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**THE QUIET REVOLUTION:
Ron Langacker's Fall Quarter 1977 lectures**

1. Introduction

I have taken the opportunity, on the occasion of the Imagery in Language Conference in Honour of Professor Ronald W. Langacker, to reflect on a relatively early stage in the development of Professor Langacker's linguistic theory, now known as Cognitive Grammar.¹ The particular stage I refer to is the series of lectures given by Professor Langacker (RWL) to graduate students at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) during the Fall Quarter 1977. It is a stage with which I have some first-hand knowledge, since I was a graduate student in that class, and my reflections on those lectures are based on the set of notes that I took at the time and have managed to preserve over the years. In what follows, I shall try to convey a sense of the intellectual context of the time and the ideas that RWL was promulgating at that time. As such, it falls short of what one might expect of a "History of Cognitive Grammar", offering, rather, a snapshot of a particular point in that history. Nevertheless, I believe the lecture material I report on below is particularly interesting in the way it presages, in an incipient way, quite a number of the ideas which appeared in their fully-developed form some ten years later as Langacker (1987) and which are directly relevant to the theme of this conference.

¹ In fact, it was a singular pleasure to be able to deliver my paper to the Imagery in Language Conference on the 28th September 2003, twenty-six years to the day since the first day of Professor Langacker's 1977 Fall Quarter lectures. I would like to acknowledge here, too, my indebtedness to Professor Langacker for enriching my understanding of language in incalculable ways and also for imparting a particular kind of intellectual stance which is not all that common amongst linguists: an openness to, and a respect for, the unconventional and the unfashionable.

2. The linguistic context

It is useful to consider the linguistic climate in which RWL was working in order to better appreciate the material covered in the 1977 lectures. There was certainly a good deal of original content in those lectures, and the content was very far removed from the major linguistic theories which prevailed at the time in North America (above all, Generative Syntax in one of its many guises and Relational Grammar which was enjoying considerable success around 1977). Nevertheless, there were, "in the air" so to speak, a number of ideas about the nature of syntactic and semantic theory which presented significant departures from mainstream theorizing. Neither then, nor now, could linguistic research in the USA be described as following any narrow, prescribed agenda. Certainly, from the perspective of linguists working on the West Coast, there was an abundance of provocative new ideas finding their way into conference papers, working papers, graduate seminars etc. I shall briefly mention a number of these ideas in so far as they appear connected in some way to the lectures by RWL.

It is convenient to take 1975, mid-way through the 1970's, as a starting point. It was the year in which the first meeting of the student-run Berkeley Linguistics Society was held, representing a West Coast equivalent of the celebrated meetings of the Chicago Linguistic Society. That first meeting, the proceedings of which were later published as Cogen, Thompson, Thurgood, Whistler and Wright (1975), contained a number of papers which give some indication of the vitality and flux within the field of linguistics, as practised on the West Coast. A paper by Fillmore (UC Berkeley) on "An alternative to checklist theories of meaning" (Fillmore 1975) begins with the observation: "There seems to be in the air today two ideas whose times have come: the Prototype and the Frame. I'd like to consider here their relevance for semantic theory." It was a modest introduction to concepts which have come to be seen as having far-reaching importance to semantics.² They would find expression, too, in the works of RWL. That same paper by Fillmore was remarkable for the way in which it also introduced the linguistic audience to the relevance of a body image in language systems, a theme destined to become a favourite topic of research in the ensuing years. Fillmore writes:

...we know, without knowing how we know, the prototypic ways in which our bodies enable us to relate to our environment; this knowledge we might speak of as part of our *body image*. Our language

² Fillmore, in the paper referred to here, drew upon the then recently published paper of Rosch (1973) in his discussion of prototypes. In so doing, he was instrumental in helping to make Rosch's ground-breaking research known to linguists.

provides us with orienting and classifying linguistic frames – such as UP/DOWN, FRONT/BACK and LEFT/RIGHT – which we could not understand, or could not easily understand, if we lacked bodies or if we lacked a body image. (Fillmore 1975: 123)

Talmy (Stanford University) presented a paper anchored in the psychological notions of *figure* and *ground*, using these terms thus: "The FIGURE object is a moving or conceptually movable point... The GROUND object is a reference-point..." (Talmy 1975: 419). Already, the more abstract understanding of *figure* ("movable or conceptually movable", italics mine JN) heralds a new, psychologically informed mode of discourse in semantics and a mode of discourse which came to be incorporated, in a much expanded and very fundamental way, into RWL's own theorizing. A third paper from that conference which deserves mention in the present context is Lakoff and Thompson's (1975a) paper "Introducing cognitive grammar". Lakoff and Thompson (both UC Berkeley) situated their research into grammar well and truly within the study of cognition:

The study of cognitive grammar is part of the study of cognitive capacity as a whole. This includes at least the representation of knowledge, memory, processing strategies and mechanisms, reasoning, principles of social interaction, and whatever other abilities or knowledge enable one to use language. (Lakoff and Thompson 1975a: 307)

The authors summarize their view of grammars as "just collections of strategies for understanding and producing sentences" (Lakoff and Thompson 1975a: 295).³

1975 was also the year that the Chicago Linguistic Society held a parasession, alongside its annual meeting, on the theme of Functionalism, with the papers published as Grossman, San, and Vance (1975). The theme of the parasession points to a growing interest in modes of explanation for linguistic data which stretch beyond theorizing within an autonomous linguistic framework. A remarkable contribution to that conference is Cooper and Ross's paper (both M.I.T.) on "Word Order" (Cooper and Ross 1975). It is a paper which works its way through a stunning variety of English language phenomena, claiming to find evidence for a host of principles influencing lexical and syntactic organization: The Food and Drink Hierarchy (Fish > Meat > Drink > Fruit > Vegetables > Baked Goods > Dairy Products > Spices); Me First Principle; Up vs. Down; Right vs. Left; Vertical vs. Horizontal. As a discussion of "word order", it

³ Despite the use of the label *cognitive grammar* by Lakoff and Thompson to refer to their approach, I was not aware at the time (1977) of any widespread adoption of this phrase or the particular model described by the authors.

radically redefined the scope and nature of such inquiry. The concluding remarks impart a sense of the authors' audacity and verve:

Although we have up until now been tacit on this matter, we hereby forsake the guise of linguistics proper and admit to being card-carrying Whorfers.

Whorfers of the world! Unite! You have nothing to lose but your brains! (Cooper and Ross 1975: 103)

Lakoff and Thompson's (1975b) paper on "Dative questions in cognitive grammar" further elaborated upon their notion of *cognitive grammar*: "Rules of grammar are processing strategies of a certain sort; abstract grammars are convenient fictions for representing aspects of linguistic processing, and have no independent reality." (Lakoff and Thompson 1975b: 337). RWL's paper in the volume (Langacker 1975), "Functional stratigraphy", seems to be still some theoretical distance from the 1977 lectures in terms of content and notation, exploiting as it does tree diagrams to express functionally distinct layers of meaning in clause structure. Still, the paper is unequivocal in its rejection of mainstream theorizing about grammar: "... all current versions of transformational grammar fail to come to grips with certain fundamental properties of language" (Langacker 1975: 351). A reader of the paper would have read the opening remarks, though (s)he could hardly have appreciated just how the author was to deliver on his reference to a "wide-ranging program":

This paper can be regarded as an extended remark taken out of context. It represents one small part of a wide-ranging program of research on the nature of semantic structure and its articulation with grammatical form. (Langacker 1975: 351)

The paper by Yngve (University of Chicago) seems to be even more ominous in its portrayal of the state of linguistics and what measures are necessary to put linguistics on the right path:

In other words, we must literally start from the beginning and develop the foundations of a new linguistic discipline. It may turn out that not a single concept from the old discipline can be salvaged and used as a foundation block for the new. (Yngve 1975: 542)

In the immediate context of UCSD, RWL was one of a number of distinguished faculty teaching syntax and semantics. UCSD faculty in the second half of the 1970's included, on the syntax and semantics side, Yuki Kuroda, Sandra Chung, Edward Klima and David Perlmutter. It would be difficult to find any real commonalities between the content of RWL's 1977 lectures and the

material being taught, and research being published, by these colleagues around this time. I can not speak about the degree to which RWL might have found intellectual encouragement or inspiration from these colleagues, though it seems unlikely that this would have occurred in any extensive way. I suspect that the reality was rather that RWL carried out the research he was doing on syntax and semantics without much discussion with colleagues. In this respect, however, the situation at UCSD may not have been very different from how academics interact, or not, in the majority of university departments of linguistics.

The foregoing observations are sufficient to give some sense of the linguistic climate of the mid 1970's, without claiming to be a comprehensive account of the state of linguistics in the USA at the time. Certainly in the context of linguistics as practised on the West Coast, there was a surge of new ideas, inspired more by research in psychology rather than autonomous linguistic theorizing, which began to take hold. As I see it now, the situation was such that there was no shortage of new ideas pointing in new directions. What was lacking, though, was a theory or framework that united many of these ideas into a coherent whole.⁴ Langacker (1987) provided that coherent whole for many linguists.

3. The 1977 lectures

The lectures I report on were held once a week during the Fall Quarter 1977, commencing on the 28th September 1977 and finishing on 30th November 1977, according to my notes. The topic of the lectures continued in the following Winter and Spring Quarters, until the 9th June 1978, though I restrict myself here just to the content of the Fall Quarter lectures. The classes were at the graduate level and small in size (from memory, less than a dozen students). Fellow graduate students at the time included Susan Lindner and Eugene Casad. A memorable, and, in my own experience of linguistics instructors, unique feature of the class was the extensive use that RWL made of coloured chalk, with colours being incorporated to some extent into the notation. My notes, regrettably, do not faithfully record the details of the colours and I ignore this aspect in what follows.

⁴ There is a view that the terms *theory* and *framework* must be rigorously distinguished in linguistics. I do not share that view. My experience has been that, within linguistics, *theory* is used by proponents of a framework who believe, wrongly, that their framework has more validity than others. The preference for one of the two terms has more to do with one's writing style than with any substantive differences about the content of what is being proposed. Langacker (1987: 5) refers to his *Cognitive Grammar* as a *framework*.

3.1. Syllabus

The lecture material was given the title *Space Grammar* on the syllabus and that is how RWL's theorizing was referred to in that Quarter and throughout the time I was studying at UCSD (1976-1981). It was still possible, in 1977, to sketch the syllabus for a course on the blackboard on day one of classes, without any accompanying written description, and this is what happened in RWL's class. In the current climate of higher education, this practice is hardly possible any more, most universities requiring a prepared written syllabus, along with all the necessary legalistic material (a code of student behaviour, definitions of cheating and plagiarism and the penalties they incur, the basis for awarding a grade etc.). But the more relaxed atmosphere of the 1970's suited the evolutionary nature of the theorizing that RWL was doing in those months and allowed for easy changes to the syllabus as the course progressed. Table 1 shows the original syllabus and the changes it underwent.

Table 1. The three versions of the *Space Grammar* syllabus

9/28/77	11/9/77	11/16/77
I Introduction A. Orientation B. Facets of Structure C. Summary of Propositional Structures	I Introduction	...
II Morphemes	II Morphemes	...
III Lexicalization	III Morphology A. Psychological Assumptions B. Morphological Shape C. Form & Meaning D. Patterns & Domains	III Morphology A. Assumptions (last time) B. Morphological Shape C. Form & Meanings D. Patterns & Domains
IV Derivational Patterns V Lexicon & Grammar	IV Grammar and/as Lexicon	IV Grammar as Lexicon

The role of morphemes in this scheme is striking, compared with other treatments of the topic of "grammar" at that time. Indeed, the course came to be essentially about morphemes and their complexities. It is particularly interesting

to observe the changes in the last sub-topic where it is possible to track the evolving status of the lexicon within the course to the position of "Grammar as Lexicon".

3.2. Orientation

Beginning on day one, it was clear that we were confronting a vision of linguistics that was seriously at odds with the then current theories of syntax and semantics. (1) repeats the three declarations made by RWL at the beginning of the first class.

- (1) a. grammar is non-generative
- b. no division into discrete components
- c. no transformational rules, in fact no syntax as a distinct entity

The idea of autonomous syntax, a feature of virtually all North American theories of syntax in the last quarter of the twentieth century, was described as a "self-fulfilling prophecy". The term *exegesis* was used by RWL to refer to his *modus operandi*, defined as the "taking apart of whole structure and seeing how it works".

3.3. Leading ideas

I provide here a summary of the leading ideas in the course, without necessarily maintaining the chronological order in which these ideas surfaced during the course.

3.3.1. Autonomous - dependent

A distinction between autonomous and dependent units was made, with dependent elements requiring the presence of other units as part of their makeup. Figure 1 depicts dependent verb structures (intransitive and transitive), showing the presence of (one or two) nominal units which are required to make the verbal structure complete. Note the use of circular and oval shapes to depict the structures and the shading to represent a part to be filled (here, by autonomous nominal units).

Within the inflected form of a verb, e.g., *worked*, the PAST suffix *-ed* is a dependent form, requiring the presence of a verb stem to complete the verbal

structure and make the autonomous word *worked*. *Worked* is autonomous at the word level, but dependent at the clausal level. Nevertheless, the same representational devices are employed and, indeed, there is no strict separation of the two levels.

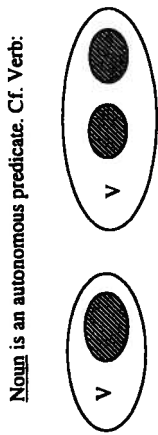


Fig. 1. The representation of (dependent) verbs

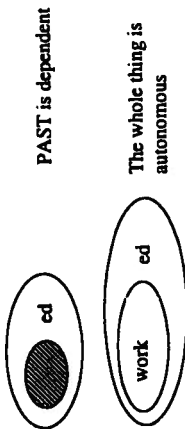


Fig. 2. The representation of the (dependent) PAST suffix

The combination of a subject and the inflected form of the verb, e.g., *he worked*, is understood as attributing pastness to 'he work'. Figure 3 shows the dependencies in such cases: the suffix is dependent on the presence of a verb stem and the verb depends on the presence of a subject. In addition, Figure 3 reproduces a tree-like representation, more in the spirit of Langacker (1975), which was also presented in class at the time, to emphasize the point that the pastness is attributed to 'x work', rather than just 'work'.

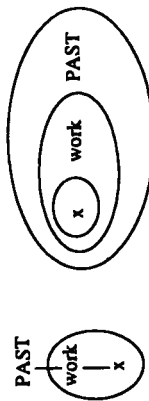


Fig. 3. The representation of *x worked*

3.3.2. Integration of form and meaning

Central to the lectures was the essential integration of form and meaning, represented as in Figure 4. The bipolar nature of the morpheme was a constant theme throughout, even if there could be some variation in the notational devices used to convey this aspect of the morpheme. Sometimes, of course, the discussion might focus on either the semantic or the formal/phonological pole.

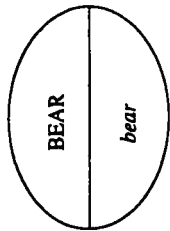


Fig. 4. The representation of an autonomous morpheme

Alternatively, the semantic and phonological poles could be represented as in Figure 5, where the unit status of the association of form and meaning is represented by a surrounding rectangle.

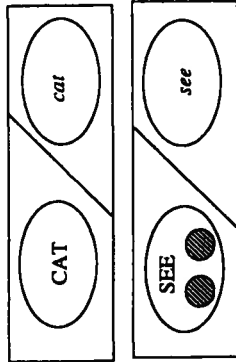


Fig. 5. Alternative representations of morphemes

3.3.3. Index of Familiarity

RWL introduced a number of quantitative measures, or indices, intended to reflect different kinds of gradience. The measures were hypothetical proposals, rather than being empirically derived. One of these was the *Index of Familiarity* (IF), characterized and illustrated as in Figure 6. IF was a very direct attempt to acknowledge a place for usage facts within a grammar, with individual users

showing varying degrees of familiarity with lexical items. The blackboard content, reproduced in Figure 6, betrays the uncertainty about the particular notation to be used (a number, dashed lines forming a box around the lexical item, a number attached to a fully boxed in a lexical item).

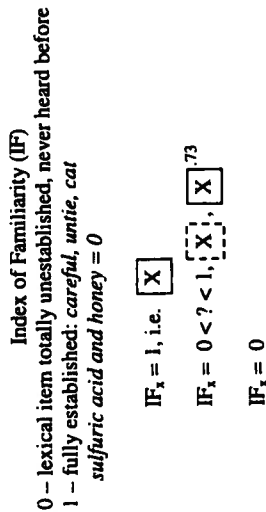


Fig. 6. Proposal for an Index of Familiarity

The notion of 'familiarity' could be applied equally well to each component of the symbol: the form (pronunciation, written shape etc.), the meaning (concept etc.), and the association of the form and meaning. One could, for example, be familiar with a form of a symbol, without being equally familiar with the meaning. An effective example used in class was the word *meretricious*. Its form or pronunciation is recognized easily enough by many users of English, but its precise meaning seems to elude most users of English, including all the graduate students in class on the day ('attractive in a superficial or vulgar manner but without real value (formal); seemingly plausible or significant, but actually insincere or false; relating to or like a prostitute (archaic)'). The word *cat*, on the other hand, is familiar as a form or pronunciation, as a concept, and as a recurring symbolic unit of the language. Figure 7 reproduces the word *cat* showing its associated IF's for a typical user of English.

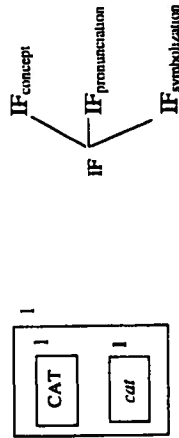


Fig. 7. The word *cat* and its three Indices of Familiarity

There was a kind of inverse to IF which was the *Index of Strain*, a quantification of the degree of effort required to recognize a form, meaning, or the symbolic status of the integrated form and meaning. There was also an *Index of Boundedness* which was meant to indicate how closely items were bound to other items, e.g., how closely an affix is bound to a stem.

3.3.4. *Lexical nets and prototypes*

The invariably complex nature of the semantic component of a morpheme necessitated the concept of a *lexical net* representing the relatedness of senses. A lexical net was needed not just to relate the kinds of senses typically distinguished as polysemy in a common dictionary; it was also needed to relate typical instantiations of a sense. An example used in class was *chair* and Figure 8 is my rendition at the time of the blackboard summary of the meaning of *chair* in the sense of 'furniture for sitting on'. Lexical nets are closely linked to the notion of a *prototype* as the most typical instance of the category, in this case the kind of chair most familiar from classrooms, living rooms etc. In addition to the major prototype (PT) for the category of *chair*, there are *satellite prototypes* (PT', PT'', etc.) representing other, commonly recognized types of chairs ("local standards" of chairs). My notes also record RWL as pointing out that not every lexical item should be expected to have a prototype.

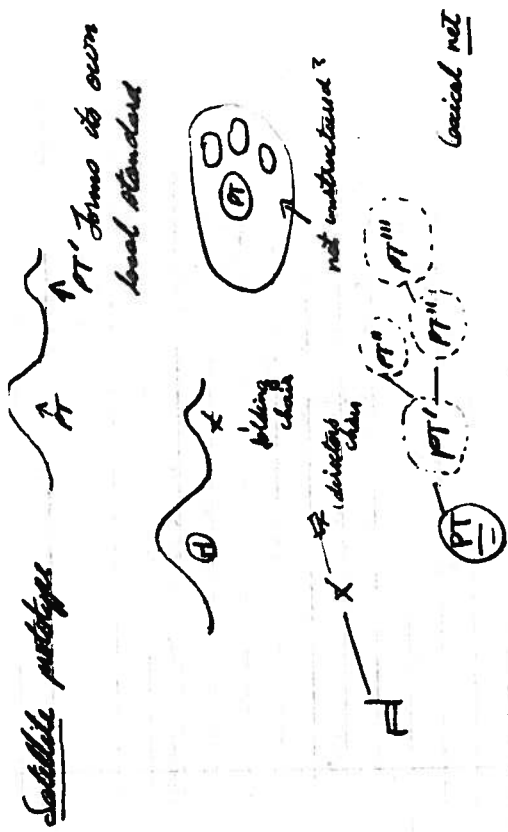


Fig. 8. The lexical net of *chair*

were envisaged. Note the reference to "for Ron" reminding myself that the frequencies of cocurrence of the adjective + noun combinations needed to be appreciated at the level of an individual user. For RWL, then, collocations such as *dumb cat* were regarded as very frequent, while *faithful dog*, *fat cat*, *broken dish* were seen as somewhat less frequent in occurrence. As with the Index of Familiarity, the discussion was at a speculative, hypothetical level rather than in terms of empirical justification of the actual measures. Note the metaphor of speakers as "lexical sponges".

3.3.7. Space Grammar as an inventory of items

The whole of the grammar was conceived as an inventory of items. Figure 12 is my rendition at the time of the blackboard diagram which illustrated this notion, including the note that "this is something like what total representation of grammar looks like". Alongside a list of the singular meaning-form units *bed*, *car*, *brother*, *child* etc. would be the list of plural meaning-form units. Thus, *cars* and *children* would be represented, too, as form-meaning pairs. Furthermore, there are lists of more schematic units, such as the form-meaning unit representing the plural *-s* formation, as well as the form-meaning unit representing the plural *-en* formation, as well as the noun category. The schematic units are inherent in, and expressed as, actual form-meaning pairs, as indicated by the lines with arrows pointing to the instantiations. More difficult cases of pattern recognition, as with *child* and *children*, are represented with the help of dashed lines.

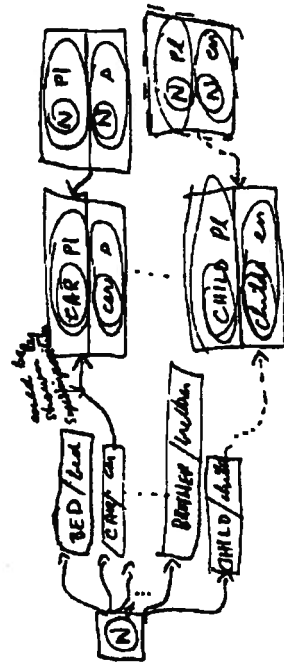


Fig. 12. Grammar as an inventory of units

3.3.8. The English passive construction

No discussion of grammar in the 1970's would have been complete without its own analysis of the English passive. Figure 13 is RWL's representation of the semantic structure of *she was seen*. As happened regularly in the course, a tree-like structure in the tradition of Langacker (1975) is resorted to when it comes to representing clause structure. Superimposed on the tree structure is RWL's 1977 convention of using box diagrams to enclose unit-like structure. In Figure 13, PAST + BE constitutes a lexical unit corresponding to *was*. In a similar way, PERF + SEE, where SEE has an unspecified subject argument, is a "complex lexical unit" realized as *seen* in a passive construction. Note, though, that the combination BE + PERF + SEE with unspecified subject argument is also boxed in. In other words, *be seen* in the passive construction is also a complex lexical unit. It is not just the morphology of a language which reduces to an inventory of units; so, too, syntax is reduced to a list of complex lexical units.

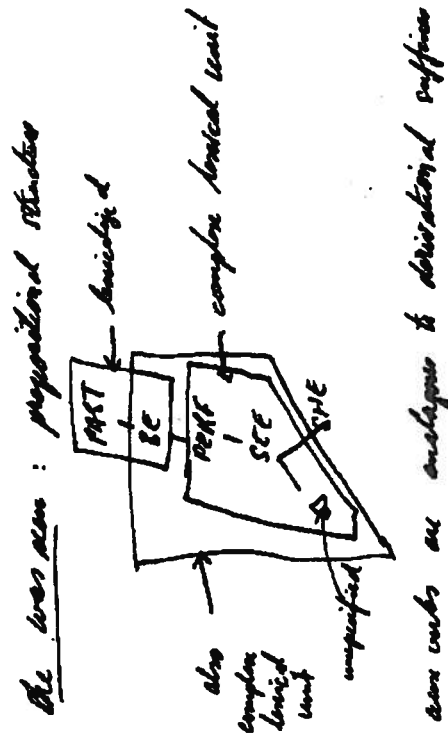


Fig. 13. The English passive as a complex lexical unit

4. Retrospective

From the vantage point of 2004, the lecture material in the 1977 lectures seems to me, still, quite provocative in both content and style of presentation. It was, as one can imagine, even more provocative at the time. Certainly, the

lectures incorporated some of the ideas that became familiar in the 1970's, e.g., the notion of a prototype, but, ultimately, the lectures contained a highly idiosyncratic mix of content. Partly, it was the user-oriented approach (Index of Familiarity, Index of Strain, collocational frequencies, individual perceptions of semantic relatedness etc.) that contributed to the strangeness of the content, contrasting starkly and defiantly with the dominant formal, autonomous, normative-deductive methodology of the era. The centrality of the symbol, as an integration of form and meaning, must also have been puzzling to many. The linguistic symbol is familiar through a famous discussion by Saussure, but it hardly figured in linguistic discussion in the 1970's.⁵ Culler (1976: 88) sums up the prevailing attitude to Saussure's notion of the sign thus: "Linguists have paid lip service to the concept but have not allowed it to govern their analysis of language." As the syllabus and the material reported on above make clear, symbolic units, integrating form and meaning, are the basis not just for the lexicon but for the grammar as well. A focus on the morpheme went hand in hand with a close attention to relatedness of the senses of a morpheme and, hence, polysemy, an area of study that did not sit comfortably with prevailing approaches. Quite apart from the content, the notation employed by RWL – coloured chalk, light and dark lines, circles, boxes – would have appeared rough and unsophisticated to some. The crisp and delicate diagrams of Langacker (1987) were still a long way off.

For graduate students at the time, even for those like myself who were drawn to RWL's ideas, adopting RWL's approach was not without its perils. There was no journal in existence which had a history of publishing such research; it was not clear what conferences would be available for graduate students to present such research; there did not appear to be any linguistic society which encompassed such research; and, most importantly, would such research help or hinder a graduate student applying for a job on the North American market? Even within the Department of Linguistics at UCSD, it was not the case that "space grammar" had a large following. As mentioned above, there were certainly other syntacticians at UCSD who could provide supervision. With the move of David Perlmutter to UCSD in 1978, Relational Grammar (RG) became an especially attractive model for UCSD students to adopt. The Table of Contents of the 1979 *Linguistic Notes from La Jolla* (Hubbard and Tiersma 1979), the working papers of the Department of Linguistics at UCSD, gives

⁵ The textbook by Atkinson, Kilby and Roca (1982), which is rather more theoretical and more inclusive than most linguistics textbooks, is typical in its treatment of the Saussurean sign. Saussure's TREE sign is reproduced on p. 8, as part of a discussion of the arbitrariness of the sign, and never referred to again in the 388 pages of the book.

a sense of the research being undertaken at the time (see Table 2). Five of the six papers are written within the RG framework. RWL's paper, "Grammar as image" (Langacker 1979) – one of the first attempts to present, in print, the material of the 1977–1978 lectures – seems incongruous within such a volume.

Table 2. Table of Contents of *Linguistic Notes from La Jolla*, No. 6, 1979 (Hubbard and Tiersma 1979)

Catherine Crain	Advancement and ascension to direct object in Chamorro	3
William D. Davies	The syntactic structure of relative clauses in Choctaw	33
Philip L. Hubbard	Albanian Neapolitan morphology: passive, multi-attachment, and the unaccusative hypothesis	55
Ronald W. Langacker	Grammar as image	87
David M. Perlmutter	'Predicate': A grammatical relation	127
David Tuggy	Indirect object advancement in Tzotzil revisited	150

5. Concluding remarks

In honouring Professor Langacker through an Imagery in Language Conference, it is appropriate to look back at "how it all started". Cognitive Grammar, as has become familiar to us through Langacker (1987, 1991), did not suddenly materialize out of nothing. It had its own gestation period stretching back over a number of years and the 1977 Fall lectures form part of that gestation period. I have called those lectures a *quiet revolution* in my title to this paper. It was *quiet*, because the ideas were being communicated in RWL's restrained, unpretentious (though highly articulate) manner to just a small group of trusting graduate students. If I describe the lectures as a *revolution*, it is more from the vantage point of some twenty-six years later that I do so. Events are properly called revolutions only when they have indeed made an impact. Until they have made an impact, such events are better described as radical stirrings in the provinces. In 1977 it would have been a bold observer to have seen a revolution underway.

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