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OBITUARY

In Memoriam René Dirven (1932–2016)

René Dirven, distinguished cognitive linguist, died on August 18, 2016 at the age of 83 in his hometown Mechelen, Belgium. Cognitive linguistics has lost one of its outstanding scholars and supporters. René Dirven figures prominently as one of the founding fathers and the spiritual mentor of cognitive linguistics. He promoted cognitive linguistics in Europe and worldwide. In the spring of 1989, he organized a symposium on cognitive linguistics in Duisburg, Germany, which in retrospect was declared to be the “First International Cognitive Linguistics Conference” (ICLC). The symposium became a true landmark in cognitive linguistics: It was here that René also promoted the founding of the *International Cognitive Linguistics Association* (ICLA), launched the series *Cognitive Linguistics Research* and the journal *Cognitive Linguistics*, and initiated a “Cognitive Linguistics Bibliography Project”, which evolved into the present-day large electronic bibliographies on cognitive linguistics and metaphor and metonymy.

René received his doctoral degree from the University of Leuven in Belgium in 1971, with a thesis on *Some problems of attribution and predication in English syntax: A transformational approach*. Chomsky’s syntactically based generative grammar was the prevalent model accepted at that time, but René was already arguing for a semantically based and conceptually motivated view of language. It was clear that he was on his way towards becoming a cognitive linguist, a perspective that he later on vigorously propounded in many publications, plenary lectures and talks in Europe and around the world.

In 1972, René Dirven was appointed Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Trier and, from 1985 until his retirement in 1998, he taught at the University of Duisburg in North-Rhine Westfalia, Germany. Teaching English as a foreign language to prospective teachers of English meant making the structure of language meaningful and transparent to the students. The linguistic model that best suited this purpose was, of course, the cognitive framework. Many of René’s books and articles dealt with suggestions and ways of applying the insights of cognitive linguistics. The two volumes entitled *Applied Cognitive Linguistics* (Pütz, Niemeier, & Dirven, 2001a, 2001b) were the first extensive publications concentrating on applying cognitive linguistics to the areas of language acquisition, language learning and pedagogy. René’s main interest was on intricate issues of English grammar. He wrote books and articles on the grammar of English,

edited and supervised the three volumes of *A user's grammar of English* (Dirven, 1989) and, together with Günter Radden, wrote the textbook *Cognitive grammar of English* (Radden & Dirven, 2007).

René always understood language within its larger social context. After several visits to African countries, he initiated the foundation of LiCCA (*Languages in Contact and Conflict in Africa*), an international macro-sociolinguistic research project funded by the Flemish Government (1996–1999) and involving various universities and research institutions in Africa, Europe and the United States. The major thrust of LiCCA was to contribute to making optimal use of the multilingual potential in African countries. René was convinced that the language problems, ideologies and educational issues of sub-Saharan Africa should be tackled cooperatively by government representatives, language communities and academics alike and he urged researchers to take up this challenge. His work on language contact and conflict situations in Africa resulted in many publications, also highlighting undemocratic multilingual language policies especially in South Africa. The book on *Cognitive Sociolinguistics* (Kristiansen & Dirven, 2008) combined socio-linguistic variation within a usage-based approach. He was also fascinated by the unusually rich metaphorical world of Afrikaans and wrote a book on *Metaphor and Nation: Metaphors Afrikaners live by* (Dirven, 1994). As a token of appreciation for René's work on and for the African continent, African scholars offered René a Festschrift entitled *Living through languages: An African tribute to René Dirven* (van der Walt, 2007).

René held many positions within the cognitive linguistics enterprise. From 1995 to 1997, he served as the third President of ICLA. He also constantly wrote state-of-the-art reports on the rise, development and perspectives of cognitive linguistics, such as "Major strands in Cognitive Linguistics" (Dirven, 2005), "Cognitive Linguistics" (Dirven, 2008), and "Looking back at 30 years of Cognitive Linguistics" (Dirven & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011). In the course of his academic career, René published close to 30 books and 190 articles. The high esteem René enjoyed as an outstanding scholar among his numerous colleagues and friends can be seen from the books and *Festschriften* dedicated to him (Pütz, 1992; Smieja & Tasch, 1997; van der Walt, 2006; De Knop & De Rycker, 2008).

René was a gifted teacher and an invaluable source of inspiration for his students and young researchers. He encouraged young scholars to conduct research, write and publish and thus contributed to the academic careers of many cognitive linguists in Europe and throughout the world. René has our lasting deep respect and recognition for all the work he did for us. René Dirven will be remembered for his impressive scholarly work, his warmth and his positive attitude.

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Günter Radden on behalf of the cognitive-linguistic community