

## Categories and Language

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**Abstract:** Language exists because human subjects define themselves in the circumstance they are in. This is possible because they are able to know, not directly through their senses only, but adding something new to the construct they create in their conscience. The main thing they add to the construct created is categories, something invented or fabricated by the human subject at the moment of speaking.

**Keywords:** Act of Knowing, the Human Subject, Speaking, Saying and Knowing, Category, Instruments a Priori, Scientific Categories, Categories of Knowledge, Linguistic Categories

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### 1. The Function of Categories

The function performed by categories will be different depending on the point of view they are studied. Categories can in principle be

1. Elements going beyond particular languages because they are elements manifesting thought —universal level of linguistic determination<sup>1</sup>. Once you have determined the reality of categories in this way, you can ask
  - a. If categories are categories of things or, on the contrary, mental constructs.
  - b. If categories are formed with the properties things have in common, that is, if they are formed based on experience or, the contrary, analogy.
  - c. You can ask, with Aristotle, for the character of the knowledge necessary to create categories.
2. Elements belonging to a particular language, that is, you can conceive of them as belonging to this language and not that one —historical level of linguistic determination;
3. Elements manifesting the way of thinking of the author

who formulated them —individual level of linguistic determination.

4. Elements constituting a fact of saying thus constituting something mental with the only function stated. Remember that the categories of Aristotle for a long time have been known as “elements you can say something of”, that is, as τὰ λεγόμενα, τὰ λεγόμενα<sup>2</sup>.
5. Elements bearing a particular purpose or function when they were conceived of.
6. And finally, you can ask if categories are symmetrical, that is, if they have are made with only one criterion or with several.

Of all these aspects I am going to study the universal or absolute reality of categories, that is, I am going to study categories at the level having to do with speaking and the conditions affecting speaking.

### 2. The Absolute or Universal Reality of Categories

The problem of the absolute reality of categories can be formulated as, *what is the ultimate reason for the existence of categories? What is the real or cognizant base to understand categories?* Since this problem is the study of categories at the

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1 For Coseriu, language is activity, the activity of speaking, *enérgeia*, free and end-directed activity. For Coseriu, “speaking is the human universal activity performed individually in contexts and situations by individual speakers as representative of speech communities with communal traditions in the technique of speaking” (Coseriu 1992, p. 86). This means that language has three levels: language is universal (all human subjects speak); language is historical (whenever you speak you will speak in a particular language). And language is individual (language is performed individually).

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2 Cf. Mittelmann, 2009.

universal level of linguistic determination, you cannot speak only of Aristotle's categories but you have to refer to categories in themselves, that is, to all types of categories, since categories are to be considered in what they really are and they are used for.

### 2.1. *The Categories by Aristotle: the Concept of Being*

For Aristotle, a category is based on the concept of Substance. As he says "a Substance appears to be 'something'" (τὸδε τι = something = "this thing I can touch")<sup>3</sup>, that is, any Substance, as the pure condition of Being, is, exists in it and at the same time is something objective, thus assimilating the concept of Substance to the way of Being of natural things. Things, for Aristotle, can be touched<sup>4</sup>, that is, they are something existing objectively. In this way a Substance is and, by virtue of this, is objective. With this the condition of Being is assimilated to the condition of natural physical and concrete things. A Substance is the first of categories and what you can say of it is to be applied of it in a privative way. But Aristotle's intention is to deal, at the same time, with the other categories<sup>5</sup>, that is, categories designating things existing in something else, namely, *Quantity, Qualification or Quality, Relative or Relation, Where or Place, When or Time, Being-in-a-position, Having or State, Doing or Action, Being-affected or Affection*<sup>6</sup>. These ones participate of the same way of being of a Substance, that is, they exist and exist objectively, the pure condition of Being, but with a peculiarity: they are not in them (as Substance is) but in something else, that is, they are in a Substance. Since a Substance is something objective the other categories are objective as well, something existing but being in something else. With this distinction Aristotle in his *Categories* separated two ways of Being: Being in it and Being in something else. In both cases the thing affected existed objectively.

Once Aristotle defines Substance as something being objectively, he looks for cognizant relationships usually given, not in a Substance (the pure condition of Being objectively), but in natural things to which he applies the concept of

Substance, relationships of signification which, although created by analogy with the conditions of material things, are nothing but cognizant relationships added to the combination of something objective plus the pure condition of Being (=a Substance). The assumption by Aristotle that anything being is a Substance is the base "to say of" all categories. In this way, the way of Being in something else constitutes the base to speak of the all other categories. The particular thing in the existence of categories is that Aristotle conceives of them just as Being given in many things and by virtue of this, Aristotle conceives of them as something in things, thus being something objective, something similar to things, which can be touched. Because of this, as well, you can say something of them. In themselves categories are abstract, that is, something mental.

### 2.2. *Categories, Things and the Act of Knowing*

Aristotle did not pose the problem if real things exist or not. As a consequence, he does not either bear in mind the task of the cognizant subject. Because of this, he did not pose the problem if categories are real or to what extent they are real. He assumes that the things he meets in the world are, that is, exist objectively, and because they are, he looks for the ultimate foundation of their Being in what he conceives of as a Substance. Now then, if a Substance is something he creates as an intuition and looks for in things, the other categories (*Quantity, Qualification, Relation, Where, When, Being-in-a-position, Having, Doing and Being-affected*), categories that cannot be conceived of unless they are in something else, which, on the other hand, it is ultimately a Substance, will also be the result of an intuition by Aristotle. As a consequence, both the Substance and the other categories have the same degree of reality: they are the answer to an act of knowing, the act of apprehending reality mentally starting with an initial sensation, *aisthesis*<sup>7</sup> as Aristotle would say<sup>8</sup>. Categories in their most radical reality are instruments *a priori* of human knowledge because they are given and exist in and because of the act of knowledge, and the contrary: thanks to categories human knowledge exists. In this sense, categories are absolute and given necessarily. Without categories, whatever they may be, there is no human knowledge proper. There can be an intuition or *aisthesis*, something to be developed sensitively, that is, in accordance with the nature proper of *aisthesis* thus constituting knowledge as well. And this is the line of demarcation separating sensitive knowledge, a type of knowledge in both humans and animals (moving because of sensitive impulses) and properly human knowledge, creative knowledge, the result of human freedom, changing the sensitive and concrete into abstract, the abstract into ideas and ideas into contents of conscience<sup>9</sup>.

3 Categories, 3b10-3b23. For an explanation of categories in general and Aristotle's categories in particular, cf. Martínez del Castillo, 2011.

4 Cf. Ortega y Gasset, 1992, p. 177.

5 I use the expression 'the other categories' to refer to the categories by Aristotle different from the first one, Substance, that is, the ones denoting the way of being of something existing in something else.

6 Categories by Aristotle have always been misunderstood just from its commentators, who could not understand the Greek of Aristotle's time since they lived some five and six hundred years after him. In order to understand Aristotle categories it is necessary to bear in mind Aristotle's intention. Aristotle tried to inaugurate a new type of science in his time, that is, he intended to study things individually, not merely the essence of things, Being and the Ideas by his master Plato. He tried to do what later on, some 1800 years later, would be inaugurated, positive science, in the Renaissance. So with his categories he found out that there were different kinds of things: some exist in them, some are a Substance, and some exist in something else, the other categories which exist in a Substance. These categories, the ones I called the other categories, constituted aspects in things expressed as categories. Because of the peculiarities of the Greek language, these ones have not been properly understood up to the 20th century with E. Benveniste. Cf. Martínez del Castillo 2011, particularly §§ 3 and 4.

7 *De Anima* III, 1, 425a, 14 apud Ortega y Gasset 1992, p. 128.

8 For Coseriu the speech act starts with an initial intuition, a concept similar to *aisthesis* by Aristotle. Cf. Coseriu 1985, p. 75; y 1986a, pp. 27-32.

9 Cf. Martínez del Castillo 1999, chapter 3. 3.

### 2.3. Human Knowledge

Human knowledge, which necessarily starts with the sensitive and concrete (sensation or *aisthesis*), makes what comes through the senses into something else. This making the sensitive into something else out of the sensitive and concrete is pure creation, pure abstraction, transformation of the mode of Being of the percept apprehended<sup>10</sup>. The result of this is that the extract created in this way is something manageable and useful, thus characterizing human knowledge as unique. And this manageable and useful extract is what constitutes ‘Being’<sup>11</sup>, or Substance, or category<sup>12</sup>. The extract abstracted, pure invention, is the category, the *essence*, an instrument *a priori* of knowledge, that is, an instrument without which neither knowledge, Substance or Being would exist.

Now then, categories are performed by an individual creative and intelligent subject incardinated in a circumstance<sup>13</sup>. Human beings, wherever and whenever they are, will always know, that is, will make the sensitive into abstract up to constituting a category, an essence, or class of things they will freely apply to the percept apprehended or intuited. To do this, human beings will need something material to express their creation and offer it to others<sup>14</sup>. Given the limits of creative subjects, categories, necessary in themselves and instruments *a priori*, are to be implemented in something material and contingent, that is, forms with limited value. Given the historical condition of the speaking subject<sup>15</sup>, the material forms must be common and shared in a speech community, that is, they must be historical and thus contingent. If in themselves categories are necessary, in their implementation constitute something contingent, even, momentary. The necessary existence of categories is something different from their performance.

The act of knowing, starting with *aisthesis*, is an act of transformation in which the subject invents, that is, creates extracts from *aisthesis*, modifies them, attributes them a certain degree of reality, gives them indefinite designation,

10 Remember that Ortega y Gasset interprets abstraction as extraction (cf. Ortega y Gasset 1992, p. 64). When you abstract something out of a thing considered to exist, you will extract something, an aspect or mental consideration imposed on the thing existing, out of the thing you consider to exist, and will consider it as if it was something independent and different from the thing it was extracted out of (cf. also Ortega y Gasset 1996, p. 107). As you can see the thing extracted is considered as if it existed in it, but really it cannot be but in the original state. For example, colour, extracted out of the surface it is given. This reveals the nature of human knowledge: whenever we know we make the nature of the thing come to us through our senses into something abstract.

11 Being, for Aristotle, ἐνέργεια ὄν, is Being existing in it, performing itself, and being as the potency of its own performance (knowledge)

12 Since the concept of Being, for Aristotle, is Being executing itself, you can identify the Essence of Being with its Existence. The Essence is nothing but what the category adds to entities. A horse is the Being executing itself as a horse. The Being of the horse is in the category representing it.

13 Ortega y Gasset 1994, p. 190.

14 Coseriu 2006, p. 44.

15 “A historical subject is a subject involving other participants in the same historicity, that is, in the same speech community” (Coseriu 1985, p. 48), (my translation).

relates them, gives them a name, determines them for their application to real things, and makes them into words and expressions of a particular language<sup>16</sup>. These creations may be either individual or common, or both at the same time<sup>17</sup>. With this, the act of knowing creates categories and these make possible human knowledge. The act of knowing is both individual and absolute, passing from the necessary to the contingent, from the universal to the historical, thus being an act of historical creation<sup>18</sup>. The act of knowing is an act of translation from the language of the senses, which is mute, into the language of Being<sup>19</sup> —the thing created by virtue of the application of the category to the newly created construct.

*Aisthesis*, by virtue of the act of knowing, from its original state of being concrete and sensitive and thus ephemeral, is made into something different from what it was<sup>20</sup>. In this way language, necessary mediator<sup>21</sup> in human knowledge, is made into the possibility of Being<sup>22</sup>. In other words: human knowledge would not exist if language would not give the means to create essences or categories. For Ortega y Gasset, knowledge is a perspective, that is, something created by the cognizant subject<sup>23</sup>.

### 2.4. Human Knowledge and Categories

Categories, thus, are *a priori* instruments of knowledge on the one hand, contingent instruments of knowledge, that is, historical, on the other, and even, individual instruments of knowledge and thus ephemeral. These three aspects coalesce together in the same act of knowing. Now then, any act of human knowledge is a complex one because it is an act of knowing, speaking and saying at the same time. In this sense, all categories are linguistic: they are made with elements of a language and in accordance with the forms, contents, rules, procedures, attitudes and beliefs in force in a language. In this sense categories go beyond their concrete individuality. They are in force in some way or another in a speech community (=

16 Cf. the intellectual operations in the speech act, Martínez del Castillo 2004, §5 to §10. These intellectual operations by the speaking subject have been explained in two processes, the process of creation and the process of fixation, cf. Martínez del Castillo 2015b and Martínez del Castillo 2015c.

17 Cf. Martínez del Castillo 2004.

18 Historical creations can constitute a fact of speech, something temporary and sporadic, or a fact of language, the partial reconstitution of a language.

19 “[...] it belongs to reality that Man should be before it and see it. The terms perspective and knowledge are nearly equivalent. [...] Knowledge is not only a *modus cognoscentis* but also a positive modification of the thing known. [...] Knowledge [...] is a perspective, as a consequence it is neither a proper introduction of the thing known into the mind [...], or ‘the thing itself’ being in the mind *per modum cognoscentis* [...], or a copy of the thing [...], or the building the thing [...], but an ‘interpretation’ of the thing being known submitting it to the translation [...] from the language of Being, which is mute, into the ‘saying’ language of knowing. This language the thing known is translated into, is nothing more or nothing less than *language, logos*. Knowing in its ultimate and radical execution is dialectics —*διαλέγειν*— *speaking just of things*. Words express the points of view patent to us on which aspects of Reality manifest themselves (Ortega y Gasset 1989, pp. 41-42), (my translation).

20 Cf. Ortega y Gasset 1992; cf. Martínez del Castillo 2004.

21 Cf. Coseriu 1988, pp. 47-48.

22 Coseriu 2006, p. 30

23 Cf. footnote n° 19 above.

language), not existing in them but virtually in the minds of speakers in the way they, as members of a particular speech community, conceive of and apprehend reality.

### 2.5. *The Study of Categories in Linguistics Today*

Cognitivists interpret categories as universal entities, that is, as entities that are given independently from their value as elements belonging to a particular language and detached from the individual speaker using them. For cognitivists, this type of universality is structural in human beings, that is, it is something founded on or caused by human biology, psychology, genetics and culture. This means that cognitivists attribute this type of universality to somatic, psychological, genetic and —contrary to these— sociological causes<sup>24</sup>. The proof given by them to defend this opinion is that categories can be verified empirically<sup>25</sup>. Cognitivists support this opinion in what they call human categorization, a process given in humans, in the structure of the mind, which is “embodied”<sup>26</sup>.

### 2.6. *Empirical Research Applied to Categories*

The defense of empirical research applied to categories by cognitivists is due to the confusion of the concepts of “natural”, “historical” and “common”. Apart from this, they do not know the concept of “belief”<sup>27</sup> and its role in human knowledge, or the concept of “historicity”<sup>28</sup> and, as a consequence, the concept of “otherness”<sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, they have never analyzed what the human knowledge consists in thus attributing what is universal to the biological or genetic structure of humans. Speakers born in a particular historical speech community (=a language) will learn the beliefs in force in their speech community as the only instruments in their relation with the world. For ‘naïve’ speakers, there does not exist anything but the reality they first learnt or, sometimes, the reality they learnt once and for all. The knowledge learnt in this way constitutes beliefs developed in individuals without any participation on their part. Because of this, cognitivists will say that these sets of knowledge (=beliefs) are natural. The reason of this, from my point of view, is double:

- a) Because these sets of knowledge (beliefs) are learnt without any reference to the problem involved, and
- b) Because, for those people learning beliefs in the way

stated, problem and solution constitute the same thing.

In this way beliefs are considered to be incontrovertible, facts that are as they are because they are naturally. The realization of the existence of beliefs as a fact given in humans has been described for very long earlier. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas, who criticized the consideration of beliefs as natural, said,

“Ea quibus a pueritia animus imbuitur, ita firmiter tenentur ac si essent naturaliter et per se nota”<sup>30</sup>.

(Those things the human mind is influenced with from childhood, are held firmly as if they were natural and evident)

Ortega y Gasset speaks of beliefs as “a system of beliefs”. For him, beliefs constitute a ‘Faith’ thus preventing humans from being free<sup>31</sup>. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1935), on his way, describes this fact in terms of particular languages:

“Because of the very act in connection with human beings knit the net of language from their inside, they themselves are made a thread of that one, and every language lays down a circle round the people the language belongs to, so that they will not be able to leave out of that circle unless they at the same time enter the circle of another language”<sup>32</sup>.

Hence that you can say that language is thought<sup>33</sup>.

## 3. The Historical Reality of Categories

Now then, given the existence of categories as beliefs amongst the speakers of a particular language, the researcher can legitimately verify which those beliefs are in this and that speaker and even in this or that speech community. You can verify that the speakers of a particular language use the categories transmitted with their language and manifest those beliefs transmitted spontaneously and nearly automatically<sup>34</sup>. That is, the categories of a language and beliefs in force in a speech community constitute a fact that speakers cannot avoid and only if they reflect on the problems involved in both of them, can speakers understand them completely. And in this there are two aspects to be considered:

- a) The fact that categories exist before our experiments, that is, the fact that we know the existence of categories before we try to verify them; and
- b) The fact that particular beliefs belong to this or that particular speech community or language.

24 Lakoff 1990, p. 266.

25 Cf. Lakoff 1990, pp. 6-7

26 Cf. Lakoff 1990, p. xvi; Lakoff y Johnson 1999:7. For a criticism of cognitive linguistics, cf. Martínez del Castillo 2008.

27 Some authors, instead of belief, use the concept “myth” or “language myths”. Strictly speaking, a myth is an allegory or a parable.

28 The concept of historicity and thus the condition of historical refers to the mode of being of humans who as individual subjects “are-together-with-others”, and go beyond themselves as mere individuals thus participating with others and creating social facts. Because of this human subjects will acknowledge as proper of themselves something that at the same time is acknowledged to belong to others as well. This is possible because of, and through, language, which will always be given in a moment of history. Because of this human subjects will make them in history (Cf. Coseriu 1988, p. 43).

29 Human beings are-together-with-others. Cf. previous footnote.

30 *Summa contra gentiles* I c, XI.

31 “In a belief, a man does not elect his way of thinking or believing, but on the contrary, is deep in his faith, unable to realize how he fell in it or intuit the way to go out of it. His belief does not appear a belief to him but reality itself” (Ortega y Gasset 1989, p. 173), (my translation).

32 Humboldt 1990, p. 83, (my translation from the Spanish text).

33 Cf. Humboldt 1990, p. 37.

34 Cognitivists would say ‘unconsciously’ (cf. Lakoff 1990, p. 6). To say unconscious knowledge is contradictory with itself. Coseriu says: “the topic that a particular type of knowledge is unconscious is a *contradictio in adiecto*. The idea of situating idiomatic knowledge not in the individual subject but in the collective conscience is simply a compromise solution. You give for granted that idiomatic knowledge is reliable enough and that the subject cannot justify that type of knowledge. Because of this, you will withdraw false conclusions” (Coseriu 1992, p. 215-216, my translation).

In this sense categories are historical, that is, made in history at a particular moment in a particular speech community. Even within the language they belong to, their period in force is longer or shorter. Beliefs appear and disappear in individual speakers. In the same way as the meanings of a language can change, beliefs can last for a shorter or longer period of time. So in this sense you can distinguish two levels in categories: the universal level, something to be studied with method *a priori*; and the historical level, something to be verified empirically, that is, with method *a posteriori*. In both cases categories and beliefs can only be interpreted.

Now then, the question arises: *are categories the same for all human beings?* All beliefs, whatever their origin, manifest in a particular language but they in themselves do not belong to language. In this sense the answer is no. Even beliefs may be held by some speakers and not by others of the same speech community. As a consequence, since categories manifest in language, the same methods of language research must be applied to the study of them. So the reason given by Lakoff that the classical theory of categories was not the result of empirical study<sup>35</sup>, applies partially to the problem of categories, if it does. Lakoff misunderstands the problem of categories identifying all aspects in them in one and accepting that their nature is structural in the human “unconscious”<sup>36</sup>: one thing is the category speakers use; something completely different is the study of categories by linguists and philosophers; and something completely different is the three levels of linguistic determination<sup>37</sup> applied to categories in order to study them. Categories are instruments *a priori*, something necessary in human knowledge (universal level of linguistic determination). Not all categories are in force in a particular language (particular or historical level of linguistic determination). And the categories of every individual speaker can be different (individual level of linguistic determination). Empirical study, with reserves, can only be applied to the historical aspect of categories. Empirical method may be operative once we know that categories exist and once we know the historical nature of categories. Empirical study then is reduced to the mere verification of the existence of this or that belief in this and that speaker.

On the other hand, Lakoff attributes to Aristotle what he calls the classical theory of categories. However, he asserts that the interpretation of “human categorization is essentially a matter of both human experience and imagination”<sup>38</sup>, that is, categorization is formed with the combination of experience, that is, empirical method, and imagination, that is, analogy. This method can tell us what the categories of this or that language are, that is, this is the method adequate to studying the historical aspect of categories, to verify the existence of categories, not the universal aspect of them. But to verify if a category exists you must previously know of its existence. By

the way, the combination of experience and imagination (analogy) is just the method Aristotle created his principles and definitions with<sup>39</sup>.

### 3.1. *The Analysis of Category Balan of Dyirbal*

For cognitivists, the most effective proof of evidence of both the empirical method applied to categories and the nature of categories, is given by Lakoff in the interpretation of category *balan*, of the Dyirbal language, an aboriginal Australian language. Trying to prove that categories depend on categorization and that this is a natural process, Lakoff adduces the fact that in Dyirbal you have to use words in accordance with the requisites of the category they belong to<sup>40</sup>. In Dyirbal there are four categories: *bayi*, *balan*, *balam* and *bala*. Now then, the category *balan*, the second one, is made up of the following semantic objects: *females*, *fire*, *water* and *fight*. Lakoff changes females for “women” and interprets fire, water and fight as “dangerous things”. From this fact Lakoff takes the title of his book, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*<sup>41</sup>, one of the foundational books in cognitive linguistics. Lakoff concludes:

“Dixon [the author who studied the Dyirbal language<sup>42</sup>] has provided a superb example of how human cognition<sup>43</sup> works. Though the details of categorization may be unique to Dyirbal, the general principles in force in the Dyirbal system show up again and again in systems of human categorization”<sup>44</sup>.

And on the next page he asserts:

“Dixon’s analysis explains why the Dyirbal system is the kind of system that human beings can function with”.

That is, in accordance with these words, *the kind of system* (with the definite determiner) means that there is no other system humans can function with. It is thus something universal: the right way of categorizing by humans. As a consequence, Lakoff considers categorization in Dyirbal as the universal and genuine categorizing in humans.

But in this interpretation by Lakoff you can see three levels that Lakoff does not realize. One thing is what Dyirbal as a particular language establishes in its use, something having to do with a particular grammatical function not with meaning; another thing is the meaning of words, something necessarily belonging to the world of Dyirbal, thus historical meaning; and another thing is the motive of connotation produced with the category *balan*. Now then, *who do the semantic objects*

39 Cf. Ortega y Gasset 1992, pp. 115-16 and Ortega y Gasset 1992, p. 226.

40 “Whenever a Dyirbal speaker uses a noun in a sentence, the noun must be preceded with a variant of one of four words: *bayi*, *balan*, *balam*, *bala*” (Lakoff 1990, p. 92).

41 Cf. Lakoff 1990.

42 Dixon 1982.

43 The so-called cognitivist linguists and psychologists have coined the words cognition and cognitivists to mean human knowledge but involving no metaphysical import in it.

44 Lakoff 1990, p. 95.

35 Lakoff 1990, p. 6.

36 Lakoff, *ibidem*.

37 Cf. footnote no 1.

38 Lakoff 1990, p. 8.

included in the category 'balan' constitute motive of connotation for? The category *balan* causes connotation just in some people not belonging to the world of Dyirbal, that is, in Lakoff and his followers. For these, fire, water and fight constitute dangerous things. As a consequence if females appear in that category, women must be dangerous, too. But as we can see, this type of connotation is external to the Dyirbal language, since the function of the class of words *balan* is merely grammatical, manifesting itself in the combination of the words in language use.

Classes of words similar to Dyirbal *balan* can be found in western languages, for example, in English. In English, as in many languages, word classes are defined in terms of the requisites imposed on them by the neighbouring words. If you study the syntagmatics<sup>45</sup> of the adjectives *young*, *new* and *old* you can see that *young* and *new*, conveying the same lexical meaning, /age: short/, are to be separated in their combination with the opposition /+living: -living/, thus creating two different word classes (or categories). *Young* and *old* can be applied of /+living/; *new* and *old* can be applied of /-living/. In this sense you say *a young lady* as against *a new house*. However *old* is to be combined both with living and non-living semantic objects, /±living/. So you can say *an old woman* and *an old house*. As a consequence, you can say that the word classes represented by *young*, *new* and *old* in English, function in a very similar way as the class *balan* in Dyirbal. And the fact is that no linguist has so far said similar things as the ones insinuated by Lakoff putting together women, fire and dangerous things. They all are grammatical classes and as such conventional, that is, arbitrary and historically motivated<sup>46</sup>. Words, at the same time as they convey meaning, they have their requisites to be used, their syntagmatics in accordance with, they form classes different from one another.

But when Lakoff tries to explain why the "members" of the category *balan* suggest that women, fire, and dangerous things create connotation, he is just using the principle he denies, namely, that things are categorized together on the base of what they have in common, that is, he attributes to women something in common with females, fire, fight and dangerous things. He justifies this, saying that "the chain of inference—from conjunction to categorization to commonality—is the norm"<sup>47</sup>.

Following with his line of thought Lakoff adds:

"The idea that categories are defined by common properties is not only our everyday folk theory of what a category is, it is also the principal technical theory—one that has been with us for more than two thousand years"<sup>48</sup>.

From my point of view, Lakoff should have said who defend or defended that categories are formed in accordance

with the principle that categories are defined by properties in common. Lakoff does not examine or explain this principle. He merely rejects it, attributing it to the classical theory of categories. Lakoff on the other hand does not say what the so-called classical theory of categories is. Nor does he justify his attitude against it; even more: he does not analyze the consequences it may have, as we are going to see next.

The problem consists in analyzing which categories, if any, are formed with the principle of the properties things have in common. In the mere statement of this problem by Lakoff there are several assumptions, to be clarified first,

- a. The categories of Aristotle have nothing to do with the type of categories Lakoff speaks of.

Categories of Aristotle are structured in terms of the concept of Substance, the category denoting a particular mode of Being: being in it objectively. The other categories (*Quantity*, *Qualification*, *Relation*, *Where*, *When*, *Being-in-a-position*, *Having*, *Doing* and *Being-affected*) are to be understood as based on a Substance and at the same time as being considered to be just like a Substance, since the way of Being in them is Being in something else, that is, Being in a Substance.

- b. When Lakoff speaks of the categories of the classical theory, he says that they "have been with us for more than two thousand years"<sup>49</sup>, an idea he repeats several times<sup>50</sup>.

With this expression Lakoff refers to those categories in force in the tradition in the technique of speaking. As a matter of fact, in the tradition of the technique of speaking of a particular speech community (=a language), there are many beliefs in common (categories and meanings). But in this statement you have to determine which those categories in the tradition are. From my point of view, those categories in the tradition are not the categories by Aristotle, nor even those categories referred to by Lakoff as the categories formed with the principle of the properties things have in common.

#### 4. The Categories of Knowledge, Individual Categories

The categories in the tradition are those I like to call the *categories of knowledge*. That is, the sets of categories (beliefs and meanings) participated by the speakers of a speech community and used in the act of knowing. But in these, there is no principle of the properties things have in common. Categories of knowledge are formed on *analogy*. Categories of knowledge, those categories necessary for us to know, are not formed on *induction (experience)* but on *creation*, that is, *analogy*. They have to do with the genesis of concepts, that is, with the act of knowing.

When you first learn a new concept, say, the concept of an

45 The way words are to be combined.

46 Κατά συνθήκην, cf. Coseriu, 1982, pp. 13-59.

47 Lakoff 1990, p. 5.

48 Lakoff, 1990, p. 5.

49 Lakoff, *ibidem*.

50 This idea is repeated on page 6: "From the time of Aristotle to the later work of Wittgenstein"; and page 9: "These ideas have been part of the superstructure of Western intellectual life for two thousand years", etc.

animal you did not know before, you select the few characteristics of it you can in the sporadic and momentary act when you first apprehend it, thus forming a concept, that is, a category about the kind of an animal that one belongs to. Then, you attribute infinite possibility of designation to your concept because of *analogy*, thus creating a new concept with content and designation. Now then, if you see a second exemplar of that kind of an animal (that is, a member of that species you did not know) and verify that your concept does not concord with the new exemplar you have in front of you, you will change your initial concept and correct it in the required way<sup>51</sup> thus using analogy as well. So in this act of knowledge there is no experience, no principle of things having properties in common, that is, there is no *induction*, but *analogy*<sup>52</sup>, creation.

On the other hand, the categories in the tradition cannot have been with us for such a long time. A language, for Coseriu, is a *historical object*<sup>53</sup>, manifesting the historicity of the speakers who created it. Human beings are *historical subjects*<sup>54</sup>, since they create their own historicity manifest in the particular language they create. Historicity involves something in common<sup>55</sup>, that is, historicity means *participation* and *solidarity*. Historicity is made up on the base of a double relationship of solidarity: *horizontal solidarity* or solidarity with the listener, and *vertical solidarity* or solidarity with the tradition, that is, solidarity of speakers with those who speak or spoke the same language. In this respect a language is a system of isoglosses<sup>56</sup>, that is, a system of sets of common linguistic acts, common to all speakers who speak or spoke the language in an area of space and over a period of time.

The first aspect of solidarity is the object of study of synchrony<sup>57</sup>. Solidarity with the listener manifests itself in the language both the speaker and the listener have in common, that is, in the state of the language<sup>58</sup>. A state of the language is the language actually spoken in a speech community, a set of systems of isoglosses extending over a period of time, shorter or longer. The state of the language involves a particular configuration of the activity of speaking. In synchrony all linguistic forms are analogous<sup>59</sup>, not homogeneous. A historical language is nothing but the succession of different states of the language<sup>60</sup>. Any state of the language is the

reconstitution of the previous one<sup>61</sup>. The degree of commonness between the different states of language (*isoglosses*) varies. For example, the speakers of the present state of language, Modern English, may not understand the language in the Early Middle English period or even in Late Middle English period. In this sense you cannot expect that categories have lasted for two thousand years in the different states of the same language and in the different languages in the world. To say such a statement it is necessary to demonstrate the degree of commonness (the *isoglosses*) in all words now existing in the present state of the language.

In the rejection of the principle of things having properties in common by Lakoff, we can see four aspects:

1. The category in itself (universal reality of categories);
2. The historical category: all categories are linguistic. Because of this, they are, apart from universal, historical, that is, contingent: they all belong to a particular language;
3. The category created on the spot in the speech act (individual and contextual reality of categories); and
4. The study of categories.

In itself a category is an instrument *a priori* of knowledge. At the same time a category is a historical reality in force in a speech community (=a particular language) for a longer or shorter period of time. And at the same time it is something created on the spot in particular contextual circumstances determined by the meaningful expressive intentional purpose of the individual speaker<sup>62</sup>. And finally the study of categories is something belonging to the theory about categories, not about the living reality of speaking and knowing. These four aspects must be born in mind and cannot be mixed up.

## 5. Linguistic Categories

Categories exist because of human knowledge. Human knowledge is possible only with language and because of language. Since meaning is the original and internal function of language, linguistic categories are to be defined in terms of the most important defining features of language. Language is meaningful, creative, intended to others, historical and material<sup>63</sup>. Due to the character of human subjects, who speak because they have something to say, and say because they know<sup>64</sup>, language is intentional. This means that the instruments *a priori* of knowledge serve the intentional purposes human subjects impose on knowledge<sup>65</sup>, just because human knowledge serves the most radical necessity of human subjects: surviving in the circumstance they are in<sup>66</sup>, that is, surviving in this world.

Human subjects have two dimensions: the dimension

51 Cf. Coseriu 1992, p. 226. On page 227 Coseriu says: "language learning by the child is a permanently creative activity and a sacrifice: the child will abandon what it itself has created when it verifies its creation not to be efficacious in its communication with adults and other children" (my translation).

52 The reasoning, based on analogy, would be more or less like this: if this animal in front of me is in this way, all the members of the species it belongs to must be the same as this one.

53 Coseriu 1985, p. 48.

54 Coseriu 1988, p. 21.

55 Coseriu 1988, p. 70.

56 Coseriu 1986a, p. 17.

57 Synchrony and diachrony, the two axes of language study. They were defined by Ferdinand de Saussure as belonging to language. Coseriu redefined them as two axes belonging to language study. Cf. Coseriu 1988.

58 Cf. Coseriu 1988, p. 48.

59 Coseriu 1988, p. 48.

60 Coseriu 1988, p. 222.

61 Coseriu 1988, p. 31; Coseriu 1988, p. 18.

62 Cf. the role of the meaningful intentional purpose of the individual speaker in Martínez del Castillo, 2015b.

63 The five universals of language, cf. Coseriu 2006, pp. 44-45.

64 Cf. Martínez del Castillo, 2004.

65 Cf. footnote no 19 above.

66 Ortega y Gasset 1994, p. 190.

subject-object and the dimension subject-subject<sup>67</sup>. Because of the first dimension human subjects manifest themselves as free and creative. Because of the second dimensions human subjects are historical, that is, made together with others participating with them in history. Language thus is the manifestation of human freedom and intelligence<sup>68</sup>.

Because human subjects are free and intelligent, because the most radical essence of humans manifests itself in the human knowledge, and because categories are instruments *a priori* of knowledge, linguistic categories are intentional, inclusive, end-directed and historically motivated, something we have discussed in a previous article<sup>69</sup>.

## 6. Categories in Science

The only categories that were formed, or are being formed, in accordance with the principle of things having properties in common, are those belonging to specialized jargons (the language of physics, biology, the language of doctors, the language of the different branches of engineers, of computer science and so on), that is, the functional languages defined with diastatic differences<sup>70</sup>, the concept of category Lakoff is perhaps thinking of.

But these are scientific classifications of things, not linguistic categories. They are not linguistic systematizations of facts of experience. Coseriu calls these facts "nomenclatures"<sup>71</sup>. These categories, since they are scientific but not linguistic, differ from linguistic categories in that the things they represent existed before the category was formed. Just the contrary of linguistic categories: things in linguistic categories start existing when the category is applied to the construct apprehended, thus making it a particular thing, not earlier.

Summing up, the relationships of signification defined by Aristotle in his *Categories* and all types of categories, constitute cognizant relationships given because of an act of knowledge either justified in it or justified intuitively. In this sense the reality of categories is absolute: they are necessary for the act of knowledge to exist, that is, they are instruments *a priori* of knowledge. The same can be said of category *balan* and all Dyrirbal categories, which, as categories of a language, are historical but in themselves are absolute. And the same can be said of the categories I have called the *categories of knowledge*: they are absolute, some of which having been introduced in the tradition thus being at the same time historical. In so far as some categories of knowledge have been introduced in the tradition of a particular language, they are linguistic, not merely categories of knowledge. And they all, except for Aristotle's categories and scientific categories, are individual. Those categories that may be formed with the

principle of the properties things have in common, since they are not linguistic, are absolute, instruments *a priori* to create science, but they cannot be either historical or individual, since they are not structured with linguistic criteria and since things in them existed before these categories were created. In this sense, they are not delimiters of species<sup>72</sup>.

## 7. Conclusion

Categories are *instruments a priori* of the act of knowing, perhaps the most important of all intellectual operations in the act of knowing. Since the act of knowing is executed in the speech act or the act of speaking, saying and knowing, categories are *instruments a priori* of language.

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67 Coseriu 1985, pp. 32-33.

68 Cf. Coseriu 1988, p. 196.

69 Cf. Martínez del Castillo 2015i, pp. 67-76.

70 Coseriu 1988, pp. 123-130; Coseriu 1992, pp. 293-306. Cf. Martínez del Castillo 2015g, § 5.1.

71 Coseriu 1981, pp. 95-107.

72 "[...] language does not certainly create entities, natural things or in other words, objective things to which it attributes a particular mode of being [...] [or] the way of being attributed to 'things': on the contrary, it acknowledges and delimits modes of being in 'things' themselves and because of this it is delimiter of species or, [...] 'classes' of entities (classes which, from the point of view or its objectivity, can also be classes of only one member and even of empty classes (Coseriu 2006, pp. 73-74).



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