PARTICIPATORY SENSEMAKING, SOCIO-CULTURAL EMBODIMENT, AND LINGUISTIC PRACTICE

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In recent times the interdisciplinary study of embodied interaction has received a boost in areas as diverse as social enactivism, intersubjectivity research, skills and apprenticeship research, the psychology of joint action, studies of infant-caretaker coregulation (and in other fields), philosophy of social ontology and “mindshaping”, as well as dynamic systems approaches to social interaction. The common underlying assumption of these different approaches is that individuals are seen as implicated in each others’ meaning making in fundamentally embodied and dynamically interwoven ways. Such approaches stand in a potential relationship of mutual reciprocity with Cognitive Linguistics (CL).

Many approaches emphasize the role of bodily perception and action when they appeal to mechanisms of alignment, entrainment, recognition of shared perceptual affordances, or extended bodies that interpenetrate each other structurally (in dance, conversation, body memory, etc.) and reach out into the social sphere. A complementary issue is how embodied mechanisms relate to “cognitive” facets of interaction, such as the sharing of representations, the process by which common ground and a “we”-mode is established, and task co-representations or the meshing of action plans when people follow joint activities. Importantly, many scholars also credit the dynamics of time-locked engagement in a shared task as an ontological and causal plane that deserves study in its own right. In sum, we see newly emergent angles on embodiment with a dynamic, lived, and participation-oriented focus. The advent of new methodological tools matches all this, e.g. joint action experiments, micro-ethnography, (neuro-)phenomenology, or complexity theoretic time-series analysis.

Clearly, these issues reflect the long standing CL interest in the intimate connection between embodied experience, imagery, inference, and expression. Cognitive Linguists have developed tried-and-true tools for discovering sensorimotor traces in language processing, for doing descriptive analysis of imagery in speech, rhetorics, categorization, language of space, and other fields. CL aims to explain how lived experience informs concepts and the various facets of language in its socio-cultural manifestations.

Moreover, the burgeoning interest in ‘usage-based’ approaches – the action of “languaging” – is making the study of natural conversation contexts increasingly attractive, while language systems are also seen as originating from language use, thus turning the traditional theoretical relation between competence and performance upside down. The idea of speaking-in-interaction is becoming a rich meeting ground between traditional CL theory and new frameworks that highlight intersubjectivity, joint attention and joint action (e.g. Verhagen 2005, Zlatev et al. eds. 2008, Fussaroli et al. 2009).

In this theme session we hope to align terminology, merge methodologies, and create a setting for the long overdue cross-fertilization between research communities. We see many opportunities for mutual constructive criticism as well as emerging collaborations around a more integrative theoretical framework, including cross-checks from specialized areas regarding general frameworks. Enactive, interaction related, and dynamics-oriented researchers can benefit from many potent insights in CL; inversely CL can be infused with new tools and ideas from their side. Accordingly, the theme session welcomes both linguistic approaches with a “participatory” focus and general frameworks from which linguists can learn.

Questions of interest include – but are not limited to – the following:

• How does language understood as a social practice challenge traditional notions of language as a symbolic or representational system and can the two be considered compatible?
• How do people make sense together including interaction failures or dynamic repairs (e.g. DiPaolo & DeJaegher 2007)? How are conversations, including their embodied elements such as posture, gaze, gestures, voice, distance, and tempo micro-coordinated? What aspects figure in the making and breaking of interaction dynamics? Do interaction settings create general types of challenges that can be grasped in a taxonomy? What skills are needed to manage interactions competently?
• When conversation is dynamically created through interaction rather than planned in advance, what cognitive anticipation, modulation, and correction mechanisms are needed to support this feat? What supportive role do the higher-timescale dynamics and interaction history play?
• What does language have in common with other interactive activities and where does it differ? How is joint embodied problem solving, say in carrying something together, different from speaking? How does linguistic interaction relate to work on joint improvisation (e.g. Sawyer 2002)?
• What does pre-verbal or proto-verbal interaction have in common with discourse in its later forms; how do the latter emerge from the former (e.g. Nomikou & Rohlfing 2011)? Is it meaningful to posit continuity with general processes of participatory sense-making, down to the level of biological autonomy and agency (e.g. Cuffari et al. 2014), or not?
• What methods are suitable for describing participatory sense-making and interaction skills microgenetically? Can we go beyond methodological individualism while respecting the perspective of individual skills (e.g. Kimmel 2016)?
• What is the power of interaction dynamics over individuals, when a conversation begins to self-organize as a complex system, possibly resulting in interaction paradoxes (e.g. Fusaroli et al. 2014)? What is the scope of this relative autonomy of interaction and how do individuals deal with entrainment into a supraindividual dynamic?
• What can be learned from radically enactive positions (e.g. Chemero 2009) that downplay the necessity of representations? Can this encourage Cognitive Linguists to push dynamic mechanisms further than recognized so far? Should Cognitive Linguistics be considered a bulwark against excesses of anti-representationalism or does it provide a “third way”?
• How is verbal explication of embodied states and dynamics possible? What are impediments to it that methods need to overcome (e.g. Petitmengin 1999)?
• How do we insert traditional CL views into a view of interaction as ongoing dialectical exchange? For example, while the body is considered as a source of imagery, it frequently becomes the target domain, e.g., in sports, dance or yoga instruction
• What role does verbal instruction play in embodied apprenticeship of all sorts (including cultural body habits), and what is its relation to co-action and joint attention to body ensembles?
Usage-based Cognitive Linguistics studies language on the basis of language use. Language use takes place in interaction. A proper understanding of interaction is, thus, relevant for usage-based linguistics (cf. Levinson 2006). Comparing linguistic with non-linguistic interaction processes (working together, dance, team sports) contributes to understanding what is specific for linguistic interaction.

One property of linguistic interaction is the presence of meta-communication. As Clark (2004: 373) notes, “coordinating on performance indexes cannot always succeed with primary signals alone, that is, with signals that refer to the official business of the discourse … Speakers and addressees often deploy collateral signals, that is, signals that refer to the local, ongoing performance of those primary signals”. Departing from this ‘division of labor’ in languaging, we asked ourselves in how far a similar division can be perceived in non-linguistic interactive practice, in particular in dance.

Kimmel (2012) in his research on tango dancing, refers to analogies between languaging and tango dancing: There is a division of roles, leader and follower, and tango has its own ‘grammar’, consisting of posture, directions and (sequences) of steps, used in a creative way by the dancers. Good tango also requires “well-coordinated muscle activation to enhance one’s ability to read one’s partner correctly” (p. 80). Although Kimmel doesn’t say so explicitly, the function of such muscle activation, and other ‘signals’ like changing hand pressure on the back of the partner, could be interpreted as analogous to that of collateral signals in language.

In the present paper, we will focus on analogies between language use and dancing with respect to turn taking. In contrast to conversation, in partnered dance both participants are often ‘active’ at the same time, but there can be a division of roles in terms of leader and follower. According to Benjamin (2002: 115) “following skills arise from an ability to understand the intention of the person leading” and, in many forms of improvisational dance, the leader role is negotiable and transferable.

Using a combination of ‘textual analysis’, literature review, testimonials & 1st person experience (phenomenology), We will look in particular, at transitional interactions in Liquid-lead Ballroom dancing (Copp & Fox 2015), partnered improvisational tasks and Contact Improvisation. How is intention communicated? What is involved in ‘kinesthetic listening’ which is a pre-requisite for effective following? How do dancers signal that they want to change roles, for example through shifts in pressure at the point of contact (Schmidt 2010)? Are the official and meta-activities distinct? If so, are they linearly ordered or are they rather realized simultaneously, for example by distributing the two types of activities across different body parts?

In our presentation, we will make use of an embodied experiential approach with participants having the opportunity to experience simple techniques to enrich their understanding.

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INTERCORPOREAL EMBODIMENT AND COMMUNICATION IN YOGA

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Keywords: intersubjectivity, embodied interaction, intercorporeal communication, yoga

Yoga is an embodied practice that can serve as an ideal site for looking at language, cognition, and embodiment in an interactive context. It is a site of participatory sense-making (de Jaegher and di Paolo, 2007) that can be examined in similar ways as dance (Sheets Johnstone 2011, Kimmel 2012).

Interactions between students and teacher in yoga are linguistic—in the form of cueing—and non-verbal—in the form of physical adjustments. Moreover, verbal instructions routinely, though not exclusively, refer to how students are to position or move their bodies. Drawing on my own experience as both a yoga student and instructor in addition to relevant literature, I develop a phenomenology of this kind of interaction as a form of intersubjective agency. Contrary to some popular opinions, I argue that yoga is not—or not only—an individual, but a deeply social practice. Not only is it dependent on individual student-teacher interactions and is therefore intersubjective (or social at a micro-level), but—even if, say, someone practices yoga using videos in the privacy of their home—its poses are generally standardized and have particular socio-cultural histories (Singleton 2010) so that it can be viewed as social at the macro-level. To that extent, yoga produces socio-cultural forms of embodiment and fits Judith Butler’s (1988) notion of “a stylized repetition of acts”. And not unlike verbal conversations, student-teacher interactions are highly context-sensitive and creative since they are responsive to particular student bodies.

Butler analyzes gender as instituted by performative acts and regards them as “shared experience and ‘collective action’”. Following Merleau-Ponty, she views the body as a “historical situation” and a set of possibilities (i.e. affordances). However, she focuses more on social construction than intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty (1964), by contrast, addresses synesthesia and extends the idea that an individual body’s organ can touch and be touched at the same time, as well as be perceived through other modalities, to other bodies. Thus, just as we can experience the sensations of touching and being touched simultaneously (or touching and seeing), we can see the bodies and actions of others as interconnected with ours. This notion of intercorporeality challenges methodological individualism (Epstein 2015); it is gendered in most concrete manifestations; and it is supported by the phenomenon of embodied cueing in yoga, where the interacting subjects must be attentive to the transfer of non-verbal information from one another, all the while maintaining a first-, second-, and third-personal orientation toward one another.

References

SCIENCE ILLITERACY AS EXPRESSION OF MISCOMMUNICATION
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Scientific literature is inherently about communication. Scientists write reports about their work to inform the world at large about their discoveries. Yet, although there is broad interest in science, science illiteracy remains at untenable highs. For example, PISA scores show that in Germany only 12% of students understand science well enough to apply it to their daily lives. These statistics strongly suggest that something is amiss as scientists attempt to communicate with their audience. As such, this talk will argue that science illiteracy is a direct consequence of miscommunication about science and the scientific process.

Miscommunication can take many forms. The two types of interest here are Metonymic miscommunication (Type A), where the conclusion of a message obscures the rest of the information it contains, and Structural ignorance (Type B) where the receiver of a message is unaware of how to organize the information it contains.

These two types of miscommunication are endemic to the way science is taught at schools and is presented in the general media. For example, typical science courses involve a strong focus on the outcomes of the scientific process (Type A). Students are required to memorize large quantities of facts, i.e. the chemical structure of carbon, or the neural pathways of the brain, with no real understanding of how or why this information came to be thought of as scientific fact. The problem is perpetuated in the press where what makes headlines are dramatic findings that say little about the process from which they were derived. Type B becomes most salient when students are asked to read scientific literature. Most receive little guidance other than the clarification that they should not approach the material as a narrative. There is typically no further elaboration on how it should be understood.

This talk will take these points and argue that scientific literature is in fact a type of narrative, and that helping students indentify it as such can help achieve greater comprehension by focusing on the sequence of events that led to the scientific finding in question. It will also argue that a didactic program centered on reading science as narrative stands to make a contribution to solving science illiteracy by 1) redirecting attention to the processes that produce scientific facts, and 2) providing a structure readers can use to understand scientific literature.

The talk will conclude by reviewing data from a series of experiments designed to test the efficacy of this approach. Briefly, we developed a pedagogical method that used narrative structure to guide readers in constructing the story told in a research article. We used a three-condition design with three separate university classes. The first received no training. The second took a parts-of-an article approach, i.e. introduction, etc. The third used narrative structure. All read actual scientific articles. Our results showed that general comprehension was significantly greater in the narrative condition. These findings support our claims about potentially improving science literacy by using narrative to help readers refocus attention to processes, instead of strictly outcomes.


Finding new directions in the language sciences

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Keywords: distributed language, 4E cognition, enactivism, ecological psychology, languaging

This paper concerns the excellent efforts that scholars have made recently, in bringing new directions to language and linguistics that are compatible with “4E” cognitive science. Our primary concern is to argue that the chief questions in this endeavor ought not to be about finding embodied, enactive, extended, embedded, etc., aspects of linguistic objects as they have previously been understood, both intuitively and within conceptual frameworks. Rather, we propose beginning with an observable episode of interaction - let us say, some people speaking to one another on some particular occasion – and asking: “What is an effective way of describing the events taking place, and of accounting for their organization and particular features, especially to the extent that these differ from those present in other, similar episodes?”

This bundle of questions has the advantage that it gives a sense of direction. Lacking one, researchers working towards non-structuralist linguistics have found themselves forced to accept the existence of the most central concepts of structuralist approaches - that is, words, sentences, clauses, phonemes, and so on - even though this acceptance effectively hampers their attempts to escape structuralist thinking (Harvey 2015). Of course, some or all units of structure may turn out to be specifiable, observable, measurable, or otherwise amenable to study within an approach that accepts E-cognition as a foundational principle. However, if this is so, it cannot be assumed but, rather, must be determined by rigorous methods. In the current landscape of 4E approaches to language and languaging, we see a number of positions that fail to ground their assumptions in such rigorous methods and/or observable phenomena. These examples include Hutto and Myin’s (2013) Radicalizing Enactivism, Golonka and Wilson’s (2015) neo-Gibsonian analysis of linguistic information, Rączaszek-Leonardi’s acceptance of “symbols” and “common ground” as theoretical primitives (e.g., Fusaroli, Rączaszek-Leonardi, & Tylén 2014; Rączaszek-Leonardi, Dębska, & Sochanowicz 2014), Cuffari, De Jaegher, and Di Paolo’s (2014) development of Maturanian “languaging”, which doesn’t hesitate to make assertions about the experiential nature of “words” and their “meanings”, and Fowler’s (2014) case for the reality of phonological forms. All of these authors have contributed significantly to the language sciences; however, they are creating unnecessary problems by failing to address foundational issues. We cannot merely assume that “words” (etc.) will be useful theoretical, functional, analytic, or operational units in future approaches to language that are enactive, extended, embodied, and embedded – or for that matter distributed and ecological.

References

PARTICIPATORY SENSE-MAKING IN CLEAN COACHING CONVERSATIONS

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Keywords: conversation, gesture, metaphor, multimodality, mimicry

In the contemporary research on conversation, the metaphor is believed to convey feelings, values and emotions (Todd and Low 2010). The metaphor also helps reducing anxiety and shaping thought processes, expressing attitudes and forming conceptualizations (Cameron and Maslen 2010).

According to Contemporary Theory of Metaphor (Lakoff 1993), metaphorical expressions are products of mappings between conceptual domains. Hence, metaphor allows speakers to comprehend abstract concepts in terms of more concrete ones. Metaphorical expressions are often multimodal, that is verbal, gestural or graphical. Multimodal metaphors in conversation are products of the process of creating metaphoricity jointly by communicants (Cienki and Müller 2008). Therefore, this process may be treated as participatory sensemaking. Additionally, metaphors expressed in both words and gestures reveal speakers’ creativity and dynamism in conceptualization (Chui 2011). However, excerpts from conversations with metaphorical expressions often show how one interlocutor attempts to “impose the metaphor” on the other (see Gibbs and Franks 2002 for a review or Cameron and Maslen 2010), instead of letting him or her to develop their own metaphorical expressions. The aim of this study is to present how multimodal metaphors can be elicited and developed in conversation without “imposing the metaphor”.

The material for analysis was extracted from Clean Coaching conversations collected especially for this project. Conversations were recorded in Polish, with two coaches and 50 participants. The topic of conversations is the future and career plans. Clean Coaching (Pieśkiewicz and Kołodkiewicz 2011; Sullivan and Rees 2010) is a metaphor elicitation method in which the coach facilitates client’s own metaphors development without imposing his or her (coach’s) metaphorical expressions. The coach is using specific questions with repetitions of client’s words and/or gestures to bring client’s attention to what he or she says and how it could be developed into multimodal metaphors. Clean Coaching was developed by David Grove (1989) as a “clean language” for psychotherapy applications and it’s been already used not only as a coaching technique (Sullivan and Rees 2010) but also as a research method (Tosey 2011).

To describe participatory sensemaking, multimodal metaphors were identified using Metaphor Identification Procedure for words (Pragglejaz 2007) and Metaphor Identification Procedure- GESTURE (MIP-G) for gestures (Cienki 2017). Our initial results suggest that coach’s verbal repetitions increase the number of metaphorical expressions generated by the client, whereas coach’s gestural repetitions lead to shared mental representations of topic and content of the conversation of the coach and the coachee. Therefore, our data provides evidence that participatory sensemaking and client’s development of multimodal metaphor can be supported by coach’s clean coaching questions with specific repetitions.

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EMBODIED INTERSUBJECTIVITY AS INTERMODULAR AND MODE-SPECIFIC INTEGRATION OF SKILL SETS

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Keywords: intersubjectivity, embodied skills, synergy, complexity theory, empirical phenomenology

Conversational language and many other forms of communication can be characterized as systems of “intermodular integration” (Carruthers, 2002; cf. Hutchins, 2014), where there is a continuous coupling dynamic with the external world. Addressing the issue, I present a theory of real-time intermodular integration with broad applicability to settings where intersubjectivity needs to be skillfully “managed” while coupling with another person and the environment (Kimmel, 2016, Kimmel, in prep.).

This view firstly claims that managing an emerging interaction arc with success requires agents to be aware of constraints at multiple timescales (Fusaroli et al., 2015; Dumas, Kelso, & Nadel, 2014) and to integrate both retrospective and prospective considerations into what happens now. Secondly, the proper theoretical way to analyze skill integration is in terms of well-orchestrated synergy (Riley, Richardson, Shockley, & Ramenzoni, 2011; Turvey, 2007), the interplay of low-level and high-level interaction mechanisms (Tollefsen & Dale, 2012), mutual constraint between parallel demands, as well as the cognate dynamic systems notions of self-organization (i.e. component interplay via auto- and cross-catalytic loops that generates a self-sustaining macro-state) and softly-assembled task solutions (Kello & Van Orden, 2009). Thirdly, successful communication frequently requires metaregulative awareness, among other things to decide when to leave things to interpersonal self-organization and when to introduce decisive transformations in the interpersonal dynamic (cf. Cohen, Freeman, & Wolf, 1996; Sutton, McIlwain, Christensen, & Geeves, 2011).

These issues can be reconstructed through microgenetic methods that dissect emergent interactions with high grainsize, as several case-study examples from bodywork, martial arts, and improvised dance will demonstrate (Kimmel, 2017, in press, Kimmel, 2012; Kimmel, Irran, & Luger, 2015; Kimmel & Rogler, submitted). In these quite sophisticated interaction domains, the functional constraints in need of integration encompass: (a) sensorimotor abilities and enabling habits; (b) skills to establish interpersonal rapport and information flow; to monitor, micro-coordinate, and repair interactions; (c) improvisational repertoires, e.g. recognizing continuations and rerouting options, transition management, creating novelty, or re-parametrizing ongoing tasks “on demand”; (d) meta-regulation that ensures a balance between sufficient order and flexibility.

Closing with a comparison, I highlight how global priorities of an embodied communication system such as efficiency, playfulness, improvisational novelty, or mindfulness impact all this. I argue that these global aims have, in the past, co-evolved with particular operational modes of intersubjectivity and highlighted specific constraints, while relaxing others. For example, what constraints the interacting individuals need to integrate depends in crucial ways on whether the interaction stream is chunked or fully continuous, whether precision or speed are of essence, whether cooperation or antagonism dominate, whether actions are locally self-sufficient or nested in higher-level goals, and whether the encounter is symmetrically negotiated or unilaterally guided. These – and no doubt further – parameters should sensitize interaction researchers, linguists, and semioticians to alternative operational modes in embodied communication systems and caution against generalizations.

References


PARTICIPATORY SEMANTICS: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF INFANTS’ PARTICIPATION IN PEEK-A-BOO-GAMES

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Keywords:  mother-infant interaction,  infant agentivity, social routines, multimodal interaction, conventionalization

In the first months of life, infants become active participants in interactions, able to co-create sensible actions with their caregivers. Most developmental work concentrates on the individual cognitive capabilities that make this possible. In our work, we attempt to analyze the structure of the social environment and infants’ engagement in social routines as crucial factors in this development.

In earlier work, it has been shown how early interactions stabilize modes of interpersonal coordination (Fogel, 1993; [Authors], 2013). Intersubjectivity may therefore emerge “movement first”, through involvement in joint goal-directed actions. In this paper, we tackle the problem of agency, investigating factors that facilitate infants’ initiative in coaction. We show, how in everyday interactions infants’ initially non-specific behavior are scaffolded to become intentional and conventionalized, which then scaffolds the gradual emergence of agentivity.

We will evidence this process within an interaction format, which often appears in early interactions, namely the peek-a-boo game (see also Bruner & Sherwood, 1976; Bruner, 1983). In acting appropriately within such a routine, we argue that infants contribute to, and affect a joint goal. Infants’ initiation of routines or their phases reflects the co-construction of this meaningful interaction. By observing the engagement in peek-a-boo longitudinally and analyzing the increasing use of conventionalized means, we can get insights into how the infant comes to take up his/her role as a full-fledged participant and whether – and in which ways – this is gradually scaffolded by caregivers.

We draw from a video corpus of 20 Polish mother-infants dyads when playing peek-a-boo, when the infants were 4 and 6 months of age. The interactions were coded in sequentially organized phases (Bruner & Sherwood, 1976; Bruner, 1983). Infants’ contributions were coded in many modalities (smile, vocalization, hand and leg movements) and also for conventionalized movements (attempted and successful covering and uncovering of the face). We hypothesized that infants who experience more scaffolding in early interactions should be able to take up an active role in the routine earlier. Furthermore, there should be a decrease in multimodal unspecific actions and increase in the frequency of conventionalized contributions. We operationalized the scaffolding behavior by the ways in which mothers structure and time the activity, while the active role of infants was understood as their attempts to cover and uncover at the specific sequential positions of the activity.

We found that already 4 months old infants attempted to uncover their face during “waiting” phases, suggesting that they already take their role in the activity. At 6 months infants showed significantly more attempts but were also successful in uncovering their face during the correct phase of the activity. Furthermore, we found a relationship between mothers’ structuring of the activity and infants’ attempts. Mothers who inserted “preparation phases” before the key junctures of the activity as well as used longer “acknowledgment phases” after these key junctures had infants who participated more actively and successfully in the activity.

References
EMBODIED CHIASMUS: FROM SOLIPSISM TO SENSE-MAKING

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Keywords: embodied cognition, chiasmus typology, conceptual figures, social cognition, multimodality

Bipedal mobility and upright posture are widely acknowledged as central features of human evolution; but the role they play in human cognition receives far less attention. The most neglected (and most salient) affordance of upright posture for the human person is the reorganization of the anatomical planes relative to quadruped mobility. This shift enables not only upper-lower limb specialization but also provides foundations for enactive modeling—via the phenomenology of movement (Sheets-Johnstone 2011) and subsequent body memories (Fuchs 2012), via the conceptual identification of inverse structural relations shared between our extremities (Pelkey 2017) and via the mimetic schemas (Zlatev 2007) these entail. This paper draws attention to an extreme manifestation of upright posture known as “spread-eagle” to illustrate ways in which the cross-linguistic figure of speech known as chiasmus (X) may be just as vitally and conceptually embodied as metaphor—with important implications for expanding the scope of Cognitive Linguistics.

The study highlights aspects of a larger project devoted to exploring relationships between spread-eagle dynamics and chiasmus patterning in multiple modalities—ranging from cultural, linguistic and conceptual chiasmus to uses of X-marks and lattice designs across cultures. The paper provides a brief overview of cross-cultural evidence spanning multiple modalities and millennia to argue that the patterned semantics of chiasmus typology (Paul 2014) and the patterned relations of X-derivative networks (Pelkey 2017) are congruent with the patterned typology of spread-eagle phenomenology along a gradient experiential cline ranging from alienated action to participatory interaction. Expanding on a recent argument by Gallagher (2014), the paper briefly examines the problem of solipsism in embodied phenomenology with reference to the thought of Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1943), both of whom utilize linguistic chiasms of differing types to frame their arguments.

Although Sartre moves beyond Merleau-Ponty’s implicit solipsism, his own account ends in social conflict and alienation. The paper illustrates ways in which these experiences are congruent with cultural uses of solitary X marks and X iterations, proposing that such instances are helpfully understood with reference to extreme body memory. When a string of X-figures is placed side-by-side, “rhombus” forms emerge between them as their necessary ground, producing a third space: the space of the in-between. This mode of visual/phenomenological experience is represented in a third type of linguistic chiasmus identified with a sense of wonder or self-forgetfulness. Finally, a fourth type of chiasmus patterning—evident in multiple modalities—is shown to be congruent with “participatory sense-making” (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007). Chiasmus in this phase involves a merger between the co-created third space and each interlocutor, obsolescing in the process earlier problems of isolation, alienation, domination and submission. The paper concludes that these aspects of embodied cognition open up fertile territory for further exploration of linguistic and cultural ontology and for better understanding problems of reflexive consciousness in both inter- and intra-personal modalities.

References


LANGUAGE AND THE TEMPORALITY OF SENSE-MAKING

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Keywords: sense-making, temporality, aspect, tense, experience

This presentation aims to address the currently debated issue of how language both constrains and allows for human sense-making to take place. Here we approach this question from the point of view of human time experience and its linguistic realization. The experience of time partially constitutes self-awareness and is crucially involved in consciousness as well as, importantly, language. As we will argue, human experience is fundamentally structured by the activity of placing events, symbols, and actions in a temporal scheme; human experience is inherently temporal. Human time is also a ‘felt’, or what we will call a ‘tensed time’, not the absolute tenseless time of physics, and human temporality displays a temporal thickness (or, depth) that has remained largely unaddressed in current debates in linguistics and cognitive science. In one obvious sense, human sense-making always takes place in the present; it is constituted in the here-and-now of the present moment. In another sense, it involves the intersection of multiple time-scales (e.g. Uryu et al. 2014), and bears traces of past possibilities and common histories. Yet these never fully determine a present instance of sense-making, which requires local negotiations and interpretations.

Perception of time and the experience of presence have been variously linked to embodied sensitivity to change and movement, on the one hand, and the very moment of enunciation in language (as in Benveniste’s observation that the present is the source of time, which is always marked by the moment of enunciation (1971)), on the other. Building on these points we explore how grammatical markers such as tense and aspect help us deal with the multiplicity of timescales by considering spatiotemporal displacements as fundamental aspects of conscious life and its expression in language (Chafe 1994). Furthermore, rather than being concerned about the notion of representations, which has been critiqued with respect to discreetness, abstraction, and rigid rule-governing, we argue for a ‘presentational’ quality to sense-making that uses linguistic markers as a way of managing temporal experience. Developing the presentational view in this way allows us to pose the question of how linguistic markers get to guide our experience. Answering this question involves at least preliminary treatments of language acquisition and socialization (e.g. Nomikou & Rohlfing 2011; Rączaszek-Leonardi et al 2013), as well as idiosyncratic embodiment and situatedness. Finally, we consider how temporal integration of social interaction as it happens during conversations or reading can be theorized using Merlin Donald’s notion of ‘the slow process’ (2007).

References

Underpinnings for a 4E theory of language

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Keywords: distributed language, interactivity, enactivism, ecological psychology, languaging

We offer groundwork for research in the language sciences that is compatible with embodied, embedded, enacted, and ecologically-oriented cognitive science (Steffensen 2015). We have reached this point by developing the ideas behind the term “distributed language” (Cowley 2009, 2011b; Cowley & Vallée-Tourangeau 2013), so that is as good a banner as any: we will lay what can underpin a distributed theory of language. Our position can be summarized as follows.

Linguistic phenomena only arise given two conditions: first, multiple humans must be engaged in co-action involving coordinated bodily movement, the organization of which is partly based on audible vocalizing; second, linguistic phenomena also require the humans involved to “take a language stance”. That is, to engage in perception where their active engagement with some pattern in the energy arrays involves experiencing them as instances of something - repetitions, for instance, or echoes, or responses (Cowley 2011a). There are many kinds of “perceiving as” in the world of animal behavior, but here we are more narrowly concerned with the specific kind that arises in all humans by two years of age, where rhythmic, repetitive coordinated articulation leads to the perception of vocal patterns as instances of voluntarily produced sounds, which the various involved people can repeat if they so choose. When participants take a language stance, the coordination becomes “sense-saturated”, taking on specific emotional and experiential significance over ontogenetic and historical timescales. This integration of vocal and bodily co-activity with a specific experiential attitude is “interactivity” (Harvey, Gahrn-Andersen, & Steffensen 2016; Steffensen 2013), and it underlies the multi-scalar nature of human linguistic enskilment, as well as the formation of behavioral norms for vocalization. In short, interactivity underlies the large-scale spatiotemporal patterns of behavior that linguists have traditionally investigated in terms of “underlying” logical structures that can be observed during periods of vocal activity, such as grammatical rules.

We argue that over the course of phylogeny, the multi-scalar organization of activity enabled by the language stance is augmented by changes to language activity that are extended by trace-making (that is, bodily activity carried out in order to leave visible patterns in slow-changing visible substrates - carving, painting, knot-tying, etc.). In essence, vocal activity whose purpose involves controlling the articulation of graphical traces becomes oriented to patterns that persist much longer than do the results of vocal activity themselves, and as a result, people sensitise to slow scales of pattern-making and more enduring forms of social coordination and social institutions. By this means, language activity enables the development of increasingly complex forms of mediated and technological interaction between humans and between humans and their environments. The lay use of the term language thus applies to this fundamentally distributed, ecological history that underpins all linguistic phenomena.

References


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PERCEPTUAL INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND THE GROUNDING OF DEMONSTRATIVES

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In previous work analysing language from the perspective of phenomenology, we have argued that the meaning of different linguistic expressions is grounded in pre-linguistic structures of embodied intersubjectivity, such as the dual nature of the living body (as “internally” felt and “externally” observed) and the intersubjective nature of object perception (Zlatev & Blomberg, 2016). For example, the meanings of action verbs like kiss and eat are arguably based on corresponding mimetic schemas, while non-actual motion sentences like The road crawls through the desert are motivated by factors such the enactive (action-oriented) nature of visual perception. At the same time, we emphasized that such intercorporeal experiences should not be conflated with the symbolic and normative linguistic meanings that are sedimented upon them.

In the present paper, I focus on a class of expressions that are particularly applicable to such an analysis, as they are more clearly than any other on the “border” between pre-linguistic and linguistic intersubjectivity: spatial demonstratives like this/that and here/there. As argued by Diessel (2006) such expressions are (a) universal, (b) closely associated with pointing, (c) among the first words acquired by children, and (d) not derivable from other word classes, while they themselves give rise to key grammatical structures such as definiteness and focus markers. Diessel attempts to explain these features of demonstratives by linking the latter to the psychological notion of “joint attention”. However, there are controversies and ambiguities surrounding this notion, for example concerning the degree of intersubjective awareness of the targets of attention.

Using the notion of perceptual intersubjectivity (Zlatev, Brinck, & Andrén, 2008), the paper develops Diessel’s argumentation and shows that demonstratives are on the one hand transparently grounded in perceptual and non-symbolic processes in the sense of phenomenology, and on the other “serve to ground the meaning of content words” (Diessel, 2006: 464). Thus, demonstratives link the two different ways in which the notion of grounding is used in the cognitive linguistic literature: on the one hand they are grounded in pre-linguistic embodied intersubjectivity, and on the other hand they fulfil the function of contextually grounding the shared symbolic representations (construals) inherent in content words.

The argument will be illustrated with an analysis of the demonstratives used by two Swedish children in their second year of life.

References