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THE RISE OF ENTRAPPED COGNITION IN THE ECOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

ПОДЪЕМ ПОПАВШЕГО В ЛОВУШКУ ПОЗНАНИЯ В ЭКОЛОГИИ ЯЗЫКА

The paper discusses a human-specific mode of cognition when ways of knowing naturally supersede the known, but at the same time, unnaturally reduce adaptivity to the changing environmental conditions.

Key words: cognitive ecolinguistics; embodiment; biology of cognition.

Рассматривается присущий человеку метод когниции, при котором способы постижения реальности естественным образом вытесняют познанное, но при этом неестественно снижают адаптивность к изменяющимся условиям среды.

Ключевые слова: когнитивная эколингвистика; воплощение; биология познания.

As a subfield of (critical) ecolinguistics, cognitive ecolinguistics is concerned with the impact of language and cognition on our way and quality of life by approaching language as a medium in and off which a human lives, with which she operates [Druzhinin, Rakedzon 2024; Kravchenko 2024]. Along the lines of Michael Halliday [Halliday 2001], I focus on linguistically traceable patterns of knowing (perception and thought) that have negative, if not destructive, outcomes. Unlike his somewhat realist premise, I argue that these patterns result from what I call ‘entrapped cognition’ – a human-specific mode of cognition when ways of knowing naturally supersede the known, but at the same time, unnaturally reduce adaptivity to the changing environmental conditions. On this view, cognitive entrapment is not the fault of the brain or body or environment alone, but rather our brain-body-environment engagement that we maintain and conserve in and through language. Each of these three components is part of a wider cognitive system and does not function independently: Our body is a consequential composition of our neural components and their relations, our environment is a consequential composition of what we do in the relational space that our embrained body permits. The feature of this system is that it is not and cannot be known to us in its complexity but appears to be controlled, predictable and simple in the language through which we operate.

I bring methods of systems thinking along to cognitive ecolinguistics and describe four major factors that account for entrapped cognition. These are arguments from:

- agency (human cognition operates within and on constraints it cannot escape);
- the observer (human cognition is grounded in phenomenological experience that cannot ‘tell a story’ of its appearance);
- genesis (human cognition is a derivative, retroactive process whereby one deals with novelties through older ways of understanding);
- abstraction (human cognition operates through abstraction in the course of which more qualities of a situation are lost than gained).

There are four major regularities established in and through language that entrap human thinking into a delusional simplification of the world. I name these as ‘the four traps’ – those of allness, stillness, symmetry and sameness.

1) The trap of allness is an all-instead-of-one understanding of the world whereby individual items of experience are ignored because they fall within a larger boundary, i.e. they are collected under a certain umbrella term.

2) The trap of stillness is a product-instead-of-process understanding of the world whereby motor experience is ignored for its more stable sensorial effects that can be morphologically objectified by substantives.

3) The trap of symmetry is based on a matching-instead-of-fitting understanding of the world whereby one ignores experiences that do not contrast or compare. Fitness, or ‘fittingness’, means that items can work together or, if not, changes can be made to achieve workability. Matching implies the existence of some model against which items are judged to be good or bad, right or wrong, true or false. Matching seems to be a more popular way of dealing with the world than fitting because everyday language itself is based on the principle of symmetry.

4) The trap of sameness can refer to a consistence-instead-of-persistence understanding of the world whereby experiential changes and inconsistencies are ignored if a precursor of the experience persists throughout the experience.

All these ways of cognitive entrapment pose ecological dangers for human flourishing and a healthy, sustainable development of the environment.

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