FRAME SEMANTICS AND AN EFL CONTEXT IN BRAZIL: AN ESSAY ON THE CASE FOR EPISTEMOLOGICAL GAINS OF AN APPLIED COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS ENTERPRISE

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ABSTRACT*:* The essay discusses the place of Fillmorean scholarly work within Cognitive Linguistics and focuses on Scenes-and-Frames Semantics therein. After a bird's eye view of the importance of the Frame concept in our research trajectory, we sum up its relevance to Applied Cognitive Linguistics: it is a tool suitable to verifying if the differences in depth and granularity for the mental lexicon English L1 or near-native proficient speakers and Brazilian advanced EFL college learners reveal can account for difficulties the latter group may face in interpreting a theater play script by Edward Albee. Methodologically, an ongoing experimental investigation backs up the theoretical discussion and hints at pedagogical insights: we need to render the instruction of lexical items in EFL environment more in tune with the encyclopedic knowledge structure as shared by competent English speakers, thus making the teaching/learning of vocabulary at university more efficient and psychologically grounded.

KEYWORDS: Frame Semantics. Applied Cognitive Linguistics. Mental lexicon. Encyclopedic knowledge. College EFL pedagogy.

RESUMO: O ensaio discute o locus do legado Fillmoreano dentro da Linguística Cognitiva e foca especificamente no paradigma da Semântica de Molduras e Enquadres dessa herança. Depois de uma visão panorâmica da importância do conceito de Moldura na nossa trajetória de pesquisa, sumarizamos sua relevância para a Linguística Cognitiva Aplicada: trata-se de uma ferramenta que se presta a verificar se as diferenças em profundidade e granularidade para o léxico mental que falantes de inglês L1 ou com proficiência de quase nativo e aprendizes universitários brasileiros de ILE avançados revelam explicariam dificuldades que o segundo grupo possa enfrentar ao interpretar uma peça de teatro de Edward Albee. Metodologicamente, uma investigação experimental em andamento dá suporte à discussão teórica e sugere lampejos pedagógicos: precisamos tornar a instrução de itens lexicais em ambiente de ILE mais em sintonia com a estrutura de conhecimento enciclopédico compartilhada por falantes de inglês competentes, e, com isso, a prática de ensino/aprendizagem de vocabulário na universidade mais eficiente e embasada psicologicamente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE*:* Semântica de Molduras. Linguística Cognitiva Aplicada. Léxico mental. Conhecimento enciclopédico. Pedagogia universitária de ILE.

Introduction

This essay attempts to discuss theoretical implications related to an ongoing research project (MENDES, 2013a) being run at my former home University, in which I am the advisor of an undergraduate student on a voluntary basis and we set out to investigate:

> A) If the paradigm of Frame Semantics Fillmore has proposed since the mid 70's can be used to detect interpretation problems even our advanced EFL students majoring in English may have while reading a play script by Edward Albee.

> B) What conclusions this survey may yield for our teaching the vocabulary of English to monolingual Brazilians in an EFL environment in college so that their learning of the target language is rendered more efficient and the socioculturally specific encyclopedic knowledge background these words tap into will be made as far as possible more explicit.

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1 The place of Frame Semantics within Cognitive Linguistics: an overview

Fillmore's insights and thorough scholarship amount to a thread of research that anyone who investigates Cognitive Linguistics – henceforth CL – with care will easily recognize as one of the foundations this still recent school is based upon, next to other founding fathers such as Ronald Langacker, Leonard Talmy, and George Lakoff (CROFT; CRUSE, 2004, DIRVEN; VERSPOOR, 2004, UNGERER; SCHMID, 1996).

The invaluable Fillmorean legacy to CL is still being harvested – see e.g., particularly concerning the target of the present essay (BUSSE, 2012, FRIED; NIKIFORIDOU, 2013, ZIEM, 2014); – and ranges over the most diverse areas of the scientific scrutiny of natural languages. Most crucial to our here enterprise, however, is to identify 3 stages therefrom that complement each other in a very articulate way: Case Grammar, Frame Semantics, and FrameNet. In a nutshell, Case Grammar (e.g. FILLMORE, 1968, 1977) is a counterargument to the generativists' approach to language that used to "sweep under the rug" of syntax disturbing questions pertaining to the realm of meaning. Frame Semantics (FILLMORE, 1975, 1985, *inter alia*) proposes mental models of objects, situations and events so that a speech community can conveniently ground the way its construal of the world is reflected in language usage. And FrameNet (FILLMORE; ATKINS, 1992, 1994, FILLMORE; BAKER, 2010), among others, strives at providing lexicographers with a computational modeling of the interaction between Case Grammar and Frame Semantics.

CL in general makes the case for the prominence of meaning-related phenomena in the explication of human verbal semiosis. This establishes a stance on linguistics that clashes with the way Chomsky and his followers have always conceived the field. For the generativists, syntax is paramount, categories are defined by necessary and sufficient conditions, and the description of a posited LAD (language acquisition device) that is distinct from other human cognitive capacities is the linguist's job, no matter what formal framework one adheres to in order to achieve this goal: the Principles and Parameters theory, more traditionally, or, more recently, the Minimalist Program.

For the proponents of different hues of CL, to the contrary, the primary function of language is to convey meaning, and hence the semantics-pragmatics continuum is what stands in the spotlight; linguistic meaning is part of the human overall conceptual system and not a separate modular component; semantics is based on speakers' construals of situations, not on objective truth conditions; categorization involves central and extended senses in radial spirals structured by family resemblances in motivational links; and the linguist's job is to explain how the inventory of lexical items and grammatical constructions that make up a particular language consists of instances of form-meaning pairings that are interactionally anchored in everyday social experience (MENDES, 2008, p. 108-109).

In alignment with the tenets of the CL Movement summed up above, the dichotomy dictionary vs. encyclopedia classically held turns out untenable. Cognitive linguists sustain that: a) any and each aspect of natural language is worth explicating; b) linguistic behavior is experientially moored and socially bound; c) one cannot argue for a context-free, purely literal sense of a word. Instead, one must acknowledge that all lexical items involve a context-sensitive, culturally loaded variety of senses for a particular speech community.

We should now focus on Frame Semantics proper. Nothing could come in handier at this point than giving voice to the proponent of the paradigm himself. The state-of-the-art paper by Fillmore, in its introductory paragraph, is worth quoting for this panoramic view of the technical term[18]:

> Frame semantics is first of all an approach to describing the meanings of
> independent linguistic entities (words, lexicalized phrases, and a number of special

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[18] For another recent and comprehensive source, the reader is referred to (FILLMORE, 2008).

> grammatical constructions) by appealing to the kinds of conceptual structures that underlie their meanings and that motivate their use. These conceptual structures, called frames, can be schematizations of particular situation types and their components such as the events or states expressed by simple verbs or adjectives, e.g. *lift* or *similar*; large-scale institutional scenarios such as commercial transactions or judicial process; patterns of contrast such as that between winning and losing; networks of relationships such as what is found in kinship terminology; and a great many others. The words or other linguistic entities in a text or discourse **evoke** or **project** their frames in the minds of the language users and figure in their cognitive process of language interpretation (FILLMORE, 2009, p. 330, highlights in original kept).

We see from this definition that Frame Semantics is a theory whose aim is to explain how native speakers in a given speech community organize their mental lexicon and their everyday inferential computation through verbal semiosis in an inextricably indissociable entanglement of language, culture, and thought. This can be perceived, for instance, in the way native speakers make a specific set of links among terms such as 'offender', 'suspect', 'detainee', 'convict', and 'prisoner' so that these lexical units may all be coreferential in discourse, since it can be the case that each of them taps into the [Criminal System Process] Frame but picks out the very same person at different stages of his/her direct involvement with an illicit (FILLMORE, 2003, p. 289). Many scholars agree with Fillmore in recognizing the power conceptual frames have as an organizational device of the encyclopedic information stored in the mental lexicon. Frames, after all, not only amount to organizers of experience but also to tools for language-specific human understanding. To mention just a few in this regard, see Aitchinson (2003), Ferrari (2011), Soares da Silva (2010), and Taylor (2002).

2 Applied Cognitive Linguistics: an outline

Needless to say, linguistics as the scientific study of language the way we conceive it from Saussure onwards is a recent field of inquiry (*circa* one hundred years-old). Applied Linguistics – henceforth AL – is a term to cover a specific domain in the study of language that appears in the 1950s (ALLWRIGHT, 1998, RICHARDS et al., 1992, STERN, 1983)[19]. CL, as the last section briefly introduced, is even younger, dating from the mid 70's in the 20th century. Yet the interdisciplinary investigation of linguistic phenomena that unites the CL agenda and the AL one – Applied Cognitive Linguistics, hereafter ACL – is nearly being born nowadays, being about a decade old only. For space reasons, a scarce illustration of this spawning will have to do.

Gearing the basics of CL theory toward second/foreign language teaching and learning has become quite productive especially for the last five years or so[20]. In this vein, since the meaning of a word is always understood relative to a Frame (the sense demarcates a content load against a Frame, or, in Langacker's terminology, a 'profile' against a 'base'), Talmy (2008) uses the Fillmorean 'frame' to explain several issues of attention or salience in language and non-linguistic cognitive operations that are all argued to be relevant to 2nd/foreign language pedagogy. Now Holme (2009) points out that explicitly making learners aware of the fact that a word is usually connected to a network of associated lexis (a Frame) may be a tool to make them capture more easily how encyclopedic meaning in the target language is cut out. Lindstromberg (2010) explains in detail how the use of prepositions can be rendered much more convincing if we approach it through image schemas, metaphors,

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[19] In the more recent AL literature, particularly interesting in connection with our Frame Semantics focus here are the chapters on 'second language attrition' and on 'pedagogy of language for specific purposes' from (BERNS, 2009).

[20] A precursor that must be mentioned in this movement though is (NIEMEIER, 2005).

metonymies, and prototype effects, while Littlemore; Juchem-Grundmann (2010) provide us with a palette of possibilities according to which encyclopedic knowledge and the teaching and learning of an L2 intertwine. Still worth noting is Bielak (2011) who shows how CL can push lexical approaches applied to teaching and learning of an/a L2/FL considerably forwards, as well as Tyler (2012) who brings authoritative epistemological arguments to consolidate this goal.

Of unmatchable significance for our current purposes is the research Littlemore (2009) proffers. This is because she has a whole chapter precisely on the relationship between Frame Semantics and EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) teaching and learning. We quote:

> (...) what frame theory tells us is that, rather than corresponding to individual concepts, words and phrases are tools that cause listeners [and readers] to 'activate' certain areas of their knowledge network, with different areas activated to different degrees, in different contexts of use. (…) Learners need to be exposed to words in different contexts so that they become aware of the full range of themes that those words tap into. (LITTLEMORE, 2009, p. 77)

The transcribed excerpt presents us a challenge Fillmore (2003) had already remarked, namely: how can Frame Semantics render the learning of vocabulary to speakers of other languages more successful for EFL/ESL instructors? His suggestion is that once we take advantage of the conceptual mesh structured in encyclopedic knowledge constructs Frame Semantics reveals, and we insert this lot in learners' dictionaries, this task can be achieved. Fillmore's proposal goes hand in hand with Littlemore's argument, subsequent to the quote above, that Frames underpin students' behavior on word association tests; and that non-native speakers of English usually show a considerable difference in the amount of time they take to recognize word associations probably because the learning environment, as opposed to the acquisition setting, often does not furnish learners with the whole array of frames that words in the target language root into. Therefore, L2/FL learners will most of the times come short of L1 users of English when they are required to rely on the subtle connotations and semi-polysemous nature of lexical items in the target language under circumstances that demand from them near-native communicative competence[21] in English.

Last but not least, Littlemore (2009, p. 92-93) stresses how Frames – as well as their theoretical conceptual neighbors Idealized Cognitive Models and cultural scripts[22] – also play a decisive part in structuring encyclopedic knowledge so as to underlie the creation of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations within vocabulary networks. Hence, Frames can be used as devices to help us spot potential areas of difficulty learners might encounter while building up their word association networks either as for receptive skills (listening and reading) or as for their productive counterparts (speaking and writing) in the target language naturally.

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[21] Since it presupposes the learners will be able to pinpoint in a complex network of sense constellations organized in clouds which shade of meaning is at play at a given situation of verbal semiosis.

[22] For ICMS, see (LAKOFF, 1987). For 'cultural scripts', cf. (WIERZBICKA, 1997). Although not mentioned by Littlemore in the chapter we highlight here, the correlate notions of 'scripts' as developed by Schank; Abelson, (1977), of 'schemas' as Bartlett (1995 [1932]) put forth, and of 'domains', as Cienki (2007) propounds are also worth remarking in this connection. Ellis (2001) adds to scripts, frames, etc the notion of 'stereotypes' when he emphasizes that certain chunks of information lie at the core of creativity in all domains of cognition and in the mental organization of our canonical construal of the world: lexical meaning is grounded in experience, embodiment, social interaction, our imagery drive and our capacity to deal with attentional focus via perspectivization in one way or another. But all these characteristics of the human semiotic dynamics access and take advantage of wholes of content tied up in Frames, scripts, stereotypes, schemata…

3 Trying out our hands at ACL locally: frame semantics and the reading of a specific text *genre* by Brazilian advanced EFL students in college

At this point we should delve into the ongoing investigation that the introduction of the essay refers to, (MENDES, 2013a), and describe the experiment an undergraduate student under my supervision is conducting for us to concretely face the challenge and empirically attempt a foray into Applied Cognitive Linguistics at my former home university[23].

Nevertheless, before we do that, a bit of contextualization is in order. For over 15 years now, Fillmore-driven CL has been part and parcel of my research interests. Conceptual frames belonged in the functionalist equivalence Mendes (1998) demonstrated between double subject topic constructions in Brazilian Portuguese and their counterparts in contemporary Japanese. Mendes (2003, 2008) also relied on Fillmorean frames to argue for a three-faceted (knowledge/discourse/dialog) model to account for the verbal behavior wayfinding instructions in written German encompass. Mendes (2011) showed that although Scenes-and-Frames Semantics and other paradigms in CL have scoped over metaphors, an archetypical tier of this mental operation had never been acknowledged up to then. Mendes (2012) discloses how Frame Semantics were crucial in influencing my academic history while absorbing Luís Antônio Marcuschi's and Margarida Salomão's teachings, the two most prominent thinkers to disseminate CL studies in Brazil, the former as a representative of the German European tradition, the latter of the American Californian one. Mendes (2013b) dares a preliminary raid onto corpora-based lexicographic research in FrameNet style. Mendes (2013c) handles Frames within the argument structure of the 'Moralizing Construction' in Brazilian Portuguese. Notwithstanding, we had never undertaken a consistent investigation enterprise that had to do with Frames from an ACL viewpoint. This is precisely what we had in mind for the Mendes (2013a) manuscript.

Mendes (2010) was our very first bold foray into ACL, but it barely "scratched the surface" of Frame Semantics, since its goal was to pinpoint what the insertion – either spontaneously or planned before hand – of mother tongue by teachers and/or learners in an EFL environment at my home university might yield as cognitive tools for the participants in this scenario to construe their interaction more soundly. After class observation and questionnaire answering by instructors and learners, the study showed that L1 could serve to enable or facilitate scaffolding, comprehension check of pieces of homework or in-class task assignments in general, ice-breaking/affective filter control, discipline enforcement or relaxing-messages conveyor, focus-on-form grammar and vocabulary instruction moments that stood up against the prevailing communicative syllabus routines, and so on.

Mendes (2013a), on the other hand, aims at deeply plunging into the Frame Semantics paradigm and its relationship to EFL vocabulary teaching and learning, in what amounts to a daunting, yet worthwhile initiative.[24]

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[23] For institutional reasons at my former workplace, a professor must not run an experiment oneself, if the experiment is proposed by a Research Initiation Project registered at the University in which (s)he plans to supervise an undergrad student along an investigative enterprise. That is the case for the experiment this essay alludes to. The timetable of the ongoing research the present essay methodological basis scopes over is thus delayed because of such bureaucratic prerequisites: the first undergrad student assisting me, Thales Ribeiro Pirozi, ended up quitting since I found no financial sponsor for his job. Then, the second volunteer student to fill the slot, Alan Medeiros Castelluber, had to give up as soon as he entered our Master's program for literary studies. Only after the third student, Rafael Miranda Damasceno, was selected to play this part and has covered the preliminary readings the other two had gone through to catch up with the theoretical framework we were dealing with, did the project come to the point of preparing the experiment in ACL we are at last running in the current semester, now under my supervision from a distance.

[24] Fillmore (personal communication) confirmed to me it would be worth pursuing a project for sure and even confessed he was then pondering over the input Frame Semantics could contribute to practical matters in learner's dictionary making for EFL students. Littlemore (personal communication) was also quite enthusiastic about our research initiative and looking forward for its partial and later final results.

Hence, Mendes (2013a) strives to determine if Frame Semantics can prove a good detector of reading difficulties (and an explanatory device thereto) even our advanced EFL Brazilian students majoring in English might encounter while grappling with a play script in the original by living playwright Edward Albee: The Sandbox. The experiment shall hint at the necessity to buttress vocabulary teaching and learning in our EFL context by making explicit, as much as possible, the encyclopedic nature of the lexicon in the target language insofar as teachers ought to try harder to spot the intricacies based on which words are used relative to Frames and Frame-to-Frame relationships in natural English usage.

The project proposes to unite the cognitive stance of sociointeractionist hue – à-la (FAUCONNIER; TURNER, 2002), the late Wittgenstein, (MEY, 2009)[25], Herbert Clark (1996), Stephen Levinson (2003), Paul Werth (1999), and many others – Marcuschi (2008) propounds on the collaborative semiotic activities native speakers enact day in day out to understand each other and make themselves understood by the use of language, to a double perspective on language pedagogy:

> A) The theory about reading in L1 and in second/foreign language per se in Brazil and abroad.
> B) The discourse/text genre approach to second/foreign language teaching

Arguably, the same partnership Marcuschi (2008) observes for the language-as-action processes human beings engage in to agree on meaning in L1 also holds for their counterparts when linguistic meaning is at stake in social interaction tokens in L2/foreign language. Be it in spoken language or written language, speakers-hearers or writers-readers must actively cooperate so that they construct together a desired/plausible interpretation starting from the linguistic expressions at hand. Language just prompts people onto a rich conceptual mechanism for them to design, together, locally, situation-anchored, contextualized meaning that is pertinent to the cultural background they rely on and at the same time significant to the circumstances they happen to find themselves under. This yields the unparalleled weight of text *genres* in natural language teaching and learning. After all, the meaning of a lexical unit can only be determined relative to a Frame or to a network of Frames. And members of a speech community always negotiate meaning in social activities that instantiate a given text *genre*: an informal conversation, a job interview, a cooking recipe, an academic paper, e-mailing someone, gossiping, giving or asking for directions, phone calls, texting people, jokes, poems, and so on and so forth. These two features of verbal behavior hold both for L1/mother tongue and for L2/foreign language settings.

Hence, as Dias (2011) stresses, in L2/FL pedagogy, text *genres* also play a vital role. She emphasizes that, exactly as in the teaching/learning of L1, these practices in L2/FL will be the more successful the deeper they are backed up by a vast array of text *genres* pertaining to discourse domains as diverse as possible: quizzes, invitations, movies subtitles, blog posts, wikis, pod casts, song lyrics, fairy tales, short stories, etc.

Grabe (2008) goes in the same direction and even points out that knowledge of context and background knowledge, interlocked with sociocultural elements, and the relationship between a learner's mother tongue and his/her target language are causes for variation in reading capacity among people, not only in L1 but also in L2. He argues that this gamut of cognitive intervening factors possibly amounts to different reading models that may be available depending on the circumstances.

Bringing text *genres* into the game, Grabe; Stoller (2002, p. 44) underline that the kinds of texts one usually finds in L2/FL contexts are not the same as the ones you normally run across in L1/MT contexts. Such a difference, they go on, may lead to learners of a target

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[25] See especially the chapters 'Semantics-pragmatics boundary', and 'Linguistic anthropology' in this volume.

language finding themselves in trouble for not being very familiar with the expectations that involve a given text *genre*: newspaper articles, editorials, biographies, memos, and so on. They later remind us that, precisely for having different experiences with various text *genres*, L1 and L2 readers probably develop different approaches to the range of texts they might encounter. Many L2 contexts have to do with too simplified readings. On the other hand, it may be the case that learners will be frustrated because they are expected to cope with too demanding or challenging a reading:

> In the cases of the simpler texts (as in certain L2 reading textbooks and graded readers), these reading experiences may not match the reading experiences of L1 readers at comparable cognitive-ability levels. In settings where L2 students are asked to read difficult, often authentic, texts, reading experiences at first glance appear to be similar to those of L1 students, but closer examination reveals that the texts are often much shorter in length, a recognition on the part of materials developers of the difficulties students are likely to have with authentic texts. L2 students, over a period of time, are also less likely to be exposed to the full range of text genres that are commonly read outside of class or even outside of educational task requirements. It is not obvious what impact these differences have on L2 students, except that the range of texts that they could be reading is generally restricted (and new vocabulary exposure may be more limited) (GRABE; STOLLER, 2002, p. 57).

In a nutshell, the experiment-centered investigation we are in the midst of carrying out at our former home university has the following characteristics: the Brazilian English majors that are advanced learners of this target language are being asked to volunteer as informants in a protocol where they are supposed to undergo a monitored reading of a play by Edward Albee: The Sandbox[26]. They need to read it once and, while they proceed, circle the words they have trouble understanding in the text. They shall also come up with a list, next to these problem words, as they write down some lexical items they believe have to do with the meaning of the unknown, difficult words. My undergraduate student assistant and I will then describe the verbs and nouns spotted by most participants in Frame Semantics terms and this analysis will be checked against native speakers' intuitions. This is because exchange students in our department whose mother tongue is English have already agreed to cooperate as informants in the experiment as well, insofar as they will give us input on the meaning of the trouble nouns and verbs for most Brazilian participants. Moreover, these native exchange-students will also write down the most-immediately-think-about words that they, from the top of their heads, relate to the words most Brazilian student participants have found problematic. Corollary, native speakers' intuition will corroborate (totally, partially or not at all) the analysts' hypothesis to possibly explain why in the end those words turned out stumbling units in the text for the majority of our EFL informants, from a Frame Semantics point of view.

An illustration of the procedure should give you a more concrete idea about the experiment the research project at hand encompasses, to provide the enterprise with empirical support and methodological underpinnings. Imagine most Brazilian advanced EFL students that volunteer as participants in our monitored reading of 'The Sandbox' circle the word "whining" in the play script they are grappling with, because they do not know or at least are not sure what it means, as the text in Albee (2008, p. 91) reads:

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[26] Bernhardt (2011) has a chapter in which he handles – albeit not having to do with theater play scripts in particular – how advanced EFL students cope with authentic literary texts in general.

> Daddy (Whining)
> It's so hot!
> Mommy
> Shhhhhh. Be still... Wait!

Reinforced by the lexica they write down to try to guess from the context the meaning of the gerund verb form at stake – which we must here disregard since we have no way of anticipating them at all – this will signal to us that the learners' mental dictionary has some holes indeed in the encyclopedic knowledge web Frame Semantics proposes for them to be able to grasp that "whine" is an intransitive verb, whose Agent may be a dog, a child, or a machine. E.g., "Since the owners never took the Labrador for a walk, the poor pet used to bark and whine a lot in the backyard day in day out."(sense 1); "Your younger sister will whine, if your piece of cake is bigger than hers." (sense 2); and "The old TV set whined and broke, in a loud screeching sound." (sense 3).

In other words, the informants will be showing us that they have not acquired this region of interconnected concepts in a structured way yet, as far as these notional sets go, namely that:

a.   "whine" has to do with expressing fear, supplication, pain, as in sense 1 above
b.   or with uttering a complaint or protest as in sense 2 above
c.   or still with producing a sustained, high-pitch noise as sense 3 above renders, as of any small appliance such as a radio, an alarm clock, or a television, for instance

The students would then have to come to the understanding (by being taught so) that in the specific usage they had trouble with, the lexical unit they circled has a meaning that is a mixture having somehow shades of senses 1 and 2 above, since the playwright wants to imply Daddy is a weak man, a feeble character, subservient to the domineering, imposing Mommy. By choosing the word "whine" to mark Daddy's line, Albee for sure implies his disapproval of the subject's self-indulgence in being excessively attentive to one's own discomfort. In other words, the students in our hypothetical scenario still cannot read that much in between the lines. They do not know yet, for that matter, that the lexical item in question can be used of pet animals, of kids, or of a siren, a jet/car engine… That it feathers with 'cry', 'pule', 'whimper', 'moan', 'sob', 'wail', 'grouch', 'grump', 'grumble', 'crab', 'grouse', 'drone', 'whinge', etc. And that if the "whiner" were an animal, it would have subcategorized 'a dog', because of the syntagmatic-paradigmatic associations stored in the mental lexicon of proficient English users so that, as opposed to 'dogs whine', natural collocations such as 'horses whinny/neigh', 'cats purr', 'bees buzz', 'lions/tigers/panthers roar', and so forth are immediately retrievable or construable. To sum up, as Leonard Talmy pointed out to me per e-mail, proficient English speakers do not have single links concerning animal vocalizations across the board:

> The polysemous and interrelated character of morpheme meanings, and how those exist in a competent language user's cognition, can be illustrated by the way we relate a dog's whine to other animal sounds. Some animals are commonly understood to have a range of vocalizations, a number of them with separate morphemes for them. So a dog can whine, growl and bark. A horse can whinney, neigh, and whicker. A cat can purr, meow, and caterwaul. But some animals seem to have just one verb identified with some so-conceived single sound they produce. So a cow moos, and a sheep bleats. Leonard Talmy (personal communication).

Note that this is extremely different from the traditional approach to vocabulary learning in a FL, according to which the learner just looks up a bilingual dictionary (or is told by the teacher) the translation for an unknown word. Here we would underscore that words come in clouds, or, even more precisely, that word meanings come in sense constellations. And that

one cannot look a single star each time one beholds the sky, so to speak.

The idea is: since even our most advanced EFL learners will not have such a finely grained web of Frames to access from in their mental lexicon when reading the original play script by Albee, these students will, we hypothesize, find themselves in trouble when trying to interpret 'The Sandbox', as for certain words in the text go. Native speakers – or native-like proficient EFL/ESL speakers – on the other hand, will tend to make sense of (nearly) the entire text smoothly because, at least as far as the more central exemplars in a prototype are concerned, their encyclopedic knowledge will be widely structured enough in a congruent mesh of Frames and Frame-to-Frame relationships so that more often than not, no reading stumble/blunder will arise[27].

4 Concluding remarks

In this essay, we ventured to briefly review the place of Frame Semantics within Cognitive Linguistics, after scoping over its import to Fillmorean scholarly work in general. Then we summed up how Frames have always been present in our investigative enterprises, and we made the case for using the paradigm of Frame Semantics at the teaching and learning of vocabulary in a college EFL context in Brazil. In this connection, we reported on a research project in Applied Cognitive Linguistics we are presently implementing at our former home university. This experiment provides methodological grounding to the theoretical debate that drives the present essay forwards: Should Frame Semantics prove helpful, as we hypothesize, in spotting to us holes in the net of encyclopedic knowledge information chunks in the target language even our most advanced Brazilian EFL majors hint at while reading the play 'The Sandbox', by Edward Albee, the initiative will then yield as a gain two realizations:

1. We need to increment learners' dictionaries with Frame-based content, as (Fillmore, 1987, 2003, personal communication, elsewhere) urges[28].

2. Teachers have to overcome the challenge of going out of their way in order to try to strengthen vocabulary instruction with more solid ties to cultural, institutional, contextual, and historical mooring, in a word, much richer and denser underpinnings onto the mental lexicon cloud-like arrangement (in the computer sense of the term) of the target language, so that our foreign language learners of English in college do not have to overcome so much of a gap from their interlanguage to native-like proficiency as far as the relationship in authentic language use between communicative competence and lexis goes.

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[27] Busse (2012), Lee (2001), and Schmitt (2010) agree that to the periphery of a category, the structure of Frames may vary a bit among speakers. For instance, if Bob dedicates his weekends to fishing whereas Tom usually waits on tables as much as possible over the weekends, their Frames for 'Saturday' and/or 'Sunday' will be slightly different. Nothing though, to prevent them from understanding that, canonically, people in Western societies do engage in leisure and/or religious activities on non-working days.

[28] Uberman (2011) is a good example of such compliance, since she proffers a contrastive analysis of two Frames – that of [CRY] and that of [SEW] – in Polish and in English, and discusses the contrast's implications for EFL pedagogy.

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