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Katarzyna **Stadnik**

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

Language, cognition and time: The relation revisited

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Recently the need for acknowledging the importance of sociocultural situatedness and situated cognition for Cognitive Linguistic research has been emphasised. Situated cognition can be evoked in relation to online embodiment, when cognitive activity depends on direct interaction with the real-world environment. This contrasts with offline embodiment related to the use of symbol (e.g., a word).

Coupling and decoupling may entail different time-scales, that of real-time interaction with the world vis-à-vis off-line processing. Although the distinction into online/offline embodiment may be useful for exploring cognitive activity in the presence/ absence of real external stimulus, it may pose problems for historical research within Cognitive Linguistics viewing language as derivative of embodied cognition.

Specifically, it has been argued that symbols acquire and develop meaning during situated interindividual interaction. More importantly, given the apparent continuity of language as a system of conveying information and coordination, symbols simultaneously act as the carriers of the conceptual order that has been evolving across generations of language users in the community. Thus, insofar as language change cannot occur overnight, the community's conceptual structure is likely to evolve against the backdrop of the experiential context, rather than undergo any abrupt changes. In this sense, the present time-scale can entail what can be called the anticipated future.

Crucially, related insights from sociological inquiry into the nature of the relation between (collective) identity and human (collective) memory seem to confirm this assumption. Linguistic and cultural resources can act as memory carriers of the lived past, maintaining the collective identity of the community. In this sense, collective/ distributed cognition provides a broader framework for the identity of the individual member.

In the paper, we will present a possible unification of the various time-scales in linguistic research, suggesting a revisited conception of the relation between language as derivative of embodied cognition and time. Since the synchrony/ diachrony distinction implies cutting the fabric of the community's lived experiences into clear-cut domains of the past and the present, it fails to interweave the "remembered present" with the "anticipated future". Hence, a revisited conception of panchrony will be advocated, based *inter alia* on Barsalou's research on situated conceptualisation. Our account of panchrony will include Barsalou's idea of "being there conceptually" related to the idea of modality-specific representation that may underlie language as well as memory and thought. The problem will be illustrated with historical data from Chaucer's selected works.



References

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