

Grounding language and thinking in (inter)action and perception

Paul J. Thibault

(Agder University, Kristiansand and Beijing Normal University, University of Hong Kong)

In the light of recent work on the multimodal basis of interpersonally coordinated interactive events, this paper will consider how thinking and reasoning processes are constructed in and through inter-individual patterns of multi-agent and embodied multimodal interaction. The notion that thinking and reasoning are centred on or confined to the biological individual is questioned. An interactivist alternative will be proposed. In this framework, I shall consider some of the ways in which language extends action, perception, and thinking. Some questions the paper will explore include: What is the role of embodied multimodal meaning-making in the creation of external representations that guide and modulate activity and awareness in various tasks and social practices? How do these resources function to select, connect and focus on cognitively salient aspects of the environment of the agents-in-interaction? How do interpersonally coordinated patterns of bodily activity enable agents to lock into environmental tasks, organise them, segment them into separate components, link their different parts into larger wholes, conceptualise them, and enable complex computational tasks to be handled as socially distributed and embodied ones (instead of individually internal and abstract mental ones) whereby the external world is harnessed and coordinated in and through inter-individual activity with embodied sense-making and perception in order to solve cognitive and thinking tasks and problems. What are the implications for a theory of learning?

Some episodes of video recorded interaction will be discussed in relation to these questions. Implications for how we theorise and analyse “language” and its role in such processes will also be discussed.

Baldry Anthony P. 2005. *A Multimodal Approach to Text Studies in English*. Palladino: Campobasso.

Baldry A. P.; Thibault, Paul J. 2006. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis*. London and New York: Equinox.

Thibault, Paul J. 2004. *Brain, Mind, and the Signifying Body: An Ecosocial Semiotic Theory*. Foreword by M. A. K. Halliday. London and New York: Continuum.

Thibault, Paul J. 2004. *Agency and Consciousness in Discourse: Self-other Dynamics as a Complex System*. London and New York: Continuum.

Thibault, Paul J. 2005. “What kind of minded being has language: Anticipatory dynamics, arguability, and agency in a normatively and recursively self-transforming learning system, Part 1”. *Linguistics and the Human Sciences* 1, 2: 261-335.

Thibault, Paul J. 2005. ‘The interpersonal gateway to the meaning of mind: unifying the inter- and intraorganism perspectives on language’. In *Continuing Discourse on Language: A Functional Perspective*, Vol. 1. A volume presented to Michael Halliday on the occasion of his 80th birthday at the International Systemic Functional Linguistics Congress, Sydney, July 2005. Ruqaiya Hasan, Christian Matthiessen, and Jonathan J. Webster (eds.), 117-156. London and Oakville, CT: Equinox.

Thibault, Paul J. 2005. “What kind of minded being has language: Anticipatory dynamics, arguability, and agency in a normatively and recursively self-transforming learning system, Part 2”. *Linguistics and the Human Sciences* 1, 3, 355-401.

Thibault, Paul J. 2008. ‘Face-to-face communication and body language’. In *Handbooks of Applied Linguistics (HAL) Linguistics for Problem-Solving: Perspectives on Communication Competence, Language and Communication Problems, and Practical Solutions*, Karlfried Knapp and Gerd Antos (eds.), pp. 285-330. Volume 2: *Interpersonal Communication*. Gerd Antos & Eija Ventola (eds.). Berlin. Mouton.

Thibault, Paul J. In preparation. ‘Grounding Language and Thinking in (Inter)action and Perception’.