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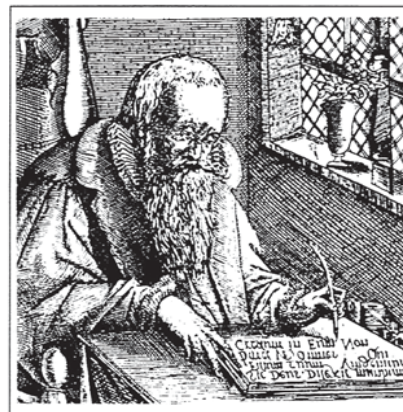
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Diskussion / Discussion / Débat

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Contributions of Cognitive Grammar to the history of the concept of *meaning*

ABSTRACT

This text intends to systematize the studies in the history of the concepts of meaning in order to understand the evolution of this linguistic topic, over the last decades, within the framework of cognitive linguistics.

The meaning of words, sentences and texts is the object of study of semantics, a discipline of linguistics that focuses on the meaning of linguistic expressions, as well as on the relations of meaning that these expressions celebrate among each other and with the world. The semantic properties of natural languages can be studied at all linguistic levels.

As a consequence of the growing awareness of the pragmatic dimension of language and of the dissolution of traditional oppositions among syntax, semantics and lexicon in linguistics, we realize that, in the second half of the twentieth century, there was a theoretical and methodological renewal and the creation of new disciplinary areas. In the 1980s, a link was established among linguistics, computer science and cognitive psychology. In this text, we highlight the contribution of all these areas to the concept of “meaning”, especially that of cognitive grammar, which identifies and represents the conceptual structures that are conventionalized in grammatical constructions, transferring our conceptual perception of the world to meaning.

1. When language scholars attempt to define what meaning is, they provide us with numerous definitions of the concept, and these definitions draw on various sources focusing on meaning. In this light, to equate the questions related to meaning requires the announced theoretical frameworks to be delimited, at a moment when we put into the equation an object as variable as language itself.

The concept of meaning has already been subject of several studies. Researchers such as Stubbs (1996), Sinclair (2004), Leech (1992), Kennedy (1998),

Tognini-Bonelli (2001), McEnery/Wilson (1996, 2001), Halliday (2006), Chomsky (1959), Teubert (2005), Meyer (2002), Bowker/Pearson (2002), Sardinha (2004), among others, presented studies in the field of the concept of *meaning*, as we will outline below.

Matters pertaining to meaning emerge as being of paramount importance in the most diverse circumstances of reference to language or discourse. Even though a consensus on this importance seems obvious, we are far from reaching an agreement on how to define meaning. Terminological richness itself may be seen as more hampering than helpful. In fact, we frequently hesitate when distinguishing between meaning and sense, between meaning and significance. The conception of meaning oscillates according to the theoretical model adopted. The ambiguity inherent in the concept of meaning requires a terminological clarification. Thus, we will generally use the term “meaning” and, when necessary, we will clarify the dimension to which we are referring. We do not aim to give an overview of the evolution of this concept in the course of the whole history of linguistic ideas. Instead, we will only focus on the second half of the last century, when the theoretical and methodological procedures in this area were renewed. This new dynamism stemmed from a growing awareness of the pragmatic dimension of language and had its origin in the neutralization of the traditional opposition among syntax, semantics and lexicon. During the 80s, there was a context that brought together linguistics, computer science and cognitive psychology, setting forth what we currently call “cognitive sciences”. It is in this context that the conceptions of meaning, which have challenged scholars for thousands of years, are revisited, thereby reopening the debate over meaning. We will examine this reproblematicization, which will precisely be the scope of this study.

2. As a discipline within linguistics, semantics studies the meaning of linguistic expressions, as well as the relations of meaning that these expressions establish between themselves and the extralinguistic world.

As regards the conception of the meaning of a linguistic form, Bloomfield (1961), highlighting the stimulus-response behaviorist paradigm, argues that a scholar should define it as the situation in which a speaker utters something and the listener responds. However, he believes the meaning to be a weak point in the study of languages: “the statement of meanings is therefore the weak point in language-study, and will remain so until human knowledge advances very far beyond its present state” (Bloomfield 1961: 140).

Thus, in a descriptivist approach, we notice this attempt to deprive linguistics of its status as a science that studies meaning. In this light, acknowledging the limitation of the linguist, Bloomfield (1961: 508) argues that the study of meaning must be the focus of other sciences: “Although the linguist cannot go

far toward the explanation of practical things, he has the task of classifying linguistic forms wherever their meaning has been determined by some other science” (Bloomfield 1961: 508).

Relying on a particular conception of science, Bloomfield (Coseriu 1980: 40) excludes the study of lexical meaning from linguistics, admitting that of grammatical meaning, though. His rejection of lexical meaning is based on the idea that the meaning of words, as far as the extralinguistic world is concerned, cannot be determined by linguistics, but only by the disciplines that study the things being referred to. Coseriu, noting the “*extrema coerência interna do pensamento de Bloomfield*” [extreme internal coherence of Bloomfield’s thought], claims that

Bloomfield renounces meaning, even though he is well aware that words do mean and that meaning is, in fact, the foundation of language. Moreover, all definitions in *language* are drawn from meaning, and we keep on reading formulae like such a unit is a form *x* with a meaning *y*. Meanwhile, the exclusion of meaning is due to Bloomfield’s particular conception of science, since he, as a behaviorist, believed that linguistic meaning could not be studied scientifically, as it was not found in facts of external behavior (no one has ever seen a meaning!), nor could it be verifiable, except by operational evidence. We know meaning through introspection, while we think of it, but according to the behaviorist methodology, from which introspection is excluded, we cannot refer to what we know of ourselves as speaking subjects, but only to what we can observe externally, and which could also be noticed by a well-built machine. Therefore, if meaning cannot be observed in facts external to behavior, it cannot be studied objectively. Bloomfield does regard science as absolute objectivity, as physicalist objectivity: it must, then, exclude meaning from its scope (Coseriu 1980: 40–41; *our translation*)

Refuting the behavioral linguistic interpretation and showing that human language cannot simply be reduced to a stimulus-response system, Coseriu criticizes Bloomfield’s principle:

To criticize this principle, a false one for sure, one must bear in mind the very conception of science in Bloomfield, noting, for example, that the objectivity of linguistics should not be understood in the sense that the natural sciences can or should be objective, or that the objectivity that is sought is not a physicalist objectivity, like the one that can be observed by a machine. If objectivity consists in full compliance to the object, when it comes to language as an object, then its full compliance falls apart if we eliminate the only feature that allows it: meaning. Thus, in behaviorism, it is no different, and the meaning, which, according to this conception, cannot be studied on the basis of introspection, is examined in accordance with distributive criteria, that is, identifying all the contexts and all the situations in which a linguistic feature occurs. Actually, in the work of Bloomfield and his followers, meaning, of which one must inevitably speak in some way, is operatively reduced to the collocations of a word or to all the situations in which it is employed. If the examination of all the situations is practically impossible, that is another different problem and, at the same time, one of the most serious difficul-

ties that are presented, when considering meaning strictly from a Bloomfieldian point of view. (Coseriu 1980: 41; *our translation*)

In *El Estudio Funcional del Vocabulário*, Coseriu (1987) claims that linguistic content consists of *signification* (or meaning), *designation* (or reference) and *sense*. In this light, *signification* corresponds to the linguistic content of a given language. *Designation* denotes the relationship that is established with the extralinguistic reality. *Sense* is the special content of a text or of a textual unit. Thus, *signification* exists in languages only, not in the activity of speaking, in general. *Signification* is the structuring of the possibilities of *designation* in a language. Just like *designation* consists in the reference to reality as its representation; it takes form in the speech act, it is the use of *signification*.

Coseriu distinguishes five types of *signification*: *lexical*, *categorial*, *instrumental*, *syntactic* or *structural* and *ontic* meaning. With regard to *lexical* signification, it has to do with the *meaning* of a word; *categorial* signification refers to the category of a word (noun, verb, adjective, etc.); *instrumental* signification is linked to the meaning of grammatical instruments (desinences, prefixes, suffixes, accents, etc.); *syntactic* or *structural* significance is applied to the meaning of grammatical constructions (lexemes + morphemes) that represent the singular and plural forms, verb tenses and modes, etc.; and finally there is *ontic* signification, whose existential meaning is assigned exclusively to sentences, because it has to do with the existential validity, in meaningful intuition, transmitted in a sentence.

As a consequence of the growing awareness of the pragmatic dimension of language and of the dissolution of traditional opposition among syntax, semantics and lexicon in linguistics, we realize that, in the second half of the twentieth century, there is a theoretical and methodological renewal and the creation of new disciplinary areas. In the 1980s, a link was established among linguistics, computer science and cognitive psychology, setting up what we currently call “cognitive sciences”. Linguistics allies itself with this movement, at a time when we need to get answers to the questions that artificial intelligence and computational linguistics have been challenged with. As Rastier argues:

Therefore, if a new social order indirectly leads us to rethink theories that meet other demands, it also leads us to a deeper knowledge of an otherwise limited object. Finally, the new demands lead to a change in the theoretical internal balance of linguistics: the research effort then focuses exclusively on certain sectors.

(Rastier 1991: 66; *our translation*)

Cognitive semantics is the key part of a process leading to the emergence of cognitive linguistics, whose development stems from different epistemological disputes, especially with Chomsky’s linguistics.

At the core of these disputes, we notice the position and role of semantics in the grammar system. For Noam Chomsky, grammar is a formal system

whose development is independent of the meaning of the elements of its formulae. Semantics would only be an element derived from a system of grammatical principles and rules. Paul Postal, George Lakoff, Haj Ross and James McCawley represent the opposing paradigm to these principles, known as “generative semantics”.

Throughout this path of disputes, semantics has become more and more important. In fact, one of the reasons why cognitive linguistics is often compared with the study of cognitive semantics lies in this constant shift concerning meaning and communicative functions.

Cognitive linguistics is like a subfield of the so-called “cognitive science”, which Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 568) regarded as the science of mind and brain.

Firstly, cognitive science presents itself as a science of the “disembodied mind”. Then, the second stage is characterized as the “embodied mind”. Cognitive semantics departs from this second stage.

In the mid-1970s, according to Lakoff/Johnson (1999), a new approach emerged, competing with the one developed in the previous stage and supported by two fundamental theses: there is a marked dependence on concepts and reasoning about the body; the conceptualization and the reasoning lie in imaginative processes, such as metaphor, metonymy, prototypes, frames, mental spaces and radial categories.

In this sense, the principles that guide this new approach are the following: the conceptual structure results from our sensorimotor experience and from the neural structures that give rise to it; because the mental structures are attached to our bodies and to our bodily experience, they are intrinsically significant; some of our motor schemas and some of our capabilities in regard to gestalt perception and image formation originate from a basic level of concepts; the brains of human beings are structured in order to project the activation of patterns of sensorimotor domains to higher cortical levels, creating the primary metaphors. These projections make it possible for us to conceptualize abstract concepts, supported by inferential patterns used in sensorimotor processes that are in direct connection to the body; the structure of the concepts includes prototypes of several types: salient examples, typical cases, ideal cases, cognitive reference points and social stereotypes, among others. Each kind of prototype uses a different form of reasoning; reason is corporeal, that is to say, it emerges from the conformity of our brain, of our body and our experiences; reasoning is evolutionary and, to a large extent, unconscious, figurative. It is composed of emotion and universally shared; the conceptual systems are pluralistic, so the abstract concepts are represented by several conceptual metaphors that are not, in general, consistent with each other.

The reflections carried out in the context of meaning highlighted its various dimensions, that is, meaning in language or in speech, the production and

the interpretation of meaning. There are several expressions that convey different conceptions and strands of meaning: situational, inferential, pragmatic, contextual and computational.

Semantics of logic conceived language as being generated from logical rules and objective semantic traits, and it could be formalized. In fact, it presented itself as a very formal semantics, revolving around the conditions of truth and the properties of the proposition, as well as the principles of philosophical logic, moving away from the individual study of the word. Semantics of logic was developed in the works of Donald Herbert Davidson (1917–2003) and Richard Montague (1930–1971). Cognitive semantics represents a broadly developed linguistic paradigm, presenting an alternative to the artificial and idealized conception of the language conceived by generative grammar, and it fits into the new paradigms of linguistics of use, as opposed to the structuralist and generative models centered on the analysis of Saussure's *langue*, due to the fact that it is interested in the aspects that are related to the processes that the speaker uses to categorize the world in the course of his/her linguistic performance.

Inference shapes the model upon which pragmatics was formed. Pragmatics is based on the principle that when we interpret an utterance, we cannot do it relying on the linguistic information alone, because there is a vast set of paralinguistic information, that is, linguistic and contextual features that intervene and condition the production and interpretation of each utterance.

As regards the problematics of difference, conceived by the eighteenth-century synonymists, we can say that it was recovered by structural semantics. With the publication of Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (1916), on the one hand, and the discovery of phonology by the Russian formalist Nikolai Sergejewitsch Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) on the other, the conditions that underpinned a new paradigm in linguistics met: structuralism, born in the Prague Linguistic Circle, founded in the 1930th. Jost Trier (1894–1970) was influenced by this paradigm to semantics as well as Leo Weisgerber (1899–1985), who, e.g., in 1927 advocated an autonomous and immanentist conception of the meaning of words, and discarded the previous methodology of diachronic, psychological and atomistic analysis of meaning in favor of a methodology in which it is synchronically and structurally analyzed. According to this conception, the meaning of a linguistic sign should not be viewed in isolation, but should be motivated by its position in relation to the linguistic structures of which it forms part.

The dimensions of meaning, structured according to a given sign theory, are simultaneously complemented by other conceptions whose object is the discursive-textual dimension and the pragmatic-enunciative dimension of meaning. In this light, Parret (1991) offers a semantic perspective whose object is

homogeneous meaning, and a pragmatic perspective that has heterogeneous meaning as its object of study, that is,

Homogeneity of meaning is a philosophical and scientific fantasy contested by Wittgenstein's therapy (sense is only "understood" by analogy, which establishes and/or preserves heterogeneity) and by the subtle phenomenology of a Merleau-Ponty (the subject who "understands" is a barred subject confronted with "wild" meaning). Linguistic pragmatics should be inspired by this double deconstruction since its object is precisely heterogeneous meaning (as opposed to the semantics whose object is homogeneous meaning): pragmatics considers meaning in terms of its heterogeneity. (Parret 1991: 133–134; *our translation*)

Semantics and pragmatics evolve along similar paths, which are sometimes intertwined, assuming a prominent role in the research of the processes that allow the production and interpretation of meaning. However, dynamic theories of meaning do not completely ignore the boundaries that contribute to the semantic-pragmatic distinction.

Semantic research focuses on the relationship between linguistic expressions and their referents, that is, it focuses on the meaning that comes from the pairing of simpler expressions into groups of words and sentences. Thus, the meaning of the whole is a function of the meaning of the parts and of the way they are intertwined. A semantic theory beyond the traditional view that meaning is restricted to the study of words is grounded in the perception of structure. Oliveira *et al.* (2001) point out that

One of the crucial differences consists in, without denying the importance of the study of the so-called content words (or open classes) such as *table, bird, writing ...*, putting the emphasis on functional words (or closed classes) such as *the* (defining article), *and, but, because ...* That is, content words are the bricks, but functional words are the mortar that binds them and brings consistency to the construction.

Therefore, there are issues that are studied by semantics and syntax. But if it is possible, to a certain extent, to study structure without resorting to meaning, it becomes more difficult to study meaning without structure. The meaning of something is, then, understood as the meaning of a syntactic expression. However, this does not mean that semantics should be considered merely interpretive because there are theories that build the two features in parallel. Thus, semantics needs syntax, but developing a grammar (or linguistic theory) without the interpretation of the expressions defined by syntax does not seem very useful.

But part of the meaning is also related to the "context of use".

(Oliveira *et al.* 2001: 66; *our translation*)

Adopting a cognitive approach to the phenomenon of meaning, Abrantes (2011) perceives

Meaning as a fundamental feature of language, not only at a lexical or textual level, but also as to its own form, the morphological and syntactic features of lan-

guage. On the other hand, from the cognitive perspective, meaning is not an isolated phenomenon, but stems from human experience: the experience of a consciousness and a body, the interaction of both with reality and the environment, and also the interaction with others in the context of their culture. Meaning is, then, related to the mental processes that guide its creation and its reception, as well as to the cultural environment in which it is shared.

(Abrantes 2011: 5; *our translation*)

Advocating the flexibility of meaning, Silva (2006) argues that

Meaning is not static but dynamic, not given but embedded in *encyclopedic* knowledge and configured in fields of knowledge or *domains*, it is not Platonic but embodied, incarnated in the needs, interests and experiences of individuals and their cultures. But this inherent flexibility of meaning does not imply chaos; it has its limits and its restrictions; it is not incompatible, or rather, it even requires some stability. Flexibility and stability are both essential in any system that intends to be efficient: both contribute to the cognitive and communicative efficiency of language.

(Silva 2006: 59–60; *our translation*)

Geeraerts (1993) and Silva (2006: 60), denouncing the failure of the *reified* conception of meanings as fixed and static things, and replacing it with a *processual* conception of signification as a process of creation of meaning, illustrate this process with the metaphor of the *spotlight*: In each use of a word, a specific portion of its domain of “application” is “illuminated”; the number of portions that can be illuminated is not specified, but it is not infinite either, and some of them are preferential. In other words, the meanings of a specific item are essentially *interpretations* that arise from a specific context, but in which some (the prototypical senses) are, for others, the *interpretive perspective*.

According to Silva (2006: 60), *prototypicality* or categorization based on prototypes causes both *flexibility*, through which speakers can adapt a category to new circumstances and experiences and include them in it, and *structural stability*, through which speakers interpret new facts through existing knowledge (the prototypical core of the category), and are thus able to prevent this flexibility from making the category communicatively inefficient.

In light of the above, Silva goes on explaining and he provides the following examples:

As simpler examples — of a semantic flexibility without polysemy or on its way to polysemy — closely look at the meaning of words such as *photographs*, *piano* or *tree*. A photograph can be understood as a visual picture, such as in a *blurred photo*, or as a piece of paper, in *ripping the photo*. A piano is a musical instrument, but it can be taken as a piece of furniture. A tree can be designated as the branches and leaves alone (*to have a picnic under the tree*) or as the trunk and root as well (*the tunnel goes under the tree*). Even if these examples, especially the latter, do not represent facts of polysemy, they do not fail to show the flexibility of meaning in a clear way, its accommodation and adaptation to different contexts, and its variability. But the general impression that derives from the use of each of

these three words is that they have a stable and invariant meaning. This apparent stability results, in this case, from different particular factors — the interconnection of different facets, as in the *photograph*; the overlap of a facet, as in the *piano*; the effects of active zones (Langacker 1984), as in the *tree* — but it is always a consequence of the dominance and salience of particular types of use of these words.

(Silva 2006: 60–61; *our translation*)

As Silva (2006: 61–64) advocates, the inherent flexibility of meaning allows two uses of a word to be considered, in a given context, as two distinct meanings (polysemy) and to be understood, in another context, as a single, unspecified (vagueness) meaning, and also, in some other contexts, as completely different meanings that are somehow associated (from homonymy to polysemy), or else as perfectly interconnected meanings that are completely dissociated (from polysemy to homonymy). Thus, if meaning is flexible and polysemy is unstable, we can say that almost all words are somehow polysemous and bearers of meanings linked among themselves and with a prototypical core by different cognitive mechanisms, gathering meanings and relations that offer higher or lower levels of flexibility. According to Silva,

[t]he flexibility of meaning and the instability of polysemy imply that we pull the meaning up and down. *Pulling the meaning up* is to look for the schematic meaning of an item, even if it does not exist. [...] *Pulling the meaning down* is to pull it to the level of specific, contextual uses, psychologically (more) “concrete”, to the level of peripheral uses, but important ones so that we can grasp the flexibility inherent to polysemous items. But if the analysis favors this level, there are also serious risks: the explosion of the senses, the loss of the “structure” of the category, the fallacy of polysemy. To avoid them, the different nodes of the *network* model should represent, not necessarily various meanings or various mental representations, but different areas overlapping in a given semantic space. In brief, the “higher” level is not more important than the “inferior”, in contrast to the traditional idea that “the abstract is the best”, and the “lower” level is not more important than the “higher” level, in contrast to what certain cognitive analyses may suggest on behalf of psychological adequacy. Both levels are necessary. And the transition between the two levels takes place through the prototypical core, which is the one that shows how the relatively stable core of a category is transformed into multiple interpretations.

(Silva 2006: 69–70; *our translation*)

Teixeira (2001), analyzing the intense relationship that cognitive linguistics puts under the spotlight between our physical and perceptual reality, on the one hand, and the linguistic configuration, on the other, provides us with the following understanding of meaning:

Languages mean, above all, what we have experienced and not only what we have learned through logical reasoning or through what we call “intelligence”. It is not only the mind that learns a language; the body is also present throughout the entire process. It is not by chance that *meaning* is radically bound to *feeling*. The tradition of linguistic studies, deeply rooted in positivism and in anti-subjectivist ration-

alism, has largely forgotten this component. As the neurophysiological sciences have increasingly shown, body and mind are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, we can say that, semantically, the whole linguistic **sense** has to be **felt**, cognitively experienced, by men. In other words, the **sign** (and its **meaning** that the language manipulates) is only a theoretical abstraction of the **meaning** that languages actually hold. And so, because it is an abstract fiction, no speaker has access to meaning, but everyone uses and experiences meaning. If we could phonetize semantics, we would say that meaning is the phoneme, and sense is the phone that the speaker uses. (Teixeira 2001: 79; *our translation*)

Based on the neurologist Antonio Damásio's understanding of brain functioning, which is primarily anchored in emotional information, Teixeira (2001) claims that

Meaningful words and concepts cannot, therefore, be considered purely relational features only on a mental, abstract level. They are rather evocative signs, **benchmarks** that represent us and present us with the reality that we associate with them, an evocation that is not only intellectual but experiential, even biological. For this reason, wanting to get the meaning of the relations that it has with things, as a certain structuralism intended, is to separate the inseparable. (Teixeira 2001: 77–79; *our translation*)

In this context, according to Teixeira, meaning depends intrinsically on how the subject perceives and interacts with reality.

And this process is not held through logical, abstract mechanisms, completely independent of reality (**signal** mechanisms), but through configurations that are anthropomorphized as possible and cognitively dependent; they are **felt**, after all. Thus, if we consider language as a **sign (with meanings)** of reality, its nonperceptual, arbitrary facet is emphasized; but if we see the same language as a structure that is dependent on human cognition, its corresponding beliefs and motor-perceptual experiences, then the **senses**, rather than the meanings, are not wholly arbitrary, but deeply dependent on the cognitive relation between the speaker and the universe that the language refers to.

It is this *felt* relation of meaning that Lakoff calls *embodied meaning*: Meaning has to be embodied, bodily perceived, as in “organized through our bodily and sensory experiences”, not in the opposing body/mind dyad, but in line with Antonio Damásio, implying both motor and cognitive mechanisms.

(Teixeira 2001: 80. *Our translation*)

In 1637, René Descartes, in his *Discours de la Méthode*, was already drawing special attention to human language as the distinctive feature that separates men from animals. Moreover, given that this ability is man-specific and autonomous in regard to intelligence, it is something worth mentioning that there are no men so brutalized and so stupid, except for the insane, that are not able to combine several words and, with them, make a speech to express their thoughts; this is not true of any other animal, no matter how perfect or well-bred it may have been (Descartes 1637).

Some of the questions that are currently asked are very different from the questions that Descartes could have asked. Actually, nowadays falling into the Cartesian dualism “body”/“reason” or “body”/“mind” is just not possible, because the current conceptions of “body” and “matter”, on the one hand, and of “reason”, “mind” and “thought”, on the other, result in completely different views than those offered by Descartes. Nowadays, among other things, science has enabled us to know that not only the “body” but also the “thought” have a biologic basis and that it is no longer possible to disconnect the reasoning, judgements and even the feelings of the human organism itself (Damásio 1995: 253–257). Therefore, in all human activity, we cannot present a division between the “mental” and the “corporeal”. This “Descartes’ error”, in Antonio Damásio’s words (1995), was responsible, in semantics as well, for the attempt to conceive meaning and human knowledge as two realities that are almost independent of the whole physical being and all the sensitive experience of a man who uses a given language.

In contrast to this perspective, cognitive semantics equates all mental schemas as being processed through the realities felt and experienced by men. The mind is always conceived as a mind in a body, and all the mental activities only take place through the sensations that the body simultaneously transmits and experiences (Teixeira 2001: 81).

Equating meaning with conceptualization, cognitive grammar aims to identify and represent the conceptual structures that are conventionalized in grammatical constructions, based on the principle that a language never represents the world itself, but our conceptual understanding of the world. This epistemology is adopted by the sociocognitive principle of language, which highlights the important function of context and culture in the production of meaning through language.

3. We have seen how the conceptions of meaning, which have challenged scholars for thousands of years, are reproblematicized, thereby reopening the debate over meaning. In this changing environment, the problematics of meaning examined from a broad perspective, and of meaning conceived from a particular point of view, has gained special attention. We have also realized that the conception of meaning varies according to the plethora of theoretical paradigms, but with the rise of a new conception of semantics in the 1980s and with its full development in the 1990s, dynamic theories of meaning have gained great importance. According to these theories, discourse interpretation is processual, that is, we interpret the sentences one at a time, in a sequence, and we examine each of them as an amplification of the information obtained.

With these new dynamic approaches to meaning, we notice a conception of semantics in which meaning is conceived incrementally, that is, meaning stems

from an established relationship between the input and output conditions, thereby withdrawing from production and concentrating on reception. In this light, the way in which the discourse is structured functions somehow as a guideline for the speaker to interpret it, with an emphasis being placed on context and culture in the production of meaning through language.

Cognitive grammar, equating meaning with conceptualization and having as its purpose the identification and representation of conventionalized conceptual structures in grammatical constructions, and founded on the principle that language never represents what is actually in the world, but our conceptual perception of the world, has greatly influenced this new concept of meaning.

By studying the philosophical and epistemological implications that polysemy has for meaning and cognition, we could see the reaction of cognitive semantics against formal semantics and generative Grammar. Silva, a scholar who focuses on cognitive semantics and whose theories we agree with, concludes that “o significado linguístico é função tanto do conteúdo *experiential* (perceptivo, psíquico, sócio-cultural), como de operações de conceitualização” [linguistic meaning is a function of both the experiential (perceptual, psychic, sociocultural) content and of conceptualization] (Silva 2006: 321).

In this context, a phenomenological, conceptualist, experientialist, socio-cultural, encyclopedic and fully (re)contextualizing semantics (Silva 2006: 323) is advocated, because meaning and language itself are conceptualizations, so neither the conceptual structure nor the linguistic structure can be reduced to a simple truth-conditional correspondence with the world.

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