Chapter 10
Can Common Sense Change? Psycho-logic, Synthetic Thinking, and the Challenge of Changing Language

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This chapter considers the notion of *common sense* from the viewpoint of shared *language*. At the most basic and relevant level, a shared language implies an agreement among the way people assign shared meaning across contexts by using same words for the same or at least similar purpose. Over time and repetition, an agreement upon word meanings becomes widely accepted. In this way, an agreement upon word meanings creates the ability for humans to communicate with ease; thus, they create commonly held meanings in the things they perceive within a commonly held sense of the world. This *Weltanschauung* is a sort of common sense of things, a common sense which also works as the linguistic basis of the psychological research project Psycho-logic (PL), first proposed by Jan Smedslund (1988, 1997, 2008, 2012). From such a linguistic viewpoint, sensible reasoning in the framework of PL has been taken to rely upon commonly comprehensible word meanings. As an example of such commonly understandable words, I discuss semantic primes with regard to their ability to remain as mental constants, or, conversely, to appear as liminal, passing, transitional notions of the day in psychological language (see also Smedslund 2012; Wierzbicka 1996).

Commonly understandable word meanings, such as semantic primes, are linguistic and psychological key elements that enable people to speak and to reason with each other with ease and without conscious effort. Purportedly, if we lose primitive basic components of language, such as semantic primes, we lose common sense, which resides in commonly shared language, and will thus face disorderliness, chaos, and misunderstandings in small- and large-group interactions. In fact, despite that Smedslund (e.g., 1985, 2011) has persistently argued that psychological

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common sense is relatively stable; some such negative developments seem already to be emerging in our era of digitalized communication. One may justifiably wonder if the ease and fluidity of communication and reasoning are merely an epiphenomenon of language which arises without a continuous and conscious effort.

I argue that we are now witnessing a potential decay of both common sense and common word meanings as our mass and social media practices keep changing (Oeberst et al. 2016, p. 105–106). While the media in our postmodern Web 2.0 world "narrow-cast" meanings to small groups of like-minded individuals, word meanings become more and more idiosyncratic in these small groups and circles to describe what something means in these particular contexts (Baresch et al. 2011, p. 18; Flaherty 2011, p. 1302–1303). Importantly, though, in any case, such like-mindedness is also at the heart of the process through which meanings can become "common." Thus, small groups have a crucial role not only as repositories of stagnant and commonplace meanings, but as birthplaces of new common meanings.

The creation and continuation of shared meanings is crucial, since without the necessary psychological key notions of common sense and common word meanings, the psychic unity necessary for social functioning decreases, as Jan Smedslund's (1988, 2008, 2012) PL posits. If shared meanings are lost, the emerging social problems and disparities posit both serious challenges and new opportunities. As an antidote to the disorderliness and the loss of common meaning we observe in our postmodern societies, I propose not only a critical analysis of the core concepts of common sense, language (in the sense of commonly understandable word meanings) and semantic primes, but an increased effort to regenerate common meanings.

As a way to regenerate common meanings, and in turn, common knowledge, I discuss *synthetic thinking* and consider how new meanings occur through reasoning. Synthetic thinking is a type of *creative* thinking which allows multiple cognitive interpretations for the same object to exist mentally at the same time and place. Synthetic thinking, therefore, enables the creative use of language and conversation. In such manner, synthetic thinking, accompanied with conversation, can generate new meanings in the social regulation of common language and interaction. Such effort, I posit, could help people to better understand each other across social groups and avoid "talking past one another."

What may remain puzzling throughout this chapter is my claim that the notions of *common sense,* shared *language* (commonly understandable word meanings) and *semantic primes* are entirely, or, at least increasingly, in a state of swift change (e.g., Strauss 1989; Virilio 1997). If that is the case, how is it, then, that despite what are commonly described as rapid media and communication developments we continue to communicate in our quotidian lives, but still manage to make sense of our casual, yet at times psychologically demanding, interactions?

The linguistic research of Wierzbicka (1996, 1999, 2001) and Goddard (1998), among others, provide a basis for a compelling answer. Their reductionist proposals and findings about a core of all human languages give some credence to the idea that the semantic primes may form the basis of a psychologically universal language which, in turn, could be presented through axioms and formal logic. The notion of cross-cultural universals of affective meaning is by no means novel (cf. e.g., Osgood et al. 1975; Wierzbicka 1996), but it is Smedslund's research in the recent era which

provides a formalized project upon which such research can build. Smedslund relies on constant and invariant core meanings of words and promotes the use of semantic primes as a basis in the formalized project of PL that depicts the common-sense nature of psychological language and reasoning (Smedslund 2011, 2012). Claims regarding a universally applicable internal conceptual language are bold. Do some rudimentary linguistic notions, such as semantic primes, capture and store the complexity of our contemporary language, or in particular, psychological language that we use in interaction and thought?

Common Meaning as Premise of Common Sense

Linguist Anna Wierzbicka (1996, 1999, 2001) has posited that all languages use similar types of semantic primes, a set of few primary words. Smedslund (2008, 2011, 2012) additionally posits that these primary words can form the basis for human reasoning and for psychological reasoning. One example of such a semantic prime is the term "is" or "exists." Other examples are, inter alia, some fundamental substantives such as "I," "you," "someone/person," and "people" or mental predicates such as "think," "know," "want," "feel," "see," and "hear" (Smedslund 2012; Wierzbicka 1996). Through semantic primes, it is possible to find semantic equivalencies in languages all around the globe (Wierzbicka 1996, 1999, 2001). In general terms, it is not hard to imagine that contemporary languages would have universal roots. Some of these roots are the semantic primes that in some manner provide, on their part, the elements of universal building blocks of language. After all, we do have common ancestors who were able to speak, regardless of the exact nature of such primary language, o*r Ur-sprach*e, which will likely forever remain as a mystery (Whitrow 1988). Yet, one might wonder, how could it be that semantic primes, or any cultural and linguistic concepts and words, could truly provide us with persisting, psychological knowledge that makes sense across cultures?

Purportedly, psychological common sense, language (commonly understandable word meanings) and semantic primes are profoundly relevant to humans, especially with regard to regulating and organizing social interaction and enabling psychological reasoning. I use the conceptualizations of these notions as they are presented in relation to the advancements of PL (Smedslund 1988, 1997, 2008, 2012). PL presumes that we, as psychologists, thinkers, and laymen, continue to express common sense through common word meanings (Smedslund 1988, 2011, 2012), meanings which could be seen as dating back to some sort of *Ur-sprach,* or to when changes in environments or technologies necessitated the development of new words or concepts. The project of PL makes use of the general assumption that words have invariant core meanings for all competent users of a language. As Smedslund (2008, p. 160) summarizes:

> There must be invariant components in word meaning in order to explain the usefulness of languages and their function in social life. If words were completely transparent, that is, their meanings completely determined by context, the orderliness of social life could not be explained. Part of the function of language is precisely to ensure communication with little contextual support.

While this statement outlines clearly the necessity of shared word meanings, some suspicion arises whether word meanings actually *are* such that there *must* be invariant components to word meanings. This idea becomes particularly contentious once we reflect upon the continuous change in media, and in particular the notion of "narrow-casting." What we see happening in mass and social media point to a communicative realm in which word meanings are increasingly variable, if not totally devoid of invariant, or at least core, components. Since this development is a common source of comment, it seems that the premise of invariability of word meanings, in the sense that Smedslund (2008, p. 160) posits it, requires critical analysis. In the current postmodern era, as some have suggested, there appears to be a cultural trend where words only have particular meanings in particular contexts. Hence, the frequently lamented disorderliness of social life seems to be a result (Baudrillard 1988; Virilio 1997), and while we might bemoan the disorder, it seems to cast doubt upon the notion of semantic primes.

As an example, how would a psychologist persist in an argument for the continuity of invariability of word meanings after the US President Bill Clinton attempted in the proceedings of Clinton–Lewinsky scandal to deflect prosecution for sexual misconduct by saying that whether he had had intercourse with a woman depended on "what 'is' is." Through such events the notion that there always are and will be constant word meanings and these meanings must be generally sensible on some principal basis, including "semantic primes," became questionable. Are there then, one should ask, words that all agents skilled in a language know ab initio—or are we entering a different type of semantic reality altogether? (Baudrillard 1988; Wierzbicka 1996, 1999, 2001)

In my view, it can be reasonably claimed that *common sense* is a sum of multiple higher psychological and societal functions; common sense, so defined, involves a set of goal-oriented behaviors and, therefore, to some extent. It involves the ever-changing phenomenon in ordinary and extraordinary life conditions, such as the above description of a nonsensical use of language in the global communicative public sphere. The extraordinary, or absurd, may actually be more descriptive of our present general state concerning common sense, as I argue that group-based meanings are potentially overriding what once was beyond doubt common sense, or in a sense, are becoming the new "common" or rather "idiosyncratic sense" which may not fulfill the criteria of "common" in the past sense of the word.

While the notion of common sense may have become problematic along with the general loss of invariant or universal components in word meanings, the notion of common sense is and remains at the core of PL (Smedslund 1988, 2012). Common sense, as posited in PL, provides the individual and groups with necessary psychological knowledge, enabling them to get along with each other and make enough sense of the social world to be able to get through at least the most basic mental or everyday interactions with ease and fluidity (Smedslund 1988, 1997, 2008, 2012). Common sense is conceptualized in PL as a culture that is the collective source of knowledge and rationality. To view human rationality as a function of common sense highlights, the fact that most of what people know is fundamentally social and acquired through socialization—a process to which humans are biologically

predisposed (Smedslund 2011). That is what Dwyer (1990) calls sociability, the ability to get along with others.

Common sense, as the notion itself suggests, is common in the sense that it is a sensibility acquired from the collective social world, a world to which there is shared *access*. It cannot be a hermetic cognitive effort created in the isolation of an individual mind. Furthermore, individuals do not need a specialized skill to acquire common sense. The only thing necessary is a common language, as both Smedslund (1988) and Habermas (1994, p. 116) suggest—and as is obvious to gain the ability to perform everyday reasoning; no formal training in formal reasoning is required.

In short, the creation of common sense requires people to interact and talk with one another, and in turn, this path of socialization teaches people common sense. As a result of our ability to speak and understand language, we can generally hold that humans are logical to the extent that they can make sense of each other. Therefore, Smedslund pursues axiomatic psychological assumptions as derivatives of common culture, shared language, and common sense (Smedslund 1988, p. 5, 1997, 2012, p. 295–297). A similar line of thought, regarding the interrelationship of language and common sense, is presented in Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas 1984, p. 11). But if language is becoming less universal, both Smedslunds and Habermas' positions are challenged since the grand conceptual premise of shared language stands before both all interpersonal communication and all notions of an interior psychological language.

As argued, a major challenge to the claims that common sense and the shared core meanings of our languages will remain permanent, unchanged, to some extent invariable, and constant, come from changes in *media* practices—and, based on those changes, in the ways in which we use language (Oeberst et al. 2016, p. 105–106). We are in a world in which Web 2.0 applications have become a primary source of news (Gottfried Shearer 2016) and the main social media app Facebook has led to a situation in which “your friends choose your news” (Baresch et al. 2011, p. 18; Flaherty 2011, p. 1302–1303).

Can My Common Sense Be Your Nonsense?

If we observe an increase in variations of word meanings and idiosyncratic expressions, we face new and serious dilemmas. For instance, when we reflect and reason, especially about matters regarding our personal issues in psychological interpersonal communication, for instance, in therapeutic sessions, we cannot in full confidence rely on derivatives of common culture, shared language, and common sense (Smedslund 1988 p. 5, 1997, 2012, p. 295–297) or on the Habermasian notion of open and forthright persuasion (Habermas 1984, p. 11). What makes sense to me may not make sense to you, despite our earnest wish to communicate, even in a therapeutic situation in which there is an assumption of shared language in a matrix of common sense.

Both Smedslund and Habermas make assumptions for maintaining shared epistemic values and the continuing potential of humans to create universally shared knowledge. These are noble ideas, but are they concomitant with our reality? I raise this concern, particularly in consideration of smaller groups and their inter-group communication, where much of the talk is emotional and intended to sustain interpersonal relationships (Ellison et al. 2011). In these intimate and smaller contexts, conflict due to misunderstandings arises easily, and the only way to ensure understanding is to be open for clarifying misunderstandings (Smedslund 1990).

PL assumes that in small-group settings we aim to be logical in the sense of being coherent with *our* understanding of the world and how we imagine it exists for us in momentary conceptual frameworks (Smedslund 1988, 2012, p. 295). In the postmodern Web 2.0 world, the momentary conceptual framework is increasingly idiosyncratic due to the developments of the Internet, communicative media, and the subsequent and dramatic increase in the circulation of group-produced knowledge (Oeberst et al. 2016, p. 105–106). The common aspects of shared language underlying the notion of common sense may simply seem less "common" today than at the initiation of PL as a theory. Smedslund'*s Psycho-logic* was first published in 1988, and at that time the current trends of language use and multiple reference groups per each individual may have been hard to imagine.

Furthermore, in 1988, Jean Baudrillard anticipated an increasing decay of common sense (1988, p. 145). In 1988, Baudrillard's world of "hyper-reality" in which signs have become—at least to some extent—unhinged from any signified (Baudrillard 1988, p. 145) seemed like an unrealistic dystopia. Today, the traditional media (i.e., television, radio, newspapers, magazines) as well as social media (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit) "narrow-cast" to small groups of like-minded individuals. In such a way, the common sense of one group may become nonsense to the others that acquire their shared meanings elsewhere. The interactive web technologies have led to a massive increase in the circulation of group-produced and group-targeted knowledge (Oeberst et al. 2016, p. 105–106). Web 2.0 platforms like Facebook and Twitter often produce "fake news." Such material satisfies the Enlightenment universal regulatory practice of knowledge of "justified true belief," one of the epistemic aspects of common sense of psychological theory, only in that it is believed (Goldman 1999). This is an obvious challenge to common sense with serious consequences. Some of the online material can be psychologically and physically harmful. For example, viewers of pro-anorexia websites have worse outcomes for the disorder than do non-viewers (Bardone-Cone and Cass 2007, p. 541–542). In the United States, anti-vaccine websites and related complaints have led 21 of 50 states to enact opt-out legislation such that, in those states, only 70% of children are now vaccinated (Bean 2011, p. 1874). What can be seen as loss or decay of common sense through our ways of using the Internet has resulted in real public health challenges (Betsch et al. 2012, p. 3729).

In my view, the belief that vaccines like the one for polio is a danger because "vaccines are biological poisons, harmful to health, and a contributing factor in childhood illness" (Kata 2010, p. 1711) is an example of common sense turned into nonsense. Here, we see that communication across epistemic differences and across

social-psychological in-groups has become difficult (Bergin 2001; Tajfel 1982). How does one find the common ground for reasoned arguments in such a debate?

Communication can function only because of common sense. As Habermas (1994, p. 116) and Smedslund (1988) argue, holding a shared language leads individuals to develop a common sense of meaning in the groups within which they communicate. Via this *sensus communis*, individuals can still operate with ease and fluidity in the symbolic realm. Our shared common sense, now and in the future, is inescapably bound to social groups. Our necessary social nature has various consequences. For instance, already-acquired schemata define what sorts of knowledge can be assimilated (Piaget 1972; Smedslund 2012, p. 296). This is the continuing basis for common sense. Yet, if people decreasingly acquire information outside small groups, there is less ground for an overarching common sense to which individuals would orient themselves to once "their friends select their news." In this scenario, the ability to communicate reasonably both psychologically and epistemologically outside one's familiar groups would be significantly impaired.

Social Groups Continue to Create Common Sense

The example of the US President Clinton and his absurd failure to agree what "is" means can be seen as an example of an era, as envisioned by Strauss (1989, p. 93) and Baudrillard (1988), where the texts of the day have ceased to signify. At the same time, we continue to go about our quotidian lives as we always have, even though truth in some common sense meaning may have vanished, even though 30% of the children in some schools are not vaccinated against polio—all of this implying the decay of what something "is" in some shared sense (Virilio 1997). Eventually, if no effort is given to regenerate common word meanings, serious health consequences may occur regarding the individual well-being—psychological and somatic (Phadke et al. 2016). Disruptions to common sense are causing direct consequences on our well-being. Common sense need not be entirely lost to create an effect; even a small disruption to common sense seems to be creating real effects upon our social well-being.

Upon examining the challenges to common sense, one can ask whether or not we can credibly now claim that invariant elements of language exist so that common sense can remain common. To what extent do words have elements that do not require a reasonably described context for the words themselves to be understood? Is the available solution a type of hyper-specialized individual who is able to understand and speak in some specialized or technical language? How do we find common meaning despite the developments of different forms of mass and social media and their related language-use practices? In my view, these questions are part of the answer. Paying attention to such developments, and to language use as a whole, is itself a starting point from which to regenerate language and to maintain shared meanings. Secondly, linguistic research on semantic primes and the formalized

structure of languages in general, and with regard to specific questions, can offer further answers.

One of the assumed goals of studying semantic primes is to discover, or rather to *rediscover,* the invariant elements in word meanings (e.g., Smedslund 2012; Wierzbicka 1996, 1999, 2001). The goal of such a rediscovery of an already existing a priori and axiomatic psychological language could then potentially apply universally in actual conversations and reasoning. In this way, the study of semantic primes reveals a general theory of a universal psychology. The discovery of semantic primes shows, as well, that human communication is goal oriented. The reason one can argue this is that the primes can only be learned through practice as a part of a child's learning of language, which itself is a goal-oriented effort toward a skill. The maintenance of the knowledge of a basic corpus of any human language, by necessity, must continue to emerging as a goal-oriented human practice, with the adult learning new and novel concepts through his or her immersion in a culture.

Therefore, in line with Smedslund's seminal arguments (2008, 2011), we can argue that common meanings and language have some fundamental and constant basis to them. Since this can be shown to be true, we must then ask how one should treat the elliptical, ephemeral, and idiosyncratic meanings that we see being created in small-group interpersonal communication? These group-based meanings are difficult to study in a formalized manner although their significance is apparent. It is small-group communication that matters most with regard to our emotional well-being and our continued felt sense of being reasonable members of our communities (Vähämaa 2013a, p. 13–14).

Semantic primes, as our core and most primitive vocabulary, will be discoverable, even when languages and meanings change over time since they are the deep core of the formalized syntax of our natural languages. A good point of reflection is this text at hand. For this text to be readable, it must be the case that for all readers of this text that there remains an always-extant and invariant corpus of word meanings. When that corpus of signifiers disintegrates, the semiotic realm itself will dissipate, with consequences we actually cannot imagine—since imagination itself exists in the semantic realm (Tateo 2015).

These changeless components of our language are now discoverable in *specialized* settings—as in carefully curated articles like the one you are reading, among sports team members or among groups of professionals. Simultaneously, invariant components of word meanings have become increasingly more difficult to discover and touch upon in more universal and non-particular settings. In the contemporary plural public sphere, mainly due to the specialized "narrow-casting" to their particular and self-selected audiences the media also choose and determine—even if in synchrony with its audience—what is considered common and what something means. Meanings of words have become increasingly enriched by the multitude of social groups that redefine meanings for themselves. To master a language and to get a grasp of common sense, thus, is more demanding than ever before.

Semantic Primes and Rediscovery of Common Language

The previously mentioned Presidential sex scandal suggested that even semantic primes can come into question, even if they do not change (Wierzbicka 1996, 1999). Thus, these semantic primes have the ability to function as mirrors and fundaments to provide something constant in our language that enables us to understand the constant changes in word meanings (Tateo 2018).

Natural language, as the domain of semantic primes, has a structure that enables modeling semantic primes, and we have the skills and technology, if we so will, to reduce to core words even the most complex psychological sentences in a formal manner. As semantic primes do appear universally, their formal research continues yielding interesting results from the viewpoint of cultural psychology and reveals important and reason-based commonalities in our languages.

On the one hand, the increasing lack of shared social ground for common word meanings brings into question the ability of the a priori research approaches to offer comprehensive enough knowledge of psychological language. Everyday talk, its idioms, elliptical meanings, and playfulness may require the psychologist to increase context-dependent approach toward reasoning. Purely generic approaches may become less and less helpful if one is willing to understand the discontent and pure unhappiness we see as outcomes of some of the current Internet discourses as we seek like-minded groups for the better and worse (Bardone-Cone and Cass 2007, p. 541–542; Hewstone 1990).

On the other hand, the discovery of a potentially increasing body of semantic primes in different languages contributes significantly to the a priori cultural psychological knowledge. Such a formal project is an ambitious and specialized project that may locate what makes something in psychology or culture constantly “common,” as a formalized presentation of psychological language increases our ability to reflect the basis of our psychological reasoning and the connection of that linguistic base to the fast-changing idiosyncrasies. These idiosyncrasies, in-group references, usage of idioms, playfulness, elliptical, and emotional vividness and ephemeral sayings are not easily found in psychology textbooks, as the everyday psychological language develops at a fast pace. Therefore, the “going back to basics” through semantic primes can be of meaningful help: semantic primes can provide a reflective mirror to the fast-paced changes in psychological language.

This might be particularly valuable if we believe that we actually now live, as Baudrillard (1988, p. 145) suggested, in an era of “hyper-reality,” in which signs have become unhinged from any signified; words and things are no longer connected, and words are defined only by other words and have no invariant components left as discussed by Resch (1992) and considered by Smedslund (1988, 2012) as a fundamentally impossible dystopia.

Even in our era, the condition of a limited language having a defined and agreed-upon reference for meanings of its words is still possible. Consider that religious discourses, which persist across nations, contain symbolic *catechisms* in which the meaning of all the terms in the *primary text* is determined. Perhaps, in some sense,

our linguistic catechism may be found, to some limited extent, in semantic primes and within their connections to universally understandable sentences as the research unfolds.

The points made thus far imply that epistemic agreements, agreements of what we regard as relevant, even as knowledge, are tightly connected to the notion of common sense. As the fundaments of reasoning, the notions of common sense and common knowledge are practically inseparable. Common sense requires the felt sense of holding common knowledge. To illustrate this epistemic viewpoint, I will next present a scenario of an imaginary prehistoric social interaction as an example of how unavoidable common sense and knowledge are in terms of social interaction. After these considerations, I offer a view of synthetic thinking as a way to deal with both the constant and changing elements of language.

Basics of Psychological Reasoning: A Prehistoric Illustration

Groups are necessary to the formation of knowledge; humans do not form knowledge outside of social structures. In order for groups to exist, they must themselves have an epistemic structure. Some things must be regarded as knowledge to enable communication (Vähämaa 2013a). The nature of social groups makes it necessary to have some sort of initial criteria of knowledge. As I have posited elsewhere (Vähämaa 2013b, p. 26):

> Very much in the very same way as every written argument must start with a letter, must every group start with an epistemology—at least some sort of lay theory of understandable and nonsense sentences.

Following this train of thought, it is apparent that in order for any social group to exist there needs to be some sort of group-based epistemology—a primitive language with common sensibility enabling the group to agree upon things—right at the very genesis of a group. A nascent—or a newborn—social, group-generated, epistemology is largely based in our social needs and their fulfillments (Vähämaa 2015). In order to achieve any social ends or goals to create common meaning, one needs paradoxically to have a group epistemology even *before* joining a group in order to start to generate knowledge through such group-based epistemology. My view on this paradox is the following: the history of man, or *Homo sapiens*, and language are equally long and, therefore, the genesis of the first group was simultaneously the genesis of first linguistic and epistemic agreements—the nascent group epistemologies.

To imagine how such an elementary level of epistemic praxis may evolve, we could think of two human beings meeting each other for the first time in prehistoric times in order to achieve some shared meanings to communicate. As the natural history has it, people have throughout time formed groups and sought out other people to meet individual needs through collective action. Consequentially, as people group together, they at once have some common "language" or signaling system.

This type of a "cave man" epistemology may be a far-fetched example as such, but it does underline the reciprocity of groups and group-based ways of founding what is common sense or common knowledge. Or, in philosophical terminology, how an epistemology emerges. One cannot have one without the other. A group has an immediate set of some level of epistemic standards to enable exchange of sensible communication, and as the group evolves, it generates more knowledge about the world "out there."

To look even further back, in the past eras before language as we now understand it, the items of perception—birds, trees, food, and dwellings, as well as the presumable "fellow men" in the perceptible world—would have be given a set of meanings that are not merely based in perceptions but based in social *meanings* due to the social *reciprocity* the group members would have had (Vähämaa 2015). In contemporary cultural psychological research, this assumption is widely credited and conceptualized as a reciprocal presupposition between continuity and discontinuity in meaning-making processes (De Luca Picione and Freda 2014, 2016; Esposito et al. 2015; Freda 2011; Freda and Esposito 2017). Simply put, continuity means that the same old ideas are in some sense left behind as these ideas become told and circulated via new narrations.

The imaginary prehistoric men would not speak merely of "the big dwelling," that exists (as a semantic prime), we would posit. They would speak of "the big dwelling where our leader, the boss, lives," yielding immediately an expression with a social dimension. Here, we see a cultural psychological implication of an initial unity of psyche and language-based orderliness (Smedslund 2012; Vähämaa 2015, p. 54–56).

All of that, I presume, would result in an elementary "regulation" of knowledge that would enable both of our imaginary cave-dwellers to make observations of the world and, through dialogue with the other group members, to develop social meanings—common sense—about the world. The imaginary *Ur-sprache* would, in its most primitive form, have to be social since it would have to be a shared effort. The primary language, *Ur-sprache,* would be a rudimentary basis of a group epistemology as being simultaneously a set of shared and common meanings.

The important point, regardless of the actual historical development of early regulatory group epistemologies, persists. Groups arise to form meanings, and in the process, they form group-based epistemologies. No knowledge, thus, exists without groups and no groups exist without a reasonable degree of *common sense*.

To Imagine Things Anew: Synthetic Thinking and Regeneration of Common Meanings

If we take the above claims to be true, or plausible with regard their conceptual value, we are struck with the notion of common sense and the need for it because we live and use language unavoidably in social groups. Here, the emphasis can be

on the *sense* part of the notion, underlining our continuing ability to reason while *common* meanings may appear "lost" or at least laborious to find as "common" is now more scattered to different loci and hard to rediscover.

How do we, as laymen, thinkers, and cultural psychologists, prepare ourselves for the presented disparities and discontents that relate to the challenges of common sense and language and, yet, depend on reasoned psychological thought and action? My answer goes as follows. In addition to seeking answers from a priori psychological knowledge, we must turn to *synthetic thinking* which relies on imagination as a resource to self-reflect, as a resource to attain new ideas and knowledge. Synthetic thinking allows us to change perspectives as it allows multiple meanings for the same object at the same time and place simultaneously. (Harris 2000; Tateo 2015, 2016.)

By *synthetic thinking*, I refer to a type of thinking where, in addition to a priori knowledge and known and easily inducible or deductible facts, one has to draw on not only facts present in the sentences at hand as in formal logic, but also use and engage in *imagination* as a relevant source of knowledge. Imagination, as a cultural psychological concept, is defined as "a fundamental higher psychological function that is devoted to the manipulation of complex wholes of iconic and linguistic signs," following Luca Tateo's definition (Tateo 2015, p. 146; see also Brinkmann 2015; Harris 2000).

A priori axiomatic and logical reasoning may prove insufficient to yield new and common word meanings because they may not address directly the role of imaginative processes even though imagination has more open-ended possibilities, and it allows co-existence of different meanings for the same objects. This view comes close to the ideas of Piaget (1972), as he assumed that while one may be "incorrect," one is still always "logical" with regard to one's own personal schemata of things and objects (see also Smedslund 2012).

The approach of PL, by itself, as a way to gain non-empirical psychological knowledge has granted us plenty of psychological knowledge. Thus, we cannot say that our difficulties in finding common meanings would be a result of lack of psychological knowledge per se. If anything, we know now more than before. In sum, we have an abundance of theoretically sound psychological knowledge embedded in our culture, stored in our books. Why, then, is there the felt need for non-axiomatic reasoning in—similar non-empirical, reflective, fashion? In simple terms, we can see from the example below that we need to rely on imagination when we reflect on different scenarios, logical or not.

For instance, we could imagine notions of "depression" and "total control of depression"—when we think synthetically. The basic principle, as already implied, is that in synthetic thinking a layperson or a psychologist gives the familiar object multiple co-existing new meanings at the same time and same place using imagination (Harris 2000; Tateo 2016, p. 437–440). A therapist in a session—or a friend in a conversation—will consider the verbalized or visualized object of thought as two or more different things at the same time and at the same place and share it through conversation. Such an *act,* the act of an expressed thought, cannot be true or

false—since actions, by default, are validated rather by their functionality, not their epistemic truth-value (Kock 2009).

Here, we could imagine that an individual *E* considers, illogically, that he/she has "depression" and "total control of depression"—both at the same time and place. Such paradox can create a novel and non-logical thought for *E* that can be called having "mixed feelings," or it can produce a thought where depression and control of depression mixed together gets a new meaning altogether. For instance, *E* could imagine or reflect on a thought where depression and control of depression form a hybrid where the felt sense of depression and the felt sense of its total control co-exist.

Such hybrids are not only interesting products of psychological reflection but are important to consider if we want to find common meanings and functioning inter-subjectivity once again (De Luca Picione et al. 2017). The individual who is psychologically functional generates hybrids which lead to new understandings and better behavioral outcomes. The individual who is not psychologically functional generates hybrids which lead to "stuckness," impaired behavioral outcomes, mental conundra, and the like. (De Luca Picione and Valsiner 2017)

Cultural psychologist, Raffaele De Luca Picione, posits that if an individual truly attempts to talk with others about new creative ideas—to *narrate* such views to others—some existing semiotic borders have to be crossed between the old and the new, thus creating a novel, future-oriented idea (De Luca Picione 2015a, b). If we do not use language creatively and do not cross over semiotic borders, we remain stuck with repetitious narrations and can not find new psychological meanings. As Raffaele De Luca Picione and Jaan Valsiner (2017, p. 541) say:

> In fact, when the border becomes too rigid, we observe forms of repetition of the same narration, a saturation of sense-making processes and a sclerotization of relations based on opposition systems.

A synthetic idea like the hybrid described above overcomes this type of "saturation" and "sclerotization"—or, stuckness—and allows new meanings to emerge. Such newfound meanings are neither repetitive narrations nor are they entirely blurred by subjectivity in a manner that would make them incomprehensible to others (De Luca Picione and Valsiner 2017). A synthetic idea occurs when none of the imagined "objects" of thought are ignored or negated but they inspire a *new* idea: an interpretation, in this example, of the verbalized or visualized object drawn from an imaginative process which allows such multiplicity and co-existence or co-genesis of projections. To enable such thinking to flourish requires considering both logic and imagination in psychological reasoning and reflection. Equally important is a congenial environment, an epistemic community, to exchange these newfound thoughts and ideas to regenerate common understanding, or, common sense.

An epistemic community, at its genesis, requires only two individuals to exist and to generate shared meanings and shared common sense. To conclude, I hold that if we simply become good at reflecting and understanding fundamental semantic primes and basic psychological axioms of our language, we are also better equipped to consider unfamiliar word meanings with flexibility and imagination. In this way,

we would enable new meanings in the social regulation of common language, common sense, and interaction between people who would otherwise "talk past one another."

Conclusions

Synthetic thinking skills allow the psychologist, the thinker, and the laymen alike to draw on their imaginative processes and intuition and allow the co-existence of multiple, uncommon, and even contrarian meanings for the objects at hand. This further yields new and novel ideas. Once these ideas are brought into conversations and interpersonal interactions, we acquire new synthetic knowledge expressed as newfound and shared meanings and regenerate at some level common sense. In the final analysis, there may not be a route besides the route of small groups to maintain and regenerate common sense as the continuing principle—even if sometimes not achieved—of our interactions.

Knowledge gained in this way enables intersubjectivity. Thus, it helps to see things as the *other* does. As cultural psychological research shows, our regulatory practices embedded in our culture, e.g., understanding, empathy, concern, control, regret, and the like, can be improved as we regain some of the lost psychic unity we can not have without a sense that we have common meanings. Ideally speaking, regulation of meaning and interaction becomes easier, between friends and acquaintances and beyond our familiar groups even though there may not be common vocabulary at the beginning of the process.

It is important to understand that the use or adaptation of language and knowledge, for instance, to come up with a novel thought and express it in a conversation, cannot be true or false as such. This is the case because *actions,* such as thinking and speaking (in contrast to propositions of thought), cannot be either true or false. In this manner, the presented approach expands the logical scope of PL. While the explication of common-sense nature of psychological language must rely on logic, some of the changes in our language use can be made visible by considering how we use our language and sensibility in an illogical manner. Illogical and novel use of language in social interaction is part of the process that may both reinforce common sense for those who interact and also challenge the boundaries of common sense. While common sense as a general principle of interaction and language may not change, some of the misunderstandings in small group interaction may be avoided by considering how individuals may express uncommon and novel thoughts and meanings by being illogical and breaking the boundaries of common sense. Therefore, it is important to encourage bold thinking, imagination, and playfulness in our language use. It is equally relevant to constantly consider the more permanent, primary aspects and key notions of our language such as the reviewed semantic primes, common sense, and the interesting changes in word meanings.

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