

# Radical Experientialism/Cognitive Typology

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This book project concerns the elaboration of a linguistic framework (**Radical Experientialism, RadEx**) that tries to link language typology, historical linguistics, and sociocultural linguistics with a cognitive theory of language camping (among others) in the field of Radical Constructivism. The following sketchy paragraphs describe some very basic (and selected) assumptions of RadEx. The model will be developed in details in the book project '**Aspects of Cognitive Typology**'. Note that RadEx does not claim to be a fully 'new' model of language. Rather, it is grounded in (and derived from) a variety of current trends (among others) in cognitive linguistics, sociocognitive linguistics, and semiotics trying to put together some of the relevant perspectives under the heading of Experientialism and Constructivism.

## Phenomenology

RadEx denies the 'objective reality' of language (in terms of 'givenness'). The framework is non-objectivistic in the sense that it views language data as **phenomena** the properties of which emerge from the interactive triangle 'data producer – data – data perceiver'. It is claimed that language is only language if it is perceived/processed by someone equipped with a linguistic knowledge system. Else, what we describe as language data is nothing but 'meaningless noise'. The 'state' of a language 'user' (or of a scientific observer) during perception thus crucially determines upon the properties of the linguistic phenomenon. The reification of linguistic phenomena turns these phenomena into 'secondary objects' entailing all the norms and theories the perceiver has activated during the process of perception. The reification of linguistic data thus allows construing 'language as such' in the sense of a cognitive and social **artifact**.

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## Reductionism

RadEx is a pronounced **reductionist** model of language. It claims that most linguistic structures can be reduced to just a few and very simple pre-conceptual (in fact experiential) and conceptual procedures (such as the figure ground relation), see ['Einfalt \(in\) der Vielfalt'](#) for details. Complexity results from various processes related to these procedures, such as metaphorical inflation, recursion, projection onto macro-levels, conceptual enrichment etc. These processes may be structurally coupled in different ways, pending on the conventionalization and habitualization of corresponding linguistic units.

## Descriptivism

In order to describe linguistic processes and language structures, RadEx starts from the reified 'version' of linguistic phenomena without neglecting, however, the underlying reification

processes and their impact on the interpretation and classification of linguistic phenomena. Reified linguistic phenomena ('data') are described in terms of **Basic Linguistic Theory** (BLT, Dixon 2009). BLT, however, is adopted to the RadEx framework in a way that reflects the layout of RadEx.

### **Cognitive Linguistics**

Major components of RadEx are related to **Cognitive Linguistics**. Contrary to some other approaches in Cognitive Linguistics, it does not aim at unveiling structures of cognition with the help of linguistic data. Rather, it asks: Which cognitive processes must be modeled in which way to in order to explain linguistic data? The descriptive and analytic target thus is language and not cognition as such.

### **Usage-basedness**

RadEx stresses the assumption that language takes only place in terms of **language practices**. The reality of language practice is the sole source for obtaining language data as well as the most relevant factor for accessing linguistic knowledge. In order to retrieve collective linguistic knowledge in terms of usage-basedness, RadEx strongly subscribes to elaborated versions of **corpus linguistics** the codes of which are adjusted to the framework of RadEx. The model starts from the hypothesis that orality has the primacy over written language. Written language is regarded as a secondary, relatively young dimension that has developed out of orality and that can be viewed as a 'luxurized' version of linguistic knowledge and language practice. Its idiosyncratic grammatical and lexical properties, however, may have a secondary impact on orality-based linguistic knowledge and language practice. Nevertheless, the fact that the origin of language is based on orality necessitates to relate basic cognitive processes to **orality** rather than to secondary processes active in the use of written language. RadEx accepts the notion of 'well formedness' only with respect to the degree according to which an utterance conforms to the socially determined language norms of a speech community. In other words: There is no 'right' or 'wrong' (and, as a matter of consequence, nothing such as 'cognitive rules') except for the violation of such norms.

### **Onomasiology/Semasiology**

RadEx accesses the analysis of linguistic data from both sides: **onomasiology** and **semasiology**. Fully respecting the corresponding **hermeneutic circle** it derives some very basic (coarse-grained) onomasiological categories from the underlying model of Experientialism. RadEx then asks in which way these categories are symbolized in language. The data obtained are then analyzed with respect to their semasiological dimensions that are again used to fine-tune or revise the preliminary onomasiological categories. These categories thus become more and more 'fine-grained' by recursive application of this method.

## Symbolism

The framework starts from the assumption that “language is symbolic in nature” (Langacker 1987: 11) claiming that every linguistic act involves the linking a (usually fuzzy) conceptual domain with a learned (entrenched) phonetic (expressive) pattern. In this sense, it is not only ‘language’ that is ‘symbolic in nature’, but every segment of a linguistic act, be it a phoneme, a morpheme, a syntactic structure, a linguistic category or the like. Accordingly, it is claimed that there is no basic (structural) difference between phonological knowledge, grammar, lexicon, and pragmatics etc. All these domains are characterized by a **semiotic architecture**. This hypothesis entails the assumption that the semiotic architecture of language and its parts is grounded in the human disposition of necessarily processing ‘Outer World stimuli’ in terms of symbolic operations. In other terms: it is not the ‘World’ that is symbolic by itself, but it is processed by human beings symbolically (or: construed) by relating a stimulus (of which nature so ever) with a conceptual ‘image’ of it [a rose is a rose only if I have an understanding of a rose].

## Grounded Language

RadEx further claims that linguistic knowledge is constituted by a ‘set’ of **linguistic signs** internalized by the individual mainly during phases of language acquisition. The systematics of this set (‘langue’ in the sense of Saussure) is conditioned by at least two aspects: First, it reflects **norms** of linguistic practice handed over from generation to generation and (modestly) accommodated to the practiced social, cultural, and communicative norms of a given language community or of its social strata (habitus). Second, it conditioned and controlled by the overall-architecture of cognition. RadEx starts from a **non-modular** model of cognition defining cognition as the ensemble of functional/conceptual values that are structurally coupled with corresponding neural patterns and activities (‘brain as the substrate/substance of cognition’). The framework assumes that most (if not all) mental processes are grounded in **experiential patterns** and **procedures** (including the experience of bodily states, situated actions etc.) guaranteeing the interaction of cognition with the ‘Outer World’. In this sense, processes related to both the sensorimotor architecture, its procedures, and physiological limitations are seen as being ultimately responsible for a wide array of knowledge types, including language. In addition, cognition-internal patterns of processing (both real and fictive) stimuli in terms of **constructions** (mental images), **pattern recognition**, and **memory-matching** constitute another decisive factor that also constitutes the cognition foundation of metaphorization processes.

## The construction of communication

RadEx assumes that – from a cognitive point of view – language is functionally grounded in knowledge patterns linking a given ‘cognitive state’ (again resulting from experiential processes) with a learned motoric (articulatory) pattern for **expressive** ‘purpose’. The accommodation of these knowledge patterns to the experience of ‘parallel knowledge’ in other individuals conditions the construction of language as a ‘**communicative**’ device that can be used to inform others about a given ‘state’ of cognition. Communication is thus not viewed as a part of the primary / radical ontology of language, but as a secondary construction grounded in the experience of **shared (collective) knowledge**. Whether or not a linguistic act

is communicative is not controlled by properties of the act itself (except it entails linguistic signs that have an appellative function), but mainly by the perceivers who decide upon this feature according to their mental state and in accordance with given social norms.

## Pragmatics

RadEx does **not** start from the assumption that the contents/meanings of sentences are propositions controlled by truth-related values. Rather, the model claims that the semiotic ‘value’ of sentences (that is of structured sequences of articulation [signifiant] coupled with event images [signifié]) cannot be construed and processed but in terms of their **structural coupling with the ‘state’ of cognition**. This ‘state’ is determined (among others) by parameters of situation, emotion, habitus, ‘private’ history etc., all of them grounded in the entrenchment of conventions related to the experience and processing of instances of these parameters. It follows that the content of any sentence (utterance) is necessarily grounded in and depended from the given ‘state’ of the individual cognitions as well as from the knowledge about/activation of the **social norms** that control the processing of this content. Norms of processing the content of sentences are active/stimulated by a corresponding (situated) knowledge frame and may be additionally symbolized linguistically in terms of specialized linguistic signs (phonetic/prosodic patterns, morphological units, (morpho)syntactic patterns or lexical units).

Accordingly, RadEx does **not** distinguish **pragmatics** per se from other dimensions of ‘meaning’. Every ‘meaning’ of a linguistic sign is necessarily pragmatic ‘in nature’, just as every sign (symbol) cannot be processed but pragmatically. Most importantly, RadEx does not assume that linguistic practice is controlled by some kind of ‘pragmatic competence’, or by cognitively grounded, conversational implicatures (cooperative principle) in terms of universals. RadEx argues that those factors that are related to conversational implicatures etc. are derived from a European/Western **model of communication** that mirrors corresponding **social norms of communication**. RadEx dwells upon a ‘**pessimistic**’ view of communication, claiming that language is **not** primarily grounded in communication but in the **expression of cognitive states**. As has been said above: Whether or not a linguistic act has a communicative effect depends from the model of communicative interaction conventionalized in a given society as well as from the given cognitive state of a perceiver (‘hearer’).

## The basis of language structures

RadEx starts from the hypothesis that the basic unit of linguistic practice is constituted by **utterances** that are the signifiant of ‘**event images**’. Accordingly, it argued that human being perceive Outer World stimuli only in terms of event constructions (images), not in terms of individual ‘objects’ secondarily related to processes and to other ‘objects’. The pairing of (articulated) utterances (signifiant) with corresponding event images (signifié) results in linguistic signs described as ‘**sentences**’. RadEx supposes that human beings cannot but ‘speak in sentences’, because they cannot but perceive in terms of event images. It follows that the general layout of RadEx is ‘sentence-centered’ rejecting categorial atomism and the bottom-up building block principle. Rather, it is assumed that sentences are **gestalt-like** macro-structures, the micro-structures of which vary with respect to the degree of their **categorial resolution**. Syntactic structures are regarded as ‘**structural linguistic signs**’

elaborated (if present) by morphological and/or lexical linguistic signs. Their signifiers represent conceptual relational templates (e.g. figure ground relations, causality, patterns related to the attention flow active during the perception and processing of ‘events’ etc.) that are ultimately derived from mechanisms of perception and experience processing. These syntactic structures (coming in parts close to what is conventionally described in Construction Grammar) are structurally coupled with memory-stored event images, both of which co-activated in case the construction of an event image is expressed linguistically.

### **The limits of language**

Both, the ‘social success’ of a given **normative** system of language knowledge and the **universal** make-up of cognitive processing guarantee that variants of ‘language systems’ usually do not transgress the ‘**horizon of language**’ (exceptions may occur e.g. in certain types of poetics such as Dada or ‘concrete poetics’). This horizon is constituted by mainly two aspects:

(a) The general architecture of cognition together with its procedural properties alluded to above. This architecture is pre-linguistic and has been **invariable** since the evolution of the ‘homo loquens’. RadEx does not start from a Universal Grammar-like language module, but assumes that the architecture of human cognition as such (focusing on experience-related patterns and processes) necessarily conditions a developmental stage that is marked for the readiness to link conceptual units with expressive patterns. **First language acquisition** thus means that linguistic knowledge patterns are gradually entrenched. They become activated in accordance with the given developmental state of cognition and condition the positive reinforcement (and social adjustment) of cognitive patterns of conceptualization. Linguistic signs that encode structural properties of event images cannot go beyond those conceptual patterns that emerge from the interaction of innate neurophysiological and cognitive patterns.

(b) The constant, recursive, and thus iterative **accommodation** of norms of linguistic practices (hence of linguistic knowledge systems) to the **social** (hence anthropological) conditions of human beings having gained their properties due to their appropriateness with respect to the ‘social nature’ of human beings.

### **Linguistic relativism**

RadEx rejects a strong version of linguistic relativism. The framework is skeptical with respect to the hypothesis that linguistic structures and lexical units shape cognitive concepts as such. In accordance with the assumption of language being grounded in overall-cognitive mechanisms (see above), it strongly favors a top-down interpretation. It nevertheless accepts that concepts (being fuzzy in nature) may be **profiled** by learning corresponding linguistic signs. In RadEx, **relativism** rather concerns the way of how concepts are expressed linguistically. In other words: Speakers of different languages do not have different conceptual strategies to process Outer World stimuli, but take more or less different options to ‘talk about’ given concepts and conceptual domain. This includes a vast array of social and cultural conventions most of which are **anachronistic** in synchronic terms.

## Diachrony/Synchrony

RadEx dwells upon the hypothesis that most linguistic patterns and units present in a given speech community are **historical phenomena**. This means that (except for features and structures related to cognitive universals) collective linguistic knowledge systems reflect **social and cultural routines** that have become conventionalized and socially normative much prior to their description at a synchronic stage. Accordingly, synchronic linguistic knowledge systems have rather low impact on cognitive processing at the same synchronic stage. The accommodation of linguistic knowledge systems to changing social and cultural patterns takes place very slowly and over generations. RadEx thus assumes that much of a given linguistic knowledge system is **anachronistic**. In order to explain linguistic structures and units, RadEx thus explicitly states that the synchronic relevance of linguistic units in terms of embodiment, metaphorization etc. must not be over-estimated. Most of these units reflect **petrified chunks** the motivation of which is no longer transparent cognitively (and hence do not exert a corresponding impact on cognition). RadEx thus constantly refers to the **sociohistorical** (diachronic) dimension of collective linguistic knowledge systems in order to explain their emergence. This includes all relevant domains, such as the expressive side (sound history), the conceptual side (semantic shifts), the history of their coupling in terms of given linguistic signs, and the underlying linguistic practice.

## Cognitive Typology

Cognitive Typology is a central component of RadEx. It aims at describing the functional and conceptual motivation of **typological diversity**. It is claimed that typological diversity is primarily based on differences in activating, elaborating, and networking the basic pre-conceptual and conceptual procedures mentioned above. RadEx assumes that these procedures rarely show up as such in language. In this sense, the *tertium comparationis* is not substantiated/symbolized in language (in terms of e.g. Universal Grammar), but always **embodied** in diverse patterns that are both the **same** and **different**. The observation of typological variation (with respect to an onomasiological dimension) is crucial in order to unveil the underlying 'common' pre-conceptual and conceptual procedures. It is claimed that typological variation is mainly grounded in differences with respect to the **history of language practices** and their **sociocultural norms**. In addition, **cognition-internal** procedures and the functional architecture of corresponding domains (such as memory) control and regularize the emergent patterns of typological variation (e.g. paradigmatic knowledge, pattern recognition, language and cognitive economy/redundancy etc.).