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COGNITION INCARNEE, COGNITION SITUEE ?
LE TEMOIGNAGE DES LANGUES ORALES
(Rapport de l'organisatrice)

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Abstract : Embodied cognition or situated cognition ? The testimony of oral languages Cognitive Linguistics has consolidated itself during the last decade as the common basis of different theoretical approaches. The idea that conceptualization is anchored in corporal (and specially spatial) experience, common to humanity, which guarantees a framework for interpersonal or even intercultural communication, seems to benefit directly from the study of orality features. An interdisciplinary approach can show how the deictic (often spatial) origin of pragmatic articulators, for instance, is part of this process of metaphorical structuration of our mental universe.

But the number of languages actually treated in theory oriented cognitive studies is very small. We will emphasize research on conceptualization which chooses to measure its hypotheses by the oral languages (Indo-European, Finno-ugric, African, Indian, Austronesian...), that reveal significant properties of human language. Two main tendencies can be distinguished in the dialectic confrontation between typological features and the search for language invariants.

1) An anthropophorically-based typology of oral speech, which relies principally on the anthropology of cases, claims that language categories are anchored in multimodal perception. Through abductive reasoning, it is proposed to reconstruct the operations of representation that underly the textual strategies of the elaboration of meaning. The process of morphogenesis is approached under different aspects (variable degrees of speaker-listener awareness in linguistic construction, discourse elaboration of spatial markers for the thematic elaboration of meaning, interaction between lexis and gestures in the genesis of numeration, bilingual speech and how it becomes contextually compatible...).

2) Among the defining characteristics of oral expression (a high redundancy necessary for decoding, improvised sequences due to the lack of time for planification...), priority is given to situational dependency, a consequence of the co-presence of conversation partners, and to the unavoidable context-

tualization of oral languages : building space into discourse is therefore not only the simple realization of an object, but a modality of apprehending the world, a way to categorize the world by language and speech.

Which of these two conceptions does the observation of oral languages lead us to prefer ? Should we consider them as mutually exclusive or, on the other hand, complementary ?

Keywords : Cognitive Linguistics. Orality features. Rare languages. Typology. Morphogenesis. Situational dependency. Contextualization.

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**DISCUSSION GENERALE/FREE DISCUSSION :
LA COGNITION, INCARNEE ET/OU SITUEE ? / COGNITION :
EMBODIED AND /OR SITUATED ?²⁰**

— (MMJF) Plutôt que d'entrer dans la discussion détaillée des contributions successives, je propose de partir du thème général qui avait été proposé aux différents invités : sur la base de l'observation des langues orales, la cognition est-elle plutôt incarnée, plutôt située, ou les deux ?

— (JPC) Le titre proposé par Jocelyne Fernandez pour ce débat me paraissait assez sibyllin. Pourtant, en y réfléchissant, on peut s'y retrouver, mais je voudrais revenir sur un point d'épistémologie : "logique incarnée", pour moi, vient des phénoménologues, pas forcément des Sciences Cognitives. Cela a été utilisé par Merleau-Ponty à propos des signes linguistiques de Ferdinand de Saussure, avec leur double face signifiant / signifié. D'autre part, les "techniques du corps" viennent de Mauss, un anthropologue qui a beaucoup travaillé sur le "sensori-moteur" (terme qu'il n'utilise d'ailleurs pas). Il a montré que beaucoup d'actions sont des choses conventionnelles, qui sont acquises et transmises. On apprend à nager par exemple, et Mauss montre qu'il y a des zones culturelles de la nage (où l'on pratique selon les cas la brasse, la nage-papillon, la nage indienne...). De même, pour commencer par la naissance, il y a, pour une femme, plusieurs façons d'accoucher (debout, allongée, sur le dos...). Ces techniques du corps ont quelque chose à voir avec "l'incarnation" dont il est question ici. Un autre chercheur français, Leroi-Gourhan, mentionnait "l'homme des techniques" et "l'homme qui parle" comme allant ensemble, mais il manquait pour moi une jonction. Or on la trouve dans la *Phonologie panchronique* de Haudricourt et Hagège: les habitudes articulatoires sont bien une technique du corps, et elles prouvent que le langage est au moins partiellement incarné. Claude Hagège me corrigera...

— (CH) Je suis tout-à-fait d'accord, et j'ajouterais même que "toute prononciation est un geste culturel."

— (JPC) Les neurophysiologues, eux, utilisent le terme de "référentiel": la coordination de tout ce qui est sensori-moteur, qui mobilise tous les sens à la fois (le toucher, la vue, l'ouïe, etc.), passe par des référentiels transsensuels. Mais à propos des parties du corps, je conteste l'approche anthropomorphique qui consiste à dire "oui, dans telle langue c'est le même mot pour oreille et pour feuille d'un arbre". Ça revient à un formalisme comparable à la "bijection" qui a été faite pour la théorie des nombres. Lakoff et Johnson, qui ont lu les philosophes allemands, Frege notamment, veulent dépasser ce formalisme de logicien et de mathématicien. Ils essaient la logique des sous-ensembles flous (*fuzzy sets* en anglais), ils tentent de faire, comme certains linguistes français (voir les échelles argumentatives de Ducrot), quelque chose de *scalaire*, encore que le scalaire soit d'un maniement délicat. En

²⁰. Discussion bilingue, transcrite et synthétisée par M.M.J. Fernandez (MMJF) à partir de l'enregistrement pris en séance. La syntaxe et le rythme de la parole naturelle ont été, dans la mesure du possible, préservés. Intervenants : CH (Claude Hagège), ES (Eve Sweetser), ECT (Elizabeth Closs Traugott), JPC (Jean-Pierre Caprile).

Sciences Humaines en tous cas, les “référentiels” me semblent préférables à ce formalisme réducteur, de type scientifique.

— (CH) I accept this productive criticism. What I want to insist upon though is that by saying that there are such words coming from the body-parts, I don’t claim that there is a direct, naïve relationship and which does not pass through highly complicated mental operations. I just declare myself not competent to analyze this aspect of the world.

— (ECT) I could agree with that. But if “embodied” in language is true, what is then the process of perception and inference ? You know, I am very much *production-oriented* in my thinking (hence my major arguments against Relevance theory), but just in the concrete sense, I don’t really understand the meaning of “embodied” (— (CH) Oh it is just a metaphorical use !) Yes but it is one which bothers me a lot, because it seems to me that it reifies language, it seems to show an object out there ! We had so many decades of discussion about problems of teleology in language, and this discussion was entirely based on the metaphor that language is a force into itself.

— (CH) Let me please argue in favor of the word “embodied”, thinking of what I call “case anthropology”. You can’t deny, since it is demonstrated by many linguists, that the way many people form *relators* by starting from names of body-parts is a certain kind of representation, in the sense of *representing* things. Things like “head” > “about, above”, “foot” > “under”, “flank” or “side” > “beside” or “near to”; “belly” will become “inside”, “back” will become “behind” and so on. And this is a very *simple* fact I am referring to.

— (ECT) Yes it is very easy to talk about “embodied language” when you deal with the body-parts. It’s harder to talk about “embodied language” when you are talking about facts and acts, because you are already in an abstract domain, and so you could say that facts and acts are perceived and inferred on the basis of socio-physical experience, but they are not in any sense as embodied and body-based as the set of special terms that people tend to refer to regarding “embodiment”.

— (ES) Why do we want to have a spatial language, as so spatially basic ? It depends how broad a definition of spatial you’ve got. I believe that we have *direct experience* for example of thinking, of realizing something, of worrying about something, about things that are more emotional, and even more abstract. I mean the real difference between things and up down / side of body / back of body and so on is not so much that some are more *concrete* than others, but some are more intersubjectively obviously shared than others. So I really feel pretty sure that you have a side of your body, a front of your body, a head, and so on the same as I do. I think if you put your finger on the table, you get the same experience of hardness as I do. But I don’t really know for sure that I am producing the same kind of state in your head as I have by saying this, even if I am trying to do this. So it is not only a matter of space vs. non space, body vs. non body, but it is access vs. non access, sharedness / non sharedness and so on. There are all sorts of parameters that contribute and we have not explored them all.

— (CH) Well, it is not only a question of access or not access. It is just linguistic evidence that most of the relators in most languages of the world come from the names of body-parts, and that’s why we can say the human body is *basic* in...

— (ES) I don’t know anybody who would like to say that the body *is not* basic, and the question is *what else* might be basic which is not as evident, as visible !

— (ECT) What about the *deictic terms* ? We know many which don’t come from body parts in many languages although some do...

— (CH) It depends ! In Tai, in Japanese, in Khmer, they do come from body-parts. And as far as I know in Indo-European languages and also in Uralic and Altaic languages, I would suggest that they might be *primar*, and come from nowhere, i.e. semantic and also morphological primes. One of the non demonstrated theories about the origin of language consists of proposing that the first words which were used were to designate *ego* and the one in front of *ego*. And so these might have been the oldest deictics. So, contrary to what we know about relators, most of which are assignable to a certain origin and especially the names

of body-parts, I don't know of any linguist having proposed an acceptable etymology of deictics, especially in Western languages and in many others, East Asian for instance.

— (JPC) Une autre précision : intrigué par le titre du séminaire de Claude Hagège au Collège de France, j'ai cru découvrir que "morphogenèse" était emprunté à la biologie génétique, pour désigner le développement des organes programmés par les gènes.

— (CH) Oui, bien sûr, je l'ai emprunté à la biologie génétique, on ne l'utilisait pas en linguistique. As you may know, Jocelyne Fernandez has invited both Elizabeth Traugott and me as specialists of grammaticalization. I myself speak of the *anthropophoric system* – with chronophorics, chorophorics, etc. – and especially "logophorics", a term I invented 20 years ago (1974), and which has been taken over by (essentially) American linguists who work in the frame of a Chomskyan paradigm and parametric theories, with quite another issue (in brief: the role of anaphora within the Government and Binding theory). But in my view logophorics are a part of my anthropophoric system just like other -phorics, i.e. instruments by which human beings organize the world in their speech; a logophoric pronoun or adjective refers to the author of a discourse which is either explicit (with a "say" verb), or implicit (a verb meaning "to think", "to wish", etc.). This approach is not very far from yours, dear Elizabeth: I am thinking of the way you define, in the article you published in *Language* some years ago²¹, how *modals* were born in English, starting from concrete meanings and moving towards more abstract meanings. This evolution of languages from more concrete to more abstract...

— (ECT) Well, I wouldn't say "evolution of language", I would say evolution of the morphological elements, particularly evolution of language-specific grammatical forms from lexical ones. It's quite possible that languages started out as pointing at something and then got grammatical structures, but I am totally agnostic of that. I have no evidence of that. I do have *plenty of evidence* of the way the words go from concrete to abstract, and so the constructions go from the referential to the grammatical.

— (CH) Well, I am quite agnostic too. I don't try to give a general solution, I just refer to the way we organize speech and wonder: to what extent can we use this frame to interpret what takes place between two people when they converse? In this respect, we are not so distant from each other, except that my perspective is not totally cognitive. But yours is not either maybe, or is it?

— (ECT) Well, it is not *exclusively* cognitive, I would not like to separate cognition and mere communication. I think cognition is there for communication and vice versa.

— (CH) Right. We have no basis to decide which of the mental operations is concerned. However, we can try to interpret a certain kind of linguistic change or linguistic relationships. When I define this as the *anthropophoric system*, I remember that "man is the measure of everything", as certain philosophers used to say. Some of my colleagues and students push me towards being a more sociologically minded linguist, or a more psychologically minded one. I am neither. I just try to think that we can account for linguistic facts by taking into account both the sociological facts and a certain amount of psychological facts, exclusively to the extent, and that is my main reserve, that they are embodied in the *material form* of language.

— (ECT) I certainly would agree with this.

— (CH) Concerning the sociological approach, I want to refer to Bernd Heine who mentions examples coming from Cushitic and Nilotic languages, which might seem to show that the way people live and organize their society can shed light on the way they construct their relations. Now, to quote myself

"in certain pastoral societies, the designation of portions of space, though based on body parts, does not refer to man, but to cattle; this is especially true of the Cushitic and Nilotic languages; the head being not necessarily the upper part of the bodies, but their

²¹ E. Closs-Traugott, 1989, On the rise of epistemic meanings in English: an example of subjectification in semantic change, *Language*, 65, 31-55. [N.d.R.]

most anterior part, “head” (*en-dukúya*) yields “in front of” (*dukúya*) in Masai, for instance.”

Examples from Somali, Shilluk and Acholi, borrowed from Heine, show the same phenomena : they refer to the cattle, but the cattle as *viewed by man*. And this is what I wanted to emphasize : it remains true that the origin is to be found in the parts of body in *cattle*, but it is put in terms by *human societies*.²²

— (ECT) I think it might be interesting if we were to find out what happens in Australian languages, where the space is based on where *the sun* is. Now, of course, that is related to humans as well. In some sense, how can we talk about anything that we don’t experience ? Aren’t we talking always about ourselves and our perception of the things around us ? It depends how far you take the definition of “human experience”.

— (MMJF) Le problème soulevé par cette remarque n’est certes pas étranger à notre interrogation initiale, mais nous devons, hélas, laisser la question de l’“expérience humaine” et de sa définition pour un autre débat. A suivre donc, avec tous nos remerciements à l’auditoire²³...

²². Bernd Heine, 1989, Adpositions in African languages, *Linguistique africaine*, 2, 77-127. C. Hagège, 1993, *The Language Builder*, 215-216. [N.d.R.]

²³. Nous retenons des commentaires présentés dans l’auditoire les deux suivants : 1) dans les langues africaines, on part d’une conception antérieure à toute représentation des parties du corps. Le champ du corps n’est qu’une référence pour comprendre quelle est la partie *active* d’un objet (ex. ce qui pique dans une aiguille, ce qui coupe dans un couteau). Cette représentation est appliquée ensuite à d’autres types de références : ainsi en gbaya (voir travaux de Paulette Roulon), la bouche, qui est la partie active de l’homme, signifiera en isolation “parole”. Mais dans une autre langue africaine, le haoussa, la “bouche” représente un orifice. Ainsi, à partir d’éléments qui semblent construits sur un schéma identique, on arrive à des concepts très différents. 2) La différence entre les notions philosophiques d’affirmance et celle, moins large, d’affirmé (chez Schelling, dans *L’usage du monde*) semble pertinente ici. Pour qu’il y ait activation, il faut que le génétique descende dans une forme humaine qui l’active, et l’on pourra donc rapprocher la notion d’“activation” de celle d’“incarnation”.

