

**Perceiving metaphors.  
An ecological realist developmental approach to metaphors**

*Agnes Szokolszky  
Szeged University*

The metatheory in current “4-E” (embodied, embedded, enacted and extended) approaches to cognition is ecological, which implies a relational, mutualist ontology and epistemology of the organism – environment system: the organism can only be conceived in terms of its ecological environment, and the environment in relation to the organism whose environment (world) it is. There is a basic compatibility and meaningfulness involved: the world offers opportunities to know and the organism is equipped to exploit these opportunities. In order to build an ecological understanding of what metaphor is we need to clarify how this metaphysical ground plays out in acts of knowing that involve metaphor. Embodied approaches typically focus on conceptual metaphors in adult language use. However, it is equally important to understand the ontogenesis of novel insightful metaphors, and the role of perception and perceptual learning. In my talk I will present an ecological realist approach to the emergence and development of metaphor, based on the theory of direct ecological perception. This approach assumes that infants are naturally geared towards perceivable meta-modal invariants that specify persistence of qualities (e.g. perceiving rigidity when sucking on a rigid substance and seeing a rigid object moving), and early metaphors (e.g., when a 3 year old says that a mother dog feeding her puppies “is a feeding bottle”) are consequences of this unfolding process in which invariants over naturally occurring kinds are perceived. Thus, metaphor production is an act of situated and experience dependent perceiving and acting, in the ecological world of socially shared meanings. Analysis of naturally occurring early metaphors, and an analysis of a dialogical situation, in which adult – child, and child-child dyads are looking at and conversing about visual metaphors will serve to illustrate and support the theoretical framework.