CHAPTER 3

MATRIX: SCHEMATIC UNIVERSALS.
HOW MANY MINDS DOES A BILINGUAL HAVE?

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Abstract
None of the current reflection on language universals analyzes the categorial question from the point of view of the ontological levels of reality. The levels of the cognitive processing of information and its linguistic expression are sometimes discussed, but not the ontological levels of reality, probably because of the “linguistic” version of ontology as a simple theory of descriptions which predominated in the last century. This chapter underlines the structural difference among different kinds of categories, avoiding the errors that may derive from imprecise delimitation of their roles. As to ontological categories, the analysis emphasizes the difference between general ontological categories and regional ontological ones. Finally, the chapter shows that “recognizing” an item does not mean, by default, applying a taxonomic category or a base category. On that basis, a proposal is made of experiments verifying the existence of representative pathologies, that is, pathologies occurring at the very base format of representations.

1. POETRY RESEMBLES PAINTINGS?

The relationship between ontology, categorization, and linguistic expression is still an open question. It requires the analysis of too many variables relative to the dynamic nature of information, where a certain role, as a Kantian “regulatory idea,” is also performed by the epistemological paradigm that predominates at a particular time.

The issue becomes even more complex when considered in light of bilingualism or multilingualism, given that in this case account must be taken of an additional variable. In fact, while it is already difficult to analyze the connection between reference and conceptualization in the case of a monolingual, it is even more so in that of a bi- or multilingual, where the analyst must consider a variety of forms of conceptualization.

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sometimes in conflict with each other, and which may affect both the reference and the conceptualization.

Moreover, this greater complexity cannot be explained by simply adding additional categories. The conflict may come about at several levels, for instance when growing up monolingual and then learning a second or third language; learning implicitly and explicitly; being brought up bilingual; acquiring different types of language, for example, a spoken language and a sign language (on the development of Creole sign languages see Pinker 1994; Golden-Meadow et al. 1995; Emmorey 2004). The conflict may also concern different components of bilingualism, like proficiency, fluency, forms of low and elite bilingualism, individual pragmatic abilities, and emotional motivations. Finally, the conflict may arise not only on aspects of conceptualization relative to specific grammatical bases (Pavlenko 1999) but even within an alternative general paradigm, such as the ones underlying the Western languages or the Asiatic languages (On this type of bilingualism see Wei 1994; Noguchi & Fotos 2000; Shin & Milroy 2000; Mishina-Mori 2005), with the further variant of bilinguals who live, for example, in highly industrialized Western contexts, or vice versa.

Analysis of bi- and multilingualism has a crucial problem to solve: determining how conceptual representations are organized on the basis of two or more conceptual systems with differing degrees of relational complexity (Clark 2005). Put more concisely: is the mind of a bilingual or multilingual different from the mind of a monolingual (On this topic see De Groot et al. 1997. See also Hakuta 1986. On the effect of L2 on L1 see specifically Kecskes & Papp 2000 and Kecskes in this volume).

2. CATEGORIZATION IN ASIAN AND WESTERN CULTURES AND LANGUAGES

Recent studies in social psychology have sought to identify the conceptual paradigms that underlie two different cultures: that of Asia and that of the West. It seems that, while Westerners categorize according to the classical Aristotelian procedure of membership in classes and difference by genus and species, Asians rely on the concept of resonance.