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The words about Memory

Introduction: Words about Memory

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Introduction: Words about Memory

Frank Arnould, Stéphanie Béligon and Céline Souchay

- 1 We are pleased to inaugurate the “Words about...” series of *Lexis – Journal in English Lexicology* with the first issue on “Words about memory”.
- 2 Defined by the *OED* as “[t]he faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past”, memory is a key issue in the development and functioning of contemporary societies, whether in the form of the duty of remembrance, computer memory or memory disorders affecting an aging population. It is addressed by countless disciplines, each with its own objectives and characteristics, to the point that it may seem pointless to speak of memory as a single entity: clearly, it has many facets, which are explored in this issue of *Lexis – Journal in English Lexicology*. Specializing in lexical questions, this journal has a contribution to make to the study of memory by helping to clarify the uses of a polysemous and polyphonic word.
- 3 This interdisciplinary issue includes contributions from terminology, linguistics – both synchronic and diachronic –, history, philosophy, cognitive psychology, literature and psychoanalysis. The studies, which cover more than two thousand years of history, focus on English (Digonnet, Cziganj), English for specific purposes (Arnould, Meyers, Michaelian, Sakuragi & Dranseika), French (Arnould, Luciani), Greek and Latin (Fendel) as well as five sign languages (De Monte).
- 4 The corpora studied are varied: scientific articles from different disciplines (Arnould, Meyers, Michaelian, Sakuragi & Dranseika), “livres de raison” from the 15th to the 18th century (Luciani), narrative texts (Cziganj), poetry (Garnier-Tardieu), foundational texts of psychoanalysis (Alliot).
- 5 Using these multiple perspectives, the contributions examine the words used to designate memory, and how these words or metaphors represent and shape our understanding of memory; they present and question the terminological tools used in the field of memory; they analyze the words designating memory to better understand the epistemology of memory (in computer science, philosophy and psychology). Finally, they examine the role of words in what makes up memory.

- 6 In his article “CogMemo: a standardized, structured and formalized terminological repository on human memory”, **Frank Arnould** presents CogMemo, a bilingual French-English cognitive psychology thesaurus available in open-access. Created in April 2018, the thesaurus, which today contains over 1,400 entries, aims to formalize and standardize the terminology relating to human memory. Frank Arnould points out that sharing information and data in any scientific field requires unambiguous terminology, hence the importance of thesauri such as CogMemo. The latter enables terminological standardization, as it includes a list of preferred terms specified to denote each concept based on the frequency of use; CogMemo also offers hierarchical and associative relationships that can disambiguate certain terms.

Arnould also presents the various possible uses of CogMemo: machine-readable, it is an indexing and annotation tool, but it also provides information that enables the transfer of theoretical information to concrete applications. The author explains that CogMemo can be used in the legal field, since it groups 160 concepts in a section devoted specifically to memory and law.

Finally, Arnould discusses the difficulties posed by the creation of CogMemo - due to the need to find equivalences between French and English, or to the lack of terminological consensus in distinct theoretical frameworks - before concluding on the thesaurus’s prospects, notably that of including all disciplines that deal with memory.

- 7 From wax tablets to computers, human cultures, philosophers or scientists use metaphors to understand the abstract concept of memory by linking it to more concrete conceptual sources. The article by **Rémi Digonnet** and that of **Charlène Meyers**, based on corpus analyses, confirm the diversity of the conceptual metaphors of memory, while stressing that some appear more fundamental than others. Digonnet’s study thus proposes a contrastive study of the metaphors of memory in English and French, based on qualitative and quantitative analyses of corpus (dictionaries and American general corpus, respectively) to identify and compare the privileged source domains of metaphors in each language. The most frequent metaphorical sources allow the author to propose a definition of memory that appears as a “visible containing object, both spatialized and quantified”. A fascinating aspect of the article is therefore to show how the identified metaphors reify a concept as intangible as that of memory, and give importance to vision to figure an entity yet considered invisible. The author concludes his study by proposing a chronological metaphorical model of memory for the English language: each memory stage (cause of memory, existence of memory, control of memory, action, loss or gain of memory) seems to have its own metaphorical sources.

Meyers’ article explores the migration and adaptation of conceptual metaphors of memory from classical computers, inspired by human memory, to quantum computers. By analyzing a corpus of *Scientific American* articles, the author observes that although certain metaphorical sources, such as CONTAINER, OBJECT, PERSON and CHANGE, have been transferred from one domain to the other, the differences in proportion nevertheless suggest distinct conceptualizations. A surprising discovery reveals that during the transition from classical computing to quantum computing, the source domains of metaphors tend to be “improved”. For example, the metaphor A COMPUTER IS A CONTAINER evolves to A QUANTUM COMPUTER IS A SUPER CONTAINER. In addition, quantum computing introduces its own metaphors of memory directly from quantum physics, using concepts such as quantum entanglement and superposition. A particularly interesting

result reveals a form of metaphorical nomadism in return: from the metaphorical migration of human cognition to classical computing and from classical computing to quantum computing, the latter itself becomes a source of metaphors for human cognition.

These two articles, based on different corpora, suggest that the general language and the specialized language of computer science use conceptual metaphors of memory that are both convergent (memory is a container and an object) and divergent, which seems to indicate partly different conceptualizations of the entity.

- 8 In her paper entitled “Memory in the signifying body. An insight into lexicon from different sign languages”, **Maria T. De Monte** analyzes how several sign languages (Italian, Brazilian, American, British and Japanese Sign languages) encode the concept of memory. She notices that although in several spoken languages – English, French or Japanese, for instance – memory is located metaphorically in various parts of the body – such as the heart – or even the environment, from a neurological point of view, memory is located in the brain or in the head. The author uses Spreadthesign among other linguistic resources and observes that in the sign languages under scrutiny, the signs referring to memory are positioned around the head. Maria T. De Monte relies on Conceptual Metaphor Theory to conclude that sign languages relate more closely to the embodied and cultural experience of memory than spoken languages do.
- 9 In her article “Crossing thresholds: the lexicalization and performance of memory in early imperial funerary inscriptions from Sicily”, **Victoria Beatrix Fendel** analyzes the language used in the funerary and honorific inscriptions of three Sicilian cities at the beginning of the Imperial Roman Empire (from the year 1 BC to 401 AD). By examining various forms of complex lexical units (phrasemes) present in these inscriptions, the study reveals a striking result: in this post-colonial, multicultural and multilingual society (Greek and Latin), the language of the tombs is not static. It reflects both cultural convergence and flexibility at the social and individual levels in the expression of memory towards the deceased. The cemetery, as a heterotopic space, thus appears as a privileged place for this externalized linguistic expression of memory and identity.
- 10 In her contribution entitled “Spiritual and Medical Dimensions of the Language of Memory in Middle English Texts”, **Natalia Cziganj** uses two sub-corpora drawn from the *Corpus of Middle English prose and Verse* (CMEPV) of over 2 million words to analyze how memory and recollection are presented: she examines the context of use of the words *memorie*, *remembraunce* and *mynde* and the collocations they form, as well as the metaphors referring to memory. She concludes that in early Middle English texts, memory is not presented as a singular mental activity since general terms for thinking were used to refer to remembering, but adds that the lexical field of memory expanded in the second half of the 14th century. Throughout the period studied, the concept of memory evolves from a cardio-centric to a cephalocentric model: the brain is eventually seen as the seat of memory, which is also considered to be under the influence of the humoral system. Furthermore, the author shows that memory is at the junction of health, morality and the soul’s connection to the divine, and that it is linked to devotional exercises that serve to anchor divine truths in the human soul.
- 11 **Isabelle Luciani** studies a corpus of two hundred “livres de raison” from Provençal archives from the 15th to the 18th centuries: these registers are first and foremost account books, intended to serve as reminders and archives. They are sometimes handed down over several generations and are kept successively by several family

members, thus embodying a family memory. Theoretically, those “livres de raison” have nothing to do with personal diaries, and yet they are produced as the expression of an “I” emanating from individual scribes who do not always identify themselves. In spite of their heterogeneous content and authors, these daily writings are all based on the need to remember, a need fulfilled by the new material and technical possibilities offered by writing.

Isabelle Luciani examines how “a lexical semantics of memory” is constructed, and shows how a representation of memory as a receptacle, “a place for the sedimentation of information” emerges in the object that is the “livre de raison”; as written by one of the scribes, “les mémoires” (in the masculine) and “la mémoire” merge into the same word.

At the crossroads between collective and individual memory, these books bear witness to the way in which the writers represent memory – their family’s memory and their personal memories, in which their emotions come to the fore. Writing down the events they go through is a way of immortalizing what they consider worthy of immortalizing, of ordering the facts and revealing “the truth”.

- 12 The article by **Kourken Michaelian**, **Shin Sakuragi** and **Vilius Dranseika** confirms an important event in the study of memory: the recent renewed interest in philosophy in this subject of investigation and its development as a coherent field of research. The originality of the article is to base its conclusions on bibliometric and quantitative analyses of the literature, based on documents stored in the PhilMemBib bibliographic database, specialized in the philosophy of memory in the 20th century. Based on correspondance analysis to estimate the temporal evolution of the terms present in the abstracts and/or titles of these publications, the authors demonstrate that this renewal is accompanied by changes in the objects of study. Since 2015, philosophers have been more willing to integrate into their work the concepts and terms of empirical sciences such as cognitive psychology (for example, episodic memory and mental time travel). To what extent do these scientific disciplines integrate in return, today more than yesterday, the results, concepts and terms of this new philosophy of memory? Answering this question would be an interesting continuation of the work of Kourken Michaelian and his colleagues, thus making it possible to evaluate the existence of a mutual enrichment, both terminological and conceptual, between philosophy and the other sciences of memory.

- 13 **Julien Alliot**, in his contribution entitled “The psychoanalytical investigation of memory: a subversion of subjectivity”, looks at how Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan approach memory and oblivion. The author points out that in the “talking cure”, Freud relies first and foremost on language to bring to light the conflicts concealed in memory. Memory thus constitutes a territory that needs to be uncovered through linguistic associations.

According to Alliot, Freud sees memory as a text, of which human subjects are the transcription. Lacan, on the other hand, regards memory, closely linked to the “parlêtre”, as a signifying structure that dominates our lives. Alliot concludes with the image of memory as a text that it is up to the subject to decipher in order to understand how it affects him or her.

- 14 The last paper in this issue is **Claire Garnier-Tardieu**’s “lover’s dictionary to Kathleen Raine’s works”; the author draws on the French publisher Plon’s “dictionnaires amoureux” to take us on a stroll through the life and work of the British writer

Kathleen Raine (1908-2003). Garnier-Tardieu illustrates each of the nearly thirty entries she has selected with a quotation by Raine before offering an erudite and impassioned analysis: she leads us from Bavington, the poetess's childhood paradise in Northumberland to India, *via* Cambridge and France. This lover's dictionary introduces us to the figures who marked Raine's life and work: the writer's mother, Jessie Wilkie, her soul mate Gavin Maxwell, but also Virginia Woolf, whom she met twice, and Yeats, to whom she dedicated numerous essays. Garnier-Tardieu also discusses the motifs that suffuse Raine's writings: the blackbird, Eden, flowers, the hyacinth, and she shows their significance in her works. The dictionary thus celebrates the poetess of multiple influences – William Blake, Platonism and Neoplatonism, Hinduism and Buddhism – for whom memory, inextricably linked to the imagination, is central to poetic creation.

- 15 We hope that this multi-disciplinary enquiry across time and language will shed some light on the consubstantial nature of words and the constitution of memory.

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