

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

REVIEW OF “ECOLINGUISTICS: COMMUNICATION PROCESSES AT THE SEAM OF LIFE”

by M. Bogusławska-Tafelska

(Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 2016. – 126 p.

ISBN 978-3-631-66766-8; DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-06416-2)

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The back cover of this well designed and produced book presents Assistant Professor Marta Bogusławska-Tafelska, who works at the Department of English Studies, University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn, Poland, as an ecolinguist who started the *Ecolinguistic Studies Program* for advanced students of linguistics and authored several monographs as well as a collection of papers published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

The book under review builds on her previous monographs (“Towards an ecology of language, communication and the mind” (2013) and “Self-education as a strategy of life. The psycholinguistic profile of the Polish student of English” (2006)), elaborating and developing further a new inter- and trans-disciplinary approach to natural communication, the approach defined by the author as ecological.

The content of the term ‘ecological’ is interpreted by the author in a way which is somewhat different from discussions of ecologism that range through the ‘mainstream’ ecological linguistics since the latter mostly takes the cognitivist stance (for recent overviews see, for example, A. Fill, V. Steffensen (2014); A. Stibbe (2012). Maintaining that “the process of human communication extends much deeper and wider beyond the forms of the language system, beyond cognitive structures and processes, and beyond social, cultural and biological mechanisms and relations” (Ch. 2, 2.1.), the author holds that communication in living systems is not a cognitive process, but a life process happening at the higher layers of the living system (Ch. 4, 4.2).

As a general-methodological underpinning of her approach, the author resorts to the quantum theory, in particular, to Włodzimierz Sedlak’s application of quantum ontology and theory to research on organic life. It should be noted that at this juncture, as a linguist, I approach the bounds of my expertise and thus have to leave it to natural scientists to decide whether the quantum-chemical ‘seam of life’ is a valid enough theory to be accepted by the scholarly community. Yet taking into account the scale of the problem addressed (it is the so-called Hard Problem of Consciousness – how a material system is capable of producing subjective / spiritual experience), I would rather welcome a new way of tackling it than disclaim the validity of the author’s argument on the grounds that currently there is not enough scientific evidence to support it.

I wholeheartedly side with the author in treating communication process as emergent and dynamic, in viewing it not only as embodied and distributed (situationally grounded), but also interactionally enacted by communicants, which puts the human communicator into the spotlight (Ch.2, 2.1). These presumptions, in my opinion, combine into a logical and uncontroversial picture of the process of sense making in natural communication. One might expect to find more examples that illustrate this process, but the author has probably foreseen this remark since she cites Professor H. Wallach claiming that “a paradigm and a theory is always stronger than data” (Ch.5 – Introduction). On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that in the focus of this study is the applied

aspect of the theory presented in the first five chapters of the manuscript.

The applied part of the research holds a detailed description of the questionnaire distributed among young Polish informants on the key concepts of the new paradigmatic approach described in the theoretical part, namely, spirituality, mindfulness, and meditation. This is followed by a discussion of results, which is profound and insightful, statistically processed and diagrammatically presented. The data obtained by the author and the conclusions she arrives at shall certainly be useful to specialists of all levels in the sphere of education.

Yet I cannot but mention that the opposition ‘cognitive :: ecological’ does not seem to be totally justified. By ‘cognitive’ the author obviously means early cognitivism of the 1970s which treats meaning as a mental representation. Yet this strain of cognitive linguistics later evolved into connectionism (1980s), embodied dynamicism (1990s), and enactivism (2000s). The enactivist strain of thought which regards cognition as a situated activity which spans a systemic totality consisting of the human conceptualizer’s brain, body, and the world (Clark 2008; Wheeler 2005), in my opinion, does not contradict the ecological approach as understood by

the author. From the enactivist perspective, the process of sense-making is ‘enactment’ of the conceptualizer into the environment, where the latter is understood broadly, as the whole world. Bearing this in mind, ‘early’ might be prefaced to ‘cognitivism’ and perhaps accompanied by a couple of references, for example (Fodor 1975; Pylyshyn 1984), for readers to have a clearer idea of what is meant by ‘cognitive’.

On the whole, I consider the book “Ecolinguistics: Communication Processes at the Seam of Life” (2016) by Assistant Professor M. Bogusławska-Tafelska to be undoubtedly novel in relation to what is already known about natural communication. The questions the author addresses (paradigmatic shifts in linguistics, fundamentals of ecolinguistics, its methodological underpinnings and applied aspects, etc.), are valid, the theory is uncontroversial and complete, the methods robust. It is my conviction that the unified ecological account of communication, which is presented in this book, is a much needed achievement. I can foresee that a number of researchers now working separately in different areas of linguistics and pedagogics will be encouraged to carry on with their work inspired by this book which brings together theoretical and applied aspects.