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On the way to intersubjectivity: between ontology of language and ontologies of minds

Keywords: shared knowledge, intersubjectivity, epistemological ontology, cognitive modeling, ontological mediation, psychological consciousness

I. The shared mind

Intersubjectivity - as Zlatev (2008: 217) notes - may have several different dimensions. In the paper I will consider only one of the aspects: sharing (understanding of) propositional content expressed by natural language utterances. It means that I am interested in the possibility of common (i.e. shared) knowledge. I will argue that due to differences between ontologies: of a language and of particular minds one has to postulate a special mechanism of “ontological mediation” which [enables] such knowledge and that intersubjectivity may be (to a degree) attained due to “tuning” ontologies of mind to ontology of a language.

II. Ontology of language, ontology of mind

I use the term ontology in its epistemological sense: epistemological ontology may be understood as a naive ontology of things talked about in natural language (as Rapaport (1981) puts it: *what the world would be like if it fits our language*). Such an ontology is a result of ontological commitments of a language. On the other hand people organize mental entities in the form of a structure reminding (formal) ontology (Quillian). An ontology of mind is accordingly understood as an explicit specification of conceptualization of a domain. The ontology establishes representational vocabulary as well as relations between the objects denoted by the vocabulary. In consequence, understanding natural language utterances involves some kind of “translation”: between ontology of language and ontology of mind. To stress the epistemological character of the ontology I will present the problem using examples of non-existent objects (like “round square”) Such “translation” may be possible due to a process called “ontological mediation”, i.e. a process by which a cognitive agent can examine and reason about differing ontologies. I will suggest particular processes by which natural-language users try to resolve problems .

III. Psychological consciousness as an ontological mediator

Cognitive models suggest some features of mental processes indispensable for “tuning” (Jackendoff 2002) ontologies, like: • the capacity to work at some meta-level, i.e. being able to think about (or conceptualize, reason) concepts from ontologies or • ability to operate on models (self-model, models of other cognitive agents), among others. Finally, I will argue that it is psychological consciousness in the sense of Chalmers (1998) that fulfills these requirements and can be responsible for explanation of bridging the gap between the ontologies.



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