



Customer Review

★★★★☆ **Embodied Simulation explained in a very chatty, very introductory book.,**
January 19, 2014

By [YON - Jan C. Hardenbergh](#)

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This review is from: Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning (Hardcover)

If you love language and meaning and are looking for a gentle introduction to neuroscience, Louder than Words might be the book for you. It presents the Embodied Simulation Hypothesis for how we make meaning out of language. The basic idea is that language processing triggers other cognitive processing elements of the brain to simulate seeing or hearing in order to decipher the meaning of words. Benjamin K. Bergen can be a bit chatty, but it reads well.

After presenting "mentalese" and the Chinese Box, a compelling case is made of "embodied meaning". That in order for something to mean something, it needs to tie into our physical bodies, rather than just trading one word for a series of other words of symbols.

The book makes a compelling case for embodied simulations are used to to process language by using the hardware of other cognitive processes. The proof of this is the time to recover when using that same hardware for its primary cognitive function.

I however found it a bit frustrating. The author assumes that you have never read another book about neuroscience. For example, he introduces the two higher level visel beual processing pathways, the What pathway and the Where pathway. That is fine to use those terms, but, how about putting in (Ventral) and (Dorsal) in parenthesis, just once? ANd spending 1/2 a page to explain why scientists need to be skeptics was a waste of ink.

One of the fun things about reading a book like this is that they bring in a lot of neuroscience experiments and descriptions of how brain lesions change things to put the pieces together. This book is no different. Due to the "no neuro" assumption, there is a very broad path covered to create the context for embodied simulation, so, lots of old favorites are covered again.

Fred Harvey Harrington said: "Most books should have been articles...". For my purposes, I probably just as happy reading one of BK papers. Or this: "Embodied meaning in a neural theory of language" which cites Bergen's work among others.

I skimmed the chapter on grammar. Gee whiz, changing the order of the words changes the meaning!

The metaphor chapter meanders. It made me long for the rich theory of metaphor in Conceptual Spaces: The Geometry of Thought, by Peter Gärdenfors.

Finally, the book takes pride on trying to put language on the same cognitive footing as vision and hearing. Embodied Simulations use other cognitive processing elements to recreate the meaning of words. That is to say, the meaning we end up with is similar to the color red and all of the other atomic precept that go through binding to become the red Ferrari. We end up with the binding problem again. This leaves us with embodied meaning as the definition of a word, but, not it does not address any deeper meaning.

If you go back to the beginning of the book, Bergen says "Language matters to us because it is a vehicle for meaning - it allows us to take the desires, intentions and experiences in our heads and transmit a signal through space that makes those thoughts pop up in someone else's head." But that is not the meaning addresses in this book. This book covers the transmission, but, it does not deal with what a desire or an intention is. That is a fairly shallow definition of meaning.

The last bit of the book makes a compelling case for not using cell phones while driving. If our cognitive processing elements are in use, for example, if our motion detection hardware is being used by the descriptions in our conversation, it slower to process what it is seeing on the road. Altho, I think emotional overload is more serious.

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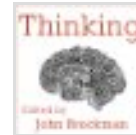
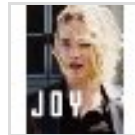
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