The Quasi-Linguistic Structure of Iyengar Yoga Āsana Practice. An Analysis from the Perspective of Cognitive Grammar

Matylda Ciołkosz
Institute for the Study of Religion
Jagiellonian University

Abstract

The objective of the paper is to draw attention to the possible relevance of the categories of cognitive linguistics for the structural analysis of ritual. Taking the Iyengar Yoga *āsana* practice as an example, the author proposes to treat it as a quasi-linguistic phenomenon and analyses the symbolic structure of its elements (single *āsanāni*). The tools applied in this pursuit are the basic categories of Langacker's cognitive grammar. By pointing to the key tenets of cognitive linguistics, including the claim concerning the symbolic (and, thus, semantic) nature of grammar, the author attempts to rephrase Staal's thesis concerning the meaninglessness of ritual to accommodate it to the cognitive (or, more precisely, enactive) paradigm. She suggests a possible relationship between the schematic symbolic nature of ritual and the specific symbolic nature of doctrine. After some of the most salient linguistic phenomena within Iyengar Yoga *āsana* practice are described, their coherence with certain doctrinal interpretations is briefly discussed.

Słowa kluczowe: Iyengar, nowoczesna joga posturalna, asana, enaktywizm, gramatyka kognitywna, rytuał
Keywords: Iyengar, Modern Postural Yoga, *āsana*, enactivism, cognitive grammar, ritual

The objective of the present paper is to indicate the possible relevance of the categories of cognitive linguistics for the structural analysis of ritual. The analysed ritual is the *āsana* practice in so-called Iyengar Yoga. The main thesis, proven through the application of the categories of Ronald Langacker's cognitive grammar, is that this practice is a structured phenomenon, and that its structure corresponds to the structure of language. Treating yogic postures and their sequences as quasi-linguistic, symbolic phenomena opens up perspectives for the study of the relationship between

ritual structure and doctrinal interpretations. Finding coherence between the schematic semantic structures underlying Iyengar Yoga *āsana* practice and the specific semantic structures of Iyengar's exposition of the categories of *Sāṃkhya-Yoga* may point to the significance of the embodied experience acquired during practice for the understanding of some of the most basic Indian religio-philosophical notions.

The main tenets of cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics has garnered attention in recent years as a useful analytical device within the study of religions.[1] However, it seems that the main focus so far has been the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphor, as proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.[2] Apparently, the ingenuity and universal applicability of this theory has rendered it so popular that some outside observers come to equate it with cognitive linguistics in general. It must be stressed, however, that the cognitive theory of tropes is not the very core of cognitive linguistics, but rather a necessary implication of its most basic tenets.

At the core of the cognitive approach to language is the observation that all linguistic meaning is built upon the embodied experience. As all cognitive structures are derived from recurrent sensorimotor patterns,[3] also linguistic structures are constructed and interpreted based on these patterns. The most rudimentary experience of the body – its orientation in and movement through space, its perceptive activity and interaction with the environment – provides the basis for language. Linguistic expressions are assembled from and interpreted through embodied schematic models. Mark Johnson calls the schematic units of embodied meaning *image schemata*.[4] They are recurrent structures of perceptive and motor programmes abstracted from everyday experience, in the form of general templates. They are complex, *i.e.* made up of parts and relations. They are also malleable, so they may be modified and filled with any amount of detail to create an infinite number of what Johnson calls "rich images". For example, a schema of an object moving into a container may be applied to interpret and model an expression such as "John entered the room", but also "an infection entered the wound" or "the two countries entered into an agreement".

The other important assumption of the cognitive approach towards language is that grammar is semantic. According to Langacker, all grammatical categories – starting with such basics as a noun or a verb and ending with composite structures – are grounded in the embodied experience, based on the embodied schemata, and thus

---

[1] See *e.g.* J. Jurewicz, *Kosmogonia Rygwedy. Myśl i metafora,* Warszawa 2001; E. Slingerland, *Effortless Action. Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*, Oxford 2003.

[2] G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago 1980.

[3] This is the main claim of an approach referred to by Varela *et al.* as "enactive". See F.J. Varela, E.T. Thompson, E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge 1993, p. 172 ff.

[4] M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago 1987, pp. 18–40.

meaningful.[5] For the present discussion, the schematic background of some rudimentary grammatical phenomena is of importance.[6] A noun, for instance, is schematically represented by what Langacker refers to as a "thing". Prototypically it is a material object, but generally it is any product of the mental capacity of grouping and reification. By virtue of this capacity, a notion as abstract as "yoga" can be construed as a "thing", being a delimited set of practices based on a delimited set of religio-philosophical assumptions and represented as a group of entities bound together on the basis of their historical, cultural and phenomenological tangency. The schema for a verb, on the other hand, is a "process", *i.e.* a set of relations between "things" represented sequentially within the temporal domain. Prototypically it is a non-material interaction associated with transfer of energy. A distinction needs to be made between perfective verbs, for which the construed relation is heterogenous (thus changing through time) and imperfectives, for which this relation remains unaltered (is homogenous). A participle, though a derivative of the verb, differs significantly in its schematic representation. Though a process, it is reified and construed in a summary fashion within a bounded temporal scope. Finally, a preposition is also represented summarily as a heterogenous (*into, upwards*) or homogenous (*in, up*) relation. It is, however, construed independently of the temporal domain.

Frits Staal, language and ritual

One of the scholars who postulated similarity between the structure of language and that of ritual was Frits Staal. In his analysis of the Vedic ritual of *Agnicayana*, Staal applied the categories of Noam Chomsky's generative grammar.[7] He proposed understanding ritual as a hierarchical rather than linear structure, in which in a more complex unit smaller ritual structures are embedded, consisting of even smaller singular rites. He claimed that the alterations of smaller units within larger systems can be described with reference to Chomsky's transformational rules.

Staal's most significant thesis is that ritual is essentially asemantic.[8] Being a form of orthopraxy rather than an expression of orthodoxy, it is devoid of any original external semantic references. Just like music, it is pure structure, pure syntax.[9] Thus, it cannot convey meaning directly, and any doctrinal references to it are made *ex post facto* in an arbitrary manner. If the author of the present paper represents this claim correctly, according to Staal the meaningful doctrine and the meaningless ritual constitute two originally independent domains, connected in a vague manner only through *post hoc* rationalisation.

---

[5] R. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*, Oxford 2008, p. 4.

[6] *Ibidem*, pp. 112 ff.

[7] F. Staal, *Rituals and Mantras. Rules without Meaning*, Delhi 1996, pp. 52–60, 85–114.

[8] *Ibidem*, pp. 131–140.

[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 165–190.

The foregoing thesis is in line with the assumption that syntax precedes semantics.[10] This assumption, however, is not upheld by the proponents of cognitive grammar, who postulate that (embodied) meaning precedes syntax, rendering it meaningful. Thus, if the categories of cognitive grammar are to be applied to the analysis of ritual, Staal's thesis needs to be rephrased. In fact, it seems that what Staal refers to as "meaningless" may be considered entirely "meaningful" from the standpoint of cognitive grammar. If a discrepancy between the standpoints of Staal and Langacker arises, it is mainly due to the differences in the definitions of the term.

By saying that ritual is meaningless, Staal claims that it is self-contained and does not bear any direct correspondence to doctrinal notions. He does, however, coin the term "structural meaning", referring to the internal syntactic relations between the elements of ritual.[11] It seems that this term is relatively close to the concept of meaning adapted by Langacker. According to the latter, being semantic means being represented conceptually in relation to embodied schemata. Thus a conceptual structure grounded in the embodied experience is a meaningful one. It seems obvious that all ritual actions, in order to be performed, need to be represented conceptually. Thus, from the standpoint of cognitive grammar, they need to be considered meaningful.

It seems that the difference between ritual and doctrine is not so much the difference between meaninglessness and meaningfulness as that between schematicity and specificity of meaning. According to Langacker, in language there exists no clear distinction between grammar and lexicon.[12] Pure grammar and pure lexicon are rather two poles of a continuum, with schematic representations situated at the grammatical and specific representations at the lexical pole. The study of yoga rituals may lead one to suppose that the interpretative activity taking place within religious traditions might also form a continuum, with a "pure ritual" pole at one end and a "pure doctrine" pole at the other. The meaning situated at the ritual pole would be entirely schematic, limited to the raw embodied schemata abstracted from ritual actions. The meaning at the doctrinal pole would be specific, based on rich images, mostly of a metaphorical character. However, just as many composite linguistic expressions are situated between pure lexicon and pure grammar,[13] most religious representations probably arise somewhere between the purely schematic conceptualisations of ritual actions and the rich, metaphorical doctrinal notions. This means, on the one hand, that the schemata abstracted from the embodied experience acquired during ritual may enforce better grasping of doctrinal representations by providing their schematic basis, and, on the other hand, that doctrinal notions may render the embodied ritual experience more salient. Such dialectic presupposes mutual coherence between the schematic meaning of ritual and the specific meaning of doctrine. Whether such coherence exists between the performance of *Agnicayana* and the "*ad hoc*", "arbitrary" meanings ascribed to it requires a careful study. So far it has been confirmed that coherence can be traced between the schematic structure of Iyengar Yoga *āsana* prac-

---

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 112.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 174 ff.

[12] R. Langacker, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 18 ff.

tice and the metaphorical interpretation of the categories of *Pātañjala Yoga* cultivated within the Iyengar tradition. This coherence shall be touched upon on the following pages.

The Iyengar Yoga *āsana* practice

The studied phenomenon, Iyengar Yoga (IY), constitutes part of a global, originally Anglophone movement referred to by Elizabeth de Michelis as Modern Postural Yoga.[14] This movement was initiated at the beginning of the 20th century, its main focus the practice of sequences of yogic postures (*āsana*) and breath-control techniques (*prāṇāyāma*). It developed under the influence of the European physical culture movement, imported to colonial India at the beginning of the 20th century.[15] Its loose doctrinal references, though grounded in *Sāṃkhya-Yoga Darśana*, are strongly influenced by Neo-Vedanta and Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of yoga.[16]

The founder of IY was B.K.S. Iyengar (1918–2014), a vishnuite brahmin born in Karnataka, initially a student of the yogi Tirumalai Krishnamacharya in Mysore. He spent most of his life teaching in Pune, Maharashtra, where in 1975 he founded the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute (RIMYI). In the 1950s he started teaching yoga abroad. He published several influential books, including a translation of the *Yoga Sūtra* with his own commentaries.[17]

Nowadays, the global IY community brings together thousands of enthusiasts worldwide. It has a loose structure, and the involvement of most practitioners does not go much further than attending group practice a few times a week. However, a comprehensive training programme for (numerous) teachers has functioned for decades, involving arduous, life-long practice under the supervision of elder teachers, regular visits to the RIMYI and a centrally regulated system of examinations. The more experienced teachers are expected to be familiar not only with the method of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* practice, but also with elements of Indian religio-philosophical systems.

A few features of the IY *āsana* practice are of particular significance. The first involves treating *āsana* not as an indivisible whole, but as a syntagm. Each posture is understood as a composite system comprising smaller units, *i.e.* precisely described configurations of minute body parts. These may include relations between different body parts (*e.g.* "the skin from the outer sides of the neck [moving] into the cervical vertebra"[18]), between the body part and the body *in a broad sense* (*e.g.* moving the "top outer thigh into the body"[19]) or between the body part and its surroundings

---

[14] E. de Michelis, *Modern Yoga and the Western Esoteric Tradition*, London 2004, p. 187 ff.

[15] M. Singleton, *Yoga Body. The Origin of Modern Posture Practice*, Oxford 2010, p. 81 ff.

[16] E. de Michelis, *op.cit.*, p. 208 ff.

[17] B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, New Delhi 2005 (first edition: 1993).

[18] From the transcript of a class taught by Lois Steinberg, an advanced IY teacher, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kvOB18HPr4 [accessed: 14.11.2014].

[19] From the transcript of a class taught by Geeta Iyengar, an advanced IY teacher and B.K.S. Iyengar's daughter, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyK7zmrRcwo [accessed: 14.11.2014].

(e.g. "thighs back and up").[20] For the sake of brevity and clarity, from now on these configurations shall be referred to as *somemes*. The same somemes are repeated in different postures in different configurations, which makes them slightly resemble phonemes. However, unlike phonemes as understood by structuralists, somemes are not asemantic (being direct applications of embodied schemata) and do not form distinctive oppositions.

Secondly, different *āsanāni* can be grouped in paradigmatic sets and can be combined into larger syntagms. The former are groups of postures with similar someme configurations (*e.g.* standing postures, backbends, turns, forward bends, inversions *etc.*). The latter are structured sequences of postures, arranged according to a vast set of rules. It must be noted that no limited set of sequences exists. As the rules of arranging the postures are general and concern relations either between somemes or between entire paradigmatic sets of postures rather than relations between particular *āsanāni*, the number of possible correct *āsana* configurations is practically infinite.

Finally, the *āsana* practice is interpreted in the categories of *Sāṃkhya-Yoga Darśana*. Iyengar's chief claim is that all the eight limbs (*aṣṭāṅgāni*) of *Pātañjala Yoga* (*yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna, samādhi*) are realised within *āsana*.[21] Also other categories of the *Yoga Sūtra* (*e.g.* the concept of *citta*) are interpreted and explained with reference to the experience of *āsana* practice.

Āsana practice as a ritual

So far the category of "ritual" has been referred to several times. As yet, though, there has been no explanation of how exactly it is understood and why IY *āsana* practice should belong to it. Even though the ritual character of *Agnicayana* might be self-explanatory to most scholars, calling what seems to be a secular and purely physical[22] activity a ritual might raise some eyebrows. For the purpose of the present paper the author has adapted a tentative definition of ritual, taking into consideration the findings of Staal and the definition of religion as proposed by Scott Atran,[23] with some amendments. Ritual is thus considered *a recurrent, structured, temporally and spatially bounded activity of selected members of a community, consisting of formally restricted motor and speech acts, bearing reference to a theory of universal human existential anxieties such as death, suffering, deception etc. shared by this community*. This definition seems both broad and narrow enough, and IY *āsana* practice fits within it. It is a recurrent, structured (as the forthcoming paragraphs will show),

[20] From the transcript of a class taught by Carrie Owerko, an intermediate level IY teacher, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCFOztW7j1s [accessed: 14.11.2014].

[21] B.K.S. Iyengar, *Yoga Vṛkṣa, The Tree of Yoga*, Oxford 1988, p. 51–76.

[22] One might expect Staal, in light of his conviction that ritual activity has no original doctrinal reference, to have no problem with a ritual being "purely physical". The enactive paradigm, with its focus on the category of embodiment, does not underestimate the symbolic significance of "purely physical" actions either.

[23] S. Atran, *In Gods We Trust. The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion*, Oxford 2002, p. 4.

temporally and spatially bounded activity. Its practitioners constitute a community (though a loosely structured one). The group of community members participating in a single practice may range from one to a few hundred. Iyengar's own interpretation of the cosmology and anthropology of the *Yoga Sūtra* provides the "theory of universal human existential anxieties" to which the practice refers.

The prototypical form of an IY *āsana* ritual includes a short seated meditation and a chant, mutual performance of a sequence of *āsanāni* guided by a teacher and passive relaxation. Prototypically, each *āsana* from the sequence is performed by a teacher or an assistant facing the group of practitioners, so that the group may mirror their actions. Each posture consists of the phase of entering into the pose, maintaining the pose and coming out of the pose, all according to a formalised pattern. Each phase requires first sequential and then simultaneous execution of multiple somemes. It is guided by the teacher's detailed instructions pertaining to particular somemes. The original language of the instructions is English (used in Pune and during international workshops and conventions). In schools around the globe local languages are used. The form of the instructions is illustrated well by the following passage: "Place the hands down. Now lift the elbow up slightly. And then, move the outer elbow ligaments in... keep that as you place the elbows down. And then move the outer wrists again to the small finger... now place the top of the head down... Lift the shoulders up... your bottom ear has to go back, lift the knees up. Now, bent knees, slowly come up... Lift the inner edges of the feet up... feet forward, navel back...".[24] It should be noted that "maintaining the pose" is not tantamount to passivity. Constant conceptual and motor effort is undertaken during this stage, to ensure the proper maintaining of all somemes.

The quasi-linguistic structure of Iyengar Yoga ā*sana* practice

According to Langacker, language, as a symbolic structure, is bipolar.[25] The *semantic pole* consists of conceptualisations of expressions. These are dynamic processes of generating mental representations of these expressions, based on image schemata.[26] Such activity involves mental scanning of a representation through a given domain (spatial, temporal, colour space *etc.*) in an either sequential (*i.e.* temporal) or summary (*i.e.* atemporal) manner. The *phonological pole* is understood broadly and consists of phonetic, graphic or motor representations of conceptualisations.

As a symbolic structure, *āsana* has the conceptualisation of the posture at its semantic pole. Its phonological pole, on the other hand, has two modes of representation. One consists of the actually executed posture, while the other encompasses the verbal commands pertaining to it. As the two correspond to each other, it is justifi-

---

[24] Excerpts from a transcript of Lois Steinberg teaching *sālamba śīrṣāsana*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kvOB18HPr4 [accessed: 14.11.2014].

[25] R. Langacker, *op. cit., p.* 15 ff.

[26] Langacker divides Johnson's general notion of "image schemata" into three separate categories: minimal concepts, configurational concepts and conceptual archetypes (*ibidem*, pp. 33–34). For the purposes of the present discussion such detailed division is superfluous.

able for the forthcoming analysis to sometimes refer to the motor representations and sometimes to the verbal ones. The minimal symbolic elements (*morphemes* in Langacker's sense) are somemes, being units both of articulation (executed motor patterns) and of meaning (their conceptualisation).

The preliminary analysis concerned fragments of IY classes held by senior teachers. Transcripts of the teachers' commands were juxtaposed with the dynamic structure of actual postures. So far, only single *āsanāni* have been studied, without a focus on larger syntagms. The phonological structures salient in the teachers' verbal descriptions and in actual postures were described in order to identify the conceptualisations expected at the semantic pole. The analysis was comprehensive, but the limited volume of this paper means that only a few of the most interesting phenomena may be discussed.

The first observation concerns the modes of conceptual scanning of postures through the spatio-temporal domain. It seems that during this process a gradual conceptual shift occurs from one, through two and three up to four dimensions (the fourth being the temporal one). When a four-dimensional model of the body is represented, the dimensions are wound back, so that finally the posture is reduced to two or even one spatial dimension (the temporal domain being compressed or removed altogether). This process is realised through first locating a point on the body (a delimited minute body part), then conceptualising (and executing) its linear movement (see Fig. 1). Two-dimensional conceptualisations are introduced by superimposing two linear movements in different directions and through the introduction of rotational movement. The superimposition of even more linear and rotational movements of multiple body parts gradually turns the representation of the body into a three-dimensional object.[27] Simultaneously, the increasingly complex models of the body are represented sequentially along the temporal axis. This, however, is not the end of the conceptual activity. Once a four-dimensional representation of an *āsana* is intact, the practitioner is urged to wind the dimensions back by conceptualising distant body parts as moving towards a single plane or axis. Inward movement begins to dominate and the spinal axis becomes the main reference point. In the given example, *adho mukha śvanāsana* (Fig. 2), the outer arms are moved towards the central axis of the body, and the front thighs are rotated towards it. The shoulder blades are moved into the body, thus nearing the spine, and so is the navel, receding towards the spinal column passively. Thus the entire posture becomes almost reduced to the spine. Then the upward and backward movement of the arms, the trunk and the legs encourages the practitioner to conceptualise the entire body as nearing a vertical axis running through the heels. As a result, what seems to be a complex three-dimensional construction is conceptually reduced to a line.

---

[27] An interesting example of this activity is the introduction of spiral motion. In numerous postures onto the rotational movement upward movement is superimposed. *E.g.* in turns the trunk is construed as a structure built of horizontal layers that are simultaneously rotated around the spinal axis and lifted. The salience of spiral motion is certainly of interest (it plays a major role e.g. in the *haṭha yoga* notions of the *nāḍyah* and of *kuṇḍalinī*) and requires more attention.
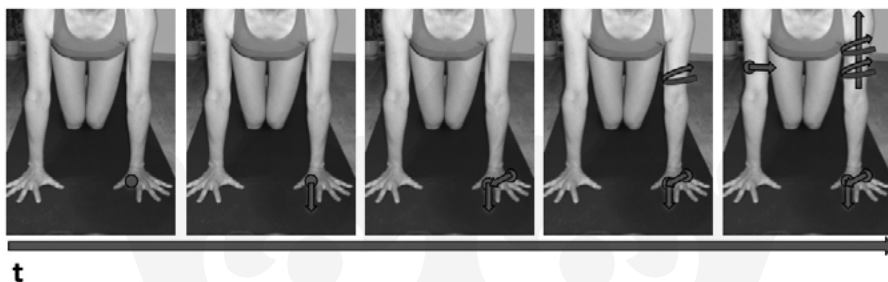
Fig. 1. The gradual development of a four-dimensional model of the posture during āsana conceptualisation and execution.
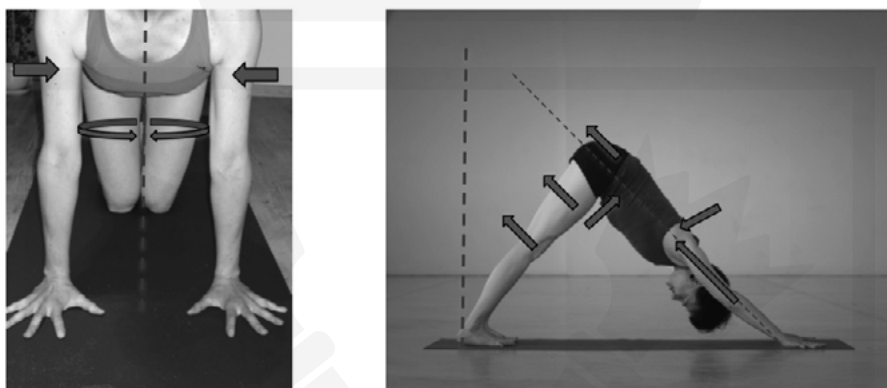

Fig. 2. The subsequent "winding" of spatial dimensions through construing the body parts as nearing a single axis.

The winding of the temporal dimension can be traced through the analysis of the verbal expressions accompanying the execution of postures. First, expressions suggesting simultaneous execution of somemes occur. In sentences like "elongat**ing** the trunk, bring the... right palm to the right ankle", "while... mov**ing** that [indent] into the body, inhale",[28] the present participle delimits a fixed immediate temporal scope of the first relation, and it is only within this compressed scope that the second relation occurs. Secondly, increased use of imperfective verbs (*e.g. be*, *keep*) at the end of the transcripts suggests that the relations determined by particular somemes turn from temporally heterogenous to homogenous. Though the conceived time may still be represented, no change is associated with it. Finally, the omission of verbs in favour of prepositions at the end of the transcripts suggests that the somemes are construed atemporally. Expressions such as "pubic bone **upward**", "shoulder-blade **into**

---

[28] Excerpts from the transcript of a class taught by Geeta Iyengar, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyK7zmrRcwo [accessed: 14.11.2014].

the body", "head of the femur bone **up**" point to a shift of the scanning mode from sequential to summary, with the temporal dimension excluded altogether.

Another phenomenon concerns replacing possessive pronouns in front of body part names with the definite article. It is natural in the English language to use possessives while referring to someone's body parts ("turn **your** head", "lift **your** arm").[29] During IY practice, however, expressions such as "don't lose **the** outer wrist", "lift **the** knees up", "don't harden **the** eyebrows" are commonplace. Through this operation, body parts become abstracted, generalised and thus separated from their owner. This seems to be related to their subsequent animisation and personalisation, crucial for the interpretation of certain religio-philosophical notions.

The animisation of body parts also seems to be influenced by the constant use of the imperative clause. As Langacker notes, simple imperatives in the English language possess no overt subject.[30] While for fully fledged exercitives (*e.g.* "**I** order you to lift the sternum") the primary focus (the *trajector*, in Langacker's terms) is the speaker-subject, and for plain constatives (*e.g.* "**You** lift the sternum"), the trajector is the subject (though not necessarily the speaker), for imperatives (*e.g.* "**Lift** the sternum"), due to the absence of the subject, it is the action of lifting itself that becomes the trajector. Thus, due to the evolutionarily advantageous human propensity to attribute agency wherever there is motion, the object of the action is construed as self-propelled, *ergo* animate.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion hopefully shows that the IY *āsana* practice is a ritual possessing an internal structure which can be understood in the categories of Langacker's cognitive grammar. The main question, however, is whether and how this observation can be of any value. The answer is that it can, providing means to investigate coherence between the schematic semantic structures of the *āsana* ritual and the specific semantic structures present in the exposition of the doctrine. A preliminary study has shown that such coherence exists. The schematic representations underlying the linguistic phenomena occurring at the ritual pole correspond to the rich metaphorical structures identifiable in Iyengar's interpretation of the categories of *pātañjala yoga*. To give brief examples related to the phenomena discussed above, the atemporalisation through the summary mode of scanning, implicit in the use of imperfectives, participles and omission of verbs, corresponds to Iyengar's understanding of *dhyāna*. *"*[I]n *dhyāna*", he writes, "**psychological and chronological time come to a standstill** as the mind observes its own behaviour".[31] The expanding and subsequent winding of dimensions during *āsana* conceptualisation may correspond to the construal of the transition from *dhāraṇā* through *dhyāna* to *samādhi*. "*[D]hāraṇā*", it is said, "is **single-pointed** attention. It modifies into *dhyāna* by being **sustained in time** whilst **dissolving its one-pointed character** implicit in the word 'concentration'.

---

[29] See R. Langacker, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 470.

[31] B.K.S. Iyengar, B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali...*, p. 169.

When it becomes **all-pointed**, which is also **no-pointed**... it leads to total absorption (*samādhi*)".[32] Finally, the omnipresence of imperatives and lack of possessives in front of body part names, contributing to the animisation and personification of body parts, is coherent with the metaphorico-synecdochic model of the body as a person made of persons made of persons. This model seems to contribute to understanding *citta* (the phenomenal consciousness of *Pātañjala Yoga*) and *puruṣa* (the absolute consciousness of *Sāṃkhya-Yoga*) as minuscule beings immersed in each and every cell of the body, *i.e.* the personifying principles of the cells.

Two concluding remarks will sum up the foregoing discussion. The first concerns the scope of the performed analysis – as said before, so far only the structure of single *āsanāni* was investigated. An analysis of entire sequences of postures will surely expose many more interesting phenomena. The second has to do with the significance of the proposed thesis. The conclusion, drawn in light of the tenets of cognitive linguistics, that ritual activities based on intense motor activity have a structure similar to that of language, is not trivial. Just because embodied sensorimotor patterns underlie language, this does not mean that all sensorimotor activity needs to be structured in the same manner language is. However, identification of such structuring, if it exists, may open up ways of exploring the embodied, ritual origin of religious meaning.

Literature References

Atran S., *In Gods We Trust. The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion*, Oxford 2002.

Iyengar B.K.S., *Yoga Vṛkṣa, The Tree of Yoga*, Oxford 1988.

Iyengar B.K.S., *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, New Delhi 2005.

Johnson M., *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago 1987.

Jurewicz J., *Kosmogonia Rygwedy. Myśl i metafora,* Warszawa 2001.

Lakoff G., Johnson M., *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago 1980.

Langacker R., *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*, Oxford 2008.

de Michelis E., *Modern Yoga and the Western Esoteric Tradition*, London 2004.

Singleton M., *Yoga Body. The Origin of Modern Posture Practice*, Oxford 2010.

Slingerland E., *Effortless Action. Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*, Oxford 2003.

Staal F., *Rituals and Mantras. Rules without Meaning*, Delhi 1996.

Varela F.J., Thompson E.T., Rosch E., *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge 1993.

---

[32] *Ibidem,* p. 171.