

A Cognitive-Interactional Approach to the Evolution of Linguistic Im/politeness

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In recent years there has been growing interest in the pragmatic dimension of language evolution (Scott-Phillips 2015; Tomasello 2008). This ‘pragmatic turn’ in evolutionary linguistics can also be seen in the increased interest in the evolution of im/politeness as a social practice, an area that has heretofore largely been neglected. Previous research has focused on the evolution of linguistic im/politeness from the perspectives of ethology (Wacewicz, Żywiczyński, & McCrohon 2014; Żywiczyński 2012), formal semantics (Vogel 2014), and sociocultural development (Bax 2011). More recently, we have proposed that it is a fruitful research endeavour to look at this question from a cognitive-interactional perspective (Pleyer & Pleyer 2016).

In this paper we want to extend this cognitive-interactional approach by investigating the evolution of linguistic im/politeness from the perspective of Cognitive Pragmatics and Cognitive Linguistics and integrate this approach with other relevant disciplines. Cognitive pragmatics can be described as the study of the cognitive aspects of the construal of meaning- in-context, focussing on the general cognitive-pragmatic principles, abilities and processes from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics (Schmid 2012). It is closely related to a more general movement in Cognitive Linguistics to focus more strongly on interactional conceptualization in discourse (e.g. Zima & Brône 2015; Fischer 2017; Hart 2015; Croft 2009). This movement therefore parallels the growing interest in the pragmatic dimension in evolutionary linguistics (Pleyer & Winters 2014).

The overall goal of the research programme proposed here is it to explore the evolutionary and cognitive foundations of linguistic im/politeness as well as its evolutionary and social-interactional functions. For this, it is crucial to give both a phylogenetic as well as an ontogenetic account of these foundations and functions. Therefore, in our paper we will present and investigate the phylogenetic and ontogenetic foundations of linguistic im/politeness. Specifically, we will look at the following topics:

- a) the existence of a cooperative framework within a Community of Practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Tomasello 2019), which is a necessary pre-condition for the emergence of linguistic conventions, including linguistic impoliteness,
- b) the emergence of conventionalization (Schmid 2016) and normativity (Tomasello 2014) on the biological, cultural, and ontogenetic timescales of the complex adaptive system of language (Steels 2011; Kirby 2012),
- c) the interactional, dynamic emergence of structure and conventions in discourse (Pleyer 2017; Galantucci 2005; Tamariz 2017; Zima & Brône 2015), and
- d) the cognitive, interactional, and evolutionary functions of linguistic impoliteness (Culpeper 2011, Wacewicz, Żywiczyński & McCrohon 2014)

For all four of these topics there is a wealth of research from disciplines such as linguistic im/politeness studies (e.g. Culpeper, Haugh & Kádár 2017; Culpeper 2011) Cognitive and Usage-Based Linguistics (e.g. Traugott & Trousdale 2013, Fischer 2017), Cognitive Pragmatics (e.g. Schmid 2012), interactional linguistics (e.g. Zima & Brône 2015), language acquisition research (Matthews & Krajewski 2015), evolutionary anthropology (e.g. Tomasello 2008; 2014; 2019), experimental semiotics (e.g. Galantucci, Garrod & Roberts 2012), and evolutionary linguistics (e.g. Tamariz 2017). All these different disciplines have important contributions to make to a cognitive-interactional approach to the evolution of linguistic im/politeness. But so far they have not been integrated in order to elucidate such an approach. The present paper is meant as a first step towards such an integration.

Selected References

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