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Conceptual Change and Emancipatory Practices: an Approach from Wittgenstein's *On certainty*[1]

Emancypacja w praktyce a pewne zmiany pojęciowe: wokół traktatu
Wittgensteina *O pewności*

ANALYSIS OF A REDUCTIVIST USE OF LANGUAGE

The defence of a "female language"

The method of analysis which Wittgenstein developed in *On Certainty* can be used to dismantle a particularly influential type of reductivism in certain academic spheres, namely the idea that there exists one sort of language which is characteristically male and another which is essentially female; that is, a male language and a female language. It is an idea which takes centre stage in some influential versions of feminist epistemology, which hold that most of the discourses about knowledge that dominate our society are *male* by nature. Or, to put it another way, the epistemic concepts in everyday use – notions like objectivity, rationality, experience, truth, knowledge, and so on – reflect male forms of knowing the world. This approach to epistemology ties in with a broader reductivist thesis, upheld by some structural and poststructural feminists [of the first and second wave (Mills & Mullany 2011), according to which the language we normally use is inherently male. These two thesis, that both (1) epistemic concepts and (2) language in general are male by nature, build on the premise that sexist assumptions are embodied and consolidated in language. As a consequence, feminism's insights should not only be set on achieving the full participation of women in the power

structures of science, politics or economics, but also (perhaps even above all) on achieving their full participation in the structures of language. The ultimate goal is to encourage women to abandon the pre-constituted everyday language which allegedly leads them to see the world through male eyes and to construct in its place a new female language. This new language, so the argument goes, would be capable of transmitting at last the way women experience and know the world.

In my opinion, the biggest logical challenge to this epistemological view of things is that the starting point for its arguments is a system of ideas – male language – which it is their ultimate ambition to overthrow. Thus, its strategy consists in using the conceptions which serve to discriminate against women, emptying them of their content, and replacing them with other forms of thought and linguistic communication which allow the woman's place in the world to be expressed. That is how it aspires to abandon the very conceptions which permit the construction of its own discourse. It is a case of a vicious circle, for the conclusion rests on the very premise which is meant to be invalidated.

In addition to this strictly logical criticism, there is another important feature that I would like to emphasize, namely, the extraordinary similarity between the arguments used to defend the construction of a "female language" and the classic arguments of scepticism. This is where I believe what Wittgenstein teaches us in *On Certainty* may be of some use. In short, I intend to apply Wittgenstein's critique of a certain kind of scepticism to that version of feminism which rests on the "female language" thesis. This procedure has already been pioneered by Alessandra Tanesini (Tanesini 1994) and Alice Crary (Crary 2001). While I share their basic strategies of approach, my argument will follow its own course and reach its own conclusions.

It is my view that Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* offers good arguments against reductivist conceptions of knowledge and of human beings. While humanists commonly regard reductivism as having its origin in scientific discourse, I hope to show that reductivism is also a path trodden by socio-cultural approaches too.

Moreover, I wish to stress that this article engages with *one* version of scepticism and *one* version of feminism. Scepticism and feminist theory come in many different shapes and sizes, which is why we should not rush to the assumption that the arguments used here are suited to any kind of scepticism or any kind of feminism.

The structuralist approach

In the last analysis, the proposal of a language for women – the thesis, that is, that an ideal language may be constructed that is capable of expressing the female way of being in the world – is heir to structuralist views of language. For Saussurian structuralists, language is not a group of mutually independent terms,

but a system in which each term acquires its meaning in accordance with the relations with other terms in which it is immersed. The meaning of the sign is arbitrary or contingent, that is to say, depends exclusively on the relations with other signs which have been established de facto. Therefore, the meaning of a term is determined with reference to a network of oppositions. The notion "woman", for instance, is applied to an animate, human, female being and is understood by virtues of a concatenation of contrasts with inanimate objects, animals, and males. In structuralism, oppositions are hierarchical: that is, one of the terms has a positive nature and governs the opposition. Upsetting this hierarchy or combining opposed components means slipping into the absurd.

One example of the kind of application of structuralist theses to the analysis of the plight of women is to be found in Lacan (Lacan 1981). *Grosso modo*, Lacan equates the nature of things with the nature of words. Hence he argues that sexism is located at the heart of language; not only that, but sexism is the very essence of language. The discrimination or inferior status of women is not due to any difference grounded in any natural or physical reality, but to a difference that has to do with language and the signified. The basic difference between the situations of men and women is that the latter "don't know what they're talking about". There is only one language and it does not belong to women, is not theirs, does not characterize them nor helps them to express themselves. Women are forced to use "the language of the father", "phallic language"; they must therefore always speak on the basis of a loaned authority, of a benchmark which governs their contents and forms of expression and which renders them inert. This state of affairs explains the difficulties which beset women when using that language.

From the very beginning, the general theses of the structuralists regarding human language attracted certain feminists because they held out the possibility of breaking with established cognitive associations. Since meaning was conceived of as being contingent, it became possible to imagine different meanings and, in theory at least, to set about reformulating each and every linguistic construction. But these prospects were largely dimmed due to the fact that structuralism did not in fact favour generalized linguistic change or actually kindle a significant and defined feminist innovation in regard of patriarchal language. Ultimately, the reason for this theoretical blockage resided in the structuralist premise that language is not the creation of individual human beings or subject to individual control on their part. In line with this premise, any speaker has always already been occupying a position in the structure of meanings, and that position defines its identity as well as the discursive role it can play. Put another way, the localizations exist beforehand and their significative relations cannot be altered. Given these limitations, the conceptual opening awaited by one brand of feminism was conveniently stitched up.

Evidently, the hackneyed Lacanian view of language and of the life experience of women offers no escape from their plight of discrimination and submission. At most it acknowledges that such a situation exists and explains why, but it is unable to devise or augur any means of remedying it. It is easy to understand the frustration felt by many feminist theorists when confronted with this description which authorizes the *status quo*.

The post-structuralist approach

In view of the fact that the structuralist approach offered no way out of the patriarchal cul-de-sac, it became necessary to explore other views of language. The next step on the path towards the construction and validation of a "female language" was the post-structuralist developments of thinkers like Derrida, Irigaray or Cixous.

The attraction of the post-structuralist approach for gender theorists is understandable to a degree. In contrast to the structuralist views which certified the impossibility of overturning the system of given meanings, Derrida offered women the chance to take part in the conceptual game with the aid of new tools which gradually began to shape new linguistic possibilities (Derrida 1989). Of course, that participation was not open, direct or head on but (it was reasonable to suppose) the voice of women, their language, would eventually be heard and take effect thanks to the echo produced by these new semantic and pragmatic practices.

Derrida's reflections fuelled the suspicion that the mere mention of women (the famous "add women and stir") was not enough to bring about significant change. In addition to this simple formalism, feminist practices needed to take full stock of textual play and discursive alternatives. This is the space that came to be filled by two of the feminist theories most influenced by Derrida's rejection of logocentrism, those of Luce Irigaray and Helène Cixous. Irigaray proposed "turning syntax upside down" / "undoing syntax" (Irigaray 1978) while Cixous advocated giving oneself over to expressive spontaneity: both complemented each other in their attempts to put the new philosophical-feminist method into practice (1995). The originality of these conceptions lies in their thesis that the destruction of the patriarchal system of discourse is not to be achieved through the strict use of logic and theoretical language, but by introducing imaginative comparisons and distinctions which strain and break conventional conceptual relations. This is the goal which gives so-called creative writing its *raison d'être*.

The process of creative writing implies that the signified is always being constructed and is not given once and for all or restricted to a single interpretation. The signified ceases therefore to be something that is unique and sacred and opens out into a plurality of opposed meanings. By means of these significative practices, women would take charge of their own location in the weave of meanings, and the

deconstruction of phallic language would enable women on the one hand to take cognizance of the expressive incapacity to which that language submitted them and on the other to enjoy the expressive liberation implicit in the newly minted grammatical forms. Equipped with these resources, women refuse to constitute the defined, silenced and exchanged object and decide on a change in strategy. According to the advocated of such a procedure, once the matrix of established meanings has been escaped and the rules of grammar broken, the female presence will flower for the first time as a subject which actively negotiates exchanges, even if only linguistic-symbolic and not economic or political.

The danger of self-dissolution

The theses discussed above start from the premise that language embodies and lays the foundations for sexist premises. That said, the proposal to completely renovate male language and substitute it with a female language is, to put it mildly, a poisoned chalice. Critiques of male symbolic language are right to remind us that we must pay heed to our ways of thinking and expressing ourselves, but that conclusion is compatible with two different proposals for action.

On the one way it may act as a stimulus for women to take the reins of the discourses that are generated about the world and the human beings that live in it. Speaking therefore becomes a form of political participation, a way of assuming power. By seeking to assert themselves in linguistic exchanges, women are active in shoring up their position and removing discrimination. Particular instances of this attitude include the effort to speak up in public debates, to insist on not being interrupted, to avoid the a priori rejection of their own opinions and judgments, and to use an assertive language. Other ways of participating in building new forms of expression are the removal of masculine substantives dressed up as general terms, the purging of dictionaries and style manuals containing sexist expressions, and the abandonment of labour or sexual stereotypes based on individuals' gender.

On the other hand, the idea that today's language does not work well for women could also give rise to a quite different reaction – one I disagree with – whereby it is accepted that the dominant group of males regulates linguistic exchanges and exercises its primacy on the basis of a linguistic system created precisely to sustain the patriarchy. After all, if credit is to be given to the idea that language as it is impedes women from expressing themselves, the simple decision to speak will not be enough for a woman for many of her experiences cannot be formulated in that language. Thence the argument used in this case more or less amounts to: "If the language that women speak, in which they must speak, is tainted with sexism, a sexism deeper than a revisable lexicon, if the grammar of language is itself reflective of male thought, then nothing women can say or write in existing language can ever be truly feminist" (Nye 1998, 3). On that count, it

therefore becomes necessary to invent a new language with which to construct our discourses, for any attempt to avail ourselves of the language already in place would lead inevitably to our failure.

That said, in my opinion the problem facing those approaches which advocate the complete dissolution of the existing language consists in the fact that on top of everything else there will be no language available for us to appeal to for we cannot rule out the possibility that the only alternative to patriarchal language is the absence of any language at all. When all is said and done, it is one thing to reject the use of terms that denigrate women, quite another to refuse to take part in any linguistic exchange which resorts to established and generally accepted meanings. That is why I think that the real risk facing a feminist theory founded on the assumptions treated above is that it will become a self-dissolving protest. The next section explains in detail in what this self-dissolution consists and how it is brought about. In the process, some similarities of argument will be brought to light between the thesis of the language for women and certain strategies of scepticism, and the tools of the Wittgensteinian analysis will be used to show the limitations of that thesis in theory and praxis.

SCEPTICAL ASPECTS OF THE THESIS OF A "FEMALE LANGUAGE"

Analogy between a brand of epistemological feminism and a brand of gnoseological scepticism

A good way of appreciating the theoretical and practical fruits of the brand of linguistic and epistemological feminism which upholds the thesis of the "female language" is to give some consideration to its similarities with a particular type of sceptical approach. To understand those similarities, it may be useful to recall one of the main strategies of scepticism, the so-called argument from counter-possibilities. This is the name usually given to those mental experiments in which circumstances are imagined which cause the world either to be different from what we take it to be or to cease to exist at all. Think, for example, of those arguments which invite us to imagine that we are dreaming, that we are victims of an evil demon, or – in the more vigorous version of the late twentieth century – that we are brains in a vat being experimented upon by means of the direct stimulation of the nerves or the region around the cortex. Whatever story is invented, the success of sceptical hypotheses resides in devising a particular situation in such a way that the possibility of its coming to be cannot be ruled out. Accordingly, it is necessary to assume that our experience would be the same whether the imagined situation were real or were indeed mere fantasy.

Take, for example, the hypothesis that we are dreaming, according to which if we attend only to what our experiences tell us there is no way of distinguish-

ing whether we are dreaming or not since there is nothing which differentiates between our waking and our dreaming experiences. If we cannot discard the possibility that we are dreaming, we cannot assert the truth of any statement we might utter about this situation. Thus the dream hypothesis ends up invalidating any urge to gain knowledge about the outside world. In the sceptical hypotheses, experience is no longer a guarantee which may underwrite our belief in the existence of the world. That is how counter-possibilities become one of the surest ways of undermining our confidence that knowledge of the outside world is possible.

We are now in a position to understand the similarity between the argumentative strategies of scepticism and those of the brand of feminist epistemology that concerns us. The ambition of both is to show how inadequate are the conceptual and argumentative resources through which we actually know and interpret the world. Thence the suggestion that we should distrust – or in more extreme versions, should rebuild from scratch – those resources together with the epistemic conclusions to which they lead us. Both the sceptical and the feminist position seek to impugn the very conceptual resources on which they need to rely in order to make intelligible what they wish to express. Both use a cluster of notions or a language with the aim of overthrowing them, the strength of both residing in their efforts to dynamite language by their very use of it. In short, the parallel between those feminist arguments which advocate the construction of a "language of women" and the sceptical arguments we have outlined lies in the fact that both need to set out from statements which they later reveal to be meaningless.

The fact that this parallel exists allows us to judge the viability of the proposed "female language" in terms of the fall-out from Wittgenstein's critique of scepticism in *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein's basic thesis is that the mere use of language commits us at once to the type of things that can meaningfully be said. Every language possesses some rules which enable us to distinguish what has meaning from what lacks it. In fact, if we cast into doubt the foundations of language, nothing we then say can have any meaning. Thus, Wittgenstein's approach permits us to show how both the sceptic and the brand of feminist epistemology we are discussing commit internal inconsistencies when trying to formulate their proposals. Those inconsistencies have to do with the calling into question of the basic linguistic rules of giving meaning, a calling into question which is absurd and sufficient in itself to disqualify its arguments. The next section develops this point in more detail.

A Wittgensteinian critique of the thesis of a "female language"

Wittgenstein's theory is highly sensitive to the localization and critique of those groups of words which, while appearing to be meaningful in principle, turn out not to be so after a more rigorous conceptual analysis. Certain combinations of

words do not manage to have meaning – are nonsense – because the language we use to communicate does not allow us to put them together in that way.

An example of nonsensical propositions or thoughts is the doubt about the existence of objects in the external world: "What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? Why can't I imagine it at all? What would I believe if I didn't believe that? So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist" (OC §247). "If I wanted to doubt whether this was my hand, how could I avoid doubting whether the word 'hand' has any meaning? So that is something I seem to know after all" (OC §369). Wittgenstein uses observations of this kind to build an argument whose first premise is that we can only doubt a proposition if we first understand what the proposition means. So I can only deny that I know that this is a hand, if I have previously understood what it means to say that this is a hand. "I don't know if this is a hand". But do you know what the word "hand" means? And don't say "I know what it means now for me". And isn't it an empirical fact – that this word is used like this?" (OC §306). Now, when we say "I do not know whether this is a hand", we suggest that the meaning we normally give to "This is a hand", is not correct; otherwise, we would be unable to make such a categorical statement as "I do not know whether this is a hand". In other words, if the meaning I normally ascribe to "This is a hand" were correct, I could not deny that I know that this is a hand. Consequently, to deny that this is a hand means that I do not know what a hand is. But according to the first premise, if I do not know what a hand is, I cannot deny that this is a hand. The consequence of this argument is that it is a fact that propositions have the meaning they have; it is impossible to deny them without at the same time denying their meaning. But if we deny that we know what the words mean, we cannot therefore know what we are denying.

The kind of contradiction Wittgenstein ascribes to the sceptic can also be explained by looking at the issue from another angle. To accept the sceptical doubt would mean accepting that I am not sure of anything, and that would include the meaning of my words. But if I do not know the meaning of my words, there can be no way for me to express my doubt: "If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either" (OC §114).

With the aid of this type of consideration, Wittgenstein states that understanding a proposition requires us to know how to use that proposition correctly on the countless occasions we introduce it into our conversations. We cannot deny a proposition independently of our communicative practices. Hence, any doubt we may place upon a proposition must take into account the language game in which that proposition is embedded: "The idealist's question would be something like: 'What right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?' (And to that the answer can't be: I *know* that they exist.) But someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that

we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like?, and not understand this straight off" (OC §24). Wittgenstein shows that any doubt we may place upon a proposition must take into account the language game in which that proposition is embedded and cannot therefore work against it. To sustain the sceptical doubt would mean discarding our linguistic practices, and that is something which cannot be done.

Wittgenstein's conclusion is, then, that the theses of the sceptics cannot be intelligible because they are nonsense (Villarmea 2003). The notion of nonsense ("*Unsinn*") has to be taken strictly. Wittgenstein does not say that those sentences are not true or correct, but that they lack the fundamental property any statement must have in order to be regarded as such, namely, meaningfulness. This conclusion pinpoints the type of difficulty which besets the hypothesis of the "female language".

Wittgenstein's critique of scepticism derives its utility for assessing the "female language" proposal from the following. The feminist arguments we have outlined try to combine two different premises: on the one hand, the idea that we are immersed in a deeply male language, that is to say, a language whose notions and rules imply a male form of representing and understanding the world; and on the other, the idea not only that a female language can exist but that we can intuit – even if only vaguely – in what it might consist. Those two premises serve to build this compound thesis: (Crary 2001, 385–386): (1) We are situated within a 'male' language or framework of mind; (2) we are able to understand (apprehend, intuit, grasp, etc.) the notion of a 'female' language or thought; (3) but we are still unable fully to say or think (develop or articulate) that 'female' language or thought. In saying that certain nonsensical ('female') sentences attempt to express things that can't (yet) be said, these theorists simultaneously use those ('female') sentences to communicate something and at the same time deny that that something can be said. In sum, "they tell us that the sentences are nonsense (absurd, unintelligible, insight-less) at the same time that they provide us with an apparently intelligible rendering (interpretation, translation or version) of what it is the sentences fail to say" (Crary 2001, 386).

So, if Wittgenstein is right, this compound thesis is contradictory since it means we can combine (some) nonsense with (some) intelligibility when in fact meaningfulness is a necessary condition of intelligibility. Theorists who embrace such arguments resemble those proponents of the view of nonsense that we call sceptics. As Crary well argues, they both find themselves committed to defend a notion of intelligible (illuminating, insightful) nonsense (Hacker 1986; Villarmea 2010). So the same sort of reasoning can be applied to them as Wittgenstein applied to his sceptical colleagues, and thus may their proposal be rebutted.

CONCEPTUAL INNOVATION AND EMANCIPATORY MOVEMENTS

Language and emancipatory movements

In my opinion, Wittgenstein's approach is very handy for understanding the type of conceptual innovation produced by emancipatory movements. It is my thesis that emancipatory movements do not construct a language *ex novo* (in contrast to what the reductivist approximations of structuralists and post-structuralists propose, as we have seen) but rather proceed by understanding how a certain segment of language works, removing problems and confusions regarding some terms, and proposing a creative use of that language which throws light onto its meaning. In some cases a new term may even be created whose meaning may be understood with reference to the use of another associated term which belongs to the same language game. Naturally, this form of action foments good mental and linguistic health, but more importantly it also contributes to the political and moral health of the community of speakers and stakeholders as a whole.

If we are to fully appreciate the role of the emancipatory movements in the interpretation of reality, we need first to define what is meant by "emancipator uses of language" or "emancipatory movement". I take "emancipator uses of language" to mean that calling into question of pre-existing normative and evaluative systems through certain innovative uses of language. "Emancipatory movements", meanwhile, are characterized by their incorporation of important cognitive and epistemological aspects. Like other social movements, they are a form of collective action, "(1) which appeals to solidarity in order to promote or impede social changes; (2) whose existence is in itself a way of perceiving reality since it makes controversial a given aspect of reality which was once taken as normative; (3) which implies a rupture in the limits of the system of rules and social relations in which its action takes place; (4) which has the capacity to produce new rules and forms of legitimation in society" (Laraña 1999, 126–127; quoted by de Miguel 2005).

How is innovation produced in linguistic-epistemic practices? How do notions which exist within a framework of reference, a network of meanings and practical inferences already associated with them, come to acquire a new use? Reflection over conceptual innovation takes centre stage in such different philosophical fields as hermeneutics, the Wittgensteinian approach and critical theory. Elsewhere I have discussed the explanation of the conceptual innovation engendered by emancipatory uses of language put forward by the so-called epistemic theory of meaning advocated by Michael Dummett in line with late Wittgenstein (Villarmea 2006b). There, I analyzed the extent to which the epistemic theory of meaning can explain or not development in the contents and use of certain concepts propounded by the projects of critical gender theory. To do so I applied that theory of meaning to the analysis of newly coined terms which, from a criti-

cal gender viewpoint, denote female experiences. I explored the introduction of such concepts as "feminization of poverty", "sex worker", "domestic terrorism", "chauvinist violence", "sexual class" and "emotional work" in an effort to demonstrate how the construction of emancipatory uses of language is an excellent testing ground for general theories of meaning.

An innovative emancipatory movement: activism related to childbirth and respect for childbirth

As we have seen emancipatory movements redefine reality by interrogating the meaning and use of some notions which are central to our linguistic practices. In the last part of this talk I propose we pay attention to the re-signification of a group of terms share a family resemblance in so far as they belong to the same semantic field. The area of human reality – pregnancy, childbirth and post-natal care – I'm interested in has barely been investigated by philosophy, and I am aware that it is an area which may be more or less familiar to you depending on your individual experiences. Yet I believe philosophical reflection is possible regarding a demonstrated fact: the processes of instrumental rationalization, maximization of medical interventionism and objectification of the subject that attend the world of childbirth have reached such a pitch that they are in urgent need of some utopia (Villarmea and Fernández 2012b; 2012c; Villarmea 2012d).

During the last seven years or so, the mass media in my country, Spain, have echoed a complaint that has turned into a loud and very well argued protest: the dehumanization that usually accompanies so many childbirths.

The need to humanize birth has been acknowledged by the Spanish Ministry of Health and Consumers' Affairs as an absolutely urgent issue. This recognition has led to the preparation of a series of strategy documents (Ministry of Health 2007; 2009; 2010) in response to a demand among social groups, health professionals and regional health authorities which has increased significantly in recent years, and which has prompted the Spanish Ministry of Health and Consumers' Affairs to set up a process in which all the affected persons and parties are invited to participate, as a prerequisite for its elaboration and consensus. The contents of these documents are the result of a thorough review of scientific evidence, of the existing research on the subject and the analysis of documented trials, and models of best practice. They were possible thanks to the combined work of professional bodies, women's groups and regional health authorities. While the attention provided at childbirth within the Spanish National Health System is based on objectives of safety and quality similar to those of other European countries, there is a widespread feeling that it could be improved by promoting a more caring approach and the participation and protagonism of women themselves in the process of childbirth. This is the fundamental objective of these reports.

The strategies aim to ensure first-class health care which is more personalised and centred on the specific needs of individual users. The aspects which are currently of great interest in this respect are those related to the continuous and permanent improvement of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are aimed at satisfying the needs of the users, who are continuously becoming better-informed and more demanding. Internationally, this issue is subject to wide variations, in terms of practice as well as of levels of attention and repercussion on health statistics. For this reason, and due to its repercussions in society, it has been a topic of discussion and study as well as a source of concern among international health organisations and all those involved in the defence of women's rights. [In comparison with other European countries, the attention offered by the Spanish Health System may be placed within a model of institutionalised interventionism, offering attention from specialized doctors and nurses, as is the case in countries such as Ireland, Russia, the Czech Republic, France, Belgium, and Poland. This model coexists with other European countries offering alternative forms of assistance. At one extreme, there is the model proposed by countries such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, which is free from institutional interference and attended by qualified, autonomous midwives. There is also an intermediate model which offers the possibility of institutionalised yet humane treatment, and which can be found in Great Britain or Germany[2].]

The Observatory on Women's Health and the National Health System have reviewed the available scientific findings on midwifery, and this review has provided valuable information for updating some current practices to bring them into line with others based on these findings. This mainly involves eliminating certain unnecessary practices and the introduction of new alternatives to those already available. The review of good practice as established in international journals revealed an emphasis on the importance of promoting women's informed participation throughout the process and in deciding the clinical procedures which should be applied. This would lead to an improvement in women's well-being, the relation between doctors and patients and increased satisfaction for all concerned, as well as reducing the number of legal proceedings started for suspected or actual negligence.

These documents (signed by the Spanish Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, the Federation of Spanish Midwives' Associations, the Midwives' Association of Spain, the autonomous regions, and users' associations) make no bones about the fact that most routine hospital interventions carried out around child-

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[2] Decades ago changes were implemented in England, Netherlands, Germany and the Scandinavian countries which would adapt their mother and child care to the WHO recommendations. Such care in Mediterranean countries, however, and those that formerly belonged to the Soviet Union is more deficient, both in terms of clinical aspects (lack of adaptation to scientific evidence) and respect for the woman's autonomy and the right of hospitalised children to be accompanied by a member of their family.

birth are unsuitable, invasive and potentially or really damaging to mother and baby alike. The goal of these strategy documents, which are advisory and normative, is to produce a profound restructuring of current health care protocols. They mean a sea-change in good practice in so far as they state quite explicitly that there should be no intervention in childbirth[3].

Before the social visibility of this problem had grown, different groups and civil associations of professional women, users of health services, and mothers had been created to recuperate the dignity and humanity that should accompany medical treatment and attention to pregnancy and childbirth[4].

In order to find a word for the fact that, all too often, women find themselves deprived institutionally and systematically of the dignity and liberty that should be theirs during pregnancy, birth and post-natal care, activism related to respect for childbirth has adopted the term "dehumanisation" in relation to obstetric care. As a result, they demand that such care be "humanised", that due account should be taken of the fact that pregnant women, women in labour and women who have just given birth are fully entitled subjects like everybody else.

We have just seen an example of the type of re-coding of reality produced by emancipatory movements. To speak of "humanization" in respect of childbirth attention is a case of the creative, innovative and emancipatory use of language. And it is not the only one. On the basis of numerous personal testimonies, childbirth activism has recently managed to codify a new network of concepts. Thus in the stories of childbirth that we can hear or read, or in the descriptions that women themselves give of their own bodily and mental experiences, we come across such terms as[5]:

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[3] The current rate in Spain is 30%; and the current US caesarean section rate is over 30%. The rate for the UK, with a better developed but non-optimal midwifery system, is 23%, for the Netherlands 14% and for Canada 24%. In Chile, the overall rate is 40%, while the caesarean section rate among women with private obstetricians is between 57 and 83%.

[4] Amongst these groups, I'd like to highlight: *Asociación El Parto es Nuestro* (www.elpartoesnuestro.es), *Foro Apoyo Cesáreas* (www.elistas.net/listas/apoyocesareas), *Hospital Maternidad Acuario* (www.acuario.org/en), *Asociación Vía Láctea*, *Asociación Nacer en Casa* (www.nacerencasa.org), *Asociación de Doulas* (www.doula.es), *Asociación Comadronas Europeas por un Parto Activo y Natural* (www.comadrona.foro.st), and *Plataforma pro Derechos del Nacimiento* (http://www.pangea.org/pdn/plataforma.html). It should be noted that most of them operate – not accidentally, we believe – outside the universities and academic environments.

[5] Extracted from the birth stories of the website *El Parto es Nuestro* (www.elpartoesnuestro.es). *El Parto es Nuestro* [Childbirth is Ours] is a Spanish Association, of which I am a member, devoted to promoting reproductive rights towards childbirth. It was founded to give emotional and legal support to women who had suffered traumatic or caesarean births. We work with the Ministry of Health and other institutions to improve the conditions of care to mothers and babies during pregnancy, labour, and postpartum. The following is a statement of motivations by one of its members: "Most of us had arrived to maternity in our late thirties with a certain degree of professional and economical security, and the feeling that feminist fights (or, at least, «true» feminist fights like access to work and education, right to abortion, or legal equality) were goals achieved long time

– "caesarea-ed woman", "cut woman" (= "caesarea", in Aymara), "unne-caesarea",

– postpartum depression", "post-traumatic stress disorder after childbirth", "emotional wound",

– "obstetric abuse", "obstetric rape" or "obstetric violence" (as a form of institutional or gender violence),

– "obstetric tourism" (travelling to another town where respected childbirth is carried out),

– "gyne-saur",

– "user" (instead of "patient", for women in labour or who have just given birth),

– "untroubled birth" (medicalized, intervened, natural, normal…),

– "joyous childbirth", "erotics of childbirth", "orgasmic birth",

– "pregnant subject" (the term I have coined).

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of these terms – I attempt it elsewhere. But what I do wish to assert is how the Wittgensteinian perspective may be brought fruitfully to bear on the analysis of particular cases of conceptual innovation within certain emancipatory practices. Wittgenstein answers the question of what understanding is and how it may be possible by relating the meaning of a term to its use. In this approach, questions related to normativity, method and validity are most definitely tied to the historicity of interpretation. To this extent, I sustain that Wittgenstein's approach is indeed valuable.

And yet, I do not wish to skip the limitations that Wittgenstein approach might have to understand emancipator uses of language. From my point of view, the main difficulty lies on the following: For Wittgenstein, conceptual change needs that we can imagine facts in a different way as they are. For he says: "If we imagine the facts otherwise than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become important. And in this way there is an alteration – a gradual one – in the use of the vocabulary of a language" (OC § 63). On the contrary, the examples show that we first innovate language and it is only then that we can change our perspective and thus see things in a different way.

The general idea is that new denominations can change our perspective and be thus emancipatory. That was precisely what happened when feminist theory started to use and reuse notions like "patriarchy" or "sexism". And that is exactly what is happening around the new terminology on ginecology and pregnancy. From a philosophical perspective, the new conceptualization on childbirth is fas-

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ago. We thought that we could already enjoy the fruits of our mothers' and grandmothers' fights, without further efforts or contributions to the feminist cause. We thought that sexist discrimination only affected women of the lower social classes. But that was until we […] gave birth to our own children. Then we were humiliated, infantilized, used and brutally divested by doctors, nurses, and even our own families of our pride and of the fantasy that equality was already achieved".

cinating. Thus the study of the conceptual innovation produced by an emancipatory movement of the likes of activism in favour of respect for childbirth may be illuminating without shadow of a doubt[6].

CRITICAL RATIONALITY IN A PLACE UNKNOWN TO PHILOSOPHY

More than any other experience I have had, childbirth condenses answers to all the classic questions of philosophy: what is life, death, the subject, the other, the body, pain, pleasure, happiness, the good, truth, beauty, freedom, time, the present, power, transcendence… How is it possible that philosophy has not spoken of childbirth at any length?

Indeed, the silence in philosophy about the female body and, especially, about all those experiences that are markedly feminine, since they have to do with pregnancy and birth, is, at the very least, a shortcoming. I am struck by the fact that in philosophy the "other" may be the world or other subjects: neighbour, stranger, even the female "other" (Beauvoir); but that other which appears in the experience of pregnancy, childbirth and post partum, that alterity I call "pregnant subject", is not, whether by definition, decree or indolence, a philosophical issue.

I am convinced that in relation to the concept of labour, childbirth, and early upbringing we put our conception of the world and of the human being at risk. Philosophy must still walk a long path if it is to achieve a valid conception of the birth-giving subject. It must question the concept of pregnancy, labour, and childbirth as non-rational processes that are more comfortably placed in the field of nature than in the fields of subjectivity and law. The pregnant subject, merely by virtue of being pregnant, is no less a subject. The *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights* (UNESCO 2005), the *Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine* (Council of Europe 1997), as well as National laws like (Ley 2002) have granted the principle of autonomy. Some medical procedures seem to make an exception to this rule when the human being is a pregnant woman, thus reaffirming the idea that she can be treated as a mere baby "container". If childbirth care is to be humanized, the fact needs to be taken seriously that pregnant and labouring women, and women who have just given birth, are fully entitled subjects.

The revolution of birth remains pending. The discourse of labour and childbirth contains many secret places which have barely been studied, analyzed or criticized. Such issues have a considerable impact on our vision of the world and our way of life.

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[6] This kind of analysis may also be brought to bear on the language promoted by other emancipatory movements like disabled associations, for example. Reflection about the evolution and developments in discourse related to the deaf and dumb and the motor disabled over the last fifteen years, and of the influence on it of discourses of gender and feminism.

In my view, knowledge is not only a description of reality but also an answer to the question of how to live in such a reality. Labour and childbirth are a privileged vantage from which to study contemporary issues like identity, body, technologies, nature, social construction, biology, culture, narrativity, gender, and theoretical and practical rationality. The pregnancy of the subject is a fruitful topic for reflection on the relations of normativity, praxis, and utopia. In this respect, I am interested in exploring the lessons we can extract from Wittgenstein's work *On Certainty*.

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RESUMEN

Este ensayo aplica el método de análisis que desarrolla Ludwig Witttgenstein en su último trabajo, *Sobre la certeza*, a casos específicos de innovación conceptual en el contexto de determinadas prácticas emancipatorias. Mi tesis es que los movimientos emancipatorios no reconstruyen el lenguaje *ex novo*, sino que abordan el cambio desde tres niveles de aproximación: en primer lugar, intentan comprender cómo funcionan determinados segmentos del lenguaje; en segundo lugar, intentan disolver o resolver algunos problemas y confusiones que se generan en torno a algunos términos; y en tercer lugar, aspiran a proponer un uso creativo del lenguaje que arroje una nueva luz sobre su significado. Esta forma de acción e intervención no sólo mejora la salud lingüística y conceptual de un grupo social; de forma más importante aún, también contribuye a mejorar la salud moral y política de una comunidad humana.

Este ensayo quiere extraer algunas conclusiones filosófico-políticas a que pueden dar lugar las últimas reflexiones de Wittgenstein. Trato de explorar qué nociones son fructíferas a la hora de enfocar en términos teóricos el asunto del cambio y la innovación conceptual que producen los usos emancipatorios del lenguaje. No es pues, mi intención presentar una reconstrucción fiel del pensami-ento wittgensteiniano, sino apoyarme en algunas de sus reflexiones para abordar un problema espe-cífico. Para este proyecto recurro a argumentos y conclusiones que he desarrollado anteriormente en (Villarmea 2006a; 2013).

Palabras claves: Wittgenstein, escepticismo, cambio conceptual, movimiento emancipatorio, teoría feminista, activismo parto, sujeto embarazado

SUMMARY

This talk applies the analytical method developed by Wittgenstein in his last work *On Cer-tainty* to specific cases of conceptual innovation within particular emancipatory practices. It is my thesis that emancipatory movements do not construct a language *ex novo*, but rather proceed by understanding how a certain segment of language works, removing problems and confusions regard-ing some terms, and proposing a creative use of that language which throws light onto its meaning. Naturally, this form of action foments good mental and linguistic health, but more importantly it also contributes to our political and moral health.

To this end I build on Wittgenstein's later works in order to derive philosophical-political yields from his thought. I am interested in exploring the question of which notions may be fruitful when addressing in theoretical terms the issue of conceptual change and innovation in emancipatory uses of language. It is not, therefore, my aim to produce any faithful reconstruction of Wittgenstein's

thought, but to avail myself of some of his reflections in order to tackle a specific problem. In this essay I build on arguments and conclusions I first developed in (Villarmea 2006a; 2013).

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule wykorzystano metodę analizy rozwiniętą przez Ludwiga Wittgensteina w jego ostatniej pracy *On Certainty* do poszczególnych przypadków innowacji pojęciowych w obrębie pewnych praktyk emancypacyjnych. Skłaniam się ku tezie, że wszelkie ruchy emancypacyjne nie konstruują języka *ex novo*, lecz raczej stopniowo starają się zrozumieć, na jakich zasadach funkcjonują pewne językowe aspekty, rozwiązując kolejne problemy i usuwając niejasności dotyczące poszczególnych terminów, i eksponując takie kreatywne sposoby posługiwania się językiem, które rzucają nowe światło na ich znaczenie. Naturalnie ten sposób postępowania nie tylko sprzyja porozumiewaniu się w obrębie grupy społecznej i zwiększa jej potencjał duchowy, ale, co ważniejsze, przyczynia się również do kształtowania korzystnych postaw moralnych i politycznych.

Niniejszy tekst ma za zadanie wyciągnięcie pewnych konkluzji o charakterze filozoficzno-politycznym, do których podstaw mogą dostarczyć ostatnie rozważania Wittgensteina. Pragnę zbadać, które z pojęć mogą okazać się płodne, w momencie kiedy odniesiemy je do pewnych teoretycznych terminów związanych ze zmianami i innowacjami pojęciowymi powstającymi w wyniku niezależnego używania języka. Intencją moją nie jest zatem wierne zaprezentowanie poglądów Wittgensteina, ale posłużenie się jego refleksjami w celu uchwycenia specyficznego problemu. W tym celu odwołuję się również do argumentów i konkluzji, które rozwinęłam wcześniej w jednej z cytowanych wyżej pozycji bibliograficznych (Villarmea 2006a; 2013).

Słowa kluczowe: Wittgenstein, sceptycyzm, innowacje pojęciowe, ruch wyzwolenia, teoria feminizmu, aktywny poród, kobieta ciężarna jako podmiot