

The Case for Languages Within Post-Cognitivism

Cognitivism: disembodied views of language

Classical cognitive science has been traditionally associated with disembodied views of language, such as generativism, which minimize the significance of linguistic diversity

What about post-cognitivism ?

Moving past disembodied cognitivism, the many faces of language - including linguistic diversity and its cognitive significance - still need a thorough accounts under post-cognivist premises

A promising starting point : situatedness

Electing situated interactivity as the primary locus for the study of linguistic phenomena, embodied approaches overcome their previous formalistic interpretations.

What about languages ?

A conceptualization of the influence of different languages on interaction and cognition is absent in post-cognitivism

Problems

- the established empirical interpretation of linguistic relativity (Neo-Whorfianism) is tacitly founded upon individualistic, modular, representational premises
- Neo-Whorfianism saved linguistic relativity from its bad reputation and academic obliteration thanks to those cognitivist premises, by taking a quantifying approach and turning LR into a verifiable, empirical hypothesis for cognitive psychology
- Ecological-enactive views of language in their actual form can't seem to offer much towards a framing of linguistic relativity, as they equate linguistic activity to other kinds of situated activity (cf. "enlanguaged affordance")
- the anti-representationalists in the language sciences (namely, the Distributed Language Approach centered around the notion of languaging) seem to be at odds with post-cognitivism and with linguistic relativity
- In general, there seems to be a problem with the mechanistic phrasing of linguistic relativity - languages influence thought - and the stress that post-cognitivism puts on complexity and circular patterns of influence and, even more importantly, on the definition of cognition as dynamic and emergent, rather than modular

Strategies

- A reformist approach is to dramatically improve ecological validity of the psycholinguistic experiments in the Neo-Whorfian fashion in order to get closer to a realistic picture of situated language-and-cognition activity
- More radical solutions, such as the ones supported by DLA and other post-cognitivist views, strongly tend towards the inextricability - both theoretical and methodological - of language, cognition and action. This results in making linguistic relativity an unusable old-fashioned rubric
- Another radical solution would be to change point of view and re-interpret, for instance, linguistic anthropology/ethnography as a situated way of seeing differences in language in action as they modulate the thinking and doings of speakers/agents
- If so, are we sure that by dispensing with "linguistic relativity" we are not leaving something valuable tied to this long-standing intuition along the way?



Scan me!

Here's a recent recording of me talking at IAS Research Seminar (Basque Country University) on this topic



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