

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Is Cognitive Linguistics deadly sinful? On the pros and cons of Cognitive Linguistics and its development

Lin Gan\*

School of General Education, Sichuan International Studies University, China

**Abstract:** Cognitive Linguistics started from the 1980s, and it has become a mainstream since the end of the last century and the beginning of this century, which has got widespread attention, with a nickname as the third revolution in linguistic circles after the Saussurean Revolution and the Chomskyeen Revolution. According to the dialectical principle of “negation of negation”, theoretical research is always advancing, thus the linguists are beginning to think of the shortcomings of Cognitive Linguistics and new developments in the future. For instance, Dabrowska (2016) pointed out the seven deadly sins of Cognitive Linguistics, which, we think, are overstated and too radical. Cognitive Linguistics has its own historical significance and makes great contributions to the criticism of Saussurean “Linguistic Apriorism” and Chomskyeen “Linguistic Nativism”, but Cognitive Linguistics also has its own weaknesses, which are to be exposed in brief in this paper. We have also tried to propose “Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics as a revision in order to emphasize the philosophical views of “materialism” and “humanism” as a basic start in linguistic research.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Linguistics; seven deadly sins; pros & cons; Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics

\*Corresponding author: Lin Gan, School of General Education, Sichuan International Studies University, China; 505300204@qq.com

**Received:** May 14, 2021; **Accepted:** June 18, 2021; **Available online:** August 26, 2021

**Citation:** Gan L (2021) Is Cognitive Linguistics deadly sinful? On the pros and cons of Cognitive Linguistics and its development. *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 3(1): 52–66. DOI: 10.18063/fls.v3i1.1249

## 1. Introduction

Dabrowska (2016) has published a paper in Cognitive Linguistics (shorted in CL), titled in *Cognitive Linguistics' seven deadly sins*, which has sharply criticized CL and pointed out seven serious problems, namely:

- (1) Excessive reliance on introspection;
- (2) Not treating the cognitive commitment seriously.
- (3) Not enough serious hypothesis testing.
- (4) Ignoring individual differences.

- (5) Neglecting the social aspect of language.
- (6) Assuming that we can deduce mental representations from patterns of use.
- (7) Assuming that distribution equals meaning.

This has aroused great attentions from academic circles and caused a lot of controversies. Inspired by it, we have carefully considered the pros & cons of CL based on the two-part dialectical standpoint and put forward a repair plan for the reference of colleagues.

According to dialectics, everything has two sides, and so does language theory which also has pros and cons. And subverters also will follow a revolution. Although CL has made up for the shortcomings of previous language theories which is very remarkable, it's also undoubtedly flawed, but is not seriously like Dabrowska's expressions of deadly sins. Obviously her overheated rhetoric also falls into the old mistake of some scholars of "overusing exaggerated words for novelty".

## 2. The origin and historical contribution of CL

In the mid-1970s, Lakoff and Johnson began to reflect on the two "shut-door"<sup>1</sup> linguistic revolutions initiated by Saussure and Chomsky and proposed completely different approaches to research. In view of their standpoint of idealism theory (apriorism, nativism), Lakoff and Johnson constructed the "Embodied Philosophy" and on the basis of which they proposed CL.

These two scholars' book named *Metaphors We Live By* was published in 1980, which sensationalized academic circles and made countless scholars bow in respect. They believed that metaphor was not only a rhetorical device, but also a basic way for humans to understand the world. There was a deep-rooted mental mechanism of "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" in people's mind, thus metaphor was formally promoted to the level of "cognition", conforming to the basic train of thought of the prevailing cognitive science, which had paved the way of theoretical thinking for the birth and development of CL. Since then, they (Lakoff, 1987; Johnson, 1987) had continued to publish on this emerging discipline respectively, which found an echo among other scholars (such as Langacker, Taylor, Dirven, etc.), and led to the establishment of the International Association of Cognitive Linguistics in Europe in 1989. This trend swept the world and soon became the mainstream of linguistics. In particular, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) had collaborated again and published the monumental work named *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, which had laid a solid philosophical foundation for CL.

As we all know that the biggest characteristic of Lakoff and Johnson in the process of establishing CL is that it involves more philosophical content than any previous linguistic theories have discussed, and that is because Johnson himself is a famous American philosopher. They have criticized the traditional metaphysics severely, and absorbed many new ideas in modern philosophy, philosophy of linguistics, mental philosophy, and postmodern philosophy (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 597–601), pushing CL to the forefront of language research worldwide. It is particularly commendable that they have also spent a lot of efforts to construct the philosophical foundation of

1. This internalist approach for language research maybe called in folk Chinese as "to shut the door and beat the dog".

the discipline, that is, the Embodied Philosophy. Therefore, scholars engaged in CL will struggle without philosophical foundation. In the first chapter of the work, they have pointed out three basic principles of Embodied Philosophy:

- (1) The mind is inherently embodied,
- (2) Thought is mostly unconscious,
- (3) Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical<sup>2</sup>;

Then they have discussed the basic ideas and research methods of CL (Wang, 2001, 2002, 2007).

If the Structural Linguistics raised by Saussure and the Transformational Generative Linguistics raised by Chomsky are regarded as two revolutions in the linguistics field of the 20th century, CL based on Embodied Philosophy, which is strongly against the theories of Saussure and Chomsky, can be regarded as the third one, leading a new direction of today's linguistics research, and promoting linguistics once again to a new stage which becomes a forefront of current linguistic theory.

### **3. The shortcomings of CL**

However, many scholars have recently reflected upon the shortcomings of CL and have put forward many beneficial suggestions, which are in full compliance with the basic law of “negation of negation” followed by the development of the discipline. We have also found some flaws in CL over the years, but it will not be as “deadly sins” as Dabrowska has said. After years of rethinking, we believe that the Embodied Philosophy and CL mainly have the following problems, which are briefly described below for reference by scholars.

(1) Although Lakoff and Johnson have referred to a lot of philosophical contents and discussed the Embodied Philosophy which is the foundation of CL and have emphasized the embodiment of mind, so as to separate from the popular idealism of Western philosophy. But unfortunately, their philosophical vision is still not broad enough to mention the materialism of Marxism-Leninism, and they only pay attention to the deconstruction in the trend of postmodern philosophy, and are completely unaware of the “constructive postmodernism”, let alone discussing the cognitive style of language from the height of embodied humanism. The philosophical standpoints of “materialism, humanism, and sociality” that should be involved in the Embodied Philosophy are still absent in their works.

(2) Humanism is a very important content of Western philosophy, and it is rarely mentioned in their works. They have explored several cognitive strategies of real humans to explain the cognitive mechanism of language effectively, including interactive experience, categorization, conceptualization, image schema, cognitive model, conceptual blending, metaphor and metonymy, construal, salience, relevance, etc. However, they simply opposed to Chomsky's concept of the ideal

---

2. If we separate these three principles, some Western scholars have already discussed it. For example, the first one is materialism in philosophy, which has existed since ancient Greece; the second is Freud's discovery; and the third is discussed by Western scholars such as Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Richards, Black, Derrida, etc. (Wang, 2011). But the integration of these three into a whole and the designation of “Embodied Philosophy” is the contribution of Lakoff and Johnson. They have followed Marx's research method of constructing dialectical materialism by combining Feuerbach's materialism and Hegel's dialectics.

human based on which they have strongly criticized the shortcomings of the previous linguistic theories. The shortcoming is that they have never been able to rise to the height of the post-modernist philosophy of embodied humanism.

(3) They claim to give a thorough rethinking of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but it is unclear that what they exactly rethink. The difference between Embodied Philosophy and analytical philosophy has not been clearly stated. One of the basic principles of analytical philosophy is the isomorphism of language, but the interaction between humans and the world has not been well analyzed. This part of the discussion is obviously inadequate. The method of solving the relationship between existence and thinking in philosophy through linguistic analysis which is advocated by analytical philosophy is very clever. They don't know much about it, so how can they carry out profound reflection?

(4) They also claim to have a profound reflection on the Postmodernist Philosophy, which, the same as the last mistake, is so obscure as to explain what they are rethinking about and what different views they have. They have sometimes made mistakes of mixing the Western traditional philosophy with Postmodern Philosophy. According to the latter, the "Embodied Philosophy" they have proposed is a challenge to the entire Western philosophy which has completely changed the traditional creed, then the Embodied Philosophy should completely belong to the category of Postmodernist Philosophy, such as "unconsciousness thought", "metaphorical concept" and so on all having distinct characteristics of post-modernity, but they have failed to realize this.

(5) They (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 343) have mentioned the need for rational reconstruction, which is a guilty of "embodied rationality as the only right way", misleading from time to time to reveal the Embodied Philosophy and the CL can deal with everything and solve all the problems. This view is obviously not in line with the basic spirit of dialectics, which is contrary to what we have proposed "the view of elephant and leopard" (Wang, 2019c), and has therefore been criticized by academics. Human beings can only go along the road of "negation of negation" forever, which is a long road of continuous exploration of truth, far from the absolute truth. To strive while there is life to live.

(6) There are many synonymous terms used in CL, such as "framework, model, schema, prototype, script, stereotype", etc., whose connotation and extension are often overlapping and the boundaries among them are blurred. What is worse is that, only "cognition" is highlighted in the subject name "CL", which fails to distinguish it from the Chomsky's research on language cognition. Their favorite but also the most distinctive "embodied mind" is not reflected in the name of the subject, which is inevitably a pity! Their interpretations of cognition in their works are inconsistent, and they sometimes suggest that it is all-encompassing, and anything that has been worked through mental operation can be regarded as "cognition", which seems to imply that it is acceptable for Chomsky to consider himself a cognitive linguist. On the other hand, they have emphasized the cognition of "embodied, unconscious and metaphorical" in the Embodied Philosophy.

(7) Lakoff and Johnson have accepted Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenology of perception", emphasizing the fundamental role of "body experience" in human mind, thinking, and language in the discussion of the Embodied Philosophy, according to which they have severely criticized the philosophical position of Objectivism, which is acceptable. We believe that it should be based not

only on the inside of the “body”, but also on the “real world” which is outside the body. According to the principle of

“惟人参之”

“wéi rén cān zhī”

“only human being makes it”

we build the philosophical theories and analyze the causes of language. We should both reflect the principles of materialism and the Embodied Philosophy, and adapt to the embodied humanism in postmodern philosophy, but they have failed to realize this principle well.

Therefore, Wang (2014) revises the title of CL to ECL which attempts to construct our own linguistic theory in China. It is expected to effectively distinguish the broad CL camp (including Chomsky, computer Software designers and some psychologists, etc.). It can not only save so much efforts and words from Lakoff and Johnson to distinguish “the first-generation cognitive science” from “the second modern cognitive science”, but also can highlight the research achievements of embodied cognition in the field of linguistics.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) have summarized all the past philosophical theories as Objectivism and have conducted in-depth criticism. On this basis, they have put forward “non-objectivism”, and they have pointed out that if the conceptual metaphor is true, all objectivist views on meaning and knowledge are false (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 273). Lakoff (1987: 158) also says that all the doctrines of objectivism about human thought and language are problematic if they are not completely wrong. This clearly shows that all the previous theories are wrong, and naturally it concludes that their theory is the only correct conclusion which is obviously inconsistent with the pluralism emphasized by postmodernist philosophy. If there is no part or most of the objective factors in our knowledge (especially in the natural sciences), and the non-objectivism is used to completely deny this foundation, how can we talk about “embodiment”? How can one gain the true knowledge of the world?

#### **4. Unclear extension of “Cognition”**

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 11) have mentioned that “cognition” refers to the mental operations or structures that can be studied in precise terms, most of which are unconscious. This point of view is obviously influenced by the research contributions of postmodern philosopher Freud, thus the “conscious cognition” focused on the research of traditional philosophy is extended to “unconscious cognition”, which makes the Embodied Philosophy have the characteristics of postmodern trend.

After they (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 10) have analyzed two simple dialogues, they can list dozens of mental processing steps which can be all completed instantly. They are processed automatically and spontaneously so that people could barely be aware of their existence.

If we follow Lakoff and Johnson’s macroscopic thought on “cognition”, all researches in language must be processed by the mind, and the term “CL” can also include all academic schools, which means there is no revolution in the study of Chomsky’s language cognition. Such an overly broad terminology is not conducive to the orientation of the discipline, and it confuses its own

distinctive linguistic school with all other cognitive studies of language.

Some scholars will say that macro-cognitive linguistics uses lower case letters, cognitive linguistics, which includes cognitive theories proposed by many schools of scholars in language research, however, Lakoff and Johnson's language theories can be expressed by capitalizing the letters as 'Cognitive Linguistics'. Then we have to ask, how does this capitalized CL differ from other cognitive theories? What are the typical features? Now that we have such a wealthy of words, why bother with this one term instead of finding another term?

The underlined phrase "precise term" in the quotation in the last sentence also seems difficult to understand. What is "precise"? This reminds people of precise calculation of mathematics. Cognitive psychologists of the first generation of cognitive science have advocated mental operation as "mental arithmetic" which means the precise method of mathematical calculation can be used to explain the laws of mental operation. It is obviously inconsistent with postmodern philosophy and the second-generation cognitive science, and is easy to associate with Chomsky, the leader of the formalist school, together with his disciples. The word "precise" is also accompanied by the influence of formalist school.

The so-called "precise" is actually a mess in the eyes of postmodern philosophers, which may still be influenced by traditional metaphysics. We also clearly remember that Lakoff's famous paper *A Note on Vagueness and Ambiguity* which was published 50 years ago in 1970, stating that the language has a feature of vagueness. He went on to publish papers in 1972 and 1973 to illustrate this point. In this sense, the "precise" used here does not coincide with the "ambiguity and pluralism" discussed by Lakoff and postmodern philosophy.

On the other hand, Lakoff and Johnson confines "cognition" to "embodied cognition" in their work. They (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 5) have pointed out clearly in the famous book *Philosophy in the Flesh: The mind is inherently embodied, reason is shaped by the body*. On page 343 of the work it says: ... *our analyses are constrained by empirical studies of the nature of cognition*. The view of embodied cognition is of epoch-making significance. It's claimed that they have launched the third revolution of the 20th century in linguistics, thus subverting the first revolution of Saussure's structural revolution based on apriorism and the second revolution of Chomsky's transformational generative revolution based on Nativism. This extraordinary revolution ultimately has split language research off the dominance of idealism, and has brought the philosophical camp of materialism back to the linguistic field. This is particularly significant for the guidance of Chinese scholars, because our country tends to adhere to the dialectical materialism. It is a pity that they know very little or even ignore Marxism-Leninist materialism and they have not mentioned materialism<sup>3</sup> in their works because their philosophical horizon is not broad enough.

If we follow Lakoff and Johnson's thinking to understand, the theory of language cognition they have put forward and the cognitive research that Chomsky and others are engaged in are totally different in many basic theoretical assumptions. It is really a pity that such a distinction is not reflected in its academic terminology, and the most essential view of embodied is drowned in the misnomer.

3. In 2003, Lakoff was invited to China to give lectures. He was asked that if he had ever read the works of materialism, and he responded with a 'no' answer.

As we know, Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1968) pioneered the study of language from a mental perspective, so he also called himself cognitive linguist. There are many scholars engaged in artificial intelligence, software design, and computer experiments at home and abroad who call themselves cognitive scientists. This has brought many uncertain factors for the academic circle to correctly understand “cognition” and clearly define the CL advocated by Lakoff and Johnson. We have already found that this phenomenon of misnomer, and it seems to be biased to only mention cognition in the name of the subject without mentioning embodied.

## **5. The revision of ECL to CL**

### **5.1. What is Embodied Cognitivity?**

Although the Embodied Philosophy and CL have initiated a revolution criticizing the Saussurean and Chomskyan revolutions, they have failed to clarify the philosophical position of materialism, humanism, and sociality. Wang (2002) has discussed the philosophy foundation of CL as Embodied Philosophy and has translated it into *tìyànzhéxué*, which proposes the brand-new design feature of “embodiment of language” to criticize Saussure’s Linguistic Apriorism and Chomsky’s view of Nativism. Later, he has felt that the word “embodiment” mostly contains the meaning of objectivist physical experience, however, the subjective meaning of “cognitive processing” is not highlighted enough, so the “embodied cognitivity” is to revise “embodiment of language”, also reasonably has changed the “CL” from abroad to “ECL”, which is intended to use “embodiment” to highlight the perception of language, so that the materialism in philosophy can return to the field of language research. We also retain the “cognitive” in the original name, using interactions, image schema, categorization, conceptualization, conceptual blending, metaphor and metonymy, cognitive model (CM (cognitive model), ICM (idealized cognitive model), ECM (event domain cognitive model), frame, stereotype, construal, salience, relevance, and other terms to reveal the causes of language. The concept of “cognitive” puts more emphasis on the humanism in language research, and the new humanistic view of postmodern philosophy can be used to restore the true nature of language, fully reflecting the basic position of linguistics as “humanology” (Li, 2002, 2005, 2011; Pan, 2006). This also indicates that ECL and CL have a homologous relationship, both in origin and in length.

ECL also integrates many unique research achievements of the embodied cognitive team of Sichuan International Studies University, such as refining the core principles of the discipline, applying super disciplinary research methods, constructing and improving the branch discipline systems, and closely integrating with language teaching. Wang (2014) has discussed the reason from ten aspects why the name of the discipline of CL should be revised, which is encouraged and supported by more and more scholars. In recent years, dozens of papers have been published for deeper analysis. Wang (2019a) has further discussed the theoretical orientation, main content, basic ideas, research methods and significance of ECL. In the same year in November, the National Association of ECL was established in Sichuan International Studies University, and the first International ECL Seminar was held which saw more than 200 scholars from home and abroad to attend. Scholars gathered to talk about the research experience in these years and made this theory develop gradually.

It is quite interesting that there is a ready-made word “*Tǐ rèn* (embodiment)” in Chinese, which has been added into the *Modern Chinese Dictionary (Fifth Edition)* two days before its

publication in 2005 (also the word “Yuànjǐng” has been added), because this word appeared in the announcement of the press communique in April of that year during General Secretary Jintao Hu’s meeting with the Chinese Kuomintang Chairman Chan Lien in the mainland of China. Some scholars believe that the word “Tǐ rèn (embodiment)” is popular in Hong Kong and Taiwan of China, but this statement is quickly questioned by many scholars who have found that the word appeared in the Chinese during the Song Dynasty and continued to be used until the Republic of China period. This shows that “Tǐ rèn (embodiment)” has always been a common word used by the mainland and Taiwan.

The interpretation of “Tǐ rèn (embodiment)” in *Modern Chinese Dictionary (Fifth Edition)* is: to perceive and know. This is perhaps the most basic way for human beings to acquire knowledge, which can be regarded as the basic starting point and methodology of all sciences. People’s life is to know the world through perception, to master the language, and to integrate themselves into the society. So it is now perfectly reasonable to use it in the name of linguistic theory.

## 5.2. Materialist standpoint

The struggle between “materialism vs. idealism” has been running through the western philosophy for more than 2,000 years. Materialism believes that material determines consciousness. The former is the cognitive basis of the latter, and the latter is the sublimation of the former. The cognition of human beings cannot be separated from concrete objective things, and “category, concept, meaning” all depend on the “objective world”. Idealism, on the other hand, holds that consciousness determines material, and only the things recognized by people are the real existence. The idea, “There is nothing outside the heart” proposed by Chinese scholars, belongs to this camp.

Chinese scholars have received the ideological education of materialism since childhood. This standpoint is well known to everyone, and is the philosophical basis that we cannot be too familiar with. It is a great pity that few people in the linguistic field at home and abroad know that Saussure and Chomsky’s linguistic theories belong to the camp of idealism.

Saussure (1916) has taken the lead in criticizing the theory of language tools proposed by Socrates in ancient Greece, vigorously advocating Linguistic Apriorism, which takes the attitude that language is a transcendental formal system beyond the individual, and people are put into a language system after birth, controlled and manipulated by it. Both the ancient Greek philosophers and Descartes of modern times have discussed Linguistic Nativism, and have also proposed “speculative grammar” and “universal grammar”. Chomsky has inherited this theory, making it once again prevalent in the academic circle for decades. He believes that people were born with a “universal grammar” or “language acquisition device” embedded in their minds. With limited stimulation, people can acquire language, and he also attempts to explain the syntax generated in the mind by using formal calculus process. On one hand, he has made great contributions to lead the language research to the direction of “mind” and “cognition”, on the other hand, he has also misled the direction of linguistic research in the world for decades, which should be reversed.

The first principle in the Embodied Philosophy created by Lakoff and Johnson is “The mind is inherently embodied”, which is the most contrary to Saussurean and Chomkyean philosophy theories and has extremely important historical significance in the linguistic field. In recent years, we have proposed ECL on this basis, and highlighted the position of materialism in linguistics, in



order to reverse the situation in which Saussure, Chomsky and others have dominated the linguistics stage based on idealism for nearly a century. Wang (2007: 288) further thinks about the materialist view of language to solve the questions of “what is the basis of the embodiment?”, “what mainly should be embodied?” and “how to embody?”, trying to illustrate the process of how matter determines the consciousness, which is also a kind of supplement to materialism.

### **5.3. Humanism**

The ancient Greek philosophers, for the purpose of “seeking the truth and loving wisdom”, kept questioning the nature of the world and established the metaphysical philosophy of objectivism, ignoring people’s subjective imagination. The long Middle Ages were an age of the “divine throne”, in which decent people were subject to the enslavement of the God. During the Renaissance of the 15th and the 16th centuries in Europe, although humanism was revived to a certain extent, under the majesty of traditional philosophical views, most scholars believed that people’s feelings were unreliable and often biased which would produce value pollution. Humanism was once again ignored by Western philosophers for various reasons. From the end of the 19th century to 1950s the early ideal language school of western philosophy of language established the philosophical view of “The language and the world are isomorphic” to criticize the illusory pseudo-propositions which metaphysics tried to prove, however the humanistic spirit was still not in their visions. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the ordinary language school in the philosophy of language and the European humanist philosophy gradually became prominent, and humanism was going out of the low tide and has gained its name by the hands of German philosophers.

Whether philosophical and linguistic studies should be based on “humanist factors” is also a watershed between postmodernist philosophy (including embodied philosophy, post-philosophy of language in China, etc.) along with ECL and the past traditional theories.

It is known to all that philosophy is mainly concerned with the relationship between “thought vs. existence (human vs. nature)” and it is obvious that both of them are closely related to human. In more than 2,000 years of exploration in the Western philosophy, traditional philosophy believes that people have subjective imagination, value faith, and prejudice, etc, but they are not conducive to obtain absolute objective truth. Therefore, people are often excluded and eventually are ruthlessly abandoned to a marginalized ending by Western philosophers, such as the Cartesian Paradigm which blatantly excludes living people.

Saussure and Chomsky’s, strictly following this way, pursue the objective nature of language as the guideline, so that the factor of the human is relentlessly driven out of the field of language research. Especially Chomsky has forcefully used “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ” which is the formalist method of describing and interpreting the language, ignoring humanist factors and deeply falling into the quagmire of traditional objectivist philosophy.

Each of the three principles of the Embodied Philosophy mentioned above involves humans as a subjective part. “Mind, thought and concept” are the results of “only human being makes it” which is said by Xie Liu, a famous Chinese philosopher of Southern Liang Dynasty. There is no direct connection between language and the outside world, during which there must be participation of human, and traditional viewpoints of referential theory, objectivist philosophy, logical positivism, truth value theory, picture theory, scientism, and formalization are all questioned because of the

neglect or abandonment of the humanistic spirit, and are criticized by postmodern philosophers.

Since the Renaissance, most modern scholars in the West believe in the doctrine of “rational human” and “scientism”, which has made the academic circle often abandon the realistic people, which has formed the opposition of “human vs. nature”. As we all know, it is precisely because of people that we have language and linguistics. This kind of theory which has discarded the humanism in the research must have inherent problems, and lack further explanation because it finally kicks people who have created the language originally out of the field of language research, which is far from the “three adequacies” advocated by Chomsky!

Western scholars have sometimes shifted to another extreme, proposing “radical humanism” and excessively promoting human subjectivity. Under the misleading of the slogan of “anthropocentrism”, people get complacent, arrogant, and infinitely demanding from nature, making the environment destroyed and an ecological imbalance has appeared, which has been severely criticized by today’s academic circles. We also disagree with the “radical humanism” or “pessimistic humanism” proposed by some foreign postmodernists, indiscriminately criticizing the “human subject” (Wang, 2006: 124), deconstructing Sartre’s “human precedence” and abandoning the human subject is also inappropriate. Foucault’s (1966) proposition that “man is dead” also seems difficult to stand on its own.

Constructive postmodernists vigorously advocate that people and nature should live in harmony, which is the right choice of the times. And harmony between human and nature must be achieved by humans and nothing can help. What will happen to the world without its enforcer? Sartre’s Existentialism of “man has precedence in his existential” is still reasonable. There is no need for the academic circle to pursue novelty blindly by opposing everything.

From this analysis, we deeply realize the profound meaning of the sentence which is “postmodernism inherited from modernism”. Modernism advocates that humanism has its own merits, but it is inappropriate to change it into “anthropocentrism”. And the postmodernists advocate “radical humanism” for a while, and then appeal “pessimistic humanism” for a while, and chant the slogan of “deconstructing the human subject”. These are all wrong. What we oppose is “anthropocentrism”, but we cannot abandon human subjects. The traditional Chinese philosophical view of “extremity makes opposition” is still very reasonable, according to which we do not accept the overstatement of postmodernists and should treat “humanism” correctly!

We have conformed to this humanistic thought, based on the main ideas of Embodied Philosophy and CL, and also on the views of materialism and humanism, we have summarized the core principles of ECL as: “Reality-Cognition-Language”, which is entitled “embodied principle”. We firmly believe that language is formed in the process of “embodied interaction” (embodied) and “cognitive processing” (cognition) with the real world, emphasizing that only under the effect of human cognition, language is possible to be connected with reality, which is also consistent with “the universalism of embodied cognitivity” and “subject-object-subject multiple interaction understanding model (SOS for short)” proposed by Wang (2009). Based on this argument, Wang (2008) have also demonstrated why the 40 English translations of *Night Mooring by Maple Bridge* have similarities and differences, which can be illustrated by cognitive construal. Yang and Wu (2015, 2017, 2019, 2020) have shown the intersubjectivity’s significant role in language production such as *ziji*, verb doubling cleft construction in Chinese and Chinese passive construction. Zhao (2019a,

2019b) has illustrated the establishment of intersubjectivity both in the evolution of first pronouns in Chinese and English pronouns. It not only can better explain the basic situation of the language both is English and Chinese, but also applies to human understanding and information dissemination.

## **6. The view of “Elephant and Leopard” and Pluralism in linguistics research**

### **6.1. The view of “Elephant and Leopard” based on postmodern philosophy**

The fourth turn of Western philosophy formed under the impetus of the French legions of postmodern philosophy, namely “postmodern philosophy” (Wang, 2019a: §3), spreads all over the world like a ghost. On the one hand, humanistic spirit has been truly publicized and attracted much attention. On the other hand, the trend of “deconstruction, subversion, destruction and criticism” is at its peak. Deconstruction of foundation, criticism of tradition, reflection of rationality, resistance to metaphysics, opposition to duality and subversion of center have also turned into a new trend in the academic world. Subsequently, “constructive” postmodern thoughts have emerged in the United States and other places, practicing the thought of “not only to destroy the old world, but also build a new world”, bringing the study of social humanities into a new era, and making the two fields of literature and translation have undergone earth-shaking changes.

Postmodern philosophers oppose monism as well as dualism, simultaneously advocating the pluralism. The so-called Perspectivism also holds this position which denies absolute truth and emphasizes that people will have different feelings if they observe the same thing from different angles. And everyone can draw their own unique insights from its own unique position, insisting to redress the wrong idea to “prejudice”. Feyerabend (1975), a famous postmodern philosopher, summed up this view in the simple saying as “Anything goes.” Deleuze (1994) once compared thought to “the dice”. “Thought is a roll of a dice”, he said, in order to emphasize diversity and contingency.

ECL accepted the influence of anti-foundationalism, decentralism, and pluralism, and put forward the “Elephant and Leopard”, which holds that there is no objective ultimate truth or absolute unity essence in the world. Language research is no exception. It can have multiple essences and perspectives, so it doesn’t have to be one and the same. “Let all flowers in bloom and all thoughts in argument” is the essence of scholarship.

There are two common idioms in Chinese: “the blind men and the elephant” and “seeing a leopard only by a glimpse of few dots”. The former idioms tell a story that six blind men touched different parts of an elephant from different angles, thus telling the whole elephant what it looked like. The latter means to recognize a leopard by a glimpse of a spot. Both of the idioms are intended to criticize the one-sided view of “overgeneralization”. But postmodern philosophers argue these two idioms are reasonable because it is impossible for us to touch or see the whole object all at once. It is inevitable to know the whole through parts, because people can never see the six sides of a cube at the same time. According to this idea, man is always on the way searching for truth, and it is impossible to recognize the whole truth of the world. Perhaps the metonymy mechanism as “part for whole”, which is discussed in detail by CL, is an inescapable human destiny.

Linguistic schools are often established by different linguists based on a certain theory from a certain angle. For example, Saussure, the father of modern linguistics, established the structuralism

theory by “closing the door to research language” based on the “empiricism”. Chomsky constructed the transformational generative linguistics by “closing the door to research syntax” based on the “nativism”. CL discusses the embodiment and cognitive aspects of language from the perspective of criticizing Saussure and Chomsky. Based on the “dialectical materialism” of Marxism-Leninism, “embodied philosophy” of Lakoff and Johnson and “postmodern philosophy” of the fourth turn of western philosophy, ECL emphasizes the embodied cognitive principle of “reality-cognition-language”, which can make up for the shortcomings of previous theories. It is clear from the above that there exists no linguistic theory which can solve all the problems of language, and there exists no method that can cover the entire world. The road of language exploration is endless.

In a word, it is impossible for people to recognize the whole nature of language on the basis of existing knowledge at that time. We are still far from this goal, so we can only make a partial understanding from a certain perspective, always walking on the way of metonymy of “part for whole”, and practicing the dialectical principle of “negation of negation”. This is the conclusion pointed out by Hu (2012) that “Sometimes truth is not in one theory, but among multiple theories”. Accordingly, the scholar must bear in mind that “to take a longer view”, must not again make the mistake of “cannot see the wood for the trees”. Of course, when you are trying to redress the misunderstanding of two idioms of “elephant and leopard”, you don’t have to keep to one opinion. You should try to touch as many different parts of the elephant as possible, see as many spots on the leopard as possible, and examine the problem from as many angles as possible. This is the “pluralism” proposed by postmodern philosophy, which advocates tolerance, inclusiveness, integration through win-win path, and realizes the organic combination of “selfness” and “otherness”.

## 6.2. Language is pluralistic

The various properties of language described in the current linguistic works or textbooks at home and abroad also fully prove the correctness of the view of “the Elephant and the Leopard”. So far, scholars’ views on the nature of language mainly involve: sociality, universality, nationality, communicativeness, systematicness, semioticalness, mentality, arbitrariness, generativeness, etc. And we also notice that different linguistic schools tend to emphasize different natures of language. Structural Linguistics emphasizes the systematicness, semioticalness and arbitrariness of language; Systemic Functional Linguistics emphasizes the sociality, communicativeness and function of language; Transformational Generative Linguistics emphasizes the nativism, mentality and generativeness of language; ECL emphasizes the embodiment, integration and iconicity of language.

What we have discussed is “language has the nature of embodied cognition”, which is a new understanding of the nature of language and the simplest and most general expression to explain the causes of language at all levels.

This new understanding of language has been mentioned sporadically by foreign scholars so far, but no paper or work has been published to formally explain this new understanding of language. Based on the above ideas, we have published dozens of articles in this century to formally propose and preliminarily discuss the recognition of language, which is a new understanding of the nature of language. It has also attracted extensive attention from scholars at home and abroad and won their strong support. These articles, reprinted by Reprinted in Information Center for Social Science of Renmin University of China, are widely cited by peer scholars. But this does not mean that ECL can solve all problems.

In the course of the three linguistic revolutions of the 20th century, each theory flourished over about 50 to 60 years. We believe that ECL appearing after CL has thrived for half a century, and there must be newer and more explanatory theories proposed after ECL.

## 7. Conclusion

Since we have proposed embodiment perspective on language more than ten years ago, we now have received many scholars' responses. In particular, its core principle of Reality-Cognition-Language has great explanatory power and is applicable to all levels of language. Our team has published dozens of articles around this core principle, and officially published the book *Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics* by the Commercial Press (Wang, 2020), which will play a positive role in promoting the popularization and development of this discipline.

The basic theory advocated by ECL is also consistent with the philosophical concept of "perceptual knowledge vs. rational knowledge". Materialists believe that human knowledge originates from sensibility, but it must be sublimated to become rational knowledge, and such knowledge is more reliable. Therefore, we have both sensibility and rationality in the study. ECL uses the word "embodied" to represent the former Tǐ, and the word "cognitive" to represent the latter Rèn. Two mental processes are closely combined, which better reflects this philosophical position. Not only does language originate from embodiment (sensibility and rationality), but all human knowledge originates from embodiment. Human life is about embodiment, and the history of human development is a continuous embodiment processing. Scholars of philosophy of language believe that all human knowledge is stored in language, so it is reasonable of Wang (2013, 2015) to position ECL as a continuation of philosophy of language.

The academic community has always advocated the close combination of theory and practice, and ECL is also making efforts to practice this basic spirit, such as Liu (2020) using ECL to explain the Chinese rhetoric devices. It has not only achieved some development in theory, but also has great significance in practice. Teaching under the guidance of "embodied and cognitive" will surely get better results (Wang and Wang, 2019b).

ECL is the inheritance and development of CL which is the current mainstream school of linguistics (Wang, 2019d). It is regarded as an inheritance because ECL has accepted CL' theoretical basis—"Embodied Philosophy" and several cognitive strategies; it is referred to a development because Embodied Philosophy and CL have failed to clarify their materialist philosophical standpoint. The humanistic and social understanding in language research is also unclear. Based on this, we have reflected on Saussurean and Chomskyeian idealist standpoints and corrected their errors of ignoring individual differences and neglecting social aspect in language research. At the same time, Lakoff and Johnson's descriptions on "cognition" is vague. Its scope could be sometimes too broad or simply limited to embodied cognition, and both of the two scopes have failed to justify themselves. Therefore, we propose ECL in order to make a little development of CL.

## Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge funding support from humanities and social sciences program of Chongqing Municipal Education Commission “The Cognitive Study on the Mechanism of Chinese New Constructions on the Perspective of the Dynamic Categorization Theory” (No. 21SKGH139), and scientific research program of Sichuan International Studies University “The Cognitive Study on the Mechanism of Chinese New Constructions on the Perspective of the Dynamic Categorization Theory” (No. sisu2019028).

## References

- Chomsky N (1957) *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Chomsky N (1965) *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Chomsky N (1968) *Language and Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
- Dąbrowska E (2016) Cognitive Linguistics’ seven deadly sins. *Cognitive Linguistics* 27: 479–491.
- Deleuze G (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. Patton P (trans). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Feyerabend PK (1975) *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*. Zhou (trans) (2007). Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
- Foucault M (1966) *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Mo (trans) (2001). Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Hu Z (2012) Man, language and existence: Five queries about Heidegger’s view of language. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* 44: 803–814.
- Johnson M (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff G (1970) A note on vagueness and ambiguity. *Linguistic Inquiry* 1: 357–359.
- Lakoff G (1972) Hedges: A study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts. In: *Chicago Linguistic Society Papers*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lakoff G (1973) Fuzzy grammar and the performance/competence terminology game. In: Corum C, Smith-Stark TC and Werser A (eds) *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago, pp.271–291.
- Lakoff G and Johnson M (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff G (1987) *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff G and Johnson M (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh—The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Li H (2002) On the image of the speaker from the perspective of the communicative structure of sentences. *Foreign Language Research* 4: 46–50.
- Li H (2005) On the image of the speaker at the word level: A study on philosophy of language. *Foreign Language Research* 5: 45–50.
- Li H and Wang J (2011) A research on subjective meaning and its structure. *Foreign Language Education* 32: 16–20.
- Liu Y (2020) Embodied construal of Chinese figures and their classification. *Foreign Language Education* 41: 25–31.
- Pan W (2006) Linguistics as human studies. *Journal of Baicheng Normal University* 1: 1–4.
- Saussure F (1916) *Course in General Linguistics*. Gao M (trans) (1996). Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Wang Y (2001) Cognitive Linguistics in Lakoff & Johnson’s writings. *Journal of Foreign Languages* 4: 15–21.
- Wang Y (2002) The philosophical basis for Cognitive Linguistics: Embodied philosophy. *Foreign Language*

- Teaching and Research* 2: 82–89, 160.
- Wang Y (2007) *Cognitive Linguistics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Wang Y (2008) The interpretation of subjectivity-objectivity in translation by means of “Embodied conceptualization”—An analysis of 40 English translations of “Night Mooring by Maple Bridge”. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* 3: 211–217, 241.
- Wang Y (2009) Multi-dimensional interactive understanding of subject-object-subject. *Philosophical Trends* 10: 84–89.
- Wang Y (2011) Contemporary research on metaphor in the viewpoint of Post-modernism philosophy. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching* 32: 3–8.
- Wang Y (2013) Embodied philosophy and Cognitive Linguistics is the continuation of philosophy of language: The 29<sup>th</sup> paper on Embodied Cognition of language. *Foreign Language in China* 51: 18–25.
- Wang Y (2014) Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics in the viewpoint of postmodernism. *Foreign Language and Literature* 30: 61–67.
- Wang Y (2015) The theoretical exploration and practical value of Embodied-Cognitive Monism: A new thought on philosophy of mind. *Foreign Languages in China* 12(2): 24–31.
- Wang Y (2019a) *Postmodern Trend, the 4<sup>th</sup> Turn in Western Philosophy: Exploring the Frontiers of Humanity and Social Sciences in the World*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Wang Y and Wang T (2019b) English grammar teaching based on Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics. *Foreign Language World* 190: 44–52.
- Wang Y (2019c) A glimpse on the 70-year research of Linguistics. *Language Education* 7: 30–35.
- Wang Y (2019d) Essential thoughts on Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics. *Foreign Languages in China* 92: 18–25.
- Wang Y (2020) *Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Wang Z (2006) *A Study of Postmodern Philosophical Movement*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Yang X and Wu Y (2015) Whether or not multiple occurrences of *ziji* can take distinct antecedents: A deictic perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics* 87: 142–155.
- Yang X and Wu Y (2017) A dynamic account of verb doubling cleft construction in Chinese. *Language Sciences* 59: 69–82.
- Yang X and Wu Y (2019) A dynamic account of *lian...dou* in Chinese verb doubling cleft construction. *Lingua* 217: 24–44.
- Yang X and Wu Y (2020) On the scope of quantifier phrases in Chinese passive construction. *International Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 7: 71–89.
- Zhao Y (2019a) A study on language intersubjectivity from Embodied-Cognitive linguistics: Taking the evolution of first pronouns in Chinese as an example. *Foreign Languages in China* 16: 50–56.
- Zhao Y (2019b) A study of the construction of linguistic intersubjectivity based on English pronouns. *Foreign Language and Literature* 35: 8–14.