

Pedagogical complementation of functional-cognitive interface

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Abstract

This commentary contributes to the understanding of integrating functional-based teaching and cognitive pedagogy by offering a mutually complementary account. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) attaches importance to sociological aspects of language and proposes that language as a meaning-making process is simultaneously shaped by context and culture (Thompson et al., 2019). Cognitive linguistics (CL), based on the second generation of cognitive science and experiential philosophy, was born based upon the rejection of transformational-generative grammar, arguing that the creation, learning, and use of language must be explained basically through human cognition as the basis of knowledge constitution (Goldberg, 2011). Surrounded by the dialogue of these two linguistic schools, the paper is guided by two overarching questions: (1) What is the theoretical compatibility between SFL and CL? (2) How can SFL and CL complement each other or produce a synergetic effect that benefits second language (L2) pedagogy?

It is demonstrated that SFL and CL are theoretically compatible as they agree upon the embodied experiential and sociocultural nature of language (Littlemore, 2009; Thibault, 2004), the categorial continuum of phonology-lexicogrammar-semantics (Meng, 2009), and corpus-based positivist epistemology (Feng, 2006). To complement one another in L2 pedagogy due to their compatibility, functional pedagogy can optimize cognitive pedagogy by facilitating learners to be aware and recognize communicative intention and socio-contextual cues, especially in the context of acquiring metonymic constructions. Cultural immersion and acculturation are keys to functional pedagogy that fill the gap of CL pedagogy lacking systematic training in cultural literacy and appreciation. Cognitive pedagogy, in turn, can complement functional pedagogy by applying image schemata in teaching to present how to select collocated verbs that can be assigned to diverse types of constructions.

Keywords systemic functional linguistics, cognitive linguistics, functional-cognitive interface, pedagogical complementation

1. Introduction

The theoretical foundations of SFL and CL are against pure structuralism and transformational-generative linguistics. SFL treats meaning as a semiotic, social, multidimensional, and intersubjective system rather than a single product of the computational mind (Muntigl, 2002; The University of British Columbia, 2010). This linguistic school also regards grammar as a meaning-making resource by exploring the interrelation between form and meaning. Structuralist linguistics insists on researching the disembodied view of the mind, which has been critiqued by functional linguists like Thibault (2004), arguing that individuals' inner minds should not be severed from meaning-making, semiotic activities. Similarly, CL is theoretically consistent with SFL, which adheres to researching embodied and extended cognition as the keys to meaning-making. Humans conceptualize their minds as inextricably tied and adaptive to the

physical world and external environment, which largely shapes language use. Therefore, independent extraction of the mind in language use is rejected (Littlemore, 2009). Instead, the experiential philosophical view constitutes the basis of CL. A cross-disciplinary account shared by SFL and CL acknowledges the roles of humans' proprioception, environmental structure, and social contexts that model adaptive language use.

Apart from the proposition of anti-structuralism of both linguistic schools, SFL and CL "postulate a continuum between grammatical and lexical phenomena" (Meng, 2009, pp. 539-576). The three-strata continuum constitutes the linguistic system in SFL: semantics, phonology, and lexicogrammar. SFL values the descriptive approach to document non-mainstream language variants associated with meta-analysis regarding their relationship with other mainstream language variants on a fuzzy three-strata continuum. That being said, language use is not either grammatical or ungrammatical in a binary sense, yet it is an extensive spectrum containing unusual and usual

grammaticality and idiomaticity across language variants. In comparison, categorization as a central construct in CL is also characterized by a fuzzy continuum. Categorization is a subjective generalization of the properties of the objective physical world, in which an item with a prototypical category within the continuum may experience categorical change that lies in a peripheral category over time. For instance, “worm” used to refer to “crawling insects” in general, but now refers to a certain kind of crawling insect, which suggests the transformation from prototypicality to peripherality. Another example of the “fuzzy-categorial” continuum approach in CL is the semantic-pragmatic interface that forms a spectrum. Specifically, meaning is part of the holistic conceptual system. Semantic and pragmatic modules are not independent of each other but jointly determine linguistic meaning (Li & Wang, 2019). Meaning lies between this interface rather than the extreme ends of this continuum. Consequently, the SFL Cardiff model suggests the reasonability to extend the categorization of the system network in SFL to enrich the “fuzzy-categorial” continuum approach in CL for cross-disciplinary reference and integration (Bartley, 2018).

Usage-based linguistics aligns with the central proposition of CL, arguing that constructional frequency accumulated over time results in form-function-meaning pairing (Butler & González-García, 2014). Corpus propels the development of usage-based linguistics by offering firsthand data about the frequency and association strength of verb-argument constructions of different language variations (Blumenthal-Dramé, 2012). For instance, when comparing two verb-argument constructions “I agree with the overarching statement” and “sports require teamwork and the ability to cooperate”, the corpus will abstract the constructional types, namely “noun subject-agree-object” for the former one and “noun subject-require-direct object-direct object” for the latter one. The verb-argument binding of the former is found to be weakly collocated than the latter (Kyle & Crossley, 2017). What is less well-known is that such integration with the corpus algorithm in CL can be traced back to SFL, which corroborates linguistic hypotheses with observations and statistics by using corpora as data sources (Feng, 2006). This theoretical compatibility underlies the basis of the positivism research paradigm that is favored by both linguistic schools.

2. Pedagogical Implications of Functional-Cognitive Interface

Halliday’s legacy is left with the sociocultural approach of language learning, namely learning about the world through language and learning about communicative abilities through language. This value underlies the cornerstone of Language Development Project as an Australian national curriculum project launched in 1977, which started to fully recognize L1 and L2 language acquisition as a semiotic procedure and an approach to stimulate learners’ meaning potential

(Moncada & Xin, 2020). The meta-functional theories and principles of SFL have been extensively applied to language education, particularly analytical and metalinguistic interpretation of diverse text genres (Forey, 2020; Ryshina-Pankova & McKnight, 2023). This is because L1 and L2 language students have been commonly found to be weak in locating textual structure and recognizing functions, genres, intentions, and ideologies (Coffin & Donohue, 2012). Many have difficulty comprehending how language is weaved and manipulated in real-life situations (García, Sagre & Lacharme, 2014). Consequently, the educational application has aimed to raise learners’ awareness of the functional organization of different text types through their lexical-grammatical realizations. By implementing such linguistic-based literary analysis, language learners under the pedagogical framework of SFL have been pushed to move beyond summarizing texts and critically examine the functional stance. Acquiring metalanguage and discussing how meaning is functionally constructed enables language learners to articulate how writers employ language to achieve particular purposes (Xuan, 2022).

To corroborate the research findings, we have investigated a representative language education program in an English-speaking country, namely Australian Victorian curriculum, in which English (as a first language) and English as an additional language (EAL) are characterized by SFL embedded in the syllabus and assessment design (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2022). By going through its assessment scheme in year 12 (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2022), it is found that listening, literary analysis, and language analysis all emphasize language learners’ awareness to employ metalanguage to deconstruct how meaning or ideology is conveyed through authors’ or speakers’ purpose and control of lexical-grammatical features within an assigned sociocultural context (e.g., Figure 1).

<p>c. Give an example of Jen’s language use and an example of her delivery that show her opinion of their teacher. 2 marks</p> <p>Language use _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Delivery _____</p> <p>_____</p>

Figure 1. An excerpt of 2022 VCE English as an additional language exam question (listening section)¹

<p>Question 2 (10 marks)</p> <p>Analyse the ways in which the writer uses argument and written and visual language to try to persuade others to share her point of view. In your response, use the material on pages 6 and 7 of the task book.</p>

Figure 2. An excerpt of 2022 VCE English as an additional language exam question (language analysis section)²

It is noted that pure functional pedagogy entrenched in the British Commonwealth language education system

¹ Source: <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/exams/english/2022/NHT/2022-EAL-NHT-w.pdf> (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2022)

² Source: <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/exams/english/2022/NHT/2022-EAL-NHT-w.pdf> (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority, 2022)

does not address or integrate with other theoretically compatible pedagogical orientations, including cognitive pedagogy.

Before reviewing the pedagogical implications of CL that may complement the limitations of SFL-driven pedagogy, it is necessary to generalize the commonalities of the key constructs in CL. Polysemy, metonymy, form-meaning iconicity, and cognitive grammar all deal with the type of meaning encoded by humans' cognitive construal and abstract schemata of situations rather than reality with absolute objectivity, different from the first generation of cognitive science. Current literature has documented the contemporary pedagogical application of polysemy and metonymy. Instructors with the cognitive approach usually start with explaining the archetypal senses of a target metaphoric construction (which can be a lexical item, a phrasal verb, or a sentence), followed by using image schemata to materialize the peripheral or extended meanings of it (Littlemore, 2009). For instance, when teaching the metaphorical use of the preposition "in" with an exemplary construction *we are in love*, the instructor may introduce the basic cognitive sense of *in*, namely something enclosed or surrounded by a container. By referring to the container theory characterized by image schema through concept-based instruction, the instructor can materialize the extended cognitive sense that an emotional state, parallel to an object, can also be confined within a narrow space. As to metonymy that represents one entity referring to another identical and pre-existing entity, it is underlain with cognitive association and connectionism that naturally emerge. One pedagogical approach can be to use a conceptual family tree to organize associative learning, which helps learners comprehend how a word has the referential function of another one. For instance, *white house* and *US president* are acquired simultaneously within an associative conceptual diagram. Similarly, the pedagogical application of construction grammar also emphasizes abstract generalization of different types of constructions that convey meaning. For instance, the instructor may invite learners to independently discover the abstract pattern of ditransitive construction through an inductive approach. Language learners' cognitive induction as a form of deep processing can significantly enhance retention (Littlemore, 2009).

After summarizing the features of pedagogical applications of both linguistic schools, it is found that parallel to SFL-driven pedagogy, the teaching application solely based upon CL is also uni-dimensional as it mainly prioritizes the role of cognition, abstraction, and construal. Although cognition is partially shaped by sociocultural mediation, CL less emphasizes how socio-semiotics and systemic grammar affect language use. Therefore, a synergetic effect between SFL and CL is worthy of exploration as their complementation and integration are beneficial to optimize modern pedagogy.

When teaching metonymy, as aforementioned, CL-driven pedagogy initiates associative learning. SFL-oriented pedagogy can complement the gap that metonymy is less explored from the perspective of meeting discourse metafunction. The nature of metonymy is to implicitly substitute a word by referring to an attribute for the thing that is meant. Thus, comprehending metonymy

requires much more than associative learning of conceptual networks in CL, but pragmatic ability and inference from social context (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994). Metonymy usually occurs in the context of an indirect speech act in which a speaker or writer may omit some information in metonymic substitution that can be originally expressed through a canonical expression. It stems from the fact that language is not sufficiently informative. It is neither necessary nor possible to express all required information precisely. Presupposition reduces much information in a metonymic construction. Metonymy can be hardly taught in pure CL-driven pedagogy because presupposition is the product of pragmatic communication and is unable to be simply acquired in associative conceptual networks.

Table 1. Chinese metonymic expression with glossing

你	是	什么	垃圾?
nǐ	shì	shénme	lājī?
You	are	what	garbage?
What	garbage	are	you?

Understanding *what garbage are you* (cf. Table 1) must rely upon the context of garbage collection. Conscious garbage classification is encouraged in China, so the original sentence is the metonymic substitution of "what type of garbage do you intend to throw" in a shortened, concise form. SFL-oriented pedagogy can complement the limitation of CL-oriented pedagogy by training learners to build an alert awareness of recognizing socio-contextual cues, the speaker's communicative purpose, and encyclopedic knowledge about broader communication skills. All socio-communicative discourse is unable to be severed from discourse metafunctions. By guiding learners to analyze experiential process (i.e. ideational metafunction), role relationship (i.e. interpersonal metafunction), and delivery modality (i.e. discourse metafunction) as manifested in the case of *what garbage are you*, they can be better informed about comprehending those substituted forms with missing information in metonymic expressions rather than invariably searching their memory in associative cognitive network with "unanalyzable" form-meaning pairing. Specifically, the ideational metafunction is the relational process that conceptually identifies the relation between garbage and its type; the interpersonal metafunction is questioning based upon an equal social status; the discourse metafunction is concise orality, which improves communication efficiency by omitting some information in this metonymic construction. Moreover, Kasper and Roever (2005) suggest that it is necessary to associate metonymic expressions with indirect speech acts from the early stages of language acquisition. Language learners will even benefit from starting with an analysis of indirect speech acts in their L1 so that they are likely to comprehend the referential function in foreign languages.

Another aspect that functional pedagogy can complement cognitive pedagogy is teaching idiomatic constructions. Hoffman and Trousdale (2013) propose that one of the characteristics of construction grammar is

idiomaticity. The investigation of constructions starts with the examination of idioms. They categorize idioms as substantive idioms and formal idioms. The former is fixed, for instance, the Chinese idiom 一日三秋 (days creep by like years). The latter is partially open to be filled in, for instance, the Chinese construction V 来 V 去, where V stands for a verb. CL-oriented pedagogy can be applied to teach formal idioms. If we take V 来 V 去 as an example, a verb that fills in this construction must carry the characteristic of short-term re-occurrence or continuity, such as 打来打去 (fight), 跑来跑去 (run back and forth), 看来看去 (look around). A verb that displays an action unable to repeatedly occur in a short time is not allowed to be assigned to this type of construction, such as 病来病去 (fall ill back and forth) and 死来死去 (die back and forth) (Chen, 2012). Language instructors can be explicit about these rules or invite advanced learners to generalize the rules of some given formal idioms by themselves.

On the other hand, learners will benefit more from acquisition if instructors apply functional pedagogy to teach substantive idioms. While many formal constructions have a rule for learners to comprehend (e.g., passivity=be+V+ed), some substantive idioms are the product of cultural accumulation as form and meaning do not seem to have inductive, schematic relations. This is what cognitive pedagogy seems to be difficult to convey in teaching. Conversely, functional pedagogy has a complementary effect because it emphasizes sociocultural immersion and acculturation in language teaching. Culture is inseparable from language, so cultural connotations of substantive idioms are often introduced in a classroom with a functional pedagogical curriculum. For instance, when instructors teach L2 Chinese, substantive constructional idioms with the character 土 (land) may not make sense to learners at first glance (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Substantive constructional idioms

Substantive constructional idioms	Glossing
皇天后土	the ancient honorific for heaven and earth
土生土长	be born and brought up on one's native land
寸土不让	never to yield an inch of ground
土崩瓦解	be disintegrated

However, if instructors implement functional pedagogy that is culturally responsive, idioms with 土 may impress learners and become much easier to memorize. Concerning these substantive constructional idioms, China is rich in resources, vast in size, and has an extensive area of arable land, which is conducive to the rapid development of ancient Chinese farming civilization under certain conditions. Ancient Chinese people regard lands as their most important resource and show worship and reverence for nature (He, 2023). Therefore, many substantive constructional idioms carry ancient Chinese people's dependence on and love for their lands. If L2 Chinese teaching is designed for L1 English students, instructors can explain comparative cultural differences

that affect idiomatic constructions. Britain is surrounded by the North Sea, the English Channel, the Celtic Sea, the Irish Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. Such an open marine environment has resulted in people's various activities closely related to the sea, navigation, fishing, and salt production (Hamblyn, 2021). Therefore, Western idioms are featured by expressions related to the sea, such as *teach fish to swim*, *all at sea*, and *a big fish*. Consequently, history and culture are indispensable components in language teaching embedded in the educational ideology of SFL, which is worthy of reference by instructors who adopt a pure cognitive pedagogy to optimize their lesson delivery.

While SFL can complement the limitation of CL in teaching metonymy and substantive idiom, CL can also have a complementary effect on SFL in the area of teaching the selection of appropriate verb types that fill in constructional phraseology. In systemic grammar, whether a linguistic unit can enter a system is determined by syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations with other lexical-grammatical items, not by the choice of itself. A syntagmatic relation is a sequential relationship in which linguistic symbols are linearly arranged. For instance, when teaching modern Chinese as a second language (CSL), the instructor can be explicit about the phonological rule that [j], [q], [x] instead of [g], [k], [h] can combine with [i], serving as syntagmatic relation. A paradigmatic relation refers to a relationship formed by linguistic constituents that are interchangeable in a given context. For instance, in CSL teaching, an instructor may ask learners to substitute the constituent of 我们 (we) in the monotransitive construction 我们看书 (we read books). Through practice, learners may gradually acquire that only animate subjects like 学生 (students) and 家人 (family members) can form a paradigmatic relation with 我们 (we), while 木头 (wood) is not acceptable.

Similar to syntagmatic and paradigmatic theories in SFL, construction grammar and pattern grammar in CL propose that a linguistic constituent entering into a construction must be restricted by holistic constructional phraseology. That said, an open choice is hardly allowed (Noel, 2002). Compared with SFL-oriented pedagogy, CL has the advantage of generalizing what type of verbs are allowed to enter what type of particular construction, not item-based learning of syntagmatic and paradigmatic rules. Shi's study (2020) explores English-Chinese cognition-typology interface of ditransitive construction with the type of verbs that allows entrance (cf. Figure 3).

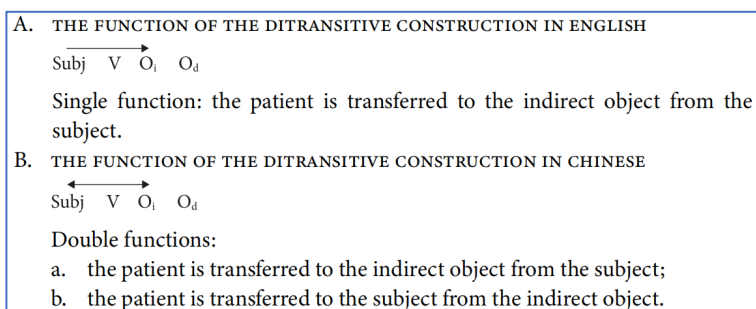


Figure 3. The function of ditransitive construction in English & Chinese (Shi, 2020)

Only verbs with the semantic characteristic of “output” or “transference” from a subject to an indirect object are allowed to enter an English ditransitive construction. If a speaker intends to present a verb with the superficial semantic characteristic of “receiving” in English and simultaneously insists on choosing the ditransitive construction, the superficial semantic characteristic of “receiving” of that verb will be destroyed and replaced by an implied “output” transference meaning from subject to indirect object. As an example, the sentence *Jane bought Kate a book* is only allowed to be interpreted as *Jane bought a book for Kate* in English, where *for* implies the subsequent action of transference to Kate. Thus, a patient is still transferred from a subject to an indirect object, as *bought* ultimately serves as the archetypal semantic function that implies “giving”. The sentence cannot be interpreted as *Jane bought a book from Kate* because presenting a verb with the pure semantic feature of “receiving” without any output action in an English ditransitive construction is unacceptable.

This in-depth analysis with relevant image schemata, however, is not prioritized in SFL-oriented pedagogy but can be readily and explicitly delivered through CL-oriented pedagogy. Cognitive pedagogy can complement the limitation of functional pedagogy when learners need to receive instruction regarding verbal selection in diverse constructions. The aforementioned analytical method (i.e. comparative constructional study for verbal selection) designed for output instruction applies to other constructional types as well. To have a synergetic effect for both pedagogical approaches, writing instruction should not only emphasize developing students’ organization of cohesive, syntagmatic, and paradigmatic relationships among different lexical-grammatical items but also an appropriate selection of verbs that fill in different types of constructions.

3. Conclusion

SFL is characterized by sociality, functionality, and systemic selectivity. CL is experiential, humanistic, cognitive, and embodied in nature. This synthesis review demonstrates the congruence between both linguistic schools. The sociocultural and communicative natures of SFL cannot be separated from the humanistic and embodied cognitive essence in CL. In other words, meaning potential is concurrently accumulated from social context and human body. Whether cognitive or functional, it is mediated through language that humans can exist and communicate in the material world. In modern pedagogy, the adoption of one single linguistic school in curriculum and teaching is uni-dimensional and less comprehensive to reveal how language is acquired through multi-theoretical, multi-paradigmatic, and multi-methodological foundations. This idea elicits the need to integrate theoretically compatible schools like SFL and CL and investigate how they can generate a synergetic effect in pedagogy. SFL can complement CL by guiding learners to recognize socio-contextual cues and discourse metafunctions when they acquire metonymic constructions that traditionally exist in a cognitive-based

lesson. Comparative cultural literacy, as the critical component of SFL-driven pedagogy, can also complement cognitive pedagogy when teaching substantive constructional idioms. Cognitive pedagogy can in turn produce a synergetic effect on functional pedagogy when learners acquire verbal assignment to diverse types of constructions. This practice can be achieved by offering image schemata and organizing inductive discussion based upon a sufficient constructional database, which is advantageous in cognitive pedagogy. Moreover, this approach to teaching verbal assignment can be combined with teaching syntagmatic and paradigmatic constructional relations in functional pedagogy. Ultimately, these integrative and complementary approaches to the functional-cognitive interface will benefit modern pedagogy.

Yihang Zhong comes from The Chinese University of Hong Kong with MA in Applied Linguistics. He is interested in language acquisition, psycholinguistics (especially syntactic processing), theoretical morpho-syntax, and traditional linguistic schools with philosophies. As an emergent scholar, he touches upon interdisciplinary fields of linguistics and applied linguistics. His recent publication includes morpho-syntactic acquisition.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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