

PARTS OF SPEECH THROUGH A COGNITIVE LENS: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

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This paper seeks to answer the compelling questions outlined in the invitation to the 9th issue of the Forum on Bulgarian Grammar: *Should parts of speech be viewed only as an instrument for description and classification, or can they be regarded as universal categories?*; and *Is it possible to find common criteria for defining word classes across languages, or are such criteria always language-specific?* I look for the answers to these questions through briefly exploring and comparing the potential of various approaches to the study of parts of speech with a focus on the classification criteria adopted by these approaches. I pay special attention to the modern functionalist approaches of the past couple of decades and to the promising cognitive approach, in particular. Taking as a point of departure the premise that theories in this framework explore the connection between conceptual and language structures as well as between language and the human mind and drawing on the fact that the mechanisms governing the human mind are common for all human beings, I argue that the cognitive approach can provide a *universal frame* for the analysis and classification of word classes, which could then be employed as a basis for devising language-specific taxonomies. I believe that it is possible to give positive answers to all of the questions above, although each of them presupposes two opposite potential answers; the choice of a universal or a language-specific classification depends on the preferred theoretical framework and the goals of the particular scholar or school.

Keywords: parts of speech; lexical classes; cognitive grammar; cognitive approach to parts of speech

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