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MENTALESE: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

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Abstract
Purpose: What does mentalese refer to as a theory introduced in the science of language is the main concern of this paper.
Method: The study is mainly descriptive where previous and related studies are reviewed and presented to reach a view about mentalese as an introduced theory in the science of language.
Results: It has been argued for a long time whether we think in language or do we use language to think. Having known two or more languages, do you we think separately in each language? Does each language possesses a different place in our brains?
Conclusions: There seems to be an agreement about the availability of mentalese as a linguistic faculty but there are different views about the nature and the interpretation of this faculty in relation to thought.
Key words: mentalese, thought.

Mentalese

Both language and thinking faculties are two gifts given to man is undeniable fact. Yet, do these two faculties interrelate to each other? Or do they affect one another? Do we think in language or do we use language in thinking? In fact, there are many questions that seem sometimes if not usually unanswerable. Had some of them has been answered, it is only answered theoretically but have never been proved scientifically. Or, has it been answered scientifically, it lacks the adequate evidences for such claims. It is a truth, however, that discussing language in relation to mind is only discussing abstract by abstract. Strictly speaking, there are many theories (hypotheses) where in some attempts have been made to answer the above raised questions from among these theories is one called as the *language of thought*, or more recently as *mentalese*. In technical terms, it is usually referred to as *computer-based theory* of language and thought (see Antony, n.d.; Bermudez, 2003; Machery, 2004, Pinker, 2002; Slezak, 2009).

Principally, the *mentalese* theory or hypothesis is originated by Chomsky (1968), Fodor (1975) and Pinker (1994), Lera Boroditsky (2001). Typically and for one reason or another it was a reaction to both the *Whorf-Sapir theory* (hypothesis) and *Ordinary Language Theory* (hypothesis), (see Wiley 2006). In its simplest words, *Whorf- Sapir hypothesis* maintains that we think in words, or our thoughts are reflected by our words and vice versa. Additionally, it is assumed that a speaker of English language, for example, is different from a speaker of Arabic language is a sense that thinking in Arabic is entirely different from thinking in English and this applies to all other languages according to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (Whorf- Sapir), Schlenker (2006). Regarding the core idea or claim of the *Ordinary Language hypothesis*, it is stated by Wiley (ibid: p. 1) as:

People often talk silently to themselves, engaging in what is called inner speech, internal conversation, inner dialogue, self-talk and so on. This seems to be an inherent characteristic of human beings, commented on as early as Plato, who regarded thought as inner speech.

Unlike the Whorf-Sapir and the Ordinary Language hypotheses, the *mentalese* hypothesis argues in favor of that we think without words, yet all humans nearly share the same mechanism(s) and vehicles of language. That is, whether was it a French speaker or an English speaker, they share the same ideas and thoughts but they only differ in the form of producing those thoughts, the former will use French language (his/her native tongue language) and the other will use English as his or her native tongue language.

Basically, Mentalese is "our thoughts before they become language, and this stuff is the same for human beings", (Boroditsky, 2001: p. 1). Wiley (ibid: p. 1) adds:

This approach, which sometimes uses the computer as a metaphor for the mind, resembles the Scholastic's theory in envisioning a purely abstract language of thought. Whatever processes of ordinary language might accompany it are viewed as

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epiphenomenal, gloss or what might be called "fluff." Ordinary language, according to this view, is a pale shadow of the actual language of thought. In addition mentalese is regarded as both innate and unconscious. It is a faculty that is claimed to be present at birth and one which operates below the awareness of the mind.

In his book, Pinker (1995: 81) maintains:

We end up with the following picture. People do not think in English or Chinese or Apache; they think in a language of thought. This language of thought probably looks a bit like all these languages; presumably it has symbols for concepts, and arrangements of symbols that correspond to who did what to whom, as in the paint-spraying representation shown above. But compared with any given language, mentalese must be richer in some ways and simpler in others. It must be richer, for example, in that several concept symbols must correspond to a given English word like stool or stud.

One can notice it is exactly the opposite of what both Sapir and Whorf believe as "People's thoughts are determined by the categories systems of classification made available by their language", (Schlenker, ibid: 1). In spite of this, Pinker (1994: 82) insists in his book and he claims:

Knowing a language, then, is knowing how to translate mentalese into strings of words and vice versa. People without a language would still have mentalese, and babies and many non-human animals presumably have simpler dialects. Indeed, if babies did not have a mentalese to translate to and from English, it is not clear how learning English could take place, or even what learning English would mean.

Thought all these theories are still alive but each one is criticized by the other one or instead another new one. For example, the *mentalese* hypothesis is criticized for being unconscious. That is, being unconscious means there is no adequate evidence for empirical data to prove the accuracy of such claims, (Wiley: ibid).

Another claim against this theory is that conducted by Clark (2002) who attempted to prove Dennett's ideas of numeral cognition as an alternative for the mentalese theory.

Conclusion

For all intents and purposes, an abstract thing introduced by an abstract thing will produce a more abstract thing. That is, the input (human's brain and language) are abstract, the given (the hypothesis of *mentalese* along with other theories) are also abstract, and no doubt the outputs are abstract. The researcher believes that all of these theories have provided or come out with something true about language and thought. It is seemingly impossible to present such a topic as language and thought from the point of view of only one science or field of study. That is to say, we need to form an approach or field of science that mix all: language study, philosophy, psychology, sociology, neurology, and some other sciences.

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