

Naturalizing language: human appraisal and (quasi) technology

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Abstract Using contemporary science, the paper builds on Wittgenstein's views of human language. Rather than ascribing reality to inscription-like entities, it links embodiment with distributed cognition. The verbal or (quasi) technological aspect of language is traced to not action, but human specific *interactivity*. This species-specific form of sense-making sustains, among other things, using texts, making/construing phonetic gestures and thinking. Human action is thus grounded in appraisals or sense-saturated coordination. To illustrate interactivity at work, the paper focuses on a case study. Over 11 s, a crime scene investigator infers that she is probably dealing with an inside job: she uses not words, but intelligent gaze. This connects professional expertise to circumstances and the feeling of thinking. It is suggested that, as for other species, human appraisal is based in synergies. However, since the verbal aspect of language constrains action and thinking, we also develop customary ways of behaving. Humans extend embodiment by linking real-time activity to actions through which the collectivity imposes a variable degree of control over how individuals realise values.

Keywords Languages · Distributed cognition · Coordination · Biosemiotics · Linguaging · Compressed information · Symbol grounding · Distributed language · Interactivity

1 Translating the past

Tis written: "In the beginning was the Word!"
Here now I'm balked! Who'll put me in accord?
It is impossible, the Word so high to prize,
I must translate it otherwise
Faust

Educated as he was in the classics, Faust turned to translation in seeking to map written words onto meanings. However, he struggled with the results. Why was this? Challenging entrenched opinion, this paper claims that this was because his underlying assumption was false. Things called words (and systems of such entities) are *not* the basis of linguistic sense-making. Rather, word forms are audible patterns, a (quasi) technology.¹ Their basis, however, lies in whole-bodied activity that binds cognitive events into collective forms of life. As human coordination, language making is thus seen as other-oriented behaviour. In writing this text, for example, I direct acts at a reader who acts to construe the products. Further, we use knowledge (however minimal) of a text that inspired Goethe and Faust. How do we do that? How do my writing and your reading exploit intertextuality (Kristeva 1980)?² To deflate any postmodern mystery, intertextuality can be naturalized or, simply, traced to its biophysical grounding. We connect texts by

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¹ Digital and printed word-forms are manufactured products; hand writing is based in hand-based technologies; however, even phonetic and visible gestures draw on a quasi-technological selection process that shapes collective modes of life. Where applied to the verbal aspect of language in general, this is said to be '(quasi) technological'.

² Intertextuality is "the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciate or denotative position" (Kristeva 1980:15). For Kristeva a text is a 'system of signs'.