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Fleshing out Language and Intersubjectivity: An Exploration of Merleau-Ponty's Legacy to Cognitive Linguistics

This paper examines how recent cognitive linguistic work on conceptualization and intersubjectivity (Verhagen 2005, 2008; Langacker 2008) echoes Merleau-Ponty's older reflection on the notion of intersubjectivity, a key factor in embodiment and language. Three topics are explored in this respect. First, the largely implicit references to Merleau-Ponty in Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) are related more explicitly to Merleau-Ponty's notion of *flesh*. Second, the discursive status of usage events is shown to be directly connected to the linguistic consequences of Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeality, as it brings together living bodies in intersubjective experiences. The third objective is methodological: the focus is not only on Merleau-Ponty's often quoted *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945, 1958), but shows lines of continuity with the explicit philosophy of language in his later work, like *Eloge de la philosophie* (1960, 1963), *Signes* (1960, 1968b), *Conscience et acquisition du langage* (1964, 1973a) and *La prose du monde* (1969, 1973b). This discussion includes Merleau's relation to Saussurean linguistics, and gives rise, perhaps surprisingly, to a dynamic view on language as a locus of intersubjective creativity, which reaches beyond the individual basis of perception, gesture and incorporated language.

Keywords: intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, cognitive linguistics, flesh.

INTRODUCTION

As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born, so also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to contract them in one sole act, as the vision comes to complete the aesthesiological body. And, as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms a part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself the speech that becomes an object of science, it antedates itself by a retrograde movement which is never completely belied – because already, in opening the horizon of the nameable and of the sayable, the speech acknowledged that it has its place in that horizon; because no locutor speaks without making himself in advance allocutory, *be it only for himself*; because with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relation to the others and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as *delocutory*, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word. (Merleau-Ponty 1964c: 199-200, English translation 1968a: 154).

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In cognitive linguistics, the Gestalt nature of conceptualization, on the one hand, and embodiment, on the other, refer to an anti-Cartesian phenomenological project (Roy *et al.* 1999: 61, Petitot 2004: 35, Doursat & Petitot 2005: 629). In this paper, I explore how embodiment – and the more recent discovery of intersubjectivity by parts of the cognitive linguistic community, mainly in the work of Ronald Langacker (1987, 1991, 1999, 2001, 2008) and Arie Verhagen (2005, 2007, 2008) – implicitly relate to part of Merleau-Ponty's older but parallel phenomenological reflection on the notions of language, embodiment, and intersubjectivity: work less quoted in the cognitive tradition than the earlier *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945); translated as *Phenomenology of Perception* (1958), henceforth PP. The previous quote by Merleau-Ponty from the posthumously published *Le visible et l'invisible* brings together reflections on related notions such as perception, language, intersubjectivity, the act of speaking, and universal language. I adopt it here as both my phenomenological and cognitive motto.

HIDDEN FLESH AND UNBEATEN LINGUISTIC PATHS

My most general objective is to restore and reinforce dialogue between cognitive linguistics on the one hand and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and enigmatic philosophy of language on the other. I do so by disentangling the abovementioned notions. It is not easy to provide clear-cut definitions of embodiment or intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty. Both the difficulty and power of seduction in Merleau-Ponty's style and philosophical method prevent any linear order of argumentative demonstration. Merleau-Ponty puts forward a series of suggestions. His *oeuvre*, from his early until his last, posthumous work, provides a cyclical reflection, built of repetitions (Bakker 1965: 106), reserved writing, and reciprocity of concepts (Lefort 196c: 347-349). Meanings for Merleau-Ponty are always a "becoming, evolving truth" (Merleau-Ponty 1963: xxi).

Objectives

My paper has three specific objectives. First, I want to describe the implicit relation between embodiment in Merleau-Ponty and embodiment in post-Lakoff cognitive linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) contains no explicit reference to Merleau-Ponty's key work. There is a hidden trace of the famous French philosopher in the bibliography, where the English translation of PP appears in a list of philosophical sources on the moral implications of cognitive science (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 598). In an interview (Brockman 1999: 9), Lakoff explicitly acknowledges his debt to Merleau-Ponty and to Dewey. Johnson (1993) does as well. That said, they take up the challenge of providing a philosophical foundation more with respect to Dewey and his American *pragmatism* (Rohrer 2001, Johnson and Rohrer 2007: 21) than with respect to Merleau-Ponty (Johnson 2007: 262). Although I fully recognize Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) pragmatic dimension and appreciate their work on embodied meaning from a linguistic point of view,

nevertheless I feel that Lakoff and Johnson's philosophical work needs to be rooted more firmly in the French phenomenological tradition. Meanwhile, the contribution of Merleau-Ponty to Johnson (2007: 275-276) is at the level of spatial orientation and bodily movement, even though Johnson admits the existence of different levels of body manifestation: the biological organism, the social body, and the cultural body, amongst others. This implicitness of Merleau-Ponty is (or perhaps is not: see Gallagher 2008b) surprising, since "flesh" is exactly the term used by Merleau-Ponty for the animated body, which both perceives and moves around in the world. The *flesh* (*chair* in French) is the locus where seeing bodies and visible world co-exist. According to Merleau-Ponty, embodied thought is one's relationship with oneself and the world, as well as with the other. Doing philosophy *in the flesh* entails these three dimensions: "Thought is a relationship with oneself and with the world as well as a relationship with the other; hence it is established in the three dimensions at the same time. And it must be brought to appear directly in the infrastructure of vision" (Merleau-Ponty 1964c: 188).

Flesh is not matter; rather, it is the way one lends one's body to the objects, and – conversely – one's body is inscribed in those objects: seeing an object is creating an image of the object in one's eye (Merleau-Ponty 1964c: 189). *Flesh* refers to a systemic perspective whereby other, similar seeing beings are involved in a reciprocal, situated process, such that one assumes these other ways of seeing might be similar to one's own. *Flesh* has an intersubjective, distributed dimension. Others appear in the *flesh* of the world in the same way a sign indicates its presence to oneself (Merleau-Ponty 1960d).

The importance of *flesh* as embodiment and intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty's work has, clearly, not been studied in depth – even been neglected – in cognitive linguistics and linguistically inspired philosophy. Merleau-Ponty is – consciously or unconsciously – an indirect source of inspiration not only for Johnson (1987: xxxvii), who labels himself a descriptive or empirical phenomenologist – as is also his position in (Lakoff & Johnson 1999); but also for other, more recent cognitively oriented researchers. I agree with Nerlich and Clarke (2007), Lapaire (2006) and Zlatev (2010) on how to judge this laconic treatment of phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty, particularly as it is found in the work of Lakoff and Johnson.

In what is probably the most philosophically elaborated on experientialism up to date, *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson (1987: xxxvii) writes: 'some of my most important claims are anticipated in the work of philosophers who might claim allegiance to phenomenology of the post-Husserlian varieties' and describes his method as 'a form of descriptive or empirical phenomenology'. At the same time, the name of the founder of phenomenology, Husserl, always seems to appear in a negative context in experientialist writings, and that of MP [Merleau-Ponty], whose work is possibly most relevant for the proposed 'embodied realism', hardly at all (Zlatev 2010: 418, cf. Nerlich & Clarke 2007).

What is striking is that, whenever Merleau-Ponty does appear, his legacy is recognized mainly through PP; his other work is touched upon briefly, often without discussion (cf. Evans 2004, Johnson 2007, Oakley 2009: 79). Zlatev (2007: 311) mentions PP in a critique of Lakoff's anti-representationalism. To my mind, the only real exception is Freeman (2004), who quotes both PP and *Le visible et l'invisible* (1964c), translated as *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968a); although her analysis, like Evans' (2004), concentrates on the notion of time. Meanwhile, Rohrer (2007: 351) acknowledges

Gallagher's (2007) positive considerations of Merleau-Ponty. At the same time, Rohrer adds this type of phenomenology as a third dimension within his survey of the dimensions of embodiment, without ever directly quoting Merleau-Ponty – referring to it as mainstream ‘counter-Cartesian philosophical accounts of mind, cognition and language’ (Rohrer 2007: 349). To my mind, Lakoff and Johnson's attitude, and Rohrer's, are characteristic of the prevailing cognitive linguistic perspective on Merleau-Ponty: the French philosopher is present, but only implicitly, indirectly; while the linguistic, Saussure-like dimension of Merleau-Ponty is not fully recognized.

The same hidden character of embodiment and *flesh* appears in the work of one of the major theoreticians of cognitive linguistics, Ronald Langacker. Echoes of and references to Saussure are absent, Langacker claiming not to have studied Saussure at all (Nerlich and Clarke 2007: 597). Merleau-Ponty is likewise absent. Although Langacker (2008:31) conceives explicitly of a nexus between phenomenological representation and neural processing, its historical/philosophical exploration is not his main concern in what is otherwise a fascinating work, where only a few references to other lines of thinking appear. I will develop the possible connection between Merleau-Ponty and Langacker in a more detailed way in the Section *Echoes in Langacker* (p. 197). Langacker's representational model is interesting: although it does not deny that there is a neurocognitive corollary of experience, experience clearly has a conceptual, semantic status, so that the scope of cognitive linguistics is not restricted to physiological accounts of experience. Neurocognitive accounts interact with the significations and mental representations in which they arise. Neurophysiology does not directly mirror representational, linguistic representations and schematicity arising from lived experience: an observation parallel to Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the nexus between language and experience (Toadvine 2009: 43). Cognitive linguistics claims that meaning should not only be conceived of as an isolated mental object, but also as an act ‘subjectively constructed so as to make sense in an intersubjectively shared universe of discourse, which is continuous with (not separate from) the material world in which other (non-discursive) human activities are carried out’ (Sinha 1999: 232).

In Merleau-Ponty's perspective, embodiment refers to the nexus between subjective and external world, where others are part of the perceived reality; while *flesh* refers to the reciprocal relations between these two realms. In my opinion, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) do not recognize this relation sufficiently, and so I attempt to tackle the issue here. This constitutes the first theoretical objective of this paper.

The second objective is more strictly linguistic: my ambition is not only to document Merleau-Ponty more extensively, but also to complete the existing, laconic or implicit connections between phenomenology and cognitive science, which have mainly stressed the (decisive) impact of Husserl on cognitive linguistics on the one hand, and the corporeal dimension of language in Merleau-Ponty on the other. Cognitive science stresses neurocognitive evidence paralleled by Merleau-Ponty's thought (Dreyfus 2005: 142-143; for a clear statement of the cognitive view, cf. Gallagher 2007: 272, 2008a:

216). I agree with the general claim about Husserl's impact on cognitive linguistics as e.g. expressed by Bundgaard (2004), writing on the indirect underpinnings from Husserl in cognitive linguistics and Husserl's echoes in Lakoff, Johnson, and Langacker. Where I disagree is when Bundgaard – although he acknowledges (2004: 27, n3) Lakoff and Johnson's indirect debt to Merleau-Ponty – judges the detour '*via Merleau-Ponty*' (Bundgaard 2004: 4) a useless one. I feel that the particular linguistic status of intersubjectivity or intercorporeality in Merleau-Ponty offers an addition to Bundgaard's mainly Husserl-based analysis. Gallagher (2007: 287) clearly acknowledges Merleau-Ponty's enrichment of Husserl, where Merleau-Ponty 'takes one's own lived body to be the locus of intersubjective experience'. Unlike Gallagher – who shows the implications of Merleau-Ponty's work on the neurophysiological substrate – I will explore the linguistic and discursive consequences of the notion of intersubjectivity.

Embodiment and intersubjectivity are closely related in Merleau-Ponty and cannot be neatly disentangled. Geeraerts (1985) is quite helpful at this point. Although his earlier work revolves around the epistemological status in the history of philosophy of paradigmatic semantics and cognitive linguistics, in (1985) he adequately connects these two important elements of Merleau-Ponty's post-Husserl philosophy of language, to make the epistemological point that *embodied* self-consciousness is based on language while non-dyadic *intersubjectivity* presupposes dynamic contact with a cultural world of discourse (Geeraerts 1985: 363) – detailing the position of language and discourse in Merleau-Ponty's culture-driven notion of intersubjectivity. This is another way to conceive of embodiment, beyond cognitivist and neurocognitive readings of Husserl's or Merleau-Ponty's (1995) philosophy of nature.

This discursive reading is central to issues addressed in cognitive linguistics. When Langacker states that the dynamic aspects of discursive conceptualization are inscribed in the linguistic experience of the perceived world, the connections between cognitive grammar and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology are striking: 'conceptualization is dynamic in the sense that it unfolds through processing time, and also because the specific course of development is a significant aspect of our mental experience' (Langacker 2008: 32).

Recently, Langacker has called for integrating discursivity into cognitive grammar. As cognitive grammar increasingly embeds constructions in rich linguistic and situational contexts, the result is to claim that the linguistic, social, and cultural contextual boundaries should be considered points on a contextual continuum (Langacker 2008: 464). This is very much in line with Geeraerts's older phenomenological reading of Merleau-Ponty in terms of discursivity. Again, I will develop the general connection between Merleau-Ponty and Langacker in more detail in the Section *Echoes in Langacker* (p. 197).

Exploring the interface between Langacker and Merleau-Ponty -- taking meaning in discourse into consideration – poses an interesting challenge. Although Merleau-Ponty's legacy to the experientialist – and not only the neurological – form of embodiment is only indirectly apparent,

nevertheless Merleau-Ponty has commonly been identified as one of the historical forerunners of embodied cognitive linguistics.

For MP [Merleau-Ponty], perception, knowledge of the world, consciousness, and language are embodied, just as they are for modern cognitive linguists. Specifically, he stresses the crucial epistemological role of the body, in the sense that the body is ‘animated’ and the mind ‘incorporated’: consciousness, according to MP, is experienced in and through our bodies – in short consciousness is embodied. As pointed out earlier, in spite of this obvious relationship, MP is not often cited in the context of Cognitive Linguistics. He is acknowledged by Lakoff (see Brockman 2000) and Johnson 1993, but an extensive treatment in a cognitive linguistic context is to be found only in Geeraerts (1985: 354-364, 1993a) (Nerlich & Clarke 2007: 602).

I see both Geeraerts’ attitude and Lakoff and Johnson’s as an explicit and implicit invitation to explore Merleau-Ponty’s work. Therefore, I will try to call to mind some of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on the role of language in embodiment on the one hand; and, on the other, the equally important and overlooked way in which phenomenological thinking was nourished by the structuralist linguistic thinking of Merleau-Ponty’s time. This constitutes my second objective. I pursue my first and second objectives in the sections *Saussure’s Language on the Move* (p.193) and *Intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty* (p. 201), respectively.

The third objective of this paper is a methodological one: I explore Merleau-Ponty’s rather dissipated contribution to cognitive linguistics, starting from – and possibly going beyond – the early PP and Merleau-Ponty’s naturalist courses at the *Collège de France* (Merleau-Ponty 1995). To fill the gap and take up the challenge set by Geeraerts, I must consider Merleau-Ponty’s thought as it unfolds, taking in consideration the genealogy of his *oeuvre*. I have already said that, when Geeraerts (1985), Lakoff and Johnson (1999), Nerlich and Clarke (2007) or Zlatev (2010) mention Merleau-Ponty, they do so exclusively with reference to PP.

My attitude will not be polemical but constructive. I take PP as a starting point for Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of language, then move in outward concentric circles towards some of his other writings, both those published during his lifetime and posthumously. My account is not exhaustive but zooms in on the progressive shaping of Merleau-Ponty’s thinking on language, feeding it into the notion of intersubjectivity I present in *Intersubjectivity and Language* (p. 203). Along the way, I quote extensively from both older and more recent French publications dealing with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of language. Note that there is no linear development of thought in Merleau-Ponty’s writings on language: language appears as a series of issues tied to – but not exclusively involving – perception (Silverman 2006: 177; see Métraux 1970 and Silverman 2006: 192-193 for overviews of Merleau-Ponty’s writings on language).

Phenomenology of perception and parole

What can one say about the general relationship between language and perception for Merleau-Ponty? In PP, Merleau-Ponty considers language (*parole*) the supreme gesture: the crowning achievement of corporal expressivity (see Fontaine-De Visscher 1974: 17). ‘The spoken word is a genuine gesture, and

it contains its meaning in the same way as the gestures contain it. This is what makes communication possible' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 214; 2008: 213).¹

Language is not the presupposition of thought but its accomplishment (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 207): its accomplishment through the body, as the title of PP's Chapter Six reveals (*Le corps comme expression et la parole*: The Body as Expression and Speech). In other words, the body is an active presence in the world of language (Fusaroli 2010) Language is an instrument of action, as uncovered by e.g. language pathology:

What the patient has lost, and what a normal person possesses, is not a certain stock of words, but a certain way of using them. The same word which remains at the disposal of the patient in the context of automatic languages escapes him in that of language unrelated to purpose.... There is thus revealed, underlying the word, an attitude, a function of speech which conditions it. The word could be identified as an instrument of action and as a means of disinterested designation (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 204; 2008: 203-204).

In his study of perception, language surpasses the extreme position of either intellectualism or empiricism. His anti-representational view on language postulates how thought is brought about dynamically through language, not merely as the linguistic reflection of an outer world and a 'container view' of word meaning:

If speech presupposed thought, if talking were primarily a matter of meeting the object through a cognitive intention or through a representation, we could not understand why thought tends towards expression as towards its completion.... A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist even for itself (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 206, 2008: 206).

Expression marks the onset of a communicative dimension in Merleau-Ponty. In PP, language's ability to enact intersubjectivity is connected not so much with linguistic meanings but with other semiotic modes of cultural manifestation: e.g., dance, painting, literary texts, and musical discourse (Kwant 1968b: 107). In both language and art, the coincidence of thinking and representation is an illusion produced by altered consciousness of the contingent relationship of expression and communication: 'thus language and the understanding of language apparently raise no problems. The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 214, 2008: 214).

In PP, the opening of the body through linguistic experience is to be understood as an illustration – at a high level – of perceptual experience, countering the internal/external dichotomy and generating a view on perception that extends beyond a mere 'screen of ideas' (Hansen: 2008: 24).

Saussure is instrumental to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical treatment of perception, while linguistics offers a philosophical alternative to Hegel's spirit or Marx praxis. The precise programmatic status of Saussure's linguistics are clarified in Merleau-Ponty's inaugural address to the *Collège de France* in 1953: both for the provisional *terminus ad quem* and the *terminus ab quo* of his post-PP reflection (Merleau-Ponty 1963: xvii). Saussure is presented as a solution to the philosophical dilemma

¹ Wherever two references to Merleau-Ponty are given like this, the first will be to the original French edition and the second to the English translation.

of things versus conscience. The speaker is both autonomous, and projected and tributary (in the etymological sense), with respect to his linguistic community. Philosophy is both connected to an anonymous symbolic world in which living actors emerge, and to ‘the personal discourse which develops in us’ (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 57). Whenever individual expression injects a new systematicity into language, Saussure is able to sketch a new philosophy of history (*cf.* Watson 2009: 62-63):

The presence of the individual in the institution and of the institution in the individual is evident in the case of linguistic change. It is often the wearing down of a form which suggests to us a new way of using the means of discrimination which are present in the language at a given time. The constant need for communication leads us to invent and to accept a new usage which is not deliberate and yet which is systematic. The contingent fact, taken over by the will to expression, becomes a new way of expression which takes its place, and has a lasting sense in the history of this language. In such cases, there is a rationality in the contingent, a lived logic, a self-constitution of which we have definite need in trying to understand the union of contingency and meaning in history, and Saussure, the modern linguist, could have sketched a new philosophy of history (Merleau-Ponty 1953: 56; 1963: 55).

Saussure’s linguistics become the means to think of the institution in which language occurs as an institution of which speakers need not conceive. There is a clear distinction between the use of the linguistic method to analyze non-linguistic semiotic dimensions of society on the one hand; and, on the other, as a theoretical tool to describe linguistic manifestations. Incorporation constitutes the common ground between these dimensions:

Just as language is a system of signs which have meaning only in relation to one another, and each of which has its own usage throughout the whole language, so each institution is a symbolic system that the subject takes over and incorporates as a style of functioning, as a global configuration, without having any need to be explicitly aware of it at all. When equilibrium is destroyed, the reorganizations which take place comprise, like those of language, an internal logic even though it may not be clearly thought out by anyone. They are polarized by the fact that, as participants in a system of symbols, we exist in the eyes of one another, with one another, in such a way that changes in a language are due to our will to speak and to be understood. The system of symbols affects the molecular changes which occur when a meaning develops, a meaning which is neither a thing nor an idea, in spite of the famous dichotomy, because it is a modulation of our coexistence (Merleau-Ponty 1953: 57; 1963: 55-56).

In PP, language gradually transforms into a new, positive problem for philosophy: something not so strongly present in earlier work such as *Structure du comportement* (1942). In what follows, I will explain how this reflection on language is fundamentally dynamic and how, after PP, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of language became gradually more central to his philosophical endeavor (Kwant 1968a: 93).

Having presented this general characterization and critique of Lakoff and Johnson, I can now present the more positive contribution of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to so-called *second-generation* cognitive science.

Saussure's language on the move

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account integrates considerations of language inspired by the linguistics and structuralism of his time.² The second part of this paper exposes Merleau-Ponty's linguistic ideas, taking two periods into consideration. I first consider Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl in PP (*cf.* Dastur 1998). Taking *Eloge de la philosophie* (1953) (*In Praise of Philosophy*) as a cut-off point, I interpret this first period as revealing (dis)continuities with later developments in e.g. *Signes* (1960) (*Signs*) or *La prose du monde* (1969a) (*The Prose of the World*), which lead to a much broader ontologically (*cf.* Edie 1987: 53-54) and linguistically founded project on language. From 1948 to 1953, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project was intertwined with reflections on Saussure's linguistic legacy to French structuralism. I hope to show that a post-structuralist perspective on Merleau-Ponty complements and pushes further the critical reading of Lakoff and Johnson (1999) offered by Haser (2005) and Zlatev (2007).

Merleau-Ponty's linguistic references appear in a deliberate but not always explicit way. Apart from his reading of Vendryès and references to Meillet, he takes Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* as a key source of inspiration. His originality resides in his embodied vision, which refers not only to the definitive static nature of language, but also to the latent dynamics of speech.

In what follows, I explore central notions in his phenomenological vision of language, mainly through two later works: the preface to *Signes* (1960, translated into English as *Signs* 1968b); and a collection of essays, included in that volume, titled *Sur la phénoménologie du langage* (1960b, translated into English as *On the Phenomenology of Language* 1968c). The latter precedes the former: Merleau-Ponty presented it during the first international phenomenology colloquium, organized in Brussels in 1951. Both texts mark important moments in the development of Merleau-Ponty's seminal work on perception.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological starting point is Husserl. While the linguist and the scientist examine language from the outside, the phenomenologist takes a complementary position (Fontaine-De Visscher 1974: 58), scrutinizing the role of the subject in relation to language: 'taking language as a *fait accompli* – as the residue of past acts of signification and the record of already acquired meanings – the scientist inevitably misses the peculiar clarity of speaking, the fecundity of expression' (Merleau-Ponty 1960b: 138, 1968c: 85).

The speaking subject completes the view on language that I wish to present. Language use as a means of communication in a living community not only makes the speaker look back to the past; his present experience simultaneously projects him towards the future: '...a language [*la langue*] regains its unity. It is no longer the result of a chaotic past of independent linguistic facts but a system all of whose elements cooperate in a single attempt to express which is turned toward the present or the future and thus governed by a present logic' (Merleau-Ponty 1960b: 138-139, 1964g: 85).

² For the institutional link between Merleau-Ponty, Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and Martinet, see e.g. (Larivée 2008: 82).

Here, Merleau-Ponty takes a more traditional view on *la langue* and refers directly to Saussure in a dialogue that results not in the mere addition of the subject to objective language but a research project in which philosophy addresses linguistics on a meta-level:

What the phenomenology of language teaches me is not just a psychological curiosity – the language observed by linguistics experienced in me and bearing my particular additions to it. It teaches me a new conception of the being of language, which is now logic in contingency – an oriented system which nevertheless always elaborates random factors, taking what is fortuitous up again into a meaningful whole – incarnate logic (Merleau-Ponty 1960b: 142, 1968c: 87-88).

The past of a language – its sedimented and conventional character captured *a posteriori* by the system of Saussure's language – is not a sequence of frozen moments, whose transitions between states are produced by a strictly objective analysis of change (*cf.* Froman 1982: 150). Instead, understood by means of Heidegger's geological metaphor (*cf.* Dastur 2001: 55), a constant restructuring takes place in which new elements reorganize the existing system and radically alter the structure of that system. Saussure's *langue* is clearly present in the notion of sedimented language: language is not a rigorously built universal system of meanings but the result of a convergent group of gestures or setting of meanings, to be conceived of as differential values. In the act of speaking with others, new meanings and new values may come about.

If universality is attained, it will not be through a universal language which would go back prior to the diversity of languages to provide us with the foundations of all possible languages. It will be through an oblique passage from a given language that I speak and that initiates me into the phenomenon of expression, to another given language that I learn to speak and that effects the act of expression according to a completely different style – the two languages (and ultimately all given languages) being contingently comparable only at the outcome of this passage and only as signifying wholes, without our being able to recognize in them the common elements of one single categorial structure (Merleau-Ponty 1960b: 141-142, 1968c: 87).

I wish to develop two aspects of language central to this radically dynamic view of language as a moving system that continuously breaks established equilibria to move 'beyond' – by means of *expression* (next section) and *anti-Cartesian meaning* (following section).

Expression

Merleau-Ponty first scrutinizes expression in PP. Gaining inspiration from language pathology, Merleau-Ponty understands thought and representation as born with language and action. Speech does not reside in the speaker as the translation of an already accomplished thought; it is the accomplishment of that thought (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 207). Original texts by famous authors awake new, distinctly original meanings in their readers: 'there is thus, either in the man who listens or reads, or in the one who speaks or writes, a *thought in speech* the existence of which is unsuspected by intellectualism' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 209, 2008: 209).

If language users are not always fully aware that language calls thought into existence, it is because they do not perceive language as distinct from silent thought. The link between the two levels is revealed as e.g. one reads literary texts with a personal style, transforming linguistic conventions.

The act of speaking breaks the silence: ‘Just as the sense-giving intention which has set in motion the other person’s speech is not an explicit thought, but a certain lack which is asking to be made good, so my taking up of this intention is not a process of thinking on my part, but a synchronizing change of my own existence, a transformation of my being’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 214, 2008: 213).

In PP, as a corporeal characteristic expression has a metaphysical function: it makes meanings exist, or it transforms things into meanings (*cf.* Dupond 2001: 25).

Anti-Cartesian meaning

For Merleau-Ponty, meaning has a particular status, which he explores in the first chapter of the third part of PP with the *cogito* as the central issue. His use of Saussure’s concepts to make the role of perception tangible through language leads to a radical critique of Cartesian meaning (*cf.* Larrivée 2008: 65) in which expression has been eradicated: ‘the paper, the letters on it, my eyes and body are there only as the minimum setting of some invisible operation. Expression fades out before what is expressed, and this is why its mediating role may pass unnoticed, and why Descartes nowhere mentions it. Descartes, and *a fortiori* his reader, begin their meditation in what is already a universe of discourse’³ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 459, 2008: 466).

In Merleau-Ponty’s vision, language is not primarily representational but instrumental. Meaning is not only about the physical characteristics of an object but also (and simultaneously) the situated act of perception by and praxis of a human body: ‘as for the meaning of the word, I learn it as I learn to use a tool, by seeing it used in the context of a certain situation’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 462, 2008: 469).

This *instrumental* vision of meaning-as-expression is not present independently either in objects or subjects but becomes perceivable in concrete – often artistic – realization: in the act of expression (Merleau-Ponty 1966b: 32). Expression is incorporated into a body made invisible and static in the Cartesian formula *cogito, ergo sum*. The preceding discussion should demonstrate how Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of language – as the locus of both subject and object – is highly compatible with the anti-Cartesianism of Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied realism. I have shown how, in PP, Merleau-Ponty situates language with respect to perception. In the posthumous volume *La prose du monde* (Merleau-Ponty 1969a, translated into English as *The Prose of the World* 1973b), one finds explicit rejection of a Cartesian linguistic project that aims at an algorithmic and universal grammar. He considers Chomsky’s project of a pure language as an impoverishment (see also Mallin 1979: 183): a phantom reduction of language to unspoken, truth-conditional, static thought.

The algorithm, the project of a universal language, is a revolt against language in its existing state and a refusal to depend upon the confusions of everyday language. The algorithm is an attempt to construct language according to the standard of truth, to redefine it to match the divine mind, and to return to the very origin of the history of speech or, rather, to tear speech out of history (Merleau-Ponty 1969b: 10, 1973c: 5)

³ The French text mentions *un univers déjà parlant*: an ‘already speaking’ universe.

Merleau-Ponty's anti-algorithmic argument is explicitly anti-universalist – a position that need not exclude some degree of representation in the body. He offers a resolute call not only for embodied perception but for embodied language. Embodied perception and embodied language are closely connected concepts: Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is also a philosophy of language, a conclusion that cognitive science has not fully recognized. In the next section, I explain how, on Merleau-Ponty's view, meaning should be given back its inherently dynamic and discursive nature.

Spoken and speaking language

On re-reading Saussure's *Cours*, Merleau-Ponty developed a rich, usage-based view of language, integrating a more static – even sedimentary – system with its creative projection in discourse. This linguistic inspiration is most visible in (Merleau-Ponty 1964a): a synthesis of teachings edited by his Sorbonne students; and in the posthumously published *La prose du monde* (Merleau-Ponty 1969a). 'Language is there, like an all-purpose tool, with its vocabulary, its turn of phrase and form which have been so useful, and it always responds to our call, ready to express anything, because language is the treasury of anything one may wish to say....' (Merleau-Ponty 1969b: 11, 1973b: 6)

A distinction needs to be made between two types or strata of language (De Waelhens 1970: 156): a *post hoc*, acquired language; and a language that comes into being in the moment of expression: i.e., in the moment in which the linguistic signs create meaning. Merleau-Ponty calls these two facets of meaning the spoken and the speaking language: '*le langage parlé et le langage parlant*' (Merleau-Ponty 1969c: 17), and develops them in *The Prose of the World*, written as a phenomenological reaction to Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (*What is Literature?*). It narrows in on literary style as a particular manifestation of speaking language.⁴ In novels like those of Stendhal, readers feel immersed in an innovative style. The author introduces his readers to a world of acquired and now available meaning. Having allowed the reader to enter that world, the author then twists the signs into new meanings, which the reader comes to know through reading:

The expressive moment occurs where the relationship reverses itself, where the book takes possession of the reader. Sedimented language is the language that the reader brings with him, the stock of accepted relations between signs and familiar significations without which he could never have begun to read. It constitutes the language and the literature of the language. Thus it is also Stendhal's work once it has been understood and added to the cultural heritage. But speech is the book's call to the unprejudiced reader. Speech is the operation through which a certain arrangement of already available signs and significations alters and then transfigures each of them, so that in the end a new signification is secreted. It is the effect through which Stendhal's own language comes to life in the reader's mind, henceforth for the reader's own use. Once I have acquired this language, I can easily delude myself into believing that I could have understood it by myself, because it has transformed me and made me capable of understanding it (Merleau-Ponty 1969c: 20, 1973d).

In the quote, Merleau-Ponty refers to the projection of an already existing system towards its transformation into the not-yet-accessible, which comes to be adopted by the language. The image of literary language he conveys is one of constant tension between the given and the new. Static and

⁴ For the position of Merleau-Ponty on Sartre, see (Kwant 1966: 140-148).

dynamic co-exist. Language becomes a meaning potential, reaching for itself: ‘thus language is not, while it is functioning, the simple product of the past it carries with it. The past history of language is the visible trace of a power of expression which that history in no way invalidates (Merleau-Ponty 1969c: 32, 1973d: 22).

Whereas, in the PP, language is present but subordinate to the analysis of the *cogito* and its perceptual status; in the later works, Merleau-Ponty shows a clearer Saussure-inspired and linguistic focus. In *La prose du monde* (1969a), the impact of language as a tool for perceptual intention⁵ and an alternative for understanding history⁶ is gradually transformed through a semiotic reading of ‘the transformation of meanings into a system of expression’ (Silverman 2006: 186): a view that need not exclude a stable dimension to language (cf. Violi 1997: 273, quoted by Traini 2006: 315).

I have made explicit Merleau-Ponty’s contribution to understanding of *expression* and *anti-Cartesian meaning* (preceding two sections). Discourse is the locus where sedimentary and creative language use meet in the present moment of speech (present section). In the next section, I look for similarities between this view on language and recent developments in cognitive linguistics: specifically, in Langacker’s *cognitive grammar*.

Echoes in Langacker

Clearly, Merleau-Ponty’s vision of language is compatible with the contemporary conceptions of language proposed by cognitive linguistics. I wish to explain how Merleau-Ponty’s voice is echoed in aspects of Langacker’s views on language dynamics. As mentioned earlier, Langacker’s project is straightforwardly phenomenological. He (correctly) takes the referential world in which linguistically conceptualized events occur as a phenomenal one:

...I have been distinguishing between ‘the world’ and what happens within it. We conceive of the world as the stable framework within which situations arise and events unfold. What counts as the world depends on one’s outlooks and concerns. Primarily, of course, we identify it with the physical universe, but we also think in terms of a social world, a mental world, a spiritual world, and so on (Langacker 1991: 276).

Cognitive grammar is that strand within cognitive linguistics that emphasizes the semantic function of language: i.e., that ‘fully acknowledges the grounding of language in social interaction, but insists that even its interactive function is critically dependent on conceptualization’ (Langacker 2008: 8). Cognitive grammar is representational. It looks for empirically sound descriptions of linguistic phenomena, as abstractions over usage events. Langacker’s is a non-modular approach: the linguistic constructions and aptitudes he describes are connected with basic cognitive manifestations. Generally in symbolic accounts of grammar – such as Langacker’s cognitive grammar – meaning is not only experiential but inherently dynamic. This is the point at which Langacker’s and Merleau-Ponty’s notions of spoken and speaking language meet:

⁵ ...As in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1945).

⁶ ...As in *Eloge de la philosophie* (Merleau-Ponty 1960).

In the first place, meaning is not identified with concepts but with conceptualization, the term being chosen precisely to highlight its dynamic nature. Conceptualization is broadly defined to encompass any facet of mental experience. It is understood as subsuming: (1) both novel and established conceptions; (2) not just 'intellectual' notions, but sensory, motor and emotive experience as well; (3) apprehension of the physical, linguistic, social, and cultural context; and (4) conceptions that develop and unfold through processing time.... So, even if 'concepts' are taken as being static, conceptualization is not (Langacker 2008: 30).

With this general characterization of conceptualization in hand, I will now consider five detailed technical notions in Langacker's cognitive grammar, on a par with Merleau-Ponty's endeavour. First, Langacker's dynamic, evolutionary model of time, with its relation of a conceptualizer to represented time in present reality, is continuously shifting forward towards the future, integrating what is now reality as part of the past, all while the time of conceptualization unfolds (Langacker 1991a: 276). Second and more specifically, conceptual scenes, along with their correlated, alternative construals, are characterized in perceptual terms (Langacker 1987: 129-130, Langacker 1991: Ch. 1): the subjects responsible for conceptualizations set up objects of conceptualization in order to get the conceptualizations 'on stage': i.e., part of the linguistic form associated with a conceptual constellation. Third and more generally, organization of figure and ground is relevant to spatial – often visual – information treatment; as well as to abstract, non-spatial domains where similar viewpoints apply (Langacker 1987: 125-126). Fourth – apart from the epistemic axes of time and modality used for representing time – a particular type of scanning consists in the reference-point relationship of similar dynamics between predications, when linking conceptual items over time and the sequential structure of linguistic expressions is at stake. This relationship involves access to more than one conceptual entity over a mental path: a notion 'which we can best appreciate... from a perceptual example' (Langacker 2008: 83). To my perspective, reference-point constructions are the locus where the dynamic aspect of mental representations in discourse are set up (Sambre 2005: 149). At every moment, perception or discourse send information to the ground containing a conceptualizer so as to build focus chains: 'a series of successive foci of attention in the context of a profiled relationship' (Langacker 1999: 365). At every relational point in the chain, grounding elements and objective construals – referring to speakers or hearers – may appear. Fifth, dynamic and continuous updating of layered information allow speakers to move away from the already 'sedimented' *parole parlée* into the constituting *parole parlante*: an embodied usage-event linked to a grounded conceptualizer. Visual representation of experiential activity is central to Langacker's account of symbolization.

Meanwhile, Langacker's cognitive grammar addresses the issue of discourse. Conceiving of and analyzing discourse requires further updating and grounded meaning dynamics, referred to through a usage event. Language is shown, explicitly, in action and again in viewing. It is important at this point to keep in mind five methodological aspects (Langacker 2001: 145) paralleling the five theoretical notions described above: (1) conceptualization is understood as a viewing frame; (2) the scope of one's conceptualization at any moment is limited to what is in the frame, and the focus operates on that scope; (3) usage events take place in physical, mental, social, and cultural contexts; (4) conceptualizations are grounded: they engage speakers and hearers in coordinated viewing of some

element in the viewing arrangement, such that some portion of their coordinated vision requires shared meaning; (5) discourse sequences can be composed of a ‘series of usage events’ (Langacker 2001: 147) that unfold through the lens of the focus of attention: the so-called zero frame, preceded by a (retrospective, past) minus frame and followed by a (prospective, future) discourse frame. In a more recent version of this account, Langacker writes:

A usage event was defined as embracing an expression’s full contextual understanding, a portion of which can be identified as its linguistic meaning. A key factor in its meaning is the interaction of the speaker and hearer, each engaged in assessing what the other knows, intends, and is currently attending to. The intended result... is that the interlocutors arrive at roughly similar conceptions of the objective content and direct their attention to the same element within it (the expression’s profile) (Langacker 2008: 466).

Langacker’s current account of the discourse space entails, in a positive way, both dynamics and grounding in visual representations of intersubjectivity, where multiple conceptualizers share common ground (Clark 1996), orchestrating and co-constructing visual, gestural, and linguistic information over time (Clark & Krych 2004: 79). One may reasonably consider Langacker’s implicitly phenomenological work on co-constructed dynamic meaning as the first positive, modern cognitive linguistic echo of Merleau-Ponty. With this positive reading of Langacker in light of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in hand, I will explore what intersubjectivity means for Merleau-Ponty. Before I do so, however, I must show how structuralism – as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) assume – need not be incompatible with a dynamic, intersubjective view of language; and how Merleau-Ponty’s thought is in line with certain aspects of structuralist thinking: a point that has not been sufficiently emphasized before. Indeed, in line with the linguistic thinking of his time, Merleau-Ponty was sensitive to the structuralist idea that language – as a system – entails a dynamic, open-ended view on language use as not only about conveying information, but also bringing language users together through the *parole* or act of speech, establishing intersubjective relations between them as they set up evolving meanings.

Another structuralism

First, I must discuss Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) declared objections to poststructuralism, since these objections occur precisely on the level of Merleau-Ponty’s linguistic position. Although I fully agree on the embodied nature of language, I think that Lakoff and Johnson’s dismissal of poststructuralism is too radical: too global. Their criticism is based on two poststructuralist positions⁷: the arbitrariness of the sign, and meanings as binary oppositions among free-floating signifiers (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 464). To some extent, Merleau-Ponty adheres to Saussure’s notion of arbitrariness, offering only indirect criticisms by reference to Gustave Guillaume’s work (Merleau-Ponty 1964d: 173). Nevertheless, criticizing poststructuralism exclusively by reference to differential values and the notion of system denies justice to Saussure’s project.⁸ I will proceed by a close reading of a (to my

⁷ Two other poststructuralist positions – *relativism* and *contingency* – will not be discussed here.

⁸ For another reading of Saussure – by Meillet, who was a direct inspiration for Merleau-Ponty – see (Swiggers 2008).

mind) fundamental French text explaining the nature of the structuralist endeavor, published at the final stage of the period in which Merleau-Ponty discovered Saussure: i.e., (Ducrot 1968). I will focus specifically on the chapter by Oswald Ducrot, devoted to structuralism in linguistics. When Saussure refers to structures, they need to be understood as the elements that human beings use as objects of *exchange* (Ducrot 1968: 11). Exchange is a central notion: the structural and differential organization of the language system was born precisely as an anti-Cartesian and anti-referential semiotic movement in reaction to the dominant grammar of Port Royal, by which sentence order was considered as pure reflection of thought.

Saussure's anti-representationalist system is opposed to the referentialist vision of language as mirror to the Cartesian world. The order of words is autonomous and internal: 'even if we maintain that language, conceived of as a system of words, is a kind of microcosm which order is the exact copy of the universal order, we discover, in the elements of this microcosm, another world, also governed by rules and hierarchical by nature, but which does only witness itself' (Ducrot 1968: 23).⁹ Certainly, this view does not simply imply a static, differential state of affairs: 'they [languages] have their own dynamism, a possibility or even a requirement of change' (Ducrot 1968: 29).¹⁰ Similarly, the *system of language* implies an instrumental view on language as something used by individuals to transmit information (Ducrot 1968: 51).

Although Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 467) acknowledge the (post-)structuralist understanding of meaning as *changes over time*, they reject poststructuralism on the basis of its notion of system. This is too narrow a view on structuralism – at least within the French tradition of enunciative linguistics following Benveniste and Culioli. The subtle positions and discussions inside structuralist thinking aside, two aspects of structuralism are at the heart of the embodied project of semiology: the rejection of Port-Royal's logical externalism, which Saussure criticized because it relegated language to the realm of the logical mind (Simone 1992: 32) – a rejection that led to the anti-Cartesian notion of *langue*; and the open-ended nature of language, with its subjective and intersubjective *parole*. Lakoff and Johnson are incompatible with Saussure only if one accepts the traditional reading of *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Linguistic constructions cannot be conceived independently from the relations they build between speakers: static semantic devices that, only on a second view, may express a(n) (inter)subjective stance. (Ducrot 1968: 81-82).

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) explore the phenomenological foundations of embodied cognition, with echoes both of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and – perhaps surprisingly – structuralism. However, they do not explicitly develop any method for approaching the phenomenologically embodied nature of intersubjectivity, as is provided in Langacker's cognitive grammar (see previous section).

⁹ The English translation is mine.

¹⁰ The English translation is mine.

This brings me back to the value of arbitrariness to Merleau-Ponty. Arbitrariness would imply that the world is given before language, and that language is assembled in a discursive sequence. Unlike Langacker, with his idea of entrenchment, Merleau-Ponty shows that neither conceptualization nor discourse nor meaning exist before language; or, more generally, before the act of expression. One needs to consider the relationship between thought, language, and embodied discourse in terms of simultaneity. If one does so, the retrospective viewpoint on the conventional nature of signs and their established meaning vanishes and the creative ‘prospectivity’ of language appears. In embodied *parole*, gesture and emotion are both constraint and freedom, cultural and natural. Repeating ‘sedimented’ language in creative acts of *parole* means giving birth to possibilities opened up by one’s bodily organization, which institutes – in all senses of the word – one’s full potential, given the body that one has (Dastur 2001: 62). Strangely enough, Merleau-Ponty’s conception of Saussure-style arbitrariness becomes an argument *in favor* of Lakoff and Johnson’s non-arbitrariness hypothesis: a reading of poststructuralism that is not recognized by *Philosophy in the Flesh*. Therefore, I do not agree with Dastur’s (2001: 64) claim that Merleau-Ponty’s dynamic interpretation of Saussure’s linguistics has misunderstood the character of *signifiant* and *signifié*. On the contrary: Merleau-Ponty’s return to Saussure’s sign is prompted by his focus on the praxeology of linguistic action in contextualized speech. Subjectivity is rooted in intersubjectivity (Culioli 2002: 147) and leads to discursive *afférence*: i.e., senses that add new content to previously entrenched, inherently semantic information. This relation between Saussure’s *langue* and *parole* can be found in the non-overtly phenomenological but hermeneutic/interpretive semantics of François Rastier (1991), who takes meaning into discourse: meaning does not precede discourse but is rather elaborated in it (Rastier 2003: 46)¹¹.

If Merleau-Ponty is implicitly present in second-generation cognitive science then, I argue, Lakoff and Johnson’s (*cf.* Brockman 1999) reading of Merleau-Ponty – in particular, his PP – leads to a mistaken conception of metaphorical thinking where the role of language remains strongly linked to body and gesture (Langacker 2008: 463) in a biologically generic (Pawelec 2007: 101) individual mind, while linguistic representations remain a ‘categorized patterned cognitive experience’ (Kravchenko 2002: 47). This is a too-limited reading of PP. For Langacker, grounding and intersubjectivity place Merleau-Ponty into the picture from the onset, along ‘a continuous scale of entrenchment in cognitive organization’ with a usage event as target (Langacker 1987: 59, 65-66). The next section considers what status the *other* could occupy in this usage event – in the view of Merleau-Ponty and in the view of contemporary cognitive linguistics.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN MERLEAU-PONTY

Intersubjectivity appears explicitly in *Phénoménologie de la perception*. That said, it is thematized in a more strictly linguistic way in Merleau-Ponty’s later and posthumous work, expressed as a direct

¹¹ For discussion, see Valette (2006: 287-88).

consequence of embodiment and flesh. I argue that, for Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological status of intersubjectivity is not part of any self-contained language (Froman 1982: 87) but rather part of a perceptive and communicative reciprocity. I will show this view to be compatible with Verhagen's and Langacker's linguistic work on intersubjectivity and grounded discourse.

Beyond Husserl

Merleau-Ponty develops an original reflection of Husserl's phenomenology with respect to intersubjectivity. For Husserl, the *problem of other minds* is linked to the observation that not all modes of consciousness are modes of individual consciousness and the reality that the subject is aware of the presence of others (Sanders 2008: 144). Merleau-Ponty remains close to Husserl, explicitly acknowledging Husserl for going beyond the Cartesian paradox:

Positing another person as another myself is not as a matter of fact possible if it is *consciousness* which must do it. To be conscious is to constitute, so that I cannot be conscious of another person, since that would involve constituting him as constituted, and as constituting in respect to the very act through which I constitute him. This difficulty of principle, posited as a limit at the beginning of the fifth *Cartesian* Meditation, is nowhere eliminated. Husserl *disregards* it: since I have the idea of others, it follows that in some way the difficulty mentioned *has in fact been* overcome. But I have been able to overcome it only because he within me who perceives others is capable of ignoring the radical contradiction which makes theoretical conception of others impossible. Or rather (since if he ignored it he would no longer be dealing with others), only because he is able to live that contradiction as the very definition of the presence of others. This subject which experiences itself as constituted at the moment it functions as constituting is my body (Merleau-Ponty 1953: 89-90, 1968e: 93-94).

Whereas for Husserl, taking the perception of another body into one's subjectivity entails a transcendental intersubjectivity, such that the projection of another consciousness causes a fundamental asymmetry between the subjects,¹² Merleau-Ponty tries to dissolve this asymmetry. Note that intersubjectivity is not the endpoint of the phenomenological project, but rather part of the initial stance whereby one rejects any strict separation between subject and object in perception. To emphasize the importance of intersubjectivity for Merleau-Ponty, I repeat here his claim from the introduction to PP:

Hitherto the *Cogito* depreciated the perception of others, teaching me as it did that the I is accessible only to itself, since it defined *me* as the thought which I have of myself, and which clearly I am alone in having, at least in this ultimate sense. For the 'other' to be more than an empty word, it is necessary that my existence should never be reduced to my bare awareness of existing, but that it should take in also the awareness that *one* may have of it, and thus include my incarnation in some nature and the possibility, at least of a historical situation. The *Cogito* must reveal me in a situation, and it is on this condition alone that transcendental subjectivity can, as Husserl put it; *be* an intersubjectivity. (Merleau-Ponty 1945: vii, 2008: xiv).

Merleau-Ponty's innovative post-Husserl solution to the problem of intersubjectivity is this: intersubjectivity directly follows from corporeity, while the bodily perspective of the other belongs to perception itself, being one of the perspectives of which perception is composed (Reynaert 1997: 329-330). One's ability to see the world from different perspectives is the direct consequence of the nexus

¹² See (Merleau-Ponty 1964a:238-240) for Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Husserl's stance.

of body and world: ‘we must conceive the perspectives and the point of view as our insertion into the world-as-an individual, and perception, no longer as a constitution of the true object, but as our inherence in things’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 403, 2008: 408).

This view – of the body, and the body of the *other* – is not only a natural phenomenon, but also a situated, cultural one. The body, as the first cultural object, generates mutuality and reciprocity in how intersubjectivity is to be conceived (Sanders 2008: 145).¹³ If one’s own consciousness has a body – a body that is not only the physiological body that science reveals – why would other bodies not have similar consciousness? (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 403) Merleau-Ponty’s intersubjectivity moves away from transcendental subjectivity towards ‘the reciprocity of a shared corporeal existence’ (Sanders 2008: 144). Perceiving the *other* as another perspective on one’s own subjectivity is not fundamentally different from the awareness that one’s own body can take many perspectives on the world. Perceiving the *other* is an anti-Cartesian act of conceiving the *cogito*, embedded in nature and in culturally situated perception.

Intersubjectivity and language

Together, nature and culture are the locus where, in intersubjectivity, the *cogito* meets the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 399). Space does not permit me to offer any detailed analysis of Chapter Four in the second part of PP: *Autrui et le monde humain* (‘on the *other* and the human world’) (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 398-419). However, let me underline two aspects of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty’s early work: the notion of communication, and the social world as a part of subjectivity. Saussure is not yet referenced, but one finds the idea of sedimentation, discussed before in a different context. In the cultural world as object of one’s perception, one reads the anonymous presence of the *other*; and language is the dominant cultural object central to perception of the *other*.

It is easy to understand Merleau-Ponty’s position in the context of painting, once meaning creation and intersubjectivity in the visual semiotics of the painting are conceived of as a process. The meaning of a paint stroke or a painting results from transformation of the individual perception. The praxis of the painter is transformed in the moment of its reception by the viewer, who then decides whether or not this newly created meaning will become part of culture. In this viewing, the audience recognizes the intention of the artistic creation; this meaning then becomes part of the semiotic world. Expression is the endpoint of individual creation. It leads, inevitably, to semiotic intersubjectivity and further semantic development:

There is nothing but a vague fever before the act of artistic expression, and only the work itself, completed and understood, is proof that there was *something* rather than *nothing* to be said. Because he returns to the source of silent and solitary experience on which culture and the exchange of ideas have been built in order to know it, the artist launches his work just as a man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout, whether it can detach itself from the flow of individual life in which it originates and give the independent existence of an identifiable *meaning* either to the future of that same individual life or the monads coexisting with it or to the open community of

¹³ A similar argument can be found in Gallagher (2007: 287), but with different neurocognitive consequences.

future monads. The meaning of what the artist is going to say *does not exist* anywhere – not in things, which as yet have no meaning, nor in the artist himself, in his unformulated life (Merleau-Ponty 1966b: 32, 1964f: 19)

The Merleau-Ponty of PP pays particular attention to dialogue – where the sediment of language is transformed, but where the initiative does not belong to either speaker. Dialogue transforms language. Only after one starts privately considering the limits of this ‘thinking the world’ does the *other* disappear, so that one returns to one’s subjectivity:

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground: my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being [*un être à deux*] where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field, nor I in his: we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge [*glissent*, i.e. ‘slide’] into each other, and we co-exist through a common world [*un même monde*, i.e. one world]. In the present dialogue, I am freed from myself, for the other person’s thoughts are certainly his; they are not of my making, though I do grasp them the moment they come into being, or even anticipate them. And indeed, the objection which my interlocutor raises to what I say draws from me thoughts which I had no idea I possessed, so that at the same time that I lend him thoughts, he reciprocates by making me think too [*il me fait penser en retour*: ‘he makes me think on the turn’] (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 407, 2008: 413).

Language takes one beyond the transcendental subject. In the intercorporeal body of the act of speaking, interlocutors’ viewpoints and perspectives merge, and there is only one world to be known. The solitude of the reflecting subject and the social nature of communication (Spurling 1977: 52) are but two moments or two sides of a coin. The *other* takes away the primacy of one’s knowing the world and brings one into the previously unthought of (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 413). The presence of the *other* – even if he refuses to communicate or even if one distances oneself from him – opens up the social world, not as a mere object amongst other objects but as a field or dimension of existence (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 415). The social world is another aspect of transcendence: ‘the problem of the existential modality of the social is here at one with all problems of transcendence. Whether we are concerned with my body, the natural world, the past, birth or death, the question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take them up and live them...’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 417, 2008: 423).

In Merleau-Ponty’s early reflections on intersubjectivity as revealed in PP, language – along with its link to intersubjectivity – is still subordinate to gesture and bodily perception. In Merleau-Ponty’s discovery of Saussure, language gradually becomes the main key to intersubjectivity: of all expressive operations, it is the only one able to transform bodily style in linguistic sedimentation (e.g., in written language) and the only route by which intersubjectivity comes – indirectly – into being (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 222). Meanwhile, gesture or other non-linguistic behaviour can only be transmitted by direct imitation. The intersubjectivity of language in PP has a directly post-Cartesian status. It does not reject the *cogito* as such, so it is not strictly anti-Cartesian; but it shows how speaking constitutes language. In this act of constitution, the tacit *cogito* is situated perceptually in the world and ‘made’ to speak (Carman 2008: 191, Madison 1973: 133):

...Silent consciousness grasps itself only as a generalized 'I think' in face of a confused world 'to be thought about'. Any particular seizure, even the recovery of this generalized project by philosophy, demands that the subject bring into action powers which are a closed book to him and, in particular, that he should become a speaking subject. The tacit *cogito* is a *cogito* only when it has found expression for itself (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 462-463, 2008: 470).

Merleau-Ponty is both similar to and different from Lakoff and Johnson in how he approaches the relationship between *cogito*, language, and intersubjectivity. The analogy he expresses in the quote above holds for embodied subjectivity; but it does not fit when the perceptual status of the speaker – in his intersubjective relation to the world and others – is revealed to be a speaking *cogito*. On this latter conception of intersubjective embodiment, Merleau-Ponty does not straightforwardly reject Cartesianism. Meanwhile, Saussure's impact on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intersubjectivity is more visible with respect to another proponent of cognitive linguistics: Arie Verhagen, whose work I will now re-examine in light of Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty and intersubjective musings in cognitive linguistics

Recent writings in cognitive linguistics have stressed the importance of the human ability to deal with and semantically represent the *other*. Drawing inspiration from authors as varied as Bühler, Benveniste, Ducrot, Jakobson, Tomasello, and Traugott, Verhagen (2005: 4-8) transforms Langacker's account of construal: not only is the speaker's perspective on a conceptualized scene understood within a situated context of speaking; but that approach may be used in contexts with multiple speakers, mostly containing an addressee: contexts where multiple 'subjects of conceptualization engage in cognitive coordination by means of an utterance, with respect to some object of conceptualization' (Verhagen 2005: 7). Core elements of grammar – evaluative adverbs or connectives like *so* or *although* – play a role in managing intersubjective viewpoints. I can illustrate this with an example of Verhagen's (2008: 317-318):

There is little chance that the operation will be successful.

- (a) *So let's give it a try.
- (b) So let's not take the risk.

The conventional meaning of the expression 'little chance' does not depend on the positive or negative character of the assertion that follows. Rather, it instructs the hearer to interpret the assertion in a certain way: i.e., by inverting the positive or negative value of the assertion, as indicated in response (b) (Verhagen 2008: 318). Meanwhile, the non-inverted response (a) seems wrong.

Similarly, in the case of complementation, the connection between two clauses does not correspond, in its cognitive treatment, with a traditional decomposition into two parts; rather, it informs as a whole, based on the argumentative strength of the predication. Verhagen distinguishes first-person, present-tense examples such as *I promise that X* from third-person, past-tense examples such as *John promised that X*, where the latter constitute responses to a previously asked question by an interlocutor who asks to be brought to some place. Whereas the first-person, present-tense utterances maximize argument strength and speaker involvement, 'the strength of the third person, past

tense utterance is less, as the cognitive coordination between author and addressee is indirect, “via” the onstage perspective of a third person; but it still functions to coordinate the perspectives of speakers and addressee, just like a first person utterance’ (Verhagen 2008: 325): i.e., even third-person, past-tense matrix clauses indirectly function in discourse to align first- and second-person perspectives. This enunciative, interactive, and intersubjective view on grammatical structure is very much in line with Merleau-Ponty’s post-Saussure view of discursive communication as instrumental exchange, as discussed above.

Language is not only a means of transmitting truth-conditional information, but also a way of influencing others’ states of mind. When Verhagen references Ducrot’s notion of argumentativity (*cf.* Anscombe and Ducrot 1983), it is precisely with this intersubjective consequence of language use in mind: ‘human language may be more involved than animal communication with influencing *mental states*, with consequences for *long-term* behavior, rather than with *immediate* behavioral effects, but this is a matter of degree’ (Verhagen 2005: 14). Verhagen’s work should not be understood as in any way opposed to Langacker’s view of construal; it is rather a continuation of it, as a way of bringing speaker/hearer relations and their *grounding* into linguistic expressions – and, potentially, into grammatical constructions themselves.

Allow me to review briefly Langacker’s seminal ideas on grounding. Grounding dynamically way establishes mental contact between an entity and the participants in a speech act: i.e., the speaker and hearer, who jointly form the *ground* (Langacker 1991: 91, 96-97). Grammatical rules are schematic. They remain imminent in schematic instantiations in actual usage events. The situatedness of linguistic utterances and the way they point at speakers is already present in Langacker’s model. Verhagen brings into the foreground certain cognitive-grammatical assumptions present in Langacker, while drawing attention to intersubjectivity in a radically innovative way: ‘...the normal situation for linguistic expressions is that features of an object of conceptualization are construed in relation to one or more facets of the Ground, both of them at least partly by conventional means’ (Verhagen 2005: 18).

This does *not* mean that all of linguistic meaning is intersubjective (Verhagen 2005: 210). Clearly, though, intersubjectivity is encoded in linguistic meaning. Verhagen develops several case studies of linguistic constructions that display grounding effects, even as his account remains faithful to Ducrot’s adage that argumentativeness is part of the linguistic system: both the conventional expressions at the level of the *langue*, and the topical inferences associated with them (Verhagen 2005: 168, 208). In contrast to Langacker, Verhagen does not see intersubjectivity at work at the level of multi-agent discourse; therefore, he dismisses certain elements of intersubjectivity that Merleau-Ponty’s embodied vision could otherwise account for. For Verhagen, the embodied character of intersubjectivity relates to the symbolic, grammatically structured means by which potential groundings are established – not to the fully encyclopedic and discursive realization of the setting. Verhagen’s analyses do not include cases where speaker and hearer alternate, as they do in interactive discourse.

That said, Verhagen's construal may easily be extended to rich, interactive discourse settings. If a speech event is identified with the profiled event onstage and interlocutors with their fellow participants, a special viewing arrangement is produced in which the objective content subsumes the entire ground (Langacker 2008: 467-469): e.g., the meaning of an imperative contains the speaker/hearer interaction, whether onstage and profiled or not (Langacker 2008: 470). Cognitive grammar – backed by studies on subjectification and grammaticalization – has mainly insisted on the gradual ways in which language may become disengaged from the world: i.e., how the brain's processing activity – as activity of the body – transcends the body and moves away from the ground (Langacker 2008: 535, 540): 'in this essentially usage-based perspective, all linguistic utterances display subjectivity of some sort, and subjectification may consist in the gradual diminishing of the "weight" of objective features of conventional meaning in favor of objective ones' (Verhagen 2007a: 75).

In contrast to this dominant view on language change, Verhagen and Langacker take a different path: attending not only to an ascent from speech to conventionalized language: an expression I borrow from (Itkonen 2008: 285); but also to a descent into conventionalized, 'sedimented' discourse. Their path examines how schematic meanings in language are part of the ground: i.e., part of speaker and addressee; even as they move towards the bodies that these participants inhabit. If Langacker acknowledges that time is a fundamental aspect of dynamic conceptualization¹⁴ – as in the dynamic epistemic model outlined earlier – then Merleau-Ponty is a guide for what I would label an 'inside out' reading of intersubjectivity's place in cognitive linguistics: starting from language and moving to discourse in real usage events. Merleau-Ponty's embodied intersubjectivity constitutes one of the missing philosophical foundations for ongoing work on interactional, co-constructed meaning as it arises in naturally occurring behaviour (*cf.* Hougaard 2008: 183, 204). Discourse is the locus where individuals 'recognize that other people also have minds, have intentions and have their own representations of reality – their own systems of mental spaces, their own viewpoints and construals' (Chilton 2008: 254).

Unlike Verhagen, Merleau-Ponty is not so much interested in the conventional, 'sedimented' expression of intersubjectivity as in the instrumental use of language:

On the contrary, in the light of Husserl's and Scheler's conceptions, we no longer can consider language acquisition as the intellectual operation of reconstructing meaning. We are no longer in the presence of two entities (expression and meaning), the second of which might be hidden behind the first. As a phenomenon of expression, language is constitutive of consciousness. From this perspective, to learn to speak is to coexist more and more with the environment. Living in this environment incites the child to recapture language and thought for his own means. Thus, acquisition no longer resembles the decoding of a text for which one possesses the code and key; rather, it is a deciphering (where the decipherer does not know the key to the code)... Arising from signification of this variety, language is pregnant for the child when he hears it used around him. Hazy at first, the signification articulates itself and becomes more and more precise. It is not a question of a phenomenon on the level of pure thought or understanding. It is the *value of use* that defines language. Instrumental usage precedes signification per se (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 342, 1973a: 50, 52).

¹⁴ Not only conceived time (see e.g. Evans 2004 and Freeman 2004), but also the processing time for conceiving.

I do not address this tension to create conflict between phenomenology and cognitive linguistics. Rather, I wish to show how – starting from Merleau-Ponty – cognitive linguistics might, in the context of authentic language use, trace new lines of research through the intersubjective point where the recuperation of the reached-so-far meets the vividly prospective birth of language:

We must understand that language is not an impediment to consciousness and that there is no difference, for consciousness, between self-transcendence, and self-expression. In its live and creative state, language is the gesture of renewal and recovery which unites me with myself and others. We must learn to reflect on consciousness *in* the hazards of language and as quite impossible without its opposite (Merleau-Ponty 1969c: 26, 1973d: 17).

With regard to sedimentation, the axis of past conceptualization is flexible: it reaches from the vast historical macro-level of linguistic history (Merleau-Ponty 1960c: 30, 1969d) to the micro-level of listening and speaking in conversation (Merleau-Ponty 1960c: 28), at the same time that every present act of speaking is a momentary flash: a provisional equilibrium (Merleau-Ponty 1960c: 34). Both the paradox and the strength of language is to be found in the embodied and intersubjective present, where sediment and creativity meet. Note the metaphor implicit in the *unfolding* time of conceptualization, projected towards the conceived future. As co-participants, speaker and listener move together towards the future:

The power of language lies neither in that future of knowledge toward which it moves nor in that mythical past from which it has emerged: it lies entirely in its present, insofar as it succeeds in ordering the would-be key words to make them say more than they have ever said, and transcends itself as a product of the past thus giving us the illusion of going beyond all speech to things themselves, because in effect we go beyond all given language. In that moment, something has been gained once and for all, founded forever, and it can be transmitted the way past acts of expression have been, not because we have grasped a piece of the intelligible world or rejoined adequate thought, but because our present use of language will be repeatable as long as the same language is in use or scientists are capable of restoring it to the present (Merleau-Ponty 1969c: 58-59, 1973d: 41).

In the next section, I explore this creative dimension of the ongoing, intersubjective linguistic act.

Language as intersubjective creativity

In Merleau-Ponty's later work, body and intersubjectivity become more intertwined. Even if language is not considered anymore, then an improved, cognitive stage of perception; language's impact; and Saussure's views on intersubjectivity all become more prominent.¹⁵ As noted earlier, Saussure is not explicitly mentioned in PP in the chapters on intersubjectivity, where Husserl remains the main reference (see Edie 1987: 63). He appears – enigmatically – in Merleau-Ponty's 1953 essay on Husserl and the phenomenology of language (Merleau-Ponty 1960): one of the key texts for Merleau-Ponty's understanding of language, in which Saussure is the reference from which creativity is coined.

Intersubjectivity entails communication. Symbolic systems add a conceptual dimension to the communicative act, in which various strands are brought together and integrated:

For meaning lies latent not only in language, in political and religious institutions, but in modes of kinship, in machines, in the landscape, in production, and, in general, in all the modes of human

¹⁵ For a detailed introduction, see (Carman 2008: Ch. 4, Sanders 2008).

commerce. An interconnection among all these phenomena is possible, since they are all symbolisms, and perhaps even the translation of one symbolism into another is possible (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 57, 1963: 56).

In common with language, philosophy manifestly uses the power of expression that other symbolic systems only implicitly exert (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 58). An analogy appears, on a symbolic level, between the speaking *cogito* and the philosopher: ‘the philosopher is the man who wakes up and speaks. And man contains silently within himself the paradoxes of philosophy, because to be completely a man, it is necessary to be little more and a little less than man’ (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 63, 1963: 63-64).

When one perceives the gesture or conduct of the *other*, one’s perception of the spectacle – in the etymological sense of the word – makes the *other* inhabit one’s body. As one perceives the *other*, one is invaded by this ‘second me’ outside oneself. Language is the preeminent case where this conduct occurs (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 90). Both indirect speech and situatedness are involved. This is the locus where the *cogito* meets the *other*, and the consciousness of one’s incarnate life can be considered: ‘in order for the alter ego and the thought of others to appear to me, I must be the I of this body of mine, *this* incarnate life’s thought. The subject who effects the intentional transgression could not possibly do so except insofar as he is situated. The experience of others is possible to the exact degree that the situation is part of the Cogito’ (Merleau-Ponty 1953: 91, 1968c: 95).

This situation leads directly to language. The relation between *signifiant* and *signifié* invokes the power of expression in the words of both the speaking *cogito* and the *other*. Intersubjectivity is the locus where one can consider the unknown with, and in the presence of, others.

Linguistic creativity resides not only in the monologue or *technê* of the speaking *cogito* (cf. Tréguier 1996: 98), but in his praxis of speaking through intersubjectivity:

But then we must take with equal strictness what phenomenology has taught us about the relationship between the signifying and the signified. If the central phenomenon of language is in fact *the common act of the signifying and the signified*, we would deprive it of its distinctive characteristic by realizing the result of expressive operations in advance in a heaven of ideas: we would lose sight of the *leap* these operations take from already available significations to those we are in the process of constructing and acquiring. And the intelligible substitute we would try to base them on would not exempt us from understanding how our knowing apparatus expands to the point of understanding what it does not contain.... Our present expressive operations, instead of driving the preceding ones away – simply succeeding and annulling them – salvage, preserve and (insofar as they contain some truth) take them up again ; and the same phenomenon is produced in respect to others’ expressive operations, whether they be past or contemporary. Our present keeps the promises of our past; we keep others’ promises (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 91-92, 1968c: 95).

Every act of linguistic creation is a dynamic process of engagement with the social *other* (cf. Waldenfeld 1998). Such a creative view on language through the perspective of intersubjectivity is compatible with Merleau-Ponty’s earlier views on the individual basis of perception, gesture, and incorporated language (cf. McNeill 1992: 17, 125). It is just another perspective on the same thing: ‘for more clearly *but not differently* in my experience of others than in my experience of speech or the

perceived world, I inevitably grasp my body as a *spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it*' (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 89, 1968c: 93).

If people individually experience the creativity of authors in their reading of literature, then dialogue is the place where they most clearly sense the impact of the *other* on creative language transformation. Merleau-Ponty (1960c) entirely dedicates himself to the relationship between perception of the *other* and dialogue. The power of language – through its textuality (Bucher 1991: 192-193) – differs from the silent perception of the *other*. Perception imposes the *other* as a concentric circle touching one's own sphere: a 'me' which is an *other*: '*tout autre est un autre moi-même*' (Merleau-Ponty 1960d: 185); '*il y a un moi qui est autre*' (Merleau-Ponty 1960d: 186). Language realizes more than what the gesture of the *other*, in tacit approximation, reveals. Language establishes a common situation that is not only a community of being but of doing (Merleau-Ponty 1960d: 195). In using language, one's meanings invade the *other* even while his words resonate back. This exchange transforms language through the interaction:

The other's words, or mine in him, do not limit themselves to vibrating like chords the listener's machinery of acquired significations or to arousing some reminiscence. Their flow must have the power of throwing me in turn toward a signification that neither he nor I possessed before. In watching an organism orient gestures toward its environment, I begin to perceive its perceiving because the internal organization of its gestures is the same way as my own conduct and tells me of my own relation to the world – in the same way, when I speak to another person and listen to him, what I understand begins to insert itself in the intervals between my saying things, my speech is intersected laterally by the other's speech, and I hear myself in him, while he speaks in me. Here it is the same *to speak to* and *to be spoken to* (Merleau-Ponty 1969d: 197, 1973e: 142).

The reciprocity of dialogue – where one simultaneously speaks as a subject and is addressed as an object – has the power to transform language, as, in the present moment, one incorporates what was not present in one's past experience. Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity is the key to understanding the incorporated – or rather, the incorporating – power of linguistic creativity. The differences between oneself and the *other* encounter each other, resulting in a transformation of self and *other* and the engendering of new meanings (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 198). To his merit, Merleau-Ponty has revealed the intricate relationship between embodied mind, gesture, and intersubjectivity. The idea of transformative linguistic creativity through dialogue, as it is presented in *La prose du monde*, leads intersubjectivity beyond the conventional power of linguistic expression, both foreshadowing and transcending Verhagen's (2008: 329) account of 'mutual influencing ...with consequences for long term behavior'. Such a view nicely complements Zlatev's (2008: 232-237) notion of language as *post-mimesis*.¹⁶ Rediscovering this ignored¹⁷ aspect of Merleau-Ponty's work in the light of cognitive science is, to my mind, illuminating.

¹⁶ Zlatev distinguishes between post-mimesis₁ (*proto-language*) and post-mimesis₂ (fully systematic language). I would label language as post-mimesis₃. The effect of belief understanding in triadic mimesis is the means of transforming linguistic meaning. For a descriptive exploration of intersubjective layering and transformation of meaning, see (Sambre *in press*).

¹⁷ For example, by (Lindblom and Ziemke 2007: 139).

CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING AHEAD

I have provided in this paper an exploratory reading of Merleau-Ponty's notions of embodiment and intersubjectivity that is not limited to PP but includes his later work.

In the first part of the paper, I stressed Merleau-Ponty's notion of anti-Cartesian meaning. I showed how this notion both is and is not compatible with Lakoff and Johnson's and Langacker's notion of *flesh*. I sided with Merleau-Ponty in his rejection of Husserl's conceptualist representationalism (cf. Carman 2008: 27-28) and demonstrated how he developed a subtly original reading of expressivity and Husserl-style intersubjectivity (cf. Zahavi 2002). In Merleau-Ponty, one finds a clearly linguistic, indeed discursive perspective connected to vision and the natural body – something that cognitive science has not properly explored. 'The word and speech must somehow cease to be a way of designating things or thoughts, and become the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world' (Merleau-Ponty 2008: 211). I offered some reflections on the relationship between perception and language in PP: a relationship that already is motivated intersubjectively by considerations from Saussure. In the PP, linguistics becomes the central impetus behind Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project.

In the second part of the paper, I explored Merleau-Ponty's PP in light of his later and posthumous work, including *Eloge de la philosophie* (1960, 1963), *Signes* (1960, 1968b), *Conscience et acquisition du langage* (1964, 1973a) and *La prose du monde* (1969, 1973b). Through the course of these works, considerations on language gradually intertwine with an intersubjective view on language: a view that is only implicit in PP (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1953: 94). I explore a number of key notions: expression in general and the act of speaking in particular; the instrumental praxis of language by a human body, allowing one to transform the sediment of language in a dynamic and creative projection of the perceived world; Langacker's *current discourse space* (CDS) – clearly compatible with and implicitly echoing that view on praxis – in which Langacker addresses issues of grounding, updating of conceptualizations, and linguistic dynamics; and finally structuralism: not the form of structuralism criticized by Lakoff and Johnson but a different structuralism, called for by the intrinsically dynamic nature of language as lived through the perceiving and speaking body. I showed how this open and communicative view on language is a quite different interpretation of Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique générale* than the traditional static one.

Finally, in the third part of the paper, I made a claim for re-thinking cognitive linguistics' recent post-Husserl conception of intersubjectivity, in light of Merleau-Ponty's considerations on the role of the *other* in dialogue and language. Intersubjectivity does not only appear in conventionalized expressions, as Verhagen (2005, 2008) correctly claims. It also appears in the linguistic – specifically, conversational – act of bringing different viewpoints together (Langacker 2001, 2008). Such an approach allows one to bring cognitive linguistics closer to the incorporated or intercorporeal dimension of language found in Merleau-Ponty. Through careful re-reading of the notion of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty's later work, I showed how one can take the phenomenological

impact of Merleau-Ponty's seminal ideas further in cognitive linguistics, with its recent 'discovery' of discourse and intersubjectivity. Both Verhagen (2005, 2007, 2008) and Langacker (2001, 2008) open constructions and cognitive grammar to intersubjective and interlocutive relations. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological insights contribute to this extension, where the issues at stake are both the connection to other minds (Verhagen 2008) and the meaning potentials (Langacker 2008) in interpersonal distribution or scaffolding (Sutton 2008: 48). Language provides the key: bringing together embodied agents, intersubjectively involved in pushing existing language beyond the borders of convention. In my opinion – embodied meaning aside – language-as-manifestation-of-intersubjective-creativity is, for cognitive linguistics, both the most important contribution and challenge of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project. The best direction cognitive linguistics could take is to further develop Langacker's CDS model, combining it with Verhagen's detailed descriptive work on rich, authentic linguistics materials whereby speech participants discursively re-invent the language that they share.

As I explored Merleau-Ponty's legacy in this paper, I re-discovered some of the ways in which his thinking on embodiment and intersubjectivity influenced understanding of supra-individual discourse (Geeraerts 1985: 364, Fontaine-De Visscher 1974: 63-79), collaborative cognition in communication (Sutton 2008: 20, Clark 1996), and textuality and the role of culture in the social world (Merleau-Ponty 1945). Numerous implicit or laconic references to Merleau-Ponty's work can be found in the cognitive literature, which I briefly reviewed. I hope to have sketched a thematic, systematic, but not necessarily exhaustive overview of the nexus between cognitive linguistics and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as mutual sources of inspiration, whereby embodied mind and intersubjective self meet language. Re-thinking or re-creating Merleau-Ponty in light of cognitive linguistics (*cf.* Merleau-Ponty 1969: 146) suggests a similar process to the one described by Merleau-Ponty in the last lines he ever wrote, on the temporal value of painting and writing:

If no painting come to be *the* painting, if no work is ever absolutely completed and done with, still each creation changes, alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates or creates in advance all the others. If creations are not a possession, it is not only that, like all things, they pass away; it is also that they have almost all their life still before them (Merleau-Ponty 1964b: 92-93, Baldwin 2004: 321).

Obviously, this is not the last word on the relationship between phenomenology and cognitive linguistics or between embodied intersubjectivity and language. This paper invites further reflection on the implicit (Harder 2007: 1262, Nerlich & Clarke 2007: 602) and explicit – if mostly laconic – relationship between cognitive linguistics or cognitive poetics on the one hand and their European phenomenological foundations on the other (*cf.* Zlatev 2010). Not least, it attempts to maintain the dialogue with Descartes, as did Merleau-Ponty. Informative interaction between phenomenology and cognitive linguistics (or cognitive science *tout court*) 'involves an exchange of questions, rather than of results or methods' (Tauber 2008: 68, commenting on Gallagher 2003). Cognitive poetics has a place here, next to micro-structural work in linguistics or discourse studies: it vividly shows – on the macro-level – that, when art appears in a given culture, its past is in a process of being re-invented

(Merleau-Ponty 1969: 139, see also Matthews 2006: 139-151). The continuity in Merleau-Ponty between language and the arts may help bridge gaps between cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics.

I conclude with a note on Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesianism, which is neither a mere rejection nor definitive destruction of the connection between subjective and objective world. Merleau-Ponty bases his ideas on a rich dialogue with Cartesian thinking. A philosophical landmark, Descartes' *Meditations* taught Merleau-Ponty that the relationship between thinking body and thought-of world is a matter of gradual, step-by-step experience. As in Descartes, the serial re-thinking whereby the *cogito* anticipates his own future thinking and the reactions of philosophers yet to come is not always consonant with the past even as it echoes the original voices heard (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 132). Intersubjectivity aside, one finds in Merleau-Ponty, with respect to perception and language, no denial of Descartes but rather a modest, ongoing, and dynamic dialogue with him (Merleau-Ponty 1969: 137). I hope to have shown, in a modest way, not only that cognitive linguistics silently incorporates Merleau-Ponty so as to challenge phenomenology (Adamson 2004: 94); but also that, on the reverse side of the coin, Merleau-Ponty keeps raising continental, philosophical, linguistic, and semiotic (*cf.* Eco 1988: 219, 1999) questions for post-Cartesian cognitive science.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Frank Brisard, Geert Brône, Walter De Mulder, Kurt Feyaerts, Riccardo Fusaroli, Dirk Geeraerts, Jean-Rémi Lapaire, Doris McIlwain, John Sutton, Elisabeth Zima, and Jordan Zlatev for helpful comments and constructive discussions on phenomenology and cognitive linguistics. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their detailed feedback. The usual disclaimers apply.

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