

Peter Stockwell

## Review of: Line Brandt, *The Communicative Mind*

- Line Brandt, *The Communicative Mind: A Linguistic Exploration of Conceptual Integration and Meaning Construction*. 636 p. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2013. [Price: £69.99]. ISBN 978-1-4438-4144-3.

This is a significant book. It begins by making a claim for an interdisciplinary collision of linguistics (especially semantics and pragmatics), literary studies, neurophenomenology, cognitive psychology, philosophy and sociology. It draws on fiction, poetry, everyday discourse; metaphor, iconicity and readerly effects; rhetoric, grammatical description, and a historical range of thinking about language. The result is an assertion that all of these related dimensions can be resolved into a single over-arching discipline: that of cognitive semiotics. This is an ambitious project, but over 600 pages of surprisingly readable and clear argument, it is exactly what emerges.

In the beginning and central to the entire book is the concept of *enunciation*. This is a much broader unit of analysis than is typically adopted in linguistic or even discourse analytical studies. If an utterance is a sentence in its context of use, then an enunciation is an utterance in its full social, interpersonal, cultural and communicative context. »The study of enunciation entails systematic accounts of those conceptual categories shaping language, that are derived from representational acts of interpersonal communication, and awareness in a speaker of other subjectivities« (49). This summative formulation from the introductory chapter captures the sense that Brandt's thinking places communication at the heart of her theoretical argument. And this is communication in the empirical, verifiable, partly observable sense. Though there is a strong philosophical, critical and abstract aspect to Brandt's notion of communication, at every stage her statements are pinned down to concrete examples and situations.

A false distinction has emerged in recent years, in which some discourse analysts have complained that cognitive scientific approaches to language have been overly psychological and insufficiently social and ideological. I think this perception is wrong, but Brandt's positioning of communicativeness as the object of analysis refutes it once and for all. The choice is not between objectivity and subjectivity, but between those unreachable binaries and *intersubjectivity*. The approach throughout the book is on readerly effects, meaning-making, and the connections between articulation and mind, but the whole enterprise is accomplished with a keen attention to social significance and cultural meanings as well. Crucially the argumentation returns again and again to language in use, authentic examples, empirical data and real, recognisable situations of discourse. Several core beliefs drive the argument (23 – 5, paraphrased):

- semantics is shaped by experience
- experience is inherently dynamic
- experience cannot be reduced to physical sensations alone
- there is no language / sensation dichotomy
- language is conceptually structured

- language is always dialogic and has a communicative purpose
- meaning is intentional and situated
- embodied cognition is extended to include others' bodies.

Some of these have become cognitive linguistic orthodoxy, and will be recognisable to anyone steeped in the key ideas of the cognitive scientific revolution; some propositions are more debatable, or at least require the additional glossing that Brandt provides. The key proposition here points to the dialogism of language: even talking to yourself involves a division of mental labour. Even utterances and exclamations that are apparently vented solipsistically into the air have been designed and uttered within the inescapably dialogic texture of language. Even failed communication has communicativeness as a necessary design feature in its fabric. The value of Brandt's positioning of these core propositions lies not only in the clarity of her articulation, but in their integration into a coherent field.

The book proper begins with an exploration of ›fictivity‹, arguing that fictional interaction has its primary meaning in its own articulation, rather than as a representation of something real and tangible. Exploring non-actuality is particularly interesting for me, with my own research into literary linguistics, and it seems to me entirely appropriate to place this in a prominent position in the book. This might not be the same impression for other readers, however. Yet an emphasis on fictivity allows for a controlled exploration of context without being distracted by truth-values or the »exceedingly nonsensical« (33) direction taken by the philosophy of language.

Much of the book draws on conceptual integration theory (née blending theory, and, before that, mental space theory) as developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. Brandt interrogates the approach, and refines, augments and adapts it throughout the book. Conceptual integration is a smart focus, partly because it is largely consistent with a range of approaches and features including conceptual metaphor theory, frames, idealized cognitive models, modalisation, conditionality, and cognitive grammar. Brandt's balanced discussion of the advantages and problems in the theory is a model of clear thinking. Her project overall is to place the notion of enunciation within conceptual integration theory. After all, it is enunciation itself – the very act of initiation – that works as a space builder, evoking some mental content for consideration (cf. 206).

Brandt proposes a typology of different kinds of integration, and develops the argument from everyday spoken and written discourse in the first half of the book, moving on to literary discourse largely in the second half. The book thus moves into what I would recognise as cognitive poetics, and addresses in turn fiction and poetry, though she prefers the more text-descriptive terms ›prosaic‹ and ›versified‹ enunciation. The analyses here are in themselves worth the price of the book. Indeed, chapters 4 and 5 could stand alone as required reading for all literary scholars, and as a polemic and demonstration of the intellectual rigour of cognitive poetics. The book ends with the effects of poetic enunciation, in a witty riff on the »seven types of iconicity« (541ff.): phonetic, syntactic, linebreak, performative, rhythmic, rhetorical, and graphic iconicity. It should be apparent from this listing that Brandt is no respecter of the rank-scale, and the account is all the better for being led by the semiotic description of effects rather than driven by linguistic levels.

Back in the first chapter of the book, Brandt outlined the significant scholarly events in her life that helped to form her thinking as presented in this volume. The outline is autobiographical, but what emerges strongly is a list of key thinkers and researchers who have had an impact on

her intellectual life. It is a refreshing take on the dry business of scholarly papers: there is a sense here of a vibrant and intense community of thinkers influencing, shaping and providing material to react with and against. The book itself, in other words, stands as an example of a communicating mind, and its success as an act of communication seems to me to be evident from the first page to the last.

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