

Book Review

Cognitive Linguistic Approaches to Text and Discourse: From Poetics to Politics.
Edited by Christopher Hart. Edinburgh University Press, 2019. ISBN:
9781474450003, 206 pp.

This edited collection provides new insights into the readerly processing of textual features by extending Cognitive Linguistic models of lexis and grammar to text and discourse analysis. Each chapter showcases how applying frameworks from the Cognitive Linguistic toolkit of textual analysis to real communicative activities can reveal something new about the literary, rhetorical, or ideological effects authentic language use has on readers' experiences and mental processing. Its replicable analyses, using a variety of frameworks and methods with texts from assorted discursive genres, exemplify the viability of the Cognitive Linguistic enterprise for examining effects of textual choice on reader experience of text and discourse. This book therefore benefits researchers seeking to explore how Cognitive Linguistic approaches to text and discourse might suit their research projects.

Cognitive Linguistics constitutes many partially overlapping approaches rather than a single well-defined theory. These approaches collectively consider language use to reflect and reveal the workings of mental processes. They therefore aim to examine language use in a way that is compatible with cognitive scientific research about the human mind. The Cognitive Linguistic focus tends to lie on mental processes of meaning construction in idealised, non-contextual instances of language, since its frameworks were originally developed to explain language use

at the sentence-level. This volume argues that Cognitive Linguistic approaches can be productively extended to higher-level experiential effects of engagement with longer stretches of text, such as the experience of emotions while reading or the processing of ideological framing of news events. To argue for this extension, it brings together research carried out in the converging Cognitive Stylistic and Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) traditions that study such experiential effects in literary genres and political text, respectively.

What unites these two traditions is their shared “principled concern for the mental processes at work when [readers] encounter and experience texts” (7). Though they differ in the kind of textual material they study (literary genres and political text, respectively), the research programmes of each tradition reflect the Cognitive Linguistic view that our embodied and social experiences inform the meanings we attach to language use (Johnson). Correspondingly, they both use Cognitive Linguistic frameworks to deal with the quantifiable and measurable effects of textuality on cognition and produce systematic, rigorous, and replicable analyses of textual experience. The nine case studies in the volume competently demonstrate these commitments shared by the two traditions. Collectively, these studies convincingly show how research from both traditions can contribute fresh insights into the cognitive and experiential dimensions of text processing.

Particularly poignant is the way the volume’s combination of analyses across different textual genres illustrates how analytical framework choice depends on the cognitive process studied rather than text genre. For instance, though chapters are ordered according to text genre on a spectrum from the ostensibly literary (Chapter 1) to the ostensibly political (Chapter 9), chapters 1 and 9 use the same Cognitive Linguistic framework to discuss how language construes readerly experience of each text: Cognitive Grammar. This model of grammar is built upon the idea that how we express things grammatically is related to how we conceive them. In other words, the readerly experience of a text can be explained by the way it is constructed. This is why Peter Stockwell’s discussion of the sense of ambience in Percy Shelley’s poem *A Summer Evening Churchyard* in Chapter 1 and Christopher Hart’s analysis of ideological

effects in news reports of violence at political protests in Chapter 9 can both make use of Cognitive Grammar; the framework can shed light on the linguistic underpinnings of both cognitive experiences despite textual genre. This use of Cognitive Linguistic frameworks across genre underscores the convergence of Cognitive Stylistics and Cognitive CDA in their shared endeavours. Though analyses in the volume are limited to texts in English and of the linguistic modality only, the volume's chapter organisation effectively illustrates that the two traditions should be considered "as part of a broader approach to text and discourse analysis emerging within Cognitive Linguistics" (9).

However, the volume does not claim that every Cognitive Linguistic framework can unproblematically be applied for discourse analysis. Chapter 4 provides a good example of how refinements to frameworks might be necessary to satisfactorily account for the complexity of a discursive dataset. Discussing forum entries about experiences of pain by contributors with Trigeminal Neuralgia, Elena Semino shows that the Cognitive Linguistic framework Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) can explain an observed tendency to describe pain in terms of causes of damage to the body. CMT characterises metaphorical expressions in terms of the correspondences between its terms, thus allowing Semino to show how subjective experiences like pain are understood in the data in terms of other, intersubjectively-accessible experiences. Nevertheless, this approach cannot completely account for metaphors that evoke scenarios likely not directly experienced, or for the contextual pragmatic choice for some metaphors. Semino suggests refining existing theoretical concepts within CMT to address the first problem and adopts a different theoretical framework to address the context in which metaphors are produced. The example used for the latter discussion is a simile referring to a painful night as a "Mike Tyson night." Semino argues that a Dynamic Systems approach, which defines metaphor communication as the product of cognitive, linguistic, pragmatic and cultural influences, can successfully account for why this particular creative metaphor might appear in her data: cultural knowledge informed its production. Semino's discussion adeptly highlights how applying Cognitive Linguistic frameworks to discourse analysis might push the boundaries of Cognitive Linguistics to stimulate refinement and innovation and implies a strong

encouragement for readers to be similarly innovative.

The volume does not shy away from eclectic use of frameworks and methods to illustrate employment of Cognitive Linguistic approaches either. Chapter 8 is the best example of this eclecticism. Sam Browse’s analysis of responses to a speech by Theresa May in this chapter uses ethnographic reader data to theorise a model of oppositional reading with concepts from two Cognitive Linguistic frameworks: Cognitive Grammar and Text World Theory. These two frameworks share a focus on the pre-existing knowledge audiences use to process texts, allowing Browse to characterise his ethnographic data in terms of such audience knowledge. Combining this data with linguistic description of May’s speech enables him to describe readers’ interpretative processes in such detail that he can observe and explain nuances in individual oppositional readings and shared reception processes. Browse’s analysis skilfully portrays how the use of reader data combined with eclectic usage of Cognitive Linguistic frameworks can significantly augment discourse analytic results, both in accounting for specific datasets and feeding back framework refinements to Cognitive Linguistics.

Overall, the volume comprehensively presents the state of applied Cognitive Linguistic research, providing excellent representative examples of applying and refining Cognitive Linguistic models for text and discourse. Novice readers might struggle to follow some argumentation if they are unfamiliar with terminology but will enjoy the chapters as exemplary Cognitive Linguistic discourse analysis once they grasp basic tenets. Though the volume lacks discussion of text and discourse beyond English or the linguistic modality, it clearly provides stepping-stones to future applied Cognitive Linguistic research by encouraging eclectic integration of frameworks and methods that best suit the exploration of the experiential effects of linguistic choice.

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WORKS CITED

Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.