THE EMBODIED THEOREY OF LANGUAGE

Language is more than an abstract symbolic system; instead it is an ability grounded in the human embodied dimension. Accordingly, our conceptual structures are shaped by the peculiarities of our bodies and by their motor potentials. Language understanding may be described as a kind of embodied simulation, rather than the activation of a disembodied symbolic knowledge.

EVIDENCE

Action priming
- Words understanding influences action execution.
- Gentilucci & Gangitano (1998)
- Sentence understanding influences the execution of oriented actions.

Language priming
- Observing actions influences speech production.
- Gentilucci (2003)
- Preparing actions: influence language understanding Lindemann et al. (2006)

Action verbs somatotopically activates the MC.
- Action sentences somatotopically activates the MC.
- Buccino, M. et al. (2005)

THE SIMULATION PARADIGM

Language understanding is meaning re-enacting. Semantic comprehension is a non-inferential process based on the ability of mapping words and sentences on one’s own motor expertise.

PRAGMATISM UPDATED

According to the pragmatic turn in philosophy of language (Wittgenstein, Austin, Strawson, Grice, Searle et al.) semantics is not only a question of how words relate with meanings; but it is also a question of what actions we make with them.

... this is only the tip of the iceberg...

A pragmatic theory of language leads to reconsider the relationships between semantic comprehension and the human motor potentials.

Language is a tool

Linguistic behavior is always an attempt to change the environment using words, sentences and gestures.

Language is a practical extension of our bodies extending the range of actions that can be carried out through bodily effectors.

Understanding other’s people linguistic behavior, is understanding other’s people practical intentions.

THE CRITICAL CHALLENGE

Can an embodied theory of language be extended to the totality of the semantic domain?

Differently from action-related words like kick or grasp, abstract terms as justice or faith have not a concrete referent in the physical world, so it is difficult to understand how their meanings can be grounded in motor cognition.

THE ENACTIVE SOLUTION

Linguistic communication is always an action-oriented behavior devoted to modify a state of affair. Language is a tool employed for making actions and reaching goals, any occurrence of words and sentences suggests a practical need in front of which the linguistic behavior emerges as an attempt of solution.

Word and sentences never exist in isolation, but are always embedded in a communicative frame which contributes to determine the range of motor activities associated with their actual employment.