Przekraczanie granic w języku, literaturze, kulturze

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tom 1

Coding and Transferring or Actions and Interactions?
An Alternative Approach to Understanding Language

Abstract

The article undertakes the new emerging perspective of language as a dynamic form of activity between interacting human agents and redefines it as "an activity in which wordings play a part" (Cowley). Drawing on the views of Maturana, Bottineau, Harris, Thibault, Cowley and others, the author situates the concept of language in the vast field of ecology, agency and interactivity. Language thus conceived is not a code-like denotational structure but an aspect of sense-saturated communicative coordination and a result of human actions and co-actions. On this view we describe a conversation as an unfolding process of two or more interactants entering the cognitive dynamics which allows them to connect to each other and to their environments thus pursuing their individual and shared goals. This can be referred to as sense-making through dialogicality.

Key words: language, dialogicality, interactivity, co-action, distributed perspective, embodiment

Abstrakt

Niniejszy tekst proponuje przyjęcie nowej perspektywy na język jako dynamiczną formę działania zachodzącego pomiędzy jednostkami ludzkimi, czyli jako „czynność, w której swoją rolę odgrywają elementy słowne [wordings]" (Cowley). W tym ujęciu język przestaje być denotacyjną strukturą o charakterze kodu, ale aspektem sensopełnej [sense-saturated] koordynacji komunikacyjnej powstającej na gruncie ludzkich (współ)działań. Korzystając z badań Maturany, Bottineau, Harrisa, Thibaulta, Cowleya i innych, autor umieszcza język w dyskusji na polu ekologii, sprawczości i interakcyjności [interactivity]. W rozmowie następuje wejście dwojga osób w taki rodzaj dynamiki

poznawczej, który pozwala im łączyć się ze sobą nawzajem oraz ze swoim środowiskiem w procesie realizacji własnych i wspólnych celów, co można nazwać dialogiczną sensotwórczością.

Słowa kluczowe: język, dialogiczność, interakcyjność, współdziałanie, perspektywa rozproszona, ucieleśnienie

With new developments appearing in science, it is inevitable that some overhaul of methods and approaches to core phenomena in the humanities will be necessary. One such phenomenon is language discussed in linguistics from a number of perspectives: as a subject taught in schools, as a form of communication, as a system of grammar, as what is translated, as a phenomenon undergoing constant change etc. Encompassing this variety we observe that they all treat the object of their study in the same way: as a static code-like phenomenon which is used by humans as if it were a tool which, at the same time, is primarily analyzed in terms of its symbolic and structural properties. Little attention is given to what makes language special: its ontogenetic contingency on interaction between speakers and its essential value as what people do rather than what people do with. The fairly recent debate in the realm of applied linguistics and cognitive science aims at questioning this fossilized state of affairs. What emerges is a refurbished definition of language in the ecological, embodied and distributed perspective. The strong coherent and multidisciplinary argumentation places activity and the human agent in the centre of the analysis thus revealing new facts about the nature and the mechanisms behind the linguistic practices displayed by two or more interacting humans. As such, this new perspective is also paving the way for new types of research and methods used for the analysis of language primarily as talk-in-interaction.

Dispelling the Language Myth

In our understanding, language is a complex negotiable system manifesting itself in the process of interactivity, or sense-saturated communicative coordination. This goes much beyond instrumentalism which mainstream linguistics offers as a method of approaching and analyzing language. As Bottineau (2008) puts it:

> The cliché has it that linguistic science is the only discipline to study its own object, language, using it as an instrument in the form of lexically marked concepts and discursively expressed descriptions and theories. But talking about language using language will inevitably alter the language, to the extent of making many words redundant, among which the words language and word themselves.

The belief that abstract forms labeled as words, phrases and sentences or grammatical categories known as nouns, verbs, objects, etc. play one of the key roles in linguistic communication has for generations dominated the academy. Language has been described as an autonomous system of signs with no reference to the functionality of its emergent architecture in the form of "spontaneous bottom-up self-organising interactions, not top-down imposition of structure or constraint by any preexisting template" (Deacon: 2005, 274). Similarly, understanding information as an entity undergoing transmission while developing the language skill has been called language acquisition. We want to contest these claims. We observe that language is not a code, neither is it located in the brain nor, for that matter, restricted to an individual. Instead, we want to see language as a form of a human "activity in which wordings play a part" (Cowley: 2014). We see language in the distributed perspective, which allows us to go beyond the limitations of the discussion frames established by traditional orthodox linguistics. Such

a perspective places our argument in the domain of social interaction bringing to the fore what seems to be the forgotten or sometimes ignored essence of human communication. On this view language purports to be a dialogical system characterized by interactivity and responsivity affording cognition understood as the processes of appropriation, construction and reconstruction of personal knowledge. This echoes Bakhtin's idea of language as an area where cognitive processes occur and makes his notion of dialogicity a strong foundation on which to build this interactive description: language is something we first make alive and then perform as social actors. By making this clarification we orient ourselves to a complex system including texts, speech, conversation, gestures, habits and other social phenomena. This language use, or rather languaging activity, can be described as individualistic idiosyncratic discourse laden with speaker's intentions, histories, beliefs as well as the intentions, histories and beliefs of those with whom the speaker interacts linguistically. Interactants in a conversational exchange integrate verbal patterns labelled by Cowley as wordings with affect and self-expression (i.e. judgments and modes of thinking).

This is nothing new, in fact. With Harris' publication of *The Language Myth* (Harris: 1981), we received a new basis for the empirical study of talk-in-interaction and new tools for theorising language as an activity. Harris issues doubts concerning the nature of language challenging some well-established views:

> When we come across words we do not know, words which apparently did not exist a few years ago, it is difficult to resist two conclusions. One is that if there are verbal *codes*, they cannot be fixed: on the contrary, they must be changing all the time. The other conclusion is that if there are such codes, different people use different ones, and these too change. Until yesterday, mine did not include the word *moshpit*.

today it does. But if the code has the kind of instability evidenced by the sudden emergence of new words and meanings, what guarantee of stability is there for *old words* and meanings? (Harris:1998, 9).

For Harris, this apparent instability undermines the viability of the concept of the code as it fails to provide a "source for those publicly invariant meanings that supposedly underpin verbal communication in the commu-nity, and can consequently be both *encoded* and *decoded* by those who know the code" (Harris:1998,9).

Cowley, Linell, Thibault and Kravchenko are among those who continue to propose abandoning Carthesian dualism (observed in de Saussure's and Austin's philosophy) in discussing language as leading to inadequate description of a reality in which speakers *use* language as a system by doing things with *linguistic forms*. In this dualistic paradigm, language became a code with its *users producing* and *processing* such elements as words, phrases and sentences. These are further *transmitted* or *transferred* as thoughts and ideas *from* the mind/head of one speaker *to* the other's. What supposedly warrants successful communication is the code shared by speakers of a given linguistic community. This is what Harris calls the language myth firmly embedded in the Western thought. By adopting the EDD perspective (Ecological, Dynamical, Distributed) as pre-sented in Love (2004), Thibault (2011), Cowley (2007a) and many others we present ourselves with the chance to see language as a less abstract and a more human-generated and human-oriented phenomenon. On this view language becomes an activity which is embodied (not abstract), real time-related and multiscalar (existing on different time-scales) practice being also non-local (it cannot be located to any specific physical space) (Steffensen and Cowley: 2010) and symbolic (Rączaszek-Leonardi: 2009). The adoption of Hutchins' notion of distribution (Hutchins:1995) moves the discussion of talk-in-

interaction to the realm of Distributed Language Theory (DLT) which asserts the embedding of language in social and cultural systems rather than portraying it as a represen-tation of human thought. This stance defends the construc-tivist claim as it departs from seeing language as a static occurrence instead claiming that speakers actually live in it and realise it in and through action. What follows is that language is dialogical, i.e. "linked to other orientation" (Linell: 2013,169).

A need occurs at this point of research development to begin systematizing these approaches. Much as this is a neckbreaking task – given the fact that we are only leaving the gestation period of what seems to be a valuable contribution to our knowledge of language and the limitations of this texts – we feel it is worthwhile to take stock of what we have on the linguistic table. It is not our ambition here to give a thorough and detailed description of what is available at the moment in this discipline but rather to propose a sketchy overview of the state of the art and its main elements acting as reference points navigating us through the new trends in the theory of language. The emergence of this alternative linguistic science coincides with a shift observable for some time in the humanities which can be called the relational turn. It made its mark on the approach to linguistics in what Harris proposed to call interactional linguistics. Much as he can be seen as a forefather of what we know about language now, he offered a perspective which despite its apparent novelty (language as occurring between interacting agents rather than originating and *residing* in their heads) entrains Mace's famous suggestion "Don't ask what is in your head, ask what your head is in." What the heads of two interlocutors are in is dialogue which, and this is a fact, is on the outside*, in the wild.* So if we do anything with words, it is that we use them to harness our and our

interlocutor's activities in conversation. This is what Rączaszek-Leonardi (2012 and 2015) calls a constraint describing language as "a dynamical system, unfolding on several time-scales and encompassing several levels of organization". Alluding to Chomsky, she writes:

> Language, unlike other aspects of cognition has an intuitively clear symbolic level, and thus is especially prone to the attempts of *fast formalization*. In fact, one of the key factors that brought about the *cognitive revolution* was the conceptualization of language as generated by a formal system, and therefore as a phenomenon completely describable on the symbolic level (Rączaszek-Leonardi: 2012).

The constraints implicit in language are two-fold: there are constraints that appear as a consequence of the nature of symbols and there is a set of dynamics that are constrained. The inseparability of these two aspects make language part of the dynamical system of human com-municative interaction in which it finds its physical manifestation. Comments such as the one above appear to be a postulate for a shift from rule-based model of language. For some (e.g. Kravchenko, Cowley, Love) this canonical view unfairly monopolizes the formal symbolic layer of language. The inclination towards symbolism in the orthodox view can be due to taking the written language as the point from which analysis should take off. Instead, the proponents of the dynamical perspective see conversational interaction as a paradigmatic instance of human language and as such, the proper object of scrutiny. Building on that they intend to prove the falsity of the classical belief that language is an individual internal psychological concern. Conversely, the argument is that knowledge and language stem from an individual's experience becoming dependent on the *evidence available* to that particular individual. Simultaneously, the process of sign-making and sign-interpreting is

carried out in real, time- and environment-embedded situations, which are not *given* (Pable: 2010). It follows that language is intrinsically contextual in all of its aspects.

The contextual (time-and space-embedded) nature of language leads to the rejection of the notion that language is a *fixed code*. As people talk to each other they experience their selves and the selves of others, they sense thinking (Harnard: 2006). Therefore, language described as a dialogical activity (languaging) is not an inner process, neither is it concentrated in and on one organism. It is co-creative and as a result productive as it contributes to the existence of a shared and indivisible world integrating all languaging agents as living organisms. This is what makes language a natural and indispensable part of human ecology.

It may be claimed that in order to define language or propose a fairly reliable description of it, one needs to touch upon its ontogeny. Cowley observes that language originates in "how living bodies co-ordinate with the world" (Cowley, 2011b, p. 2), i.e. in what Kravchenko (2007), Neuman and Cowley (2013), Bottineau (2013), Thibault (2011) and others label as languaging meaning "linguistic practices in real-life cognitive and communicative (inter)activities" (Linell: 2013, 168). Cowley's (2011a) slogan "Dynamics first and symbols afterwards" seems to succinctly express the essence of this philosophy. Probably this explains why the contemporary moves in the theory of language can be observed in the joint area of social science, psychology and language studies merging under the umbrella of applied linguistics understood in James' terms (James: 1993). This approach makes us see language as a living entity emerging between interacting agents rather than inside their minds with the help of such analytical tools as Conversation Analysis (Schegloff : 2007; Sacks: 1995; Psathas: 1995), Discourse Analysis (van Dijk: 1997; Keller 2011),

Dialogical Interaction Analysis (as in the works of Mead and Bakhtin then undertaken by Linell (2009)) or the more recently developed Cognitive Events Analysis (Steffensen: 2013; 2016). What spans all these research methods is their inclination towards the analysis of language *in the wild* as something far from being a static, code-like, denotational and em-brained communicative tool. Language appears to be an inherent part of the communicative environment and an activity where meanings are born out of "the ability to share attention" (Tomasello: 2003). This has dire consequences for what we understand as communication and to how we metaphorise it. It seems that the picture of Reddy's *pipe* should leave us for good despite a number of idiomatic forms displaying the way in which humans linguistically construe the ways they communicate with each other. It is our conviction here that those were the consequence of dualistic philosophy promoted by the Western culture in which words *contain* thoughts, speakers *insert* thoughts into words and listeners *extract* thoughts from speakers' words. This thinking became an excellent substrate for a wildly held view that "our minds contain words that we use when we speak, along with rules for combining them" (Lamb: 1999, 9). In this paradigm language is a mediator in the process of sending and receiving of information. The weakness of this belief lies in ignoring the obvious bodily- and affectively-governed agency of the interacting partners in conversation as well as the reciprocity and dynamicity of kinaesthetic flow of the lived experience that they realise in and through language. Standing on the shoulders of Maturana, Love, Thibault, Cowley, Linell and Kravchenko, we propose the opposite claim: in language we *construct* meaning due to the incrementality of dialogue. If there is anything we can say about linguistic communication, it is that when we talk to each other, we interact in the consensual

domain of language. Linguistically described conversation is co-acting and co-orchestrating in the dynamical inter-subjective process of sense-making rather than re-enacting social roles in a turn-taking exchange. As such conversation emerges as a prototypical empirical material whose proper and thorough examination should contribute to more insightful des-cription of what really happens when we speak to each other.

From Constructivism to Biology: Humberto Maturana's Contribution

Considering the argument above, we propose to abandon the distinction into langue and parole or form and function. Instead of acknowledging the obvious discrepancy between activity and artifact, we are more inclined to think of language in the distributed perspective where we observe behaviour and its organisation as not reduced to abstract forms such as words, sentences or individual phonological segments. For some this might sound rather radical as it goes against the well-established offer of mainstream linguistics. In order to present the revamped and updated views on language, we need to turn to such names as Maturana, Luhman, von Glasersfeld, Watzlawick or Weisgerber whose constructivist views affected our under-standing Bakhtin's dialogicality leading to the inception and/or development of such notions as dialogism, lan-guaging and interactivity. What is prominently common to all the different strands of constructivism is the assertion that the human being as a socially-operating creature constructs both theoretical and practical knowledge of the world. The more radical form of constructivism goes further claiming that the human individual not only constructs his/her knowledge of the world but also the world (meaning the socio-cultural space) itself (e.g. von Glasersfeld: 1989). Our present discussion seems to be

inscribed in the communicative version of constructivism which synthetically presents some hypotheses acknowledged by philosophy of language. It seems that what communicative constructivists claim about language brings it out of the realm of passively received and processed abstracta (Kravchenko: 2007). Such an approach can be supported by what all linguists should agree with: language is a form of communication. If so, specific complex linguistic relations appear as another form of social lived experience. The understanding of com-munication we receive in this thinking paradigm is anti-mentalistic and antipsychological one. Instead of placing constructivist symbolic activity of a communicating indi-vidual in his/her mind we take communication as a form of co-agential interaction, which situates it in the inter-subjective and culturally-objective environment, a publicly rather than privately-owned space. We find the co-acting agents central to the communicative act which becomes an extension of their worlds as they display embodied, embedded languaging behavior. They are not users of an abstract language system but agents involved in a dialogical activity across multiple timescales. In this way Mead's symbolic interactionism finds its confirmation: any con-versation taking place in a social process or in the context of experience brings mind to the existence. Therefore language is constitutive of the mind, not the opposite.

Transferring the philosophical ruminations onto the linguistic ground we find dialogue as the essential and prototypical example of language as an activity. This is the microcosm and the core of all human linguistic activity. In other words, where there is no dialogue, there is no talk. And it is in talk that language finds its most natural and prevailing manifestation. Turning to the theory of dynamical systems, findings in neurobiology and claims made by the third wave in

cognitive linguistics (Evans: 2014) where embodiment and embeddedness of human linguistic inter-action are readily discussed brought the discussion on language to the point where it seems to ontologically belong: to human biology, as in Thibault's assertion that "talk is whole-body sense making" (Thibault: 2011). It is also important in this debate to grant validity to the theory of ecosocial systems following Bronfenbrenner's (1979) claim that that human development is affected by such contextual influences as society, institutions, cultural forces or time (chronology). All this contributed to the emergence of the EDD perspective on language. The view on language presented here finds its roots in Humberto Maturana's biological stance in discussing human activity. His point of departure is treating the human individual as any other living system whose cognition is equivalent to life (as in Leyland 1988). Building on this biocognitive foundation Maturana poses two questions on language. One is about the inner processes which permit an organism to establish a linguistic domain with another organism while the other addresses the processes in linguistic interaction which allow the organism involved in it to describe and predict the events experienced by this organism (Maturana: 1978). He starts seeking answers by   questioning   the   conventionally   symbolic and denotative character of language. What raises his doubt in the structural description of language is that words "denote entities regardless of the domain in which these entities may exist" (Maturana: 1978, 50). He notes that as denotation is the result of a consensus among speakers of a language (in that it specifies what the denotant actually denotes), it should follow a more primitive, i.e. a preliminary operation preparing grounds for it. This takes him to assert that language results from a process not requiring denotation. Language then cannot be based on denotative processes, as it is is only a "trivial necessary result" of something beyond

"ontogenic structural coupling" (Maturana: 1978) processes which take the interacting agents to the establishment of a consensual domain. Maturana contests the Chomskyan hypothesis of the innate language faculty or the never conclusively evidenced claim that language is located somewhere in the brain. Instead, what we infer from Maturana's proposal is that language is a behaviour resulting from the potentialities of humans as a biologically-driven entities. What makes Maturana's argument a significant contribution to building our fra-mework is that in orienting us to think of language in terms of connotation as prior to denotation it legitimizes the dynamic and distributed perspective we propose to adopt.

Maturana's research seems to be one of the first attempts in science to discuss language as an activity taking place outside the human brain and mind. The biological orientation he proposes safely anchors language in the body-world rather than in the sphere of abstract signs and structures. Here language, or actually languaging, seems secondary to the biology and the actual activity of the human agent. This is confirmed by Thibault who con-centrates on talk as going before any other forms of human communication. He offers the notion of first-order lan-guaging as a different theoretical object in the study of language. This term refers to the "organization of process on different scales that takes place when persons engage in talk together" (Thibault: 2011, 5). For him, individuals engaged in a dialogue enact, exploit, respond to, and attune to pico-scale bodily events with an aim to engage with each other while constructing their individual worlds together. Whatever *language patterns* exist, they are dependent on bodily dynamics. We come to the point where it becomes evident that language eludes the kind of *what-it-is* scrutiny, which might say something about its nature. If instead we depart from the *what-it-does* or *what-it-affords* point, we will find

description significantly more available. In short, the *form* that mainstream linguistics seems to be so obsessed with is only what appears to us as a material artefact of a co-ordinated activity bound up with it. As such it is much less interesting and thought-provoking as when we analyse conversations we can see a dynamic picture of social actors integrating affect and self-expression with wordings which Cowley defines as repeated (and systematized) aspects of vocalizations that, within our community, carry historically derived information.

Discarding the Code-view of Language in the Bio-ecological Framework

One small step in debunking the *language myth* is dealing with the code view of language. This metaphor does nothing but again accept the idea of language as a *product* of its own *users* who then *process* its elements in the form of words, sentences and utterances. By metaphorising language as a code we present it as naturally complex in its structure and complicated in its use. Each code represents meanings in ways familiar to and understood by only a selected group of those who have been licensed to use it, which excludes other groups from linguistic interaction as aliens or uninitiated outsiders. Before any communication occurs, a particular code requires being broken or learned by its prospect user. In other words, the *coding* system and the rules of creating structures are indispensable to those who wish to communicate. We know this is not the case. When observing infants or beginner learners of a foreign language we find that despite their poor ability to form well-structured and fully-fledged utterances (poor coding ability) they manage successful communication in the language they intend to speak. This is far too little to claim that one has mastered the code. In fact, what happens is that babies hear wordings, which is a process Cowley

compares to seeing pictures. As they do so, they adopt new social roles. In other words, first comes learning how to take the language stance (Cowley: 2011a), or orienting to *wordings* by treating speech as if it consisted of verbal patterns. Then humans learn how to connect the verbal patterns they hear with their lived experience, which makes words and grammar secondary to the actual activity of language use. As a consequence of gaining the relevant experience of being and living in the world while relating with it, social actors/agents learn to react to wordings and make proper use of them. This undermines the view of instructed language acquisition as a process of learning to organize the atoms of linguistic *units* into meaningful *structures* used to *express* thoughts. In fact, we find that they are secondary to the activity of languaging. By saying this we stand against computationism in language and we contest the claim that language is a (complex) tool. It is a skill, or more precisely, a skilled linguistic action we take, as Cowley puts it. At this point, however, we feel it important to bring forth Kravchenko's (2016) distinction into what we understand as language in terms of action and event and seen as a domain of cultural artifacts. A natural environment for language to occur is social events connecting the human body with its physical environment and cultural traditions. By rejecting the language-as-code ideology we depart from all its terminological framework, such as transcription, patterns, encoding, decoding, transmission, reception etc. We need to be careful, however, not to throw the baby out with the bathwater: language does have its form in wordings. What we postulate is that language must not be reduced to being treated as a tool or a vehicle while pushing aside the significance of real-time interpersonal activities and of the phenomena that occur between people on different time-scales. As has been demonstrated on many occasions (e.g.

Kravchenko: 2007; Love: 2004) language should be discussed in the interactive and inter-actional perspective, as an embodied activity, intrinsic to real-time coordination and cognition, at the same time non-localizable or symbolic (Rączaszek-Leonardi: 2009) as well as distributed in its virtual nature (Cowley: 2007a; 2007b; 2009).

Returning to *language use* we feel it is important to note that if there is anything talking individuals use, it is vocalisations. What follows is that instead of *doing things with words* humans perform a bodily sense-making activity during an interactive process of dialogical coordination. Communicating/talking humans thus liaise with their environment and with other individuals being its integral element. Such a relationship is not only typical of our species, which suggests broadening the scope of our scrutiny beyond what most of us traditionally consider as language study and resorting to bio-ecology. This will help us liberate from the narrow confines imposed by content-and-form thinking and open a whole new terrain where we can more freely consider the relationship between natural language, human nature and the world governed by its own dynamics. By doing so instead of looking at language as a system, we propose to see it as a system within a system, i.e. in the macrosocial perspective embracing human populations (a *biotope* in Cowley's words) as our reference point. In this way "language [is] traced to, not exchange, but (broadly) a mode of sharing experience" (Cowley: 2014, 60). We take it as a fact that living is first and languaging follows (Maturana: 1978; Cowley: 2014) thereby discussing lan-guage while forgetting about the bio-ecological domain and, what follows, individual and collective agency will not offer any chances of making progress in the studies of language. The linguistic tradition with its view focused on the structural and the formal tends to ignore the fact

that language and, what follows, discourse initially should be conceptualized as part of the living world rather than what an individual *knows* in terms of grammar, syntax, phonetics etc. We substantiate this claim by saying the obvious: in the process of becoming a human being "we draw on the continuous fluctuations of physics, our bodies and the biological world: we depend on the dynamics of the living" (Cowley: 2014a, 60). This makes all humans part of what we call here bio-ecology. In trying to grasp the nature of language and discourse we ask the question of how they contribute to the living and conversely, "how life shapes languaging beings as autonomous or self-contained entities" (Cowley: 2014a, 61). Addressing this question we place the discussion on language in the joint area of interaction and individual's ecological being. Steffensen links this perspective with the cognitive dynamics of daily human dealings such as problem solving activities, decision-making processes, striking and managing social relations, etc. He calls this *interactivity*, i.e. "sense-saturated coordination that contributes to human action" (Steffensen: 2013, 196). Building on this Steffensen coins his slogan "If you want to learn about language, forget about language" (Steffensen: 2011, 204). Its significance in our discussion reveals something much greater about language than a mere ex-perience of a phenomenon. It takes us beyond words and the relations between them into the areas where we think of language as the essence of what makes us human.

Concluding Remarks

To sum up, it seems that we are on the threshold of a major change in the linguistic paradigm where "human language is seen more and more as a suite of flexible and adaptive behaviors that are based upon a naturalistically grounded intersubjective sensitivity to the bodily   dynamics   (movement)   of   others

and the sensorimotor coupling rela-tions between persons and their worlds" (Thibault: 2011, 3). The new perspective invites us to think of language in the way its multifaceted nature suggests to be most natural. We are now opening ourselves to thinking of language as of the phenomenon that actually happens in what Maturana calls consensual domain. Language may be therefore considered an arena where the life lived by an individual becomes living together with others. Seen in this way language cannot be said to actually *occur* in the brain. Instead we find it the result of the recursive coordination of interactions as two or more human agents converse. One thing emerges as fairly uncontroversial: language is not abstract in that it is the coordination of the activities we perform in our daily practice. If there are symbols then they appear to be mere commentaries about the linguistic activity. From this it transpires that words will be secondary to the actual behaviour of speaking (as commented by Thibault and briefly discussed above). Flows of interaction and coordi-nation on multiple timescales between conversing speakers will then naturally result in differences in the results of their sense-making activity. All this testifies to the claim that language should be researched and discussed in the concrete domain of doings and dealings rather than in the abstract world of signs.

On the other hand before we plunge into the missionary zeal of revolutionising the language science entirely we need to bear in mind that the new paradigms in the studies in and on language are not unproblematic and the proponents of the classical structuralist approach may find this conception far too difficult to pin to any specific area of science and as such far too broad and interdisciplinary. This, for some, disproves the approach as only vaguely or marginally linked to linguistics. It seems, however, that relevant space exists in applied linguistics which discusses

language in its practical dimension as a form of human activity (e.g. teaching, translating, talking) allowing for contributions from related disciplines. The view of language as "a mode of co-action used in social life" (Cowley: 2011a, 3) has the potential of seeing it as something real and tactile rather than elusive. The benefit of the framework proposed here is that it brings us closer to what actually happens in conversations. It orients us to what is said and done, to expectations, assumptions and the actual wordings. These are crucial in that they are skillfully combined with vocal dynamics. Also, the new pathways we are trying to describe may cast some light onto why and how some conversations have more transformative effects than others. Finally, whether we see language as a tool, vehicle, arena or produce any other metaphorical pictures of it, it deserves to be discussed as a phenomenon *in the wild,* as an aspect of our life-world, inseparable from our biology and the praxis of living. It is so because, as Kravchenko put it on one occasion, language "is what makes us what we are – humans".

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