Conceptual Blending and the Arts

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*An Analysis of
Michał Batory's Posters*

By

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INTRODUCTION

Cognitive linguistics is one of the most innovative approaches to language study which emerged in the 1970s. Not only does it examine language itself but it also scrutinises the way human beings conceptualize things and communicate *via* a myriad of cognitive operations that occur in the human brain. Language organization as well as processing and conveying information are considered of primary significance for cognitive linguists. Besides, the field of cognitive linguistics explores the relationship between language, mind and socio-psychological experience. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the approach has recently become one of the most appealing areas of study within the whole linguistic enterprise. Indeed, what makes cognitive linguistics still so influential in the contemporary language sciences is its broad theoretical and methodological basis.

The issues which contemporary cognitive linguistics focuses mostly on are such notions as figure and ground relation (Talmy 1978, 2000), categorization (cf. Rosch 1975, Taylor 2003), conceptual metaphor and metonymy (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff and Turner 1987), mental spaces theory (cf. Fauconnier 1994), and conceptual blending theory (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2002, Libura 2010). In short, this cognitive framework is recognised as unique since it has taken a noticeably defined perspective on human cognition, and has developed a number of leading theories and phenomena within cognitive science (cf. Evans 2012).

Two noteworthy approaches to meaning construction, i.e. Mental Spaces Theory (Fauconnier 1994, 2002) and Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 1998, 2002), which have originated from cognitive linguistics, are referred to as theories of backstage cognition which make use of non-linguistic mechanisms. These theories are concerned with the nature and creation of mental spaces, integration mechanisms and networks that operate over collections of mental spaces to generate promising and novel aspects of meaning.

The purpose of the present book is to set the background of theoretical knowledge and discuss selected issues related to the paradigm of cognitive linguistics, with a particular focus on Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) theory of conceptual integration, used here as a tool for analysing intricate nuances hidden in Michał Batory's posters designed for artistic events.

The main objective of the first chapter is to focus our attention on the process of categorization, accounting for both the classical model and prototype theory in the sense of Rosch (cf. Rosch 1975). Other important elements of the prototypical model, such as levels of categorization, fuzzy boundaries and family resemblance, are also to be conferred. The insight into categorization is preceded with a brief description of the theories, on which the framework of the field of cognitive linguistics is founded. The subsequent parts of this chapter are devoted to such issues as conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual metonymy, both recognized as equally significant conceptual tools in the process of meaning conceptualization. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The last subchapter accounts for Fauconnier's Mental Spaces Theory. It outlines the definition of the notion and elaborates on basic components essential for the process of creating mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994, 2007).

The goal of the second chapter of the book is to deal with the origins of Conceptual Blending Theory, as well as the very nature and elements of conceptual blending as a linguistic and/or mental phenomenon. The following subchapters of this part present an overview of the models and types of integration networks, followed by an analysis of vital relations that accompany the blending process. Finally, the principles constraining Conceptual Blending Theory, together with the criticism levelled at Fauconnier and Turner's approach are put forward (Fauconnier and Turner 1998, 2002).

The purpose of the third chapter of this book is to offer a thorough analysis of how the processes described in Conceptual Blending Theory can be applied in practice, on the basis of Michał Batory's posters designed for artistic events. Each poster presented in this book is analysed in terms of conceptual blending processes. The blended space is meticulously discussed and illustrated to show explicitly how two distinct notions are combined together to create a new meaning that is non-computable from two input spaces. The interaction that occurs between the inscriptions and images is very distinct in every single poster. The analysis outlined in the last chapter aims at showing how these artefacts influence people and convey the hidden message, with the use of strong visual and verbal elements that accompany the blending process.

Chapter Three is followed by the final part of the book, *viz*. the Summary and Conclusions section, which gathers the main points from all the three chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Cognitive linguistics is a comparatively new approach to linguistics, which has emerged within cognitive science to become a turning point for the contemporary field of interdisciplinary research. It has been recognised as not only a wide-ranging theoretical enterprise but also as a methodological school, with its profound effect on the way language, the mind, and their relationship are regarded.

The main objective of the initial section of Chapter One (section 1.1) is to introduce the basic assumptions of cognitive linguistics. Then we draw our attention to the figure / ground organisation (section 1.2). Accordingly, the most important Gestalt principles are described first, and the focus of our interest is given to the conceptual notions and examples from the domain of visual perception, and their equivalents in cognitive linguistics. Afterwards, we proceed to the subject of categorization (in section 1.3), which, on the ground of already existing concepts, identifies the recognised similarities and differences between the entities, and puts them into groups, giving rise to new concepts within the network of encyclopaedic knowledge (Evans and Green 2006: 248). The work of cognitive psychologist, Eleanor Rosch, and her colleagues in the 1970s, and the effect of their findings on the development of **cognitive semantics**, are the key issues for the discussion taken up in this chapter. Of particular importance will also be, in section 1.4, George Lakoff's (1987) findings related to **prototype structure** and **basic level categories**, and his cognitive semantic theory of **idealised cognitive models** (ICMs) (Lakoff 1987). In fact, Lakoff's conclusions revealed in his book *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987), set the scene for the approaches in cognitive semantics relating to conceptual metaphor and metonymy, lexical semantics (word meaning) and grammar structure.

The following parts of Chapter One discuss such topics as conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual metonymy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) as well as some recent trends (in section 1.5), while section 1.6 deals with

Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994, 2007). The final part of the chapter comprises concluding remarks as well as the sketch of a further outline of the book.

1.1. Introducing Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is one of the approaches which emerged in the 1970s under the umbrella of a more general branch, i.e. cognitive science, and whose pivotal aim is to examine the relationship between language and human cognition. Cognitive linguistics, understood here as a broad theoretical and methodological enterprise, stands in opposition to the earlier trends developed within linguistics, such as Generative Grammar and Formal Semantics, while simultaneously keeping with functional approaches to language (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004; Evans and Green 2006; and Geeraerts 2006). The stage for cognitive linguistics was set with Ronald Wayne Langacker's cognitive grammar framework (1987, 1991), George Lakoff's research on metaphor, gestalts, categories and prototypes (1987), Leonard Talmy's work on figure, ground, and spatial terms (1978, 2000), Fillmore's frame semantics (1982), and Fauconnier's mental spaces (1985, 1994, 2007). For these founding fathers of cognitive linguistics, the study of language means the study of language, which is inextricably bound up with context-dependent linguistic and conceptual phenomena, expressed in the form of cognitive and cultural resources, models and frames, multiple connections, long arrays of information, creative mappings, transfers, and elaborations. Other prominent cognitive linguists who marked their way in this discipline are Eve Sweetser, Mark Johnson, Mark Turner, Ray Gibbs, Bill Croft, Adele Goldberg, David Tuggy, Laura Janda, Suzanne Kemmer, Sally Rice, Ricardo Maldonado, and Karen van Hoek, among many others. They have contributed to the development of this branch of linguistics, dealing with such issues as, e.g., conceptual blending (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2002), construction grammar (cf. Goldberg 1995), metaphor theory (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989), psycholinguistic reality of image schemas (cf. Gibbs 1990), grammaticalization (Kemmer 1988; Sweetser 1988), cognitive grammar and structuring (cf. van Hoek 1997), and the semantics of grammar (Wierzbicka 1988). Interestingly, together with the advent of the new thought in linguistics, the International Cognitive Linguistics Association and the *International Journal of Cognitive Linguistics* were established, which, according to the eminent cognitive linguist, Ronald Langacker, "marked the birth of cognitive linguistics as a broadly

grounded, self-conscious intellectual movement" (Langacker [1991] 2002: xy).

The most conspicuous difference, generally referred to in the literature, between cognitive linguistics and other approaches lies in the way language is viewed. For cognitive linguists, language is thought to reflect the patterns of thought and conceptualisation. What is more, language is treated as a window into cognitive function and the very nature of human concepts. Language provides an insight into the organisation and structure of ideas and thoughts that the human mind can generate as well as the socio-physical knowledge that a human being can experience. Having offered its overarching concern with investigating the relationship between human language, the mind, and sociophysical experience, this cognitive framework has brought "far-reaching implications for the scope, methodology and models developed within the cognitive linguistic enterprise" (cf. Evans and Green 2006: 5; Evans, Bergen and Zinken 2007: 2; and Evans 2012). Indeed, having taken a remarkably defined perspective on human cognition, cognitive linguistics has developed successfully a number of prominent theories and phenomena within cognitive science (cf. Evans 2012). Undoubtedly, the theoretical and methodological basis of this cognitive approach is what makes it constantly so influential and extremely distinctive in the contemporary language sciences.

In view of that, we proceed to present the core of this linguistic approach, which may be best elucidated in its two pivotal commitments, generally referred to by cognitive linguists as the Generalisation Commitment and the Cognitive Commitment. In his seminal 1990 paper, a founding cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, states that there are two conflicting commitments which distinguish Generative Linguistics from Cognitive Linguistics (Lakoff 1990: 40-45). According to the Generalisation Commitment, also called the Generative, Commitment, language is viewed "in terms of systems of combinatorial mathematics" (Lakoff 1990: 43). However, phenomena which do not satisfy such a condition are "non-finitary" and, as a result, disregarded by generativists (Lakoff 1990: 43). This stance is compatible with Chomsky's (1972) understanding of syntax, which, like an algorithmic system, is expected to work accurately and completely

Furthermore, referring to the Generalisation Commitment, cognitive linguists do not recognise the areas such as phonology, semantics and syntax as totally divergent, but rather as notionally distinct, in terms of dissimilar components of language and different rules which are applied for each area. This stance is in contradistinction with the formal

approaches (such as e.g., the Generative Grammar approach), which usually consider these language sub-disciplines as completely separate areas, with different structuring and operating principles. In turn, the Generalization Commitment requires "general principles," which may be defined as structuring principles that are common across different aspects of language. As exemplified by Evans and Green (2006: 28), some crucial common organisational characteristics can be found in the case of categorisation, polysemy or metaphor, which are usually recognised as distinct language components. These issues are to be discussed in the further parts of this chapter, namely in sections 1.3-1.4.

While the Generalisation Commitment pertains to the general common principles of language structure, which are held across all the aspects of language, the Cognitive Commitment makes use of the principles of linguistic structure only to learn about human cognition. Therefore, other cognitive sciences such as philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence, and neuroscience, may be engaged here as well. However, both the principles of the modular theory of mind, which formal linguistics accounts for, and the view of a distinct language module, with its supposition that linguistic structure and organisation are considerably different from other aspects of cognition, are rejected by cognitive linguists. Although the human mind is, indeed, structured in distinct modules of knowledge, a set of more general and interdisciplinary cognitive functions can be reflected in linguistic organisation (cf. Evans and Green 2006: 40-41). Hence, cognitive linguists find the Cognitive Commitment a crucial commitment, which helps "make one's account of human language accord with what is generally known about the mind and the brain, from other disciplines as well as our own" (Lakoff 1990: 40). In short, apparently opposite, these two commitments, the Generative and the Cognitive Commitments, together with some crucial hypotheses to be mentioned below, contribute to making cognitive linguistics a coherent enterprise (cf. Evans 2012).

As far as the main hypotheses of cognitive linguistics are concerned, Croft and Cruse (2004) list three of them, namely: (i) language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty; (ii) grammar is conceptualization; and (iii) knowledge of language emerges from language use (Croft and Cruse 2004: 1). What is meant by the first corollary of the first hypothesis is that language cannot be separated from the nonlinguistic cognitive abilities, as expected by generative linguists (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez 1997). The representation of linguistic knowledge as well as the processes associated with it are not generally distinct from other cognitive abilities, which human beings use outside the domain of language. In other words, the

linguistic knowledge of meaning and form also comprises some conceptual structure; regardless of the way knowledge is represented, whether in a semantic, syntactic, morphological, or phonological way. As it is explained by Croft and Cruse (2004: 2), the mind involvement is indispensable for the processes of understanding and producing sounds and utterances, while these, in fact, are the inputs and outputs of the cognitive processes. Likewise, the cognitive abilities applied to such cognitive tasks as, e.g. motor activity, visual perception, or reasoning, are thought to be similar to the abilities applied to speaking and understanding a language (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004: 2). Besides, the vital implications which derive from the first hypothesis for cognitive linguistic research mean that, first, the cognitive linguistic models can be satisfactorily elucidated by means of the general conceptual structures and cognitive abilities. Second, the cognitive linguistic models of profile-frame / domain organisation, categorisation, concepts, mental spaces and networks, have their origins in the psychological models of memory, attention, perception, categorization, and, particularly, in the models of prototypes and graded centrality (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004: 3). To conclude, the first hypothesis contradicts the view of an autonomous, special-purpose innate human cognitive faculty, and it ascertains, at the same time, that language is a distinct human cognitive ability.

With regard to the second hypothesis which constitutes the foundation of the cognitive linguistic approach, its basic claim stems from Ronald Langacker's axiom that "grammar is conceptualization" (cf. Langacker 1986, 1987, 1991, 1999, 2008). According to Langacker, meaning is not identified with concepts but rather with *conceptualization*, which refers to any aspect of mental experience. Furthermore, conceptualization is thought to subsume the following associations, as listed by Langacker (2008), namely: (i) both novel and established conceptions; (ii) not just "intellectual" notions, but sensory, motor, and emotive experience as well; (iii) the apprehension of the physical, linguistic, social, and cultural context; and (iv) conceptions that develop and unfold through processing time (rather than being simultaneously manifested) (Langacker 2008: 30; cf. Langacker 1986, 1987, 1991, 1999). In other words, conceptualization is termed by a wide range of notions, including both novel as well as fixed conceptions; sensory, kinaesthetic experience; emotional involvement; and the recognition of the immediate context (i.e. social, physical, and linguistic one) (cf. Langacker 1986: 3). Hence, as maintained by Langacker, meaning resides in conceptualization, while conceptualization resides in cognitive processing, which involves cognitive events (cf. Langacker 1986: 3, 2008: 31).

Additionally, Langacker (1986: 13) argues that not only lexicon, but also grammar may provide for the structuring and symbolization of conceptual contents, and that grammar may construct a continuum of symbolic elements. To be precise, a certain grammatical morpheme or construction associates a particular image, selected concurrently to structure the perceived situation in order to communicate. Since languages differ between one another, so do grammatical structures vary, especially in terms of the images that a speaker employs with the purpose to meet the requirements of the linguistic convention. That is the reason why grammatical inflections and grammatical constructions are considered substantial in construing the experience, communicated in a specific way (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004: 3). Indeed, communication is the goal of both the process of conceptualization of the human experience and the linguistic knowledge possessed and used by the human being with the use of one's human cognitive abilities. Therefore, as referred to by Croft and Cruse (2004), Langacker's saying "grammar is conceptualization" evokes another hypothesis, even more explicit, *viz*. that conceptual structure cannot be reduced to a simple truth-conditional correspondence with the world (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004: 3). Also, as argued by Langacker, a far wider view of communicative interaction should be employed to characterize the conceptualizations which comprise discourse; whereas conceiving cognitive semantics as static and narrow is simply unfitting (cf. Langacker 2008: 28).

Undeniably, conceptualization in all its aspects, the structure of categories, and the organization of knowledge (i.e., conceptual structures) are subject to construal operations, due to be discussed in the further sections of this chapter. Interestingly yet, the conceptualization hypothesis has stimulated the occurrence of other theories, namely Cognitive Construction Grammar represented by Goldberg (1995, 2006) and Lakoff (1987); Cognitive Grammar, developed by Langacker (1986, 1987, 1991, 1999, 2008); Talmy's Cognitive Semantics (Talmy 2000); and Hudson's Word Grammar of language networks (Hudson 2007). Hence, indeed, the paradigm of conceptualization addresses a wide range of cognitive phenomena.

Finally, the saying that "knowledge of language emerges from language use" constitutes the last hypothesis of cognitive linguistics (Croft and Cruse 2004: 1). This principle, offered by cognitive linguists, is an alternative to the reductionist views of generative grammar and truth-conditional semantics, which opt for maximally general and abstract representations of grammatical form and meaning, leaving behind, on the margin of the linguistic interest, some apparent grammatical and semantic

idiosyncrasy or anomalies. To be precise, the third hypothesis highlights the necessity of paying more attention to some rare and untypical variations which occur in syntactic structures and may happen for semantic interpretation. Expectedly, this assumption must lead to constructing more advanced models of grammatical representation. Fillmore's model of semantics of understanding, Cruse's dynamic construal approach to categorization, and the construction grammar model in syntax are the examples of such sophisticated alternative models, which address certain grammatical and lexical peculiarities. As stated by Croft and Cruse (2004: 3-4), cognitive linguists assume that language use gives human beings a chance to obtain the knowledge of language and perceive its complexities. In the same vein, categories and structures in syntax, semantics, phonology and morphology are believed to be built up from our cognition of specific utterances on specific occasions. Importantly, the interaction with other language speakers as well as the exposure to the written output of language provide a language user with gaining a higher level of proficiency (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004: 3-4).

In short, what has been said so far is that the first commitment describes the very nature and the principles that apply to all aspects of human language, while the second one is a commitment which deals seriously with the cognitive foundations of language, taking evidence from other cognitive and brain sciences. Consequently, owing to the two principal commitments being outlined, *viz.* the Generalization Commitment and Cognitive Commitment, cognitive linguistics emerges as a unique theoretical and methodological enterprise (Lakoff 1990).

Furthermore, what is also worth a mention is the fact that cognitive linguistics may be viewed as an approach to language, built on our experience of the world, and the way we perceive and conceptualize it. The very term "cognitive linguistics" may refer to a **logical view** of language, which must be separated from our use of the term here (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: x). Hence, as stated by Evans (2012), cognitive linguistics embodies a contemporary standpoint to language, since it is one of the fastest growing and influential perspectives on the nature of language, mind, and their mutual connection combined with socio-physical experience. In fact, modern cognitive linguistics comprises, inevitably, the following three overlapping components, i.e. (i) the experiential view, (ii) the prominence view, and (iii) the attentional view (Ungerer and Schmid 1996).

As far as **the experiential view** is concerned, its main assertion is the idea of following a more practical but personal path, instead of claiming the logical rules and objective definitions on the basis of theoretical

considerations and introspections. For example, being asked about the processes that occur in their minds while producing and understanding words and sentences, language users reply that while speaking about "a car," they imagine a box-like shape with doors, wheels, seats, etc. Hence, the item is described by means of their attributes, people's associations and impressions which build their personal, subjective or communal experience (cf. Ungerer and Schmid 1996: xi). These personal characteristics go beyond the objective description produced by linguists who grew up on the logical principles. Therefore, it may be concluded that the experiential view appears to be superior to the logical view because it delivers a much richer and much more natural description of their meanings (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: xi). Additionally, the experiential aspects of meanings are not only a product of one's personal experience or interviews. Cognitive linguists rely on the fact that our shared experience of the world is also stored in our everyday language, and, as such, can be garnered from the way we express our thoughts. The experiential position of cognitive linguistics in relation to human knowledge emphasizes the fact that human reasoning is determined both by our organic embodiment, and by our individual as well as collective experiences (Geeraerts and Cuyckens 2007: 5). In order to enter and explore this field, it is necessary to go beyond the logic of clause patterns, and start to examine figurative language, which is mainly represented by metaphors. This openness to figurative language seems to be important since our experience of the well-known objects and events is very often associated with abstract categories, such as emotions. Truly, we do make use of our experience of the concrete world that surrounds us. Thus, taking into consideration a panoply of observations, impressions as well as associations underlying metaphors, it is obvious that they constitute another major basis of the experiential approach (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: xii).

Another approach to linguistic utterances which goes beyond logical reasoning and objectivity is called the **prominence view** and it refers to the arrangement and selection of information which is expressed. To be precise, the sentence "The car crashed into the tree" may work as a natural description of all the circumstances which caused the breakdown of the car. Whereas the sentence "The tree was hit by the car" seems to be unnatural to report a car accident (cf. Ungerer and Schmid 1996: xii). Accordingly, it may be concluded that the selection of the clause subject is determined by the different degrees of prominence carried by the components involved in the situation. There are several applications, such as the selection of the subject as opposed to the object, the adverbials of the clause and many others that reflect the prominence view of linguistic

structures. As scrutinised by Ungerer and Schmid (1996: xii-xiii), in general, the prominence view provides a kind of explanation of how the information in a clause is selected and arranged.

Another point that is to be considered is **the attentional view**. This is an alternative approach, based on the assumption that what we actually express mirrors the elements of an event that attracts our attention. To provide more detail, if we evoke the already-mentioned sentence "The car crashed into the tree," we can admit that only a small section of the road accident is selected, which, most likely, generates in our minds the image of how the car started to swerve, how it slipped across the road, and finally rumbled onto the tree. Nonetheless, the whole scene before the car hit the tree is left behind our focus, simply due to the fact that our attention is absorbed by the most significant point in this event, namely where the path of the car ended (cf. Ungerer and Schmid 1996: xiii). Thus, one stage of the event is stressed in the sentence more profoundly in comparison to other stages. Taken together, both the prominence and attention views appear to be of the same or similar value for a syntactic analysis, in comparison with the rule-based description of logical grammars (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: xii).

Summing up, cognitive linguistics is the study of language and its **cognitive function**, where "cognitive" refers to the key role of the intermediate informational structures, as far as the contact with the world is concerned. It focuses on natural language as the means for organizing, processing, and transmitting information. Therefore, language is seen as a repository of the world knowledge, a structured collection of the meaningful categories that help us deal with new experiences and store information about the old ones. Thus, taking all these points into consideration, three fundamental characteristics of cognitive linguistics can be drawn out, as outlined by Geeraerts and Cuyckens (1996: 5), *viz.* the significance of semantics in the linguistic analysis, the encyclopaedic nature of linguistic meanings, and the perspectival nature of linguistic meanings. All in all, having learnt about the basic assumptions of cognitive linguistics in the introductory part of the proposed book, we remain in the same array of interest, based on the human conceptual system. In other words, we proceed, in section 1.2, to the issue of the figure / ground organisation.

1.2. Figure-ground Organization

The reason behind the differences which occur between human perception and experience of the reality may be found in some sensory and perceptual

mechanisms, taken after Gestalt psychology. Indeed, since conceptual notions and examples from the domain of visual perception can find their equivalents in cognitive linguistics, the section below presents the most important Gestalt principles.

To start with, the principles concerning the sensory and perceptual mechanisms were introduced and elaborated by the prominent Gestalt psychologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, e.g. Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), Kurt Koffka (1886-1941), and Wolfgang Köhler (1887-1967), among many others. The unconscious perceptual mechanisms form wholes or "gestalts" out of the perceptual input elements. To visualise it, a larger entity, even if obscured by a smaller object located in front of it, is perceived as one whole, no matter how many discontinuous parts it is made of. Gestalt psychologists agree on the fact that human beings naturally organise the elements of a visual scene into a salient **figure** and a non-salient background called **ground** (cf. Radden and Dirven 2007: 28). In short, the scene is segregated automatically by means of human perception into the so-called figure and ground organisation.

Edgar Rubin's (1915) psychological notions of *figure* and *ground* have been adjusted into linguistics by the cognitive linguist Leonard Talmy since the 1970s. Talmy (1978, 1983, 2000) accounts for the general conceptualization of figure and ground in linguistics, providing the basic definitions of the two notions. Accordingly, the **figure** is termed as "a moving or conceptually movable entity whose site, path, or orientation is conceived as a variable the particular value of which is the relevant issue;" the **ground**, in turn, is "a reference entity, one that has a stationary setting relative to a reference frame, with respect to which the figure's site, path, or orientation is characterized" (cf. Talmy 1978: 627; Talmy 2000: 184, 315- 316), as illustrated in *Figure 1-1* below.

Figure 1-1. Figure-ground segregation (cf. Evans and Green 2006: 66)

In *Figure 1.1*, the figure is the lighthouse, while the ground contains the sky against which the figure stands out. Hence, in the figure-ground asymmetry Talmy (2000) explains that a physical object is located or moves with respect to another object that is a reference point. Besides, Talmy defines the located *vs.* locating entity asymmetry in a schematization process, which involves the profiling of specific aspects of the reference point of a scene, and represents the whole gestalt (cf. Talmy 2000: 179).

Significantly, Langacker (1987) elaborates upon the asymmetry by introducing "a trajector as the figure in a relational profile;" while "other salient entities are identified as landmarks" (Langacker 1987: 231). The profile here stands for the scope / stage of the scene, while the hearer-speaker and the entity are located, all of which form the coordinate system. According to Langacker (1987), "relational predications display an inherent asymmetry in the presentation of their participants" (Langacker 1987: 231); nonetheless, the nature of participants' involvement in the outlined relationship is not supposed to be the only focus in this asymmetry. In short, the figure / trajector is the entity which stands out against the ground / landmark of a scene, while these two conceptually-centred categories are semantically peculiar, and do reflect the essential notions of Gestalt psychology (Koffka 1935: 177-210).

Remarkably, since what we perceive and what mental representations are created rely greatly on the Gestalt principles, i.e. our cognitive apparatus and perceptual processing mechanisms, the outputs of all these processes can be neither totally predicted in advance nor accurately planned (cf. Evans and Green 2006: 67-68). For instance, according to **the principle of proximity**, the elements (dots) grouped closer together are detected as if they were forming one group, i.e. columns rather than rows, as illustrated in *Figure 1-2*. While taking **the principle of similarity** into consideration, it is assumed that the same or similar visual features of some entities in a scene, e.g. size, shape or colour, make the entities be perceived as one group representatives. As it can be seen in *Figure 1-3*, the similar shapes of squares or circles give the impression of columns being formed rather than rows.

Figure 1-2. Columns of dots (Evans and Green 2006: 66)
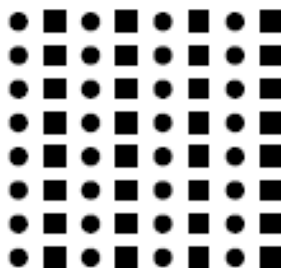
Figure 1-3. Columns of shapes (Evans and Green 2006: 67)

Moreover, thanks to our perceptual system, frequently incomplete figures or missing information can be accomplished while applying **the principle of closure**. To illustrate the point, let us have a look at *Figure 1-4*, in which a white triangle overlaid on three black circles seems to be the first to notice, while, in fact, the image presents three incomplete circles.

Figure 1-4. A triangle and three black circles (Evans and Green 2006: 67)

In the same vein, following **the principle of continuity**, continuous figures are more preferably chosen by human perception than any broken ones. Therefore, in *Figure 1-5*, two unbroken rectangles, one behind another, are recognised sooner than perceiving a discontinuous shaded rectangle, partly covered by the white whole rectangle.

Figure 1-5. Two rectangles
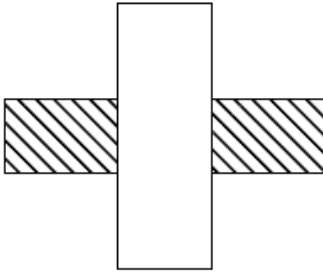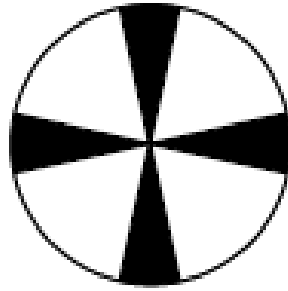(Evans and Green 2006: 67)

Figure 1-6. A black cross
(Evans and Green 2006: 68)

Finally mentioned is **the principle of smallness**, illustrated in *Figure 1-6*. According to this principle, smaller entities, such as the black cross in *Figure 1-6*, are quicker to be grasped as figures in comparison with larger entities, such as the white cross in *Figure 1-6*.

Summarising the main points which distinguish figure from ground, Talmy (2000) outlines some **definitional and associated characteristics** of objects, providing the criteria based on linguistic encoding. *Table 1-1* presents both the *definitional* features of figure and ground, which are the most significant characteristics that constitute the notions, and the *associated* characteristics, which, in turn, display a tendency to occur only in some circumstances.

Hence, according to the characteristics presented in *Table 1-1*, figure is likely to be an entity that is more exposed, coherent, mobile, better delineated and structured. Since it is usually smaller in size, figure draws our attention and interest faster. Whereas ground seems to be rather formless, shapeless and unstructured (cf. Ungerer and Schmid 1996: 157; Radden and Dirven 2007: 28).

Characteristics of *figure* and *ground*	
Figure **definitional** characteristics	*Ground* **definitional** characteristics
a. Has unknown spatial (or temporal) properties to be determined	a. Acts as a reference entity, having known properties that can characterize the figure's unknowns
Figure **associated** characteristics	*Ground* **associated** characteristics
a. More movable b. Smaller c. Geometrically simpler (often pointlike) in its treatment d. More recently on the scene/in awareness e. Of greater concern/relevance f. Less immediately perceivable g. More salient, once perceived h. More dependent	a. More permanently located b. Larger c. Geometrically more complex in its treatment d. Earlier on the scene/in memory e. Of lesser concern/relevance f. More immediately perceivable g. More backgrounded, once figure is perceived h. More independent

Table 1-1. **Characteristics of figure and ground, as encoded in language (cf. Talmy 2000: 183, 230-231, 315-316)**

Remarkably, Taylor (2002) highlights the fact that concepts frequently manifest themselves "in the manner in which a particular scene is organized for the purpose of its linguistic expression" (Taylor 2002: 11). Indeed, figure is characterised with indefinite spatial (or temporal) properties, while ground works as a reference entity with its definite properties, which can determine the indefinites of figure. Expectedly, the figure and ground alignments can be displayed explicitly also by means of words in a sentence. The actual English sentences are exemplified by Talmy (2000) and given in (1.1).

(1.1)   a)   The bike is near the house.
           b) # The house is near the bike.

(Talmy 2000: 183)

Talmy (2000) argues that these two sentences, given in (1.1a) and (1.1b), appear to be synonymous, but, in fact, their meaning is different. They represent two inverse forms of a symmetric spatial relation. The sign # [hash] in sentence (1.1b) indicates the incorrect sentence but not in terms of grammatical correctness, but in terms of pragmatics. This is the result of discrepancy between reality and cognition. In other words, if figure is

represented by the bike, the house acts as ground; hence, it becomes a specified reference point that determines the location of the bike. The house is expected to possess the characteristics of ground, and it does, indeed, since it is usually larger in comparison with the bike, and its location is generally more permanent than the setting of the bike. The bike, on the other hand, is expected to fulfil the requirements to become figure. Once ground, as a reference point, is identified, figure then gets specified. Interestingly, if both of these (i.e. the bike and the house from the sentences in (1.1)) were toys for children, the sentence given in (1.1b) would become fully proper. Hence, taking into consideration the distribution of meaning components in a sentence, Thiering (2011: 248) calls these cognitive notions of figure and ground peculiar.

Besides, according to Talmy (1978, 1983, 2000), in natural language and everyday situations, the figure-ground relation may contribute to specifying some spatial relations, *viz.* in order to determine the position of one object (figure), in relation to another object (ground). For instance, the prepositions *in*, *near*, *behind* etc. can define the location, while the propositions *into*, *out of*, *onto* etc. can be used to specify the motion of given entities (cf. Croft and Cruse 2004: 56). However, even though language (words, phrases and sentences, etc.) can be applied as a device to distinguish figure from ground, the reality and context can be the final influential factor whether to accept a particular sentence or not (cf. Fukui 2014: 106).

In short, in most cases of the figure-ground asymmetry, also visualised by means of the linguistic representations of some spatial scenes, one entity is usually privileged (figure), and the second object is given less prominence (ground). Nevertheless, figure and ground may switch round if the two entities seem to share the same size and prominence. This phenomenon is commonly known in perception as a reversal, and is well illustrated in *Figure 1-7*.

Figure 1-7.   The vase / face illusion (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: 157)

In *Figure 1-7*, a white vase or two black faces in profile are perceived. However, under no circumstances, both the vase and the two faces are recognised at the same time.

As far as language is concerned, the reverse version of figure-ground relation may occur here as well. As explicated by Zlatev (2003), and Radden and Dirven (2007: 29), it is possible to speak either of (i) "the cinema near the supermarket," or "the supermarket near the cinema;" or (ii) "the tree by the car" *vs*. "the car by the tree" (cf. Zlatev 2003: 332; Zlatev 2007). The sentences in (i) and (ii) evoke dissimilar encoded situations, and this dissimilarity stems from the variety of human experience (cf. Zlatev 2003: 332 (fn. 3)). In fact, it is the speaker's own preference, most probably specified by culture and context, or likely to be biases-determined, which is the final decisive factor to specify the semantic function of a given sentence, in order to convey a particular linguistic message. Hence, what may be concluded from the afore-mentioned examples is that language users may make an intentional choice to reverse the natural asymmetry between figure and ground (cf. Zlatev 2003, 2007; and Thiering 2011: 248-249, both of whom provide some empirical evidence to support this observation).

With regard to linguistic expressions and sentences, most frequently does it happen that ground is defined by means of prepositional phrases in spatial situations. According to Radden and Dirven (2007: 29), in simple English transitive sentences, figure is introduced when an entity is described by the subject, while ground is determined when some entity is described by the direct object. In more complex sentences the division between figure and ground is made the same way. To be precise, let us have a look at two subordinate clauses, such as (i) They began to travel *after* they graduated from the college; and (ii) They graduated from the college *before* they began to travel (my own examples based on Radden and Dirven (2007: 29 (13))). Both of these sentences present the same sequence of events, *viz*. first "they graduated from the college," and then "they began to travel." Naturally, subordinate clauses provide the ground for the figure event which is described by the main clause. In the case of the sentence in (i), the ground event is established by "graduating from the college," which creates the setting for the figure event of "beginning to travel." In sentence (ii), instead, "graduating from the college" comprises the figure event, which is situated in time by the ground event, namely "beginning to travel." According to Talmy (2000: 326), the figure / ground relation specified by the subordinator is not likely to reverse for most figure / ground subordinators. Interestingly yet, a figure / ground reversal, if occurred, may sometimes evoke totally different meanings in the course