographic and audiographic analysis (sometimes frame by frame); maybe the old method of writing down protocols, for example, of children's utterances; and some might include simulations, as in artificial intelligence or computational linguistics. The model I look to is physics, which includes both theoretical physics and experimental physics, interacting with each other. Theoretical physics without input from empirical findings would be empty, producing theories about nothing that exists out there. On the other hand, empirical research without guidance by theories is blind. It wouldn't know what to look at next, nor what to make of its findings. So as long as there is an interaction of both aspects, that's the healthiest state a field can be in, and I include Cognitive Linguistics in that. A current risk, though, is that the emphasis on the empirical side might downplay the importance of the theoretical side, and if that were to happen, that would be an unfortunate development within the field.

Revista Lingüística: Would you tell us about the new book you are writing?

Leonard Talmy: The book I'm completing, which is going to be published by MIT Press, and should appear in 2017, is called *The Targeting System of Language*. Its aim is to unify deixis and anaphora into a single cognitive system that I call *targeting*. In both cases, the speaker wants to refer to something – her *target* – located near or far in either the speech-external or the speech-internal environment. She wants to refer to this target at a certain point in her discourse and get the hearer's attention on it there as well. But how can she bring this about? She can't just directly reach into the hearer's cognition, take hold of his attention, and place it on her selected target at the intended moment.

Language solves this problem with a certain *targeting procedure*. At the intended point in her discourse, the speaker places a *trigger* – a form like *this, that, here, there, now, then*, or a personal pronoun – the set of such triggers is actually quite extensive. This trigger then initiates – or “triggers” – a 3-stage process in the hearer. In the first stage, the trigger directs the hearer to look for certain cues to the target. There are ten categories of such cues, representing ten different sources of information. This part is the mainstay of the analysis – there is a chapter for each cue type. In the second stage, the hearer integrates the cues he has found and uses them to single out the one entity in the environment that most fits those cues. This should be the speaker's intended target. And in the third stage, he takes the concept of this target and maps it onto the trigger, so he can integrate it with the rest of the sentence's meaning.

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