FAST BREAKING PAPERS - 2009

June 2009

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Lawrence W. Barsalou talks with *ScienceWatch.com* and answers a few questions about this month's Fast Breaking Paper in the field of Psychiatry/Psychology.

Article Title: Grounded cognition
Authors: Barsalou, LW
Journal: ANNU REV PSYCHOL
Volume: 59
Issue:
Page: :617-645
Year: 2008
* Emory Clin, Dept Psychol, Atlanta, GA 30322 USA.
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SW: Why do you think your paper is highly cited?

It's gratifying to see that this paper is of interest to the community. One reason is that it summarizes a new area of research that is having a significant impact on multiple disciplines associated with psychology, cognitive science, cognitive neuroscience, and social neuroscience. Many new and intriguing results have been reported that have significant implications for theories of mind and brain.

SW: Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?

For the past 50 years, theories have assumed that the brain is an information processing device somewhat similar to a computer, and that the information processing properties of the brain (cognition) are separate from the brain's systems for perception, action, and introspection (self-thought, emotion, metacognition, etc.). These new theories propose instead that the cognition is deeply grounded in these systems, relying heavily on simulations of perception and action, being grounded in the body, and being situated in the environment.

"...the new developments in grounded cognition are very likely to have extensive implications in practical domains."

Not only are there new theories that adopt this orientation, there is a plethora of new findings from diverse disciplines that support them. The paper, "Grounded Cognition," reviews many of these findings, and attempts to integrate them around a set of common theoretical themes. The paper also raises important issues and challenges that remain unresolved, and attempts to identify important areas for future research.

SW: How did you become involved in this research, and were there any particular problems encountered along the way?

I became involved in this research as a result of encountering significant problems associated with traditional views. Adopting this approach suggested solutions to these problems. There has been

considerable resistance from traditional research communities in multiple disciplines, who have been skeptical about this approach for decades. The significant change in the past 10 years is the explosion of new empirical findings that support this approach, plus more sophisticated theories that explain them. The development of theory and supporting evidence, however, is in its infancy, and tremendous development will be necessary for fully satisfactory accounts to develop.

SW: Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?

Because many social applications depend closely on theories and empirical results from basic science about mind and brain, the new developments in grounded cognition are very likely to have extensive implications in practical domains. Examples include education, psychotherapy, human factors, and economic decision-making.

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KEYWORDS: MENTAL-IMAGERY; NARRATIVE COMPREHENSION; PROPERTY VERIFICATION; OBJECT RECOGNITION; EMBODIED COGNITION; CONCEPTUAL SYSTEM; SOCIAL COGNITION; SITUATION MODELS; SEMANTIC MEMORY; APPARENT MOTION.

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