

Introduction to the Special Issue on Enlanguaged Practices

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This special issue of *Linguistic Frontiers*, titled “Enlanguaged Practices: Linguaging, Semiosis, and the Human Ecology” delves into the intricate connection between linguaging and human socio-practical behavior. It challenges the common tendency in traditional linguistics of separating linguistic behavior from practical action more generally, thus urging a shift towards recognizing their intertwined nature. This departure from orthodox linguistics, and, hence, the tendency of focusing predominantly on the inner traits of language, has been advocated by scholars such as Wittgenstein (2009), Schatzki (2002) and Maturana (1988). Despite these important voices, there is a need for exploring how practices are enlanguaged within the framework of so-called ‘radical linguistics’.

Radical linguistics is an umbrella label that covers a plurality of linguistic theories and perspectives including distributed, dialogical, ecolinguistic and integrationist approaches. In being ‘radical’, these different takes on language challenge fundamental assumptions of structuralist and representationalist linguistics. This includes countering the ‘language myth’ (Harris 1981) as well as elucidating biases towards written language (Linell 1982). In recent years, this ‘linguaging revolution’ has gained wider traction and recognition:

“[E]xceptional linguaging studies have moved from the peripheries of linguistics, cognitive science, semiotics, education and language teaching to the core of the respective disciplines and now are shifting to the very heart of life and human sciences with a promise of becoming their integrators” (Ilyin 2023, 1)

Yet, the theme of practices has largely been lingering on the periphery of the radical agenda (for a notable

exception, see Linell 2009). The purpose of this Special Issue is to facilitate a debate on the topic by emphasizing the significance of practices and their relation to linguistic phenomena broadly construed. The basic assumption is that human practices are ‘enlanguaged’ in the sense that linguistic norms and resources interrelate with them in various ways that may even go beyond interpersonal communication (cf. Gahrn-Andersen 2023). Through interdisciplinary inquiry and theoretical innovation, the contributions to this Special Issue deepen our understanding of the dynamic role of linguaging in human experience and practical entanglements. By bringing together these different voices, my modest ambition is to advance radical linguistics scholarship but also to contribute to broader conversations about the nature of language, practices, and social interaction.

In the first article of the Special Issue, Per Linell explores the concept of ‘enlinguaging’ understood as the ‘bringing of something into linguaging’. In carefully considering various manifestations of enlinguaging in activities as diverse as perception, speaking, social interaction, reading and decision-making, Linell makes a case for attributing a key enabling role to internal dialogue in such behavior. While the phenomenon of internal dialogue is often overlooked in linguistics and interactionist studies, Linell takes it to be central to how humans make sense of their surroundings and, in particular, in situations where the outcomes (or meanings) are not somehow anticipated in advance. Inner dialogue comes to function as a tacit mechanism that enables linguaging agents to cope with the unexpected by means of tacit deliberation. Internal dialogue is characterized by tacit argumentation within the individual’s mind, including both so-called ‘auto-dialogue’ and ‘hetero-dialogue’ that involve pre-predicative

deliberations and the incorporation of the perspectives of others. Linell's focus on internal dialogue investigates the conditions under which human languaging agents deal with the unexpected, the problematic and/or the poorly understood.

Alex Kravchenko focuses on an aspect of predication and, more specifically, linguistic denotation within the context of external realism. He critiques the traditional view of language as a sign system used for knowledge representation, arguing that the concept of denotation is controversial due to the absence of commonly accepted definitions for concepts like 'sign' and 'knowledge'. He suggests that the reification of linguistic signs, rooted in dualist philosophy ultimately traceable to the works of Plato and Descartes, hinders our understanding of language as a mode of human existence. In terms of a positive argument, Kravchenko proposes an important epistemological shift away from objectivist views towards a systemic approach which is influenced by Maturana's constructivist epistemology. This approach underscores the organization of language systems which "consists in viewing [language], not as a kind of object (sign system) to be studied 'in itself and for itself', but as species-specific human interactive (dialogical) behavior constituted by dynamical processes and relations between them." Rather than exploiting linguistic units with prefixed meanings, languaging agents actively bring forth meanings, not as denotations but as connotations, through their recurrent languaging activities.

Misha Ilyin's contribution thematizes the relation between things and language, and, more specifically, the role of language in relation to human existence more generally. He takes a critical starting point in the work of Austin, and the fact that it raises the important issue of 'How to do things with words'. His investigation takes him across thinkers including Heidegger, Renan and Descartes, and he explores, amongst other things, how things turn from being 'crisp' to being fuzzy once they move away from more familiar settings. Here, language and thinking starts to become interrelated; at least in terms of how we experience ourselves experiencing the world. Ilyin shows how language is both enabling (or: powerful) and constraining. The fact that language leads towards nominalization is part of this strength-weakness duality. At the same time, Heidegger's work shows that language is flexible medium and that we can work around its constraints by means of language itself; or, rather, how we actually use it (languaging).

My own paper addresses the topic of linguistic normativity in the context of the Distributed Language Perspective (DLP). The basic claim is that we can theorize linguistic normativity without presupposing a dualism between first-order articulations and second-order normative constraints – a distinction which is central to DLP. The paper challenges Saussure's assumption that language is fundamentally different from other practical activities. It suggests that language and practical activities share commonalities, and it examines how concepts like 'game' encompass diverse phenomena.

It builds on Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblances" to highlight the fluidity and indeterminacy of conceptual boundaries thus suggesting that the use of concepts is not fully governed by fixed rules. The paper discusses the implications of this insight for considering languaging as rule-regulated activity and, based on insights from Heidegger, makes the argument that first-order actions constitutive of practices and their normative second-order constructs are both, in terms of their actual constitution, traceable to the workings of human practical understanding.

Stephen Cowley's paper highlights the importance of understanding how scientific and other practices emerge in human languaging engagements with non-human actants. His contribution explores the implications of enlanguaged worlds, where languaging is intertwined with practices and ontologies. He discusses the role of languaging in shaping human perception, action, and understanding, drawing on examples from both humans and other living systems. The paper stresses the shortcomings of traditional views of language, the evolution of languaging in humans, and the importance of adopting a new perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of language, ontology, and practices. Building on Sellars, Cowley argues that language and perception intersect in practices and sociocultural contexts thus challenging the idea of a fixed, objective reality (in the realist sense). Instead, he emphasizes the dynamic and contingent nature of knowledge and suggests that understanding reality requires going beyond conventional conceptions of language and perception. In recognizing the complex interplay between languaging, human judgement, and so-called 'empirical forms', Cowley claims that it is possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of ('first') ontology and the human condition more generally.

Vincenzo Raimondi's contribution addresses the role of human self-domestication and enlanguaged practices in the evolution of human sociality and language. It presents an alternative to the human self-domestication hypothesis (HSD), arguing that languaging interactions are a crucial catalyst for evolutionary change. The paper challenges the assumptions underlying the HSD hypothesis by proposing that enlanguaged practices have reshaped ancestral developmental trajectories thus having allowed for the evolution of the distinctive mode of life characteristic of our species. Human sociality is unique, Raimondi points out, because it emerges from and is constituted by the spread of language practices, and it remains coupled with emotional socio-cognitive dispositions. Raimondi's hypothesis is that changes in early development have been central to embedding language in ancestral behaviors and establishing language as the primary mode of interaction among individuals of the same species. By introducing enlanguaged practices into the interactions in early infancy, significant transformations occurred not only in subsequent life stages of single individuals but also on the population level through our ancestral developmental patterns.

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Chiara De Franco's article critiques existing approaches within Practice Theory for their distinction between practice and discourse. She turns to Maturana's notion of languaging, arguing that a languaging perspective allows for a view of practices as meshworks of understandings, materials, and activities enabled by enlanguaged consensual coordination. Importantly, she proposes a reinterpretation of Maturana's typology of conversations, showing how conversations arise out of a special kind of first-order languaging activity: 'narrative games'. Narrative games play a foundational-constitutive role in socio-material practices where they work as languaging mechanisms that allow for the unfolding of conversations. Turning to diplomatic practices, De Franco sheds light on how languaging both influences and is influenced by practical conventions and rules. In diplomatic contexts, conversations are often framed in terms of abiding to such rules and protocols. However, De Franco argues that viewing diplomacy solely through this lens overlooks the dynamic and adaptive nature of narrative games within diplomatic encounters. Narrative games, seen as forms of enlanguaged activity, allow for gaining a more nuanced understanding of practical encounters based in conversations.

Fester-Seeger's contribution uncovers the socio-material practice of interacting with voice-enabled smart-devices. Specifically, it explores the emergent praxis logics underlying seemingly individualistic engagements with smart speakers. Fester-Seeger investigates how users, including pre-literate children, navigate the intricacies of composing commands and engaging with these technologies within mundane everyday practices. Contrary to merely conversing with the machine, the user must adhere to specific linguistic structures, such as using wake words followed by imperatives or interrogatives. Through an autoethnographic lens, the paper investigates how a child's ability to interact with a smart speaker is shaped by recursive interactions with caregivers, highlighting the intertwined relationship between languaging, bodily activity, and actual social contexts in the emergence of distinct socio-material practices in child-device interactions. Fester-Seeger's study shows the importance of understanding this engagement as an enlanguaged practice which is rooted in dialogicality, trans-situational temporality and basic human embodiment.

Concludingly, I believe that each paper in this collection offers a valuable contribution to the radical exploration of enlanguaged practices and I wish the reader a stimulating read.

Long live the revolution!

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