

BOOK REVIEW

Language and social minds: The semantics and pragmatics of intersubjectivity

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Abstract: This book provides a gradient model of intersubjectivity and social cognition in language. Through an interdisciplinary synthesis, the author proposes three levels of linguistic acts: those aimed at the speaker's benefit alone, those expressing concern for an interlocutor, and those indicating concern for societal reactions. There is a continuum of egocentric to extended intersubjectivity, which includes co-actionality, immediate intersubjectivity, and collective constructions. The model is applied to study children's mastery of intersubjective polysemy and verbal organization, and to determine "social mind" capabilities in autism spectrum disorders. While non-linguistic topics and further empirical validation are outside the scope, this innovative interdisciplinary approach meaningfully extends understanding of the intertwined nature of language, cognition, and social engagement.

Keywords: language learning, social minds, intersubjectivity, semantics, pragmatics

1 Introduction

Human social phenomena require the integration of efforts from a variety of disciplinary traditions in order to be studied in their proper context. Communication across disciplinary boundaries, vocabulary, goals, theories, and methods is often difficult in practice. This book [1] focuses on the semantics and pragmatics of social cognition as a gradient dimension of human interaction, arguing that *social awareness* and *we are speaking as members of a social group* constitute constituent elements of linguistics to varying degrees. In the Preface part, the author uses a linguistic construction [Subject NEG WANT X], which consists of a subject, the negative form of the main verb *WANT*, and a following object or embedded clause to raise questions: "How can we explain that the same linguistic form sometimes refers to a specific interlocutor and in other cases to society as a whole? How can *you* express both *you* and *anyone*?" (p. xiv) According to the author, there is a continuum in language change as well as ontogenetic development that corresponds to three types of linguistic acts: the first, is exclusively aimed at achieving some benefit for the speaker; the second, expresses the speaker's concern for how the interlocutor may react; the third, indicates the speaker's concern for how anyone in society might react.

2 Content summary

There are five chapters in this book, which are divided into three parts. In Part One, the author discusses gradient models of intersubjectivity and provides a theoretical overview of the intersubject gradient model and describes how to implement it methodologically. Firstly, the author highlights the degree to which everyday interactions are marked by intersubjectivity, and that intersubjectivity is expressed in different degrees of complexity. Identifying some of the problems in the literature on Theory of Mind (ToM) and intersubjectivity in linguistics and in cognitive psychology, he proposes a gradient method that allows interlocutors to express feelings regarding specific or general recipients which is based on various assumptions. Additionally, the author distinguishes between common behavior and intersubjectivity, emphasizing the importance of polysemy. Due to the speaker's need for large-scale interaction through spontaneous dialogue, new polysemous words continuously evolve over time. Furthermore, the author discusses the importance of large-scale corpus analysis as well as the current role of corpus data in pragmatics and cognitive linguistics.

Part Two of this book consists of chapters three and four, which present some case studies that support the hypothesis that (I-I) and (E-I) are at risk both diachronically and translingually. In this section, the author introduces the concept of interpersonal evidence in order to discuss the relationship between E-I and evidence and to introduce the preemptive dimension of intersubjective marker interactions. Further, a new approach to studying important trends in the

ability to master intersubjective polysemy during ontogenetic development is proposed, which suggests that gradient models of intersubjectivity can be used in order to study children's ability to express redundant meanings underpinning both direct and indirect relationships. In Part Three, the final chapter of the book, the author concludes that the intersubjective gradient model may have relevance and potential impact on the cognitive linguistics and pragmatics research fields. Specifically, he identifies intersubjective gradients as an illustration of a mechanism that affects the organization of verbal behavior. Finally, he discusses the possible application of gradient models to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) research and how such a framework can help determine whether or not an individual is capable of acting in a "social-mind" language.

3 Analysis and evaluation

The fundamental drive of human evolution is the shift from dyadic to collective forms of joint intention and social engagement. The author argued that there is a gradient relationship between linguistic acts that are based on the intersubjective awareness of specific interlocutors, and linguistic acts that are otherwise grounded in an awareness of social cognition and collective intentionality, the two kinds of acts were referred to as *immediate intersubjectivity* (I-I) and *extended intersubjectivity* (E-I). To be more specific, there was a semantic-pragmatic continuum from human interaction that is merely oriented towards egocentric goals (the author defined as *co-actionality*) to interaction that includes the awareness of the emotions/beliefs of a specific persona (I-I), to increasingly sophisticated interaction based on collective constructions of social values, conventions and institutions (E-I).

By synthesizing insights from multiple perspectives, including pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and psychology, this book explores the subtle and interesting aspects of intersubjectivity, which is not only understood as the awareness of the direct addressee, but also as the awareness of the general social role. Intersubjectivity can be explored from the point of view of language and communication, and the distinctive properties of language that create a shared intrapsychic world, on which intersubjectivity subtends, are discussed. A description of the brain is necessary but not sufficient for the understanding of intersubjectivity, the self, and language, all of which can only be properly understood in conjunction with a full understanding of their intertwined relationship with the body. As a result of this expanded understanding of intersubjectivity, it is able to develop new interpretations of an impressive array of linguistic data across a variety of languages. As an example of an interdisciplinary approach that contributes to our understanding of linguistic phenomena, it represents an original and important advancement in the study of language and the mind. It is worth noting that this book also develops a novel corpus-based approach, utilizing various data sets in multiple languages to achieve this goal, demonstrating how theoretical innovation and methodological rigor are often intertwined.

4 Conclusions and limitations

This book examines the semantics and pragmatics of social cognition as gradient dimensions of human interaction, providing insights into intersubjectivity and how social cognition is expressed in language at different levels of complexity. Using a combination of linguistic and theory-of-mind perspectives, it illustrates how speakers continuously monitor and project their interlocutor's responses to their conversations, outlining three categories of social cognition in first language acquisition and language change. Through a series of examples from languages around the world, he demonstrates the versatility of the model and its generalizability across languages. It also provides insights into the gradient dimension of language evolution and intersubjectivity across autism spectrum disorders. Accordingly, this book is original and innovative, and has important implications for research in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, historical linguistics, applied linguistics, and cognitive psychology. However, certain aspects of its analysis could still be expanded upon in greater detail. The rigour of linguistic research can be strengthened by providing more methodological specifics regarding the corpus-based approaches used. Further, although a variety of languages were discussed, additional quantitative and qualitative empirical studies across diverse populations would be beneficial to provide additional evidence in support of the core hypotheses. It appeared that the scope of the treatment of topics outside of linguistics, such as autism applications, was somewhat limited. Furthermore, since the model promotes a gradient conceptualization, alternative theories and generalizability to all language systems have not been fully explored. Nevertheless, these limitations are relatively minor and do not fundamentally undermine the significant contributions made through the interdisciplinary synthesis of ideas presented. In future work, the theoretical framework outlined holds promise for advancing knowledge in relevant areas with further validation and clarification.

References

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