

Cognitive Systems Monographs

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Embodied Social Cognition

 Springer

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Preface

This book is based on the work carried out during my Ph.D. thesis project. The research aim was to clarify the role and relevance of embodiment in social interaction and cognition. In doing so, I did not intend to bridge the ‘gap’ between, e.g., verbal versus nonverbal interaction. Instead, I re-characterized the issue and developed a thorough and integrated understanding that supports and explains the relationships that actually exist, which originate from the relational nature of socially embodied interaction and cognition. I argue that embodiment is a part and parcel of social interaction and cognition in the most general and specific ways, and in which dynamically embodied actions themselves have meaning and agency.

In order to investigate and analyze the role and relevance of embodiment in social interaction and cognition, the chosen approach consisted of three interrelated parts; (i) theoretical work that resulted in a conceptual framework, (ii) empirical work which illustrated parts of the theoretical framework, and (iii) their implications to cognitive science and socially interactive technology. The main part of the research was theoretical work based on an extensive literature analysis, which was used to situate the resulting framework in its historical context and to serve as its foundation. However, there was no single methodology or discipline that alone could provide the full picture of the task to be accomplished in my research, and therefore an interdisciplinary approach, which combined research and insights from a number of different disciplines, was used. The research literature discussed in the book is wide-ranging, flowing not only vertically through time but also horizontally across disciplines. It involves and addresses different research methodologies and disciplines, such as artificial intelligence, phenomenology, ethology, cognitive science, developmental psychology, neuroscience, social psychology, communication, gesture studies, and linguistics. However, it should be noted that I was aware of the potential risks of such a strategy, since I cannot claim to be a specialist in all of these disciplines, their specific terminologies, and theories. Although these different disciplines at first glance may not seem to have much in common, they offered highly complementary rather than alternative views, which helped me gain deeper as well as broader views of how crucial the body and its physiological

processes are in embodied social cognition. Therefore, the hand that holds the analytic lens throughout the book takes an embodied outlook.

Looking back at the past years, it is quite clear that the effort of working in academia (as both a researcher and a teacher), is a collective, and indeed a social experience. I therefore wish to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues and friends at the University of Skövde, Sweden. First of all, to my excellent supervisor Prof. Tom Ziemke for believing in my capability from the very beginning, and for his support and encouragement over the years. I also wish to thank Tarja Susi, Beatrice Alenljung, Henrik Svensson, Jana Rambusch, Peter Thorvald, David Vernon, Erik Billing, Rebecca Andreasson, Björn Lundell, and Maria Nilsson. Some of you for sharing my time as a doctoral student, and others for being my current colleagues.

Thanks to all people who allowed me to use the video-recording from our visit in Montana as data for the empirical study.

I also want to thank my friends and family outside the academic world. Here I particularly include those who spent some time with me when I needed to get away from the writing, including four-legged friends. The time spent with my horses has been a solace for the soul. Last but not least, I dedicate this book to my grandparents.

Lerdala
April 2015

Jessica Lindblom

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