

Cognitive Linguistics and Husserlian Phenomenology

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Abstract

Several scientific disciplines have attempted to answer questions like *What is the meaning of thought?* and *How do we think?* Psychology and Linguistics are some of them. This paper attempts to establish some contributions of Husserlian Phenomenology to Cognitive Linguistics, in relation to the theory of knowledge and meaning, mainly. First, Husserl's ideas will be reviewed, based on his *Logical Investigations*. Secondly Cognitive Linguistics will be presented as an analysis perspective of linguistic phenomena characterized by a particular conception of human mind. Then, some correspondences between the two theoretical approaches will be pointed out. Finally, a brief conclusion will be presented.

Key words: Cognitive Linguistics, Phenomenology, Husserl, contributions, thought, meaning

Resumen

Numerosas disciplinas científicas han intentado dar respuesta a preguntas como *¿Qué significa pensar?* y *¿Por qué pensamos?* La psicología y la lingüística son algunas de ellas. Este trabajo busca establecer algunas de las contribuciones de la fenomenología husserliana a la lingüística cognitiva, en lo que atañe a la teoría del conocimiento y la significación, principalmente. En primer lugar, se revisarán las ideas de Husserl, con base en sus *Investigaciones lógicas*. En segundo lugar, se presentará la lingüística cognitiva con una perspectiva de análisis de los fenómenos

lingüísticos caracterizada por una concepción particular de la mente humana. Luego, se señalarán algunas correspondencias entre estos dos enfoques teóricos. Finalmente, se presentará una conclusión breve.

Palabras claves: lingüística cognitiva, fenomenología, Husserl, contribuciones, pensamiento, significado

1. Husserlian Phenomenology: its ideas about knowledge and significancy

Perhaps, one of the most highlighted aspects of Husserl's Phenomenology is his notion of transcendence of the various facets or profiles in a perception of phenomenon as a whole. Another important aspect of his philosophy is the concept of *epoche* or phenomenological reduction, which consists of the fact that the subject does not ask if the object exists outside. It consists of releasing the object from the demand of existing outside the subject's mind who thinks it. In the words of Lambert (2006: 521): "*Epoche* or reduction is, then, the act of limiting to the examination of pure experiences as such things: it is performed returning reflectively over the experience of being without taking over from that to which the experience is directed".

Husserl (1982: 495) exemplifies this: "We do not represent Jupiter otherwise like Bismarck, or the tower of Babel otherwise like the Cologne Cathedral". From these considerations, Husserl's distinction established between "immanent object" (*extra mentem*) and "intentional object" (1982: 495-497) becomes meaningful. The philosopher explains it this way:

"being of content is very different from meaning of perceived object's being, which is presented by the content, but not really conscious".

Husserl's question (1982: 473) about "the origin of the concept of meaning and its essential varieties" is directed to these considerations. Taking into account that the immanent object is an intentional object to the perceiving subject, "real possibilities and eventually realities correspond to meanings" (Husserl 1982: 473). And there's more: various contents of consciousness may exist in relation to the same immanent object.

Another feature of significances is that they are based on significant intentions, i. e., they are products of conscience's acts, that direct or tend to. They are also the product of acts of meaning. Acts of meaning are operations of conscience. But, what is conscience? This concept is polysemic. In what sense we speak of conscience? Husserl understands conscience as the phenomenological experience established between contents of conscience (perceptions, imaginary representations, conceptual thinking acts or judgments, statements, questions, joys, pains, etc.) (Cf. Husserl 1982: 476-490).

On the other hand, psychic phenomena –such as Husserl (1982: 493) points out quoting Brentano– "are

representations or rely on representations. Nothing can be judged or appetizing or expected or feared if it is not represented". The author exemplifies this statement as follows: "Berlin Palace is, as we mentioned, a form of psychological state of this or that descriptive nature. Judging this Palace, taking pleasure in its architectural beauty or desiring to do so, etc. are new phenomenological experiences characterized in a new way" (Husserl 1982: 496-497).

Thus we arrive at the concept of representation, which is explained by Lara Saborío (1970: 113), who states that thought is fiction, play of images, metaphor. The author defines metaphor as a "synthetic creative intuition" (Lara Saborío 1970: 113). The author quotes Husserl, who states that "fiction is the vital element of Phenomenology such as all eidetic sciences; fiction is the source from which knowledge of the eternal truths derives its sustenance" (Lara Saborío 1970: 118).

2. Theory of knowledge and theory of meaning underlying cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is a theoretical framework of study of linguistic phenomena which is related to other cognitive sciences such as cognitive psychology and neurosciences. Cognitive Linguistics' main objective is "to discover the actual contents of human cognition" (Gibbs 1996). This perspective of study of linguistic phenomena declares that every statement implies a particular conceptualization of experience, from choosing the inflectional endings up to choosing sentence

structure. It aims to answer the question *What is the relationship between language, thought and experience? What restrictions have that relationship?*

An important notion in Cognitive Linguistics is *cognitive domain*, which is related to *mental spaces* (cf. Fauconnier 1994). For Cruse (Croft and Cruse, 2008: 75) they are fields of attention. For Lakoff (1987, 1991), a cognitive domain is an "idealized cognitive model": a coherent set of encyclopedic knowledge whose nature is, sometimes, very simplified and even incorrect. Some cognitive domains may be space, transitive actions (an agent performs an action that affects a patient), processes (an *experiencer* or patient undergoes a change in his/its state) and other representations of experience in which various significant elements join (v. gr., the domain of kitchenware, the domain of medical treatments, etc.).

Two basic postulates of cognitive linguistics are derived from the notion of domains: a) the idea of profiling b) the concepts of conceptual metaphor and metonymy. The idea of profiling operates with the notions of *profile* and *base*, which keep a certain parallelism with those of figure-ground, taken from Gestalt psychology. For example, the basic meaning of the word *part* can only be understood in relation to a whole that contains it (otherwise, we would be thinking the portion itself as a whole). Interestingly, when we speak of *base* or *bottom*, we make reference to the field of immediate attention. For example, if we think the fingernail as a part of the whole finger, we do not see the nail as part of the arm or trunk.

A second field of application of the notion of conceptual domains is that of the "conceptual metaphor", concept

postulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). These authors think that the scope of metaphor is not confined to poetic writing. Metaphor is not merely a figure of speech or a linguistic anomaly, but a cognitive process that permeates our language.

A conceptual metaphor is a mapping from a source domain onto a target domain. For example, in the metaphor *Intransigence is inflexibility* the source domain is inflexibility and the target domain is intransigence. Domains mapping occurs in metaphorical expressions as *I have never seen somebody so inflexible at the time of correcting an exam*, *Director is quite rigid with the issue of discipline* and *He is very hard, he always appears very firm*.

Speakers often do not notice they're using metaphors because these are deeply rooted in the human conceptual system and because they are motivated by everyday experience. For example, to speak about quantity in terms of verticality (MORE IS UP, LESS IS DOWN) is based on the experience that if we pour a liquid in a container, this rises while his quantity increase. As it is shown in this case, metaphors have a pattern of directionality ranging from the more concrete things to the more abstract concepts (cf. Cuenca & Hilferty 1999: 103). Human mind takes advantage of well delimited everyday experience domains to understand other domains, less accessible to it. These concrete domains from which one starts to understand other domains consist of the bodily experience of each person. Each one is recognized as a body moving in space, each one is contained within certain limits and that is why we extend this understanding of ourselves (in relation to things, of course) to the

understanding of more abstract ideas. This is what is called *embodiment*.

Metonymy is a concept that complements conceptual metaphor. Delbecque (2008: 37) defines it as follows: "We say there is metonymy when conceptually we take one thing for another, that we perceive as contiguous [...] differently from what happens with metaphor (where we understand a domain in terms of another one), metonymy is rather a referential phenomenon". Metonymy operates inside a single domain, in contrast to metaphor, which maps a domain over another one.

With regard to the phenomenon of categorization, Cognitive Linguistics argues that "any classification has a cognitive basis. The study of semantic-conceptual motivation of words inner structures and word classes tends to describe the cognitive ground that supports forms, categories and linguistic functions as well as relations among them" (Delbecque, 2008: 19).

From a cognitive perspective, categorization is a basic and dynamic conceptual operation; categories are open classes that can be compared to a circle in the center of which the prototypical examples are situated. A movement occurs from the prototypical examples to the periphery, which set out the most peripheral elements. According to this view, the assignment to a particular category can answer to a functional behavioral resemblance, but also –in cases of dubious categorical assignment– to some perceptual similarity with the prototype.

In other words, inferences for categorizing membership are always from Central to peripheral members (Cf. Company Company 2003: 19). On the other hand, "the categories are not defined per se [...] Membership is

assigned embedded in discourse and not abstractly”, as happens, for example, with the word *stone*, which alone can be taken as a prototypical example of inanimate noun, but used in an expression like *Pedro is a stone*, suffers a category slide” (Company Company 2003: 18).

Finally, in relation to the significance, it is considered in Cognitive Linguistics as an act as well as the result of such act; therefore, significance must be understood as a product of using and not just as something fixed, as the result of gathering semantic features. What kinds of uses are identified in Cognitive Linguistics? Delbecq (2008: 49) lists three: a) construal (various speakers build a particular situation in different ways), b) iconicity (meaning is iconic, i. e., it acts by similarity), and c) perspective (speaker’s position and conceptualization reflected in linguistic structure). For example, both *have pain* as *pain* refers to the same psychic event, but the two forms manifest two different conceptions of the process. While the verb gives it dynamism, the substantive presents it as static and completed.

3. Contributions of Husserl's Phenomenology to Cognitive Linguistics

First, it is necessary to inquire about the possibility of establishing a relationship between two paradigms apparently independent of each other such as Phenomenology and Cognitive Linguistics. An argument in favor of the possibility of this relationship is Geeraerts’s notion (2006: 3) about Cognitive Linguistics as an archipelago that gathers several theories

consistent with an overview of human cognition and language. It is a paradigm still in formation and flexible, not a theory with centuries of history and rules already established.

Another argument in favor of this relation is the fact that several authors have argued that it exists. One of these authors is Cifuentes Honrubia (1992: 144), who states that “Kantian and phenomenological conceptions of philosophical epistemology match in their basic view of human knowledge and in basic aspects of their theory of categorization”. He adds:

This complementarity between Aristotle and Rosch should not sound too strange. Swiggers (1988), on a more general level, spoke to us about Aristotle’s hermeneutics, and the medieval speculative grammar as its continuation, and as a prominent preceding of cognitive linguistics, framework of prototypes theory. This relation, which can be extended to phenomenological comments that we will later can be understood as empirical proof of the validity of a linguistic theory based on cognition: its axioms and theorems have a perspective which extends beyond description of language. This relationship –which can be extended to phenomenological comments we will do later– can be understood as an empirical proof of the validity of a linguistic theory based on cognition: its axioms and theorems have a perspective which extends beyond language description and its understanding on language at the same time helps us to untangle the core processes of human thought (Cifuentes Honrubia, 1992: 146).

Even more, Cifuentes Honrubia (1992: 147-148) argues that “cognitive approach is phenomenological because it considers that knowledge is determined by the interaction of cognitive activity of the cognoscente subject and the object known. This means that subject and object are constitutively present in their cognitive meeting [...] At the same time, however, [cognitive grammar] goes beyond Phenomenology to try to give an account of the structural aspects of cognition. Experience and conceptualization are structural interactive activities. Conceptual structures formed compose experience, but new experiences may require a dynamic extension or reorganization of an existing structure. The flexibility of prototypes characterizes them as structures that continuously transform each one”.

Another author who points out Husserl’s Phenomenology-Cognitivism relation is Jesus Adrian Escudero (2012a, 2012b). He indicates that the contributions of Husserl’s Phenomenology to new cognitive sciences have resulted in *neuropsychology*. He explains it in these words:

New cognitive sciences sympathize with the phenomenological approach, especially with the idea of reduction. With this new attitude, Husserl not only sets a new philosophical foundation for science, but, above all, he places the experience as a source of knowledge and meaning. This impulse generates a myriad of careful and detailed phenomenological analysis of human experience, such as the perceptual experience of space, kinesthesia and corporal experience, time consciousness, judgment,

imagination, memory and intersubjectivity, to cite a few examples (Escudero 2012b: 295).

A last path to establish Phenomenology contributions to cognitive linguistics is the inductive one. For this reason, some parallels that can be found between the notions presented by both perspectives in their theories of knowledge and significance will be reviewed briefly. An important parallel that can be stated is that between the notion of different conceptualizations of the same experience and Husserl’s idea (1982: 501) that “we perceive the same contents of sensation once in a way and another time otherwise. These various accesses to contents of consciousness are intentional, which is well reflected in the concept of construal of Cognitive Linguistics”.

Furthermore, the assertion that various contents of conscience (perceptions, judgments, statements, questions, joys, etc.) constitute a unity in intentional experience is one of the most important assumptions of cognitive study of language. Cognitivism does not accept that language is a mind’s module isolated from the rest of cognitive functions of the subject. Language is part of its general cognitive abilities and provides information about them.

Clearly, another parallel between the two theories is the importance that metaphor has as generating significant factor. Even more, it was said that according to Husserl, mental representations are the basis of diversity of intentional experiences. The picture that is achieved by metaphor may give rise to emotions and sensations. This statement finds its parallel in Lakoff and Johnson’s assertion that conceptual

metaphor determines how we live and act. In addition, early intuitions have for Husserl –as it was explained– an immediate reference to sensitive environment, i. e., to the space-temporality (cf. Lara Saborio, 1970: 113-114.). This assumption can be related to the notion of *embodiment*, from Cognitive Linguistics, which implies that metaphorical extensions usually go from a more concrete to a more abstract domain.

5. Conclusion

Husserl's Phenomenology has made important contributions to cognitive science in general, and Cognitive Linguistics in particular. This is why we resonate with Escudero (2012b: 298), who stresses the need for continuing the re-discovery and appropriation of Phenomenology that is being carried out recently, and that “turns on a huge potential for contemporary cognitive sciences”.

Notes

1. Translations to English have been undertaken by the author.
2. Another issue highlighted by several authors on Husserl's work is the critique of Husserl's thinking as too abstract and logical. For this work, entering in such assessments is not relevant. Only this point will be clarified: it is necessary to situate the words of Husserl in dialogue with positivism. In this regard, Lara Saborío (1970: 113) argues that Husserl faced in his time the “terrorism of laboratories”, which was in line only to accuracy, measure and what could be checked by vision and touch. In Husserl's thought, there is truth as long as there is something that appears by itself immediately to our intuition. For more information about the historical circumstances surrounding Husserl's thought, cf. Eagleton (1998: 38) and Hernandez (2002: 1-3).
3. For further development of this issue, cf. Lambert (2006: 521-524) and Hernandez (2002: 2-3).
4. Husserl (1982: 501) says it in this way: “We perceive the same contents of feeling once in a way and over again in a different way”.
5. Some leading researchers in Cognitive Linguistics are Gibbs (1992), Cuenca & Hilferty (1999), Fauconnier (1994), Ziemke (2003), Nuyts (2004), Croft and Cruse (2008) Langacker (2008, 2009), Geeraerts (2006) and Müller et al. (2012). *Cognitive Linguistic* can be written in uppercase or lowercase. In the first case, it refers to a paradigm of language study which includes several theories as prototypes and frames, under a common perspective. It was born in the eighties. In the second case, it refers to any paradigm for analyzing language as a mental phenomenon, in general. Within this second group, for example, Generative Grammar would be located (cf. Geeraerts 2006. 3).
6. A focal point is surrounded by a field of attention, “that is, by a periphery of consciousness in which entities are accessible to attention” (Chafe, 1994: 29, quoted in Croft and Cruse 2008: 75). For example, in the sentence *I left the keys on the cupboard, on the top shelf in a breadbox*, it goes without saying I left the keys in the breadbox which is in the top shelf of the cupboard. The scope is defined in the first way in order to reduce the search domains, so that the listener can follow the path to find the keys.

7. Quoted by Delbecque (Rodríguez Espiñeira et al. 2008: 31).
8. In his conceptual side, the meaning of mother, for example, is defined by biological facts; in its cultural aspect, however, it has a number of relatively complex associations, such as providing care and feeding.
9. Some of the major every day metaphors identified by Cuenca and Hilferty (1999: 100) are: DIE IS DEPART, HARD TASKS ARE CHARGES, PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS A VALUABLE OBJECT and LOVE IS A WAR. The following clarification made by the authors is interesting: there is a difference between *conceptual metaphor* and *metaphorical expression*. Metaphorical expressions are infinite manifestations of metaphors resulting from specific speech acts.
10. For further details about the scope of this concept, cf. Ziemke (2003).
11. In this regard, review Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances (1999 [1953]: 66-67).
12. What has been discussed is the standard version of prototype theory. Rosch contributors (Rosch et al. 1976) and Kleiber (1990) proposed a new version of her theory, which has been called Basic level theory. This theory proposes three categorization levels: superordinate level, basic level and subordinate level. Basic level is the most important one, from a cognitive perspective, since it includes the members of each category that we can distinguish more easily, and which are, therefore, comparable to prototypes. Basic level is also characterized as being that one that allow us to draw a picture of a particular category, because it establishes a referential neutral and non-metaphorical use of the term, for being morphologically simple, and because it constitutes the most homogeneous and informative level. Relations between both theories, prototypes and basic level, are evident. For further details about this issue, cf. Cruse (2000: 136-137).
13. Cf. Cuñarro (2011).
14. About this field of study, we do not get into details because it exceeds the scope of this work. Only some of the principles of neurophenomenology will be indicated: a) living beings are autonomous agents that are self-regulating and, in this way, they enactivate their own cognitive areas; b) the nervous system is a dynamic system that generates and maintains the consistency of its own patterns of activity according to a circular network of interacting neurons; c) the nervous system does not process information in a computational way, but creates meaning; d) the structures and cognitive processes are modulated by recurrent sensory-motor patterns of perception and action. New cognitive sciences sympathize with the phenomenological approach, especially with the idea of reduction.
15. Another author who develops Phenomenology-cognitive and sciences relation, specifically the issue of attention, is Depraz (2012).
16. In this regard, the adjective *incarnate*, used by Escudero (2012a: 179) in the following sentence is noteworthy: "Husserl says that the subject who constitutes the world needs to be bodily incarnated in the world that attempts to constitute".

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