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Cognitive Linguistics and Vietnamese Language Teaching

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Abstract: Vietnamese language teaching, or language teaching in general, is not out of serving the purpose of helping language learners understand, perceive and use that language the most accurately and efficiently as possible. In the process of the teacher's teaching and the learners' perceiving, there always appear the language barriers, the differences between the two languages, the two cultures that cause a lot of difficulties for both the learners and the teacher. This article proposes a method to deal with those difficulties, suggests some tips for language teaching based on the theory of Cognitive Linguistics in order to serve the best, the ultimate goal of language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language Teaching and Learning, Cognitive, Perceiving, Language Barriers.

1. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics is a trend of modern linguistics born in the second half of the twentieth century (Co, 2007; Thang, 2005).

In a narrow sense, Cognitive Linguistics is mainly American cognitive semantics (by Lakoff and Johnson) and American cognitive grammar (by Langacker) plus some other studies by European scholars such as Rudzka-Ostyn, Taylor, Geeraerts, Haiman, etc. (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007)

In a broad sense, Cognitive Linguistics includes many different research directions: from Fillmore's Frame Semantics and Structural Grammar to the Cognitive Typology of Talmy, Hawkins, Croft, etc. to Wierzbicka's Semantic Theory, Fauconnier's Mental Space theory and issues such as grammaticalization, iconicity, etc. (Co, 2007; Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007; Thang, 2005).

These broad and narrow scopes in the concept of Cognitive Linguistics all relate to the backgrounds of researchers from three main human resources. The first are scholars who come from Generative Grammar and Semantics (but have diverged or opposed) such as Fillmore and Lakoff, etc. The second are functional linguists who study universals and linguistic typology such as Givón, Talmy, Haiman, Croft, etc. The third are philosophers and psychologists interested in cognitive research such as Rosch, Johnson, Gibbs, Putnam, etc. (Co, 2007; Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007; Thang, 2005).

Cognitive Linguistics has a specific research object, which is the relationship between language and human thought processes such as intelligence, knowledge, understanding, memory, conceptualization of the world, etc., on the basis of experience and reasoning. It studies the interrelationships between language ability and human cognitive ability, such as the ability to construct images, logical reasoning, and acquiring new knowledge. It studies based on the in-depth relationship between language and thought (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007).

The central task of Cognitive Linguistics is to describe and interpret the intrinsic cognitive and dynamics of speakers and listeners. They are viewed as an information processing system consisting of a finite number of independent elements and distributing linguistic information on different levels (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007).

Therefore, the application of cognitive linguistics theory to teaching language as Vietnamese is essential to help learners acquire Vietnamese better and easier. (Jeannette, 2011; Randal, 2012; Tessa, 2001).

2. Teaching Vietnamese from the perspective of cognitive linguistics

First of all, from the Cognitive Linguistics point of view, language is not an autonomous cognitive ability. This principle opposes the well-known hypothesis of generative grammar that language is an autonomous cognitive ability or an isolated module with non-verbal cognitive abilities. It assumes that the expression of linguistic knowledge is essentially the same as that of other conceptual constructs, that the processes in which knowledge is used are not fundamentally different from cognitive abilities. That people use outside the realm of language. In other words, language should not be considered as an innate part completely independent of cognitive ability, the linguistic mechanism is only a part of the universal cognitive mechanism (Co, 2007).

Applying this principle to teaching Vietnamese, we must consider Vietnamese as a mass of knowledge that learners must acquire in a certain time duration like acquiring any other kind of knowledge. Therefore, it is not possible to teach them to understand immediately, but it takes a certain amount of time. To shorten this process, we must take advantage of their available knowledge, guide them to use the knowledge they already have to apply and learn Vietnamese faster. This means that for each learner we have to assess the level of basic knowledge inside and outside of their language in order to have an appropriate teaching strategy. Each group of different learners will have different knowledge capacity, thinking methods, and different levels of language response. For example, housewives will not be able to have quick language reflexes like businessmen. Or the language skills of politicians will be higher than that of computer experts. It also means that we also have to compile many different curricula for different target groups. Each curriculum has different levels, which are inherited and developed in concentric circles to serve different levels of Vietnamese language use. In each such level, there are different topics to ensure the comprehensiveness and diversity of Vietnamese language knowledge, and to update the reality of using Vietnamese in the Vietnamese community.

Linguistic knowledge (knowledge of meaning and form) is essentially conceptual structure, and semantic expression is essentially conceptual expression. According to cognitive linguists, syntactic, lexical, and phonological expressions are also essentially conceptual because sounds and utterances must be generated at the output and understood at the input of the cognitive processes, which govern speaking - writing, listening - reading activities, which are two processes related to the brain. Applying this, when teaching Vietnamese, we should take advantage of the existing conceptual structures inside learners to compare similarities and differences with the conceptual structures of Vietnamese to help learners easily recognize the cognitive rules when using Vietnamese. We should start with the similarities before getting to the differences. For example, for English speakers, they already have the structure What's your name? so we should help them get access to the saying in Vietnamese: *Tên của bạn là gì? (*Name of yours is what?) before coming to the sayings in Vietnamese: *Bạn tên là gì? (You* name is what?), *Bạn tên gì? (*You name what?), *Tên bạn là gì? (*You name is what?) .

In addition, the cognitive processes that govern the use of language (especially the generation and transmission of meaning in language) are in principle the same as other cognitive abilities. This means that the organization and extraction of linguistic knowledge is not much different from the organization and abstraction of other knowledge in the mind, and the cognitive abilities that we apply when speaking and understanding are not much different from those of the cognitive abilities that we apply to other cognitive tasks such as visual perception, reasoning, or locomotion. Therefore, language is a cognitive ability of humans, and from the cognitive point of view, language is real-time perception and the generation in time of sequences of symbolic units established, structuralized. Therefore, when teaching Vietnamese, our teachers should consider Vietnamese as a raw material to provide students and at the same time we should also guide them on how to process the ingredients to create the final products of Vietnamese expressions of the Vietnamese language. When teaching we should use the methods as vivid and realistic as possible. We can use pictures, movies or field trips which are the best because these will be much more useful for the organization of knowledge of the brain than we use language itself to define language. For example, when teaching materials with the theme of Going to the market, if we have a short film describing this process, the lesson will be extremely lively and effective, and we do not have to struggle to use the language to define what *đi chợ* (go shopping) means, What *mua đồ* (buy things), *trả giá* (bargain), *trả tiền* (pay) are, but students are equally struggling when they have to memorize so many language codes.

In teaching Vietnamese, we should not ignore cognitive psychology factors (Huong, 2001) such as:

Models of memory (for the study of the organization of linguistic knowledge in frames/domains) and the organization of grammatical knowledge in a network of taxonomic relations and relations other systems). Models of categorization (especially prototypes), hierarchical centrality, and models of category

structure for studying semantic and grammatical categories. This requires that we teach Vietnamese to have a system that goes from low to high, from simple to complex, related and hierarchical. For example, in the first class we should only teach the shortest and simplest sentences. Then we expand the grammatical components of the sentence.

Models of attention and perception (especially of Gestalt psychology to study conceptualization processes in semantics). While teaching Vietnamese, we should pay close attention to students' ability to focus attention. According to scientific studies in the world, this ability of humans only accounts for 20% of the time. We should therefore make use of this precious short time to teach what is new and difficult. Besides, we should also apply all appropriate methods to increase attention, increase the attractiveness of the lesson, increase the interest of students to avoid stress, boredom and monotony.

The next principle of Cognitive Linguistics is that semantics and grammar are conceptualization. This principle shows the approach of Cognitive Linguistics as opposed to truth - conditional semantics, which is as dominant in contemporary linguistics as generative grammar. Cognitive Linguistics argues that conceptual structure cannot be reduced to a simple correspondence of truth - conditionals with the world, that a major aspect of human cognitive ability is the conceptualization of experience in order to communicate. and the conceptualization of the linguistic knowledge we have. Therefore, it is necessary to study all aspects of the conceptual structure such as the structure of categories, the organization of knowledge and especially the leading role of inflections and grammatical structures in the structure experiences in distinct ways; as well as the conceptualization process in lexical semantic phenomena such as polysemy and metaphor and some other semantic lexical relations.

So, according to this principle we must teach students when learning Vietnamese, think in Vietnamese and live in Vietnamese because there is no one-to-one correspondence with their language. We also have to help them understand that what they learn is also just a variation but in the most official and common form of Vietnamese, not the only one, not what they learn is true, what is outside in the actual communication is wrong or vice versa. For example, they study at school: *Bạn tên là gì? (*What is your name?), *Bạn làm nghề gì? (*What do you do?), *Bạn là người nước nào? (*You are from which country?), *Bây giờ là mấy giờ? (Now is* what time?), etc. but when they actually communicate outside: *Tôi là Nam. (*I'm Nam.)*, Bạn làm gì? (*What do you do?), *Bạn là người gì? (*You are what people?), *Mấy giờ rồi? (*What time already?), etc. Besides, we also have to find the right way to handle complex language cases like polysemy, metaphor, metonymy, conversational implication, etc. For example, we should divide at the elementary level, learners should only learn words with literal meaning, without implication, without metaphor, and at some certain levels that they can learn metaphors, implications. It is important that the divisions must be reasonable and scientific to best meet the needs of Vietnamese language of students.

The third principle of Cognitive Linguistics is that linguistic knowledge arises from the use of language. This principle is opposed to both generative grammar and false conditional semantics, which hold that general, abstract (sometimes perceived as innate) schemes and categories govern the organization of linguistic knowledge and attribute many grammatical and semantic phenomena to the status of "peripheral". Cognitive linguists argue that categories and structures in semantics, grammar, lexicon, and phonology are all built on our perception of particular utterances while using them. This process of abstraction and diagramming does not lose sight of the subtle (conventional) distinctions even between very distinct grammatical constructions and lexical meanings. Detailed analysis of subtle variations in syntactic behaviors and semantic interpretations will produce a model of grammatical expression that contains both specific (which are often considered peripheral) and very general patterns of language behaviors. This can be seen in the models applied such as in Fillmore's semantics of understanding, in Cruse's dynamic structuralist view of categorization, in the new theory of structural grammar, in usage-based models of lexical and phonological, etc. (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007)

Regarding this, in teaching Vietnamese, we should learn the world's methods of handling English in teaching this language. In English, people have classified basic models to base them on as a basis for teaching English. In Vietnamese, we should also study the division of basic models used to teach as a foreign language to students whose mother tongue is other languages. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is also an application of the third principle mentioned above. In order to assess the Vietnamese language comprehension ability of students, we should also study and set up an assessment framework similar to the European CEFR. We must develop the criteria for that framework in a scientific way so that it can be applied internationally, recognized internationally as the world has recognized CEFR. If so, it will be a great success in promoting Vietnamese that we are the ones who have to actively and possitively implement it.

In the process of teaching Vietnamese, we need to study to find out when a speaker generates (and

comprehend the listening) words and sentences, what happens in his mind, how he will describe the attributes. properties of things and his associations and impressions about that thing. It was found that the attributes described by the speaker seemed to reflect the way he perceives the world around him and interacts with it; Our accumulated experiences of the world are also stored in everyday language and thus can be gained from the way in which we express our thoughts. We should examine such problems as cognitive categories, picture diagrams, and prototypes' models when categorizing things. Through such observations, we will have appropriate countermeasures to encourage positive factors for students to learn Vietnamese or limit the inappropriate and hindering factors. For example, Koreans have a way of organizing information similar to Vietnamese, so we encourage them to apply information organization in Vietnamese. Europeans have a different way of organizing information, so we have to find other rules to help them organize information in the correct Vietnamese language order. For example, Europeans say "a beautiful house" while Vietnamese say *một ngôi nhà đẹp* (a house beautiful). So, we can show them an opposite rule for this case, Vietnamese will have a way of organizing information that is: *a house beautiful*. In English, important information usually comes after, but in Vietnamese, important information usually comes first.

In Cognitive Linguistics, we cannot fail to pay attention to a very basic principle that Cognitive Linguistics studies language in relation to human beings - people think, people act (anthropocentric). The object of Cognitive Linguistics is human natural language as an integral part of cognition. Language reflects the interactions between psychological, communicative, cultural and social factors. As the result of the human intellect, language and its structure show how the mind works. The structure of language reflects functional criteria based on the use of language as a communication tool. Although the relationships between many linguistic forms and their meanings are arbitrary, they are often symbolic. As a means of communication between members of a society, language reflects many aspects of a given culture. The structure of language is composed of two important factors: an internal factor, i.e. the intellect of the individual speaker, and an external factor, meaning the common culture for many speakers of the same language. Cognitive Linguistics is a division of the cognitive sciences and is directly related to psychology, culturology and neuroscience as well as to anthropology and philosophy (Vicky, 2013). Therefore, Vietnamese language teaching cannot be separated, regardless of countless other factors that have a great impact on Vietnamese language acquisition such as society, culture, intelligence, thinking, etc. Besides, because Vietnamese language is as a second language for students, we not only study those elements in Vietnamese but also in the students' language in order to spread the Vietnamese effectively and quickly.

3. Conclusion

Regardless of teaching any language, according to any method, whether it is a mother tongue or a foreign language, learners must perceive the language before they can be regenerate and use the language. Cognitive Linguistics studies the very process of human language perception. Therefore, teaching Vietnamese applying theory and perspective of cognitive linguistics is an appropriate, reasonable and advisable thing to do and has been widely applied in the world in language teaching.

Within the scope of this article, we try to propose opinions and give arguments to build supportive views. However, due to the limited framework, we have not been able to fully and comprehensively cover the problems, advantages and disadvantages of other teaching methods and the application of Cognitive Linguistics in Vietnamese language teaching.

In order to promote and raise the level of Vietnamese language, we should invest in researching optimal Vietnamese teaching methods, building the most scientific, most realistic and most vivid supporting documents for teaching Vietnamese. At the same time, we also need to develop internationally acknowledged sets of criteria for assessing Vietnamese language competency as the world has done for English such as TOEIC, TOEFL, CEFR, etc.

In the end, Vietnamese teachers are the people who make an important contribution to the promotion of Vietnamese language abroad. Therefore, Vietnamese teachers should always try their best to explore and discover the optimal methods and ways to teach Vietnamese so that students can understand it as best and as quickly as possible, meeting the highest goals of Vietnamese language learning of students. We must teach Vietnamese in a way that transmits and keeps the love of foreign students for the Vietnamese language, Vietnamese people and Vietnam country.

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