

The Platonic Projection and the Social Turn in Cognitive Linguistics – or: How do concepts escape from the mind into the sociocultural environment?

Traditionally, Cognitive Linguistics views cognition as the overall universe of inquiry, and language as a subdomain within it (cf., e.g., Langacker 1987:4). However, for some time there has been a growing development towards including the social dimension ('a Social Turn'), cf., e.g., Gibbs (1999), Barlow & Kemmer (2000), Grondelaers and Geeraerts (2003), Croft (2005); Tomasello (2003); Verhagen (2006). This paper aims to contribute to that process.

To capture the dynamic relations between social processes and mind-internal conceptual content requires a framework that (cp. Croft 2000, 2005) includes the interplay between the individual and the population as well as between the patterns and the processes whereby they emerge. Within such an evolutionary framework, this paper takes the concept of 'niche construction' as discussed e.g. in Deacon (1997, 2003) as its point of departure. The paper proposes the notion of the 'Platonic Projection' as the socio-cognitive mechanism whereby mental structures go from being the content of an individual mind to being a feature of the sociocultural niche. The mechanism depends on the understanding of 'status functions' (cf. Searle 1995) but goes beyond that in arguing that *concepts* must be described in terms of their status as part of the world we live in (cp. also Sinha *fc*).

The mechanism is this: Human beings distil concepts out of experience, including interactive experience, and as a result some concepts (e.g. time units) are given the status (in the individual mind) of being 'shared'. These concepts enter into causal relationships with the world (e.g., an 'hour' of work brings in a certain amount of money). This normatively based (cp. Itkonen 1978) causal anchoring entails that shared concepts are part of the way the world works. Because they are out there, you have to adapt to them, as you adapt to other central features of the environment: when children start going to school they enter a niche in which they need to adapt to 'hours' and 'minutes'.

The word 'Platonic' needs to stay within inverted commas, but 'niche concepts' have certain Platonic properties, e.g., they are 'real' in the sense that they exist outside your own mind (you ignore them at your peril). Learning language consists in adapting to the normative-causal relations between expressions and mental representations in the community (e.g., in an Anglophone niche the expression [mus] invokes the concept 'moose'; in Sweden 'mouse'). Therefore you need to distinguish between the language that you adapt to (language as part of the sociocultural niche) and the language that is emerging in the mind (language as individual mental construct); and adaptation may take place in several time scales at the same time (evolutionary, sociocultural and individual)

The talk explores some consequences of this distinction: (a) for the 'Whorfian' issue (b) for the discussion of whether children and adults have different grammars, and finally (c) for understanding recursion (cf. Everett 2005 on cultural 'constraints' on cognition).

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