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METAMETAPHORICAL ISSUES

What Is "Cognitive" About Cognitive Linguistics?

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Cognitive linguistics is founded on the cardinal methodological assumption that any theory of meaning, concepts, reasoning, or language must be congruous with our most reliable empirical inquiries into the nature of human cognition. This "cognitive" commitment coincides with a "generalization" commitment (Lakoff, 1990, p. 50) whereby any satisfactory theory of these aspects of cognition must offer empirically criticizable generalizations about human conceptualization, inference, and language.

What has emerged from these commitments is a view of human understanding and experience that places our ecological situatedness at its core. Because linguistic structures are studied not in isolation from, but with an acute sensitivity to our most reliable investigations into the way human beings give coherent form to their experience, cognitive linguists have been able to illuminate the way an embodied mind adjusts to its changing environment by way of shared cognitive structures, such as image schemata, categorizations, metaphors, and narrative structures.

But what exactly counts as cognitive here? Some criticisms of the cognitive semantics approach to metaphor have been based on a misunderstanding of the meaning of cognitive within this orientation (e.g., Gendlin, 1991). By clarifying the nature of a cognitive approach to human understanding and experience, I would like to forestall objections that cognitive linguistics is either, on the one hand, too intellectualistic and subjectivistic, or, on the other hand, too physicalistic in its treatment of understanding and meaning. The basic objection I address is that "conceptual metaphors" are *overly* conceptual—that they are "mentalistic" to the detriment of a full-blooded

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account of the bodily, practical, and social dimensions of meaning and symbolic interaction. With my treatment of this objection I also speak to the opposite charge that cognitive semantics is "physicalistic" in that it overemphasizes the body and reduces consciousness to the steam above the kettle of physiological functioning.

At first glance these objections seem strange given that cognitive linguistics is explicitly committed to articulating the embodied, encultured, and imaginative dimensions of meaning. Presumably, there are doubts as to whether cognitive linguists are attaining their own goals. So, let us ask what cognitive linguists mean by the word cognitive. I propose that both of the objections previously set forth stem from an insufficient understanding of the role that cognitive linguistics gives to the natural and social environment in metaphorical structure. I meet the objections by arguing that metaphors are interactive or "experiential" structures and that insight into the fact of human interaction constitutes the center of vision for a cognitive approach. Hence, understanding the import of the "cognitive" in cognitive linguistics presupposes a vision of human experience as interactive.

It is necessary to understand the term *cognitive* in the context of an important contrast in linguistics between the cognitive and the "formal." Chomskyan linguists (Chomsky, 1965) tend to depreciate the significance of actual linguistic *performances*, emphasizing instead linguistic *competence*. Linguistic competence is explained via formal structures. Syntax, as a consequence, is a matter of pure form. Meanwhile, a cognitive approach grapples with how human beings actually make sense of their world. The generative linguist would thus regard the cognitive linguist as dealing with *merely* performative phenomena. The cognitive linguist is cultivating a theory of the ecology of human understanding. In linguistics circles, a cognitive approach dwells in the stream of human experience rather than in a supposedly pure realm of form.

But linguists employ the term cognitive differently than do some other disciplines, a fact that breeds confusion. For example, from the perspective of neurophysiology and associated fields, cognitive psychology is regarded as focusing too exclusively on intellectual operations like reasoning. Psychologists who think along more holistic lines are justifiably concerned that those who dub their approach cognitive may be overvaluing the abstract, formal, and intellectual dimensions of cognition. But to be cognitive in linguistics is anything but intellectualist; rather a cognitive approach captures the richness of human understanding and meaning that formal approaches neglect.

A related source of misinterpretation comes from the use of "conceptual" in conceptual metaphor. By the term *conceptual metaphor*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) were not overemphasizing intellectual operations. They were highlighting two crucial aspects of understanding. First, metaphors are not *merely* matters of words. Rather, they structure our embodied understandings and typically operate below the level of consciousness. Furthermore, there may be one basic metaphor at the root of a variety of linguistic manifestations. Because this basic pattern—like "*ARGUMENT IS WAR*"—is not exactly "linguistic," it may be called, for theoretical purposes, conceptual. Metaphors are "cross-domain mappings." As I will clarify later, these mappings are not wholly matters of a mind or brain.

Second, metaphor is a matter of the structure of our thought and therefore plays a crucial role in our *inferences*. If we understand an argument as something to be won or lost, something through which we may gain or lose ground, or demolish an opponent, then a structured range of possible avenues for thought and action are opened up or are closed off in accordance with our understanding of an argument in terms of war. Taken by itself, this metaphor simply does not lend itself to possibilities for placing our beliefs and values at risk of transformation as would, say, understanding conflicts of opinion in terms of the harmonious functioning of a biological organism.

Again, the words cognitive and conceptual might be misinterpreted as laying too much stress on the subject and/or knower side of our interactions, à la Descartes. But attributing a "mentalism" to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is unwarranted because their notion of "experientialism" emphasizes interaction. The notion of *interaction* is, I think, the key to understanding the nature of metaphorical structure.

We are organisms interacting with and adapting to our environments. The only way to talk about this process (especially in the West) seems to be through dualistic language. For there is no science, no *techne*, without the evolution of some sort of knower and known distinction. We speak of thought and thing, subject and object, mental and physical, mind and brain, consciousness and matter, internal and external, unextended and extended, idea and sensation, experience and nature, signifier and signified, and we then tend to overvalue one side of the distinction and de-emphasize or ignore the other. This is where experientialism comes in. (Of course, Lakoff and Johnson may think they are dissolving the previously mentioned dichotomies by invoking "experience," whereas their metaphor theory in fact lapses into a mentalism or physicalism. I address this mistaken accusation presently.)

The word *experience* tends unfortunately to be taken in its British Empiricist sense isolating the subjective aspect of our encounters with a world. Again, language is inhibitive because of its underlying dualism (although words like *life* and *history*, as John Dewey observed in *Experience and Nature*, fairly effectively go beyond the subject–object split). Understanding the notion of interaction requires a sort of insight into the nature of our historically situated doings and undergoings, the kind of insight one has when one considers, with Dewey, that walking is not a function of the legs alone, but of legs and ground; breathing is not a function of the lungs alone, but of lungs and air; digestion is not a function of the stomach alone, but of stomach and

food, and the like. The self is not a determinate, substantial subject of experiences around which we can erect a fence. All of our structured modes of acting, thinking, and feeling (from simple habits to complex imaginative structures) incorporate part of our objective environment—physical, cultural, and interpersonal—within themselves, just as ground, air, and food are incorporated into our habits of walking, breathing, and eating through interaction with legs, lungs, and stomach. All experience is of this ecological sort, and experience designates not the subject side of the encounter, but the encounter as a transactive whole. An "object," for example, is not something wholly independent of experience. An object is that which "objects" in and through an experience.

With this background, we can draw the following conclusions about the nature of metaphor. Metaphors are interactive structures. They are no more subjective than is breathing merely a matter of the lungs or walking merely a matter of the legs. Metaphors emerge through our interactions as structured modes of understanding and adapting to our physical, cultural, and interpersonal environments. They are thus of the same stuff as our habits. Our habits take an environment into themselves. It would, of course, be absurd to suppose that our habits of walking or driving are wholly subjectively constituted. Our habits, for example, of right-handedness or left-handedness have an organic fluency with our environment—we open doors, shake hands, write, and play music. If we lost our preferred arm to some injury, then reconstructed habits would have to emerge, habits that would take this changed environment with its altered organizational features into themselves. Our former habits would ground, motivate, and structure these new habits.

In just this way, metaphors are habitual (stable, but flexible) patterns of understanding and experiencing. All metaphors take an environment into themselves. With a different environment, different metaphors would emerge. This is why cognitive semantics claims that, with different types of bodies and a different range of organism–environment interactions, the necessity for adaptation would demand a fundamentally different human reason. If we did not take journeys, then we would not have a "journey" or "source–path–goal" image schema, and so we would understand neither love nor life as a journey. If wars were not prominent in our social environment, then argument would not be understood as a war. So, to say that a metaphor is conceptual does not entail an overvaluing of mind.

With their experientialism Johnson and Lakoff (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Johnson, 1987) see human understanding as reaching deep into our natural and social environment for its structure. Metaphorical structure emerges as we strive to make sense of our multitudinous and tangled world, and this structure is nonsensical if viewed from a perspective that puts excessive weight on either the mental or the extramental. A theory of metaphor must be, in effect, *ecological* or, to employ the term with its full flavor, *pragmatic*—it must always view human organisms situated in their social and physical environments.

Nonetheless, a reader with an underdeveloped ecological perspective might misinterpret or misappropriate cognitive linguistics from a physicalist standpoint. A neurophysiology-oriented reader, for example, might wrongly suppose that metaphors are reducible to "mappings" between neural sheets in the brain, instead of seeing neural networks as ecologically situated developments of organism–environment interaction. This sort of reductionism is of course commonplace (e.g., Patricia Churchland, 1986, and Paul Churchland, 1989, have tended toward this view). If metaphors were entirely reducible to neural mappings, we could in principle isolate a radically stable structure that would allow us a sort of crystal-clear access to others' minds through analyzing the metaphors they employ in discourse. Thus, we would end up with a dualism between linguistic manifestations of metaphors and their supposed necessarily corresponding neural processes. But our neural processes, our metaphorical language, our image schemata, and our environments are far too bundled together to permit such a simplified view. Metaphors are neurally instantiated and demand rigorous neurophysiological study. But one would be mistaken to suppose that metaphors are reducible to neural mappings. Even if we could nail down the neural mapping, we would not have isolated the metaphor in its entirety, because metaphors, like all habitual modes of understanding and experiencing, are ecologically situated, interactive structures.

So, cognitive semantics' view of the "body in the mind" is neither a mentalism nor a physicalism, although terminology may sometimes stand in the way of the experientialism or interactionism at work here. For example, the term *body* is used to talk about everything from brute physiological processes to our more refined organic interactions with environing conditions. This twofold sense of body has generated some misunderstanding, such as the accusation that cognitive semantics reduces human understanding and experience to the merely physiological. This serious misunderstanding might be curtailed by substituting such terms as *physiological* and *embodied*. *Physiological* designates what is more prototypically understood as the body, and *embodied* expresses the rich sense of an encultured, interactive body that people like Dewey (1988/1925), Merleau-Ponty (1962), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) articulate.

Cognitive semantics, cognitive linguistics, cognitive grammar, conceptual metaphor, conceptual mapping, and the like are terms that resonate in a meaningful way for certain purposes among a relatively small community of discourse. Perhaps our use of this somewhat insular language should be carefully re-evaluated in light of the growing interest in cognitive linguistics among a much wider community of scholars. Regardless of one's opinion of

the fruitfulness of this theoretical orientation, one would be simply mistaken to suppose that this orientation treats meaning, concepts, reasoning, or language in an intellectualist, subjectivist, or physicalist way. Cognitive linguistics moves away from reductive approaches toward a far richer account of human understanding and experience.

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BOOK REVIEW

Illuminating Shadows: The Mythic Power of Film. Geoffrey Hill, Boston and London: Shambhala, 1992, 319 pages, $17.00 (softcover).

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The noted semiologist Christian Metz observed that "film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand" (cited in Monaco, 1977, p. 127). In *Illuminating Shadows,* Geoffrey Hill endeavors to accomplish the difficult: explaining film—by adapting the general strategies of semiology and analyzing the mythic implications of movies.

Two related ideas motivate Hill's analyses of 17 feature films in *Illuminating Shadows:* (a) Contemporary cinema presents time-honored myths disguised in modern film genres, and (b) these myths are often depicted below the conscious awareness of the filmmaker. To support this second idea, Hill selects "unintentionally mythic films" (p. 17) that reveal archetypal images from the collective unconscious. The main purpose of the book is to show how the cinema is a modern manifestation of myth, reflecting the soul of our culture. And by studying molar characteristics of film such as archetypes and opposites, as well as molecular features such as color and movement, we will better understand cinema and ultimately society.

The second half of the Introduction (pp. 28-36) provides the analytical framework for mythic film interpretation. Integrating Jung, Northrop Frye, and Levi-Strauss, Hill constructs a compelling and heuristic quaternity with four major genres of film (comedy, romance, tragedy, and satire) embedded in fundamental archetypal processes. The synthesizing diagram (p. 32) alone may be valuable in film and psychology classes. The supporting sections instantiate this general framework with specific examples drawn from such diverse sources as the Bible, Van Gogh, Persephone, and *The Graduate.*

The films in *Illuminating Shadows* exemplify three major mythic catego-

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