

THEME SESSION: Language, consciousness and semiosis

What is bad about a bad conscience and what is clear about a clear one? On evaluation as a special kind of consciousness

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In exploring the relations between language and consciousness, the actual words and constructions we choose for languaging about this very consciousness are of great interest. The assumption here is that the overall intention in languaging is to make meaning, and consequently that the words with which we describe our mental world reflect our means of understanding. This would hold for the individual, as well as for humanity. In this talk I propose that evaluative expressions play a vital role for intrapersonal reasoning which in turn is crucial for making meaning.

The Swedish word *samvete* ('conscience') is used, as in English, for a special kind of *medvetande* ('consciousness'), namely not only 'thinking and being aware of it' but specifically 'thinking about right and wrong' and probably also 'feeling about right and wrong'. In addition we seem to have the possibility to evaluate this very thinking and feeling, linguistically realized as *dåligt/gott samvete* ('bad (guilty)/clear conscience'). The languaging implies that the evaluation refers not only to an experienced emotion, but also to actions, moral opinions and even personalities. (The philosophical notions *emotivism* and *moral internalism* (Björnsson 2000) is an applicable field of comparison.)

In this talk I will present a study of Swedish compounds in which the notion *samvete* constitutes the first part (data collected from the historical dictionary *Svenska Akademiens ordbok*) that reveals several aspects of conscience as a creative and meaning making process in human cognition. Among other things it is possible to distinguish a network of connections between our conceptions of conscience. This network is analysed by means of two theoretical frameworks (cf. Lascaratou 2007). Conceptual metaphor theory, specifically in the domain of emotions (Kövecses 2000), and the systemic-functional grammar view of language as a *social semiotic* (Holmberg 2002) provide tools for exploring how evaluation and meaning making cooperate.

The compounds are categorized as representing three different perspectives or roles, which I call an experiencer, a beholder and a decision-maker. These three roles seem to take part in a discussion about a complex of guilt and indignation, moral guidance and judging and decision making. The function of evaluation might be to separate unpleasant from pleasant, bad from good, guilty from not guilty thereby giving room for an intrapersonal dialogue regarding whether these dichotomies can be accepted or not in the own personality. In this talk I will argue that the languaging about *samvetet* can be interpreted in the frame of a conceptual metaphor realized as *SAMVETET ÄR ETT SAMTAL* (\approx CONSCIENCE IS A DIALOGUE), which also has explanatory potential for the role of evaluation in language and consciousness.

References

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